



## continuous conversion

### Love

by Sara Tusek

My daughter Melissa had brain surgery in June. She is doing fine now, recuperating at home. The surgery brought me together with people with whom I have really just one thing in common: we love Melissa. I've been thinking about love.

#### What is love?

A working definition of love is actively seeking the best for someone. The problem with this is that "the best" is not easy to define, much less bring to reality.



"The best" is a concept based on the idea that there is a frame of reference beyond the individual, and this frame of reference suggest certain outcomes as being superior to others.

Right away, you can see room for disagreement. Does everyone have the same frame of reference? Is there really anything beyond the individual, or

is this an idea meant to comfort (or control) people by making them believe in something beyond their individual desires?

Given these areas of possible contention, it's no wonder that attempts to love a person are sometimes perceived as manipulative and demeaning of the individual's rights, not to mention condescending. Sadly, many actions done in the name of love seem self-serving to the "loved one" and are rejected in bitter anger.

It's apparent that for love to work smoothly, the lover and loved one need to share a frame of reference (or have a tremendