

# Holley Counseling

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## Needing Love

Let us discuss our need for love in the context of marriage. We can also apply this to all other relationships. So often we feel hurt when our partner does not accept us or when we feel like they have not been sensitive or understanding of our perspective. We fight the same fights over and over, stemming mostly from the fact that we feel like our partner is not understanding, respecting, loving or accepting us. As a result we often try to change the other person and try to make them more loving or more respectful toward us. But trying to change the other person only brings more conflict and defensiveness.

Who are the people in your life who are “causing” you pain? How do you imagine surrendering the use of power and control (fight, flee and appeasement) and entrusting the relationship to God instead?

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We have not yet discussed the biblical concept of love, but in order to start thinking about it, how do you think God would have you love the people you mentioned in the previous question?

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When the spouse acts in a way that feels disrespectful or unloving, we may become angry or defensive and fight back or withdraw. We find it difficult to accept them as they are. But, *when we choose or allow ourselves to need another person's love, respect or approval, our well-being is limited by the capacity of the other person to love.* When they do not appreciate us, we are incomplete, and feel rejected or unapproved. In this case, we have chosen to let another person determine our well-being, or perhaps even our own evaluation of ourselves. In addition, we often let them pull us into becoming angry or bitter; something we never wanted to be. In a sense, we have placed them in God's role. When they love us, we feel valuable. When they do not, we are angry, resentful or we doubt ourselves. We are indeed in need of love, and are made for it, but when we expect or require this love from humans we are caged by it. As you read this article, you will see my perspective is that **It is healthy and good to receive another's love, but it is destructive to require or demand that they love, understand or respect you.**

What are your thoughts about the content of this last paragraph, especially the last sentence in bold?

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In the Trinity, God the Father gives love freely to the Son. The Son, not requiring the love from the Father, receives it freely with gratitude and is filled up. The Son spills over His love toward the Spirit Who receives it freely, while not requiring it. The Spirit's love spills over back to the Father. All three persons of the Trinity give love because it is God's essence to love. This is why God is a triune God and not just one person. He gives love and requires nothing in return because He is already full. The Father receives the love from the Spirit as the wave of the love He first sent out to the Son and now returns to Him. One God, three persons all dance eternally giving freely and receiving freely of Love, never requiring and never expecting, in an endless cycle of joy. This is the model for healthy human love. We are made for love, approval, validation and acceptance; receiving and giving it. We wither and die without it.

But, love heals and adds to our well-being only when it is received freely, as a gift, and not as something required or forced. Love heals only when it is unnecessary. That is, it only heals or adds to the quality of our life when it is not required or forced. Jesus stated the flow of love: "Freely you have received, freely give". If love is not free, it is not love. Love can never be compelled. Ultimately this may mean some people will simply never love me, and I will need to accept this. Even God can not and will not make people love Him, because love is free, or it is not at all.

When we place a requirement of love upon another person, we have failed to love, and we damage the other person, the relationship and ourselves. The result of any of these is codependence and enslavement. We become dependent upon how the other person responds, rather than being free to give and free to receive. What do we do if my spouse does not give love or is disrespectful and unloving? Jesus is the model for this. Read on....

We are invited to pursue God's love, not human love. Jesus made this abundantly clear in many different ways. Here is one example: "I do not accept glory from human beings, <sup>but</sup> I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (John 5:41-44 NIV)

The only healthy way to obtain love from another human is to receive it freely; only like a butterfly that lights on you when you finally stop striving. Of course, the butterfly may not land on you, and your reliance on God's love has to be strong enough to withstand that reality. The reason we don't require love from others is because we already have love from God, and because there is no way to guarantee that others will love us back. And to require love is a guarantee that love will not be fulfilling to you. If we rely on other's love and acceptance for our well-being, then our happiness will be determined by how well others love. God's love frees us from seeking it in others. This, in turn, enables

us to love others more purely. Our love is not tainted by a hope of having our love reciprocated. We give it with no strings attached.

Discuss the sentence above that “Love heals only when it is unnecessary”. And what do you think about the Trinity being the model for human love?

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So, is it ok to ask for love or respect in a human relationship? Yes, but not because you need it from them. Rather, you can ask for it because your friend or spouse is happiest when they give love, even if they don't know that yet, and because there is more joy in a relationship where love is shared mutually. But, as soon as you ask for it, let go of the request, knowing that your request was an act of love, and that making the request was all that was needed. It was an act of love, because they need to love and their love for you is unnecessary to you. Love is necessary to all of us, but we make a mistake when we expect or demand it. God is the source of love. God is love, and He is always sending love to us in and through everything and everyone every moment, even when we don't feel it or receive it as such. We can't survive without God's love; and His love comes to us in a myriad of ways, but we can survive without anyone's love in particular. **You are free to love them, and you are free to receive their love, but they are not free to keep you enslaved or unhappy by their failure to love.** Their rejection of you or their weak love will not diminish your well-being nor your capacity to love, because you are enveloped by Love, God's love. You desire their love, not because you are in need of it from them in particular, but because you know their capacity to love others will make them happy, together you will enjoy true community, your love between you will be a witness of hope to the world, and you will receive God's love through each other.

Discuss the quote above in bold, “**You are free to love them, and you are free to receive their love, but they are not free to keep you enslaved or unhappy by their failure to love.**”

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Think of the people in your life who you struggle with the most. Usually this is a spouse, co-worker, family member or close friend. Ask yourself this: “What expectations or requirements do I place on this person?” Then ask yourself what it would take inside you to release EVERY expectation, even them being respectful to you. Especially that.

What expectations or requirements do you place on this person and what would it take inside yourself to accept that person as they are?

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What ways are your well-being, your capacity to love, and your happiness limited by your spouse, or friend's behavior toward you? They are not keeping you from being at peace or from being able to love. It is your dependence upon their response that is keeping you unhappy. What are your thoughts about this idea?

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Does this mean that we can do without human love? Yes. We can do without human love, but we cannot live well alone, as the Bible says. "It is not good for man to be alone". We can demonstrate this. We depend on millions of people each day to live well. We depend on the people who made our houses, our cars, our hair dryers. The people who raised the chickens who laid the eggs I ate for breakfast, and the hundreds of other hands involved in getting those eggs to my frying pan were necessary for my stomach. We live better when there are others around us. We serve each other and provide help to each other in a myriad of ways both interpersonally and globally. But to *require* love, acceptance or appreciation is a violation of the very nature of love, and it is a substitute for the one love that can fulfill us, God's love. Or rather than accepting that person as a vehicle of God's presence, we treat them and their love as an end in itself. Rather than receive God through them, in whatever form it comes, sometimes we place our hope in them as if they were God; they are the end-all to our well-being. We *must* have their love or acceptance. He/She *must* understand, appreciate, respect, value me.

Our capacity to love others is in direct correlation to our current awareness and acceptance of God's love and acceptance of us. When we receive it fully, we are full and not in need. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want". "Want" is the enemy of love. When we relate to another person in terms of want or emptiness, our happiness is held captive by the strength or weakness of the one from whom we seek love. Therefore, **you cannot love someone from whom you require love**. Why? Because we will be focusing on them loving us and filling our need. I will be focusing on the hurt they have "caused" me by not being validated by them or by them not reciprocating my love. I will not be thinking of giving love to them precisely because I will be focusing on what I want from them. Or, if I do give, I will probably give to get love in return. **It is only when we do not need them that we can love them**. This is why God can love so completely, dying on the cross for us. He needs nothing from us, and we can give nothing to Him that increases His joy. He is joy. Do we think we can make Him unhappy by refusing His love or by refusing to love Him back? His joy and well-being cannot be hijacked by our failure to place our trust in Him. We can only enter His joy by receiving the love He offers and loving others freely while demanding or requiring nothing in return. This makes us free. When you receive God's love fully, you can be free from wants because you are full and because His love always flows without end. You can then let your fullness spill onto others while not requiring it in return. Perhaps He allows our love for Him to be an actual ingredient in His joy. But I don't think He lets our unfaithfulness

diminish his joy. And if He laments the fact that we have not received His love, He laments, not in a way that somehow diminishes His well-being, but as an expression of His love for us.

What do you think of this quote from above, **“you cannot love someone from whom you require love”**

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Even though God said, "It is not good for man to be alone", this does not clarify the way in which we are to be together and how this togetherness is good. It is quite clear that it does not mean that a man **MUST** have a woman. Or a woman **MUST** have a man. Jesus, the True Man, did not have a wife. Paul and Jesus both praised those who chose not to be married. In the New Testament, singleness is elevated and valued above marriage because there is less of a chance of becoming entangled in a co-dependent relationship with them. In addition to this, there will not be marriage in heaven. It is a temporary social structure to symbolize what love **could** be like, like the way God's love is within the trinity. Marriage will not exist in heaven because we will be experiencing true marriage, true union; being drawn up into the eternal dance of the love of the Trinity with all of God's people. The parent/child relationship is temporary for a different reason. It is the real example and symbol of our relationship toward God, of entire dependence.

So in what way does man need another person? "Needing" may not even be the right word to use. Man can live alone and still connect with God. But when I think about the kinds of things the Bible says about the ways a human should relate to the fellow neighbor, it includes things like love, patience, kindness, gentleness, truth-telling, faithfulness, fairness, forgiving and the like. I cannot think of any scripture that commands us to find someone to love us or to need someone. In fact the opposite is true. Rather than seek love from others, we are commanded many times to love our neighbors while not requiring it to be returned. The Bible is full of scriptures that urge us not to look for acceptance/approval from humans. The first half of chapter 6 of Matthew, in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses this concern that even our spirituality will be limited to just being an appearance of devotion to God as a way to receive approval from people. So, clearly humans are not to relate to each other in terms of pursuing approval, value or acceptance. This, I believe, is idolatry, because it supplants our seeking and accepting God's approval, diminishes our capacity to love others freely and destroys our freedom and joy.

The two relationships I know of which closely resemble anything like "need" is the parent/child and the mentoring relationship. But the parent's job, having been needed by the child, is to encourage the child to need them no longer, to make themselves obsolete. The primary image the Bible uses to describe the relationship between God and his creation is the parent/child relationship. Thus, we call him Father. To me this means that perhaps the only permanent "need" relationship that should exist for us is our need for God. There are "need" relationships between humans that are healthy, but only for a relatively short time. Unless they terminate at some point, they become an idol and stunt

the person in need, and inhibit their freedom by keeping them dependent upon the other. I have in mind a child who never leaves home, or if he does, still stays tied to his mother's apron string, or the student who perpetually worships the mentor, or the mentor who refuses to encourage the independence of his student. He keeps his ego intact by having the student always needing him and never surpassing them. A good mentor, in the end, encourages the student to move beyond them and to mentor others.

What are your thoughts so far about the dangers of people having a co-dependent relationship with others?

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The parent/child relationship is one-sided, the child needing the parent. This relationship is a symbol of our primary relationship to God in terms of dependence. God structured human relationships this way to teach us that our relationship toward Him is one of full dependence, as a child is entirely dependent upon its parents. Then, parents lift us off into the world to need them no more in order to experience the next phase of maturity toward the divine plan of reciprocal free love.

Whereas the parent/child relationship mirrored the way God relates to us and us to God, the marriage relationship is intended to mirror the way God relates to Himself (within the trinity), that is, one of mutuality. This relationship of mutuality is characterized by freely giving and freely receiving, but NEVER requiring, forcing or seizing. So the marriage relationship is a transitional relationship between childhood and eternity to teach us to love each other disinterestedly. So we move from dependence, to mutuality and then to pure agency and fulfillment. It is in the marriage relationship where we are suppose to learn to not require each other, but to bask in each other's love which is freely given, and to forgive and let go of the other's lack of love. In our broken world, we usually just transfer our dependence upon our parents to dependence upon our spouse (or other relationships) rather than learning dependence upon God and relating to our spouse in terms of disinterested love. This is why Jesus says we must "hate" our mother and father if we are going to grow into maturity.

So, marriage is a transition between dependence (which describes our relationship with God) and pure agency in heaven where we fully receive God's love and it pours out from us perpetually to others and we receive love from others from God; through them to us and us to them. We are instructed to pray for this now, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". Marriage is the battlefield in which we hopefully learn to let go of another human defining us or making us feel valued and we turn to God instead for our value and identity. It will certainly be that way in heaven.

As I alluded to above, this explains why Jesus gives us very hard sayings regarding both marriage and the parent/child and other filial relationships:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 12:26-27)

He knows that our temptation is to seek approval from parents, spouses, or any family member or friends for that matter, instead of seeking approval that comes from God. We have to let go of our parents and spouses being a necessary ingredient of our happiness or identity. This image of ourselves we hope to gain from others, our identity we have of ourselves, is the self that must die if we are to live.

What are your thoughts about not relating to your spouse in terms of need, approval, acceptance or respect, but rather in terms of disinterested love, and freely receiving love only?

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## Two errors: Co-dependency and Detachment

When it comes to relationships, especially romantic relationships, there are two errors to avoid. Co-dependency is an unhealthy dependence on another person. The co-dependent person derives their identity and happiness from their spouse, partner, family member or society in general. On the other end of the spectrum is detachment in which we shut ourselves off from others. Neither enmeshment nor detachment is healthy. Both co-dependency and detachment are self-protective strategies unwittingly used to enhance self-preservation. Co-dependency is an active movement toward the partner whereas detachment is withdrawal. The dependent person is too “close” to his or her partner, whereas the detached person is too far away. If there is a good part of co-dependency, it is the choice to be connected with others. If there is a good part of detachment, it is the choice not to be defined or limited by the other person. Christian love embraces these two good characteristics simultaneously and provides a radical alternative to withdrawal or enmeshment: passionate self-giving and individuation.

Like the co-dependent person, the Christian perspective is to be deeply engaged socially, sharing in the joys and sorrows of relationships, giving and receiving love, and yet is not co-dependent with that other person. Like the detached person, the Christian is unmoved by the partner when it comes to the development and maintenance of their core identity, and yet is not distant. To use a Christian phrase, “we are in the world, but not of it”; close but not tainted; separate yet connected.

Jesus, as with all the other important concepts, is the model for us here. God, though transcendent and free from us, and not needing us, moved by compassion, chooses to take on human form and live with us. Neither running from us nor devouring us with wrath, He came to us and lived among us: loving, forgiving, telling the truth and inviting us to

follow Him in his generous love. He did not run from his accusers, but rather faced them and loved them while being truthful. Nor did he judge or condemn them.

Rather, he accepted their rejection of Him and died on the cross, only to be resurrected, which was the confirmation that love and truth cannot die. He was neither stained by our evil, nor did he keep himself aloof from us. He modeled this by rubbing shoulders with those most identified as sinners and outsiders and invited them to follow Him. Jesus invited us to love, but did not require our love or approval for his own self-definition, neither did he shun us or withdraw from us. God is both transcendent and immanent. He is above us and free from us, but also makes himself available and comes to us in an incredibly accessible way. He gets so close that we could even kill him, and yet he would not be destroyed because Love cannot die.

Our choosing to love our friends, partners and spouses will not kill us if we attach ourselves to God's love instead of attaching our identity to those near us. Just as two people in quicksand cannot help each other out of the pit, neither can two people who require love from each other really love each other well. Only when we are on the bank in safety, not needing the other, can we reach out and truly love and help the other. We love each other best when we do not need each other, and we can love more passionately and more accurately when our love is not mixed with either co-dependency or detachment.

Our closeness is motivated, not out of need, but out of love and strength. Our distance is motivated, not out of fear, but out of a strength that resides in knowing Whose we are. Jesus' death represents his closeness to the world. He came so close as to lose his life. His resurrection represents his freedom from us and ours from each other. No matter whether we are loved or not, whether we "succeed" or not, we will resurrect if we stay true to our actual identity.

When you consider the two extremes of co-dependency or stoicism, which do you tend to identify with most? What would it take for you to move close to others, yet not lose your identity or inner strength?

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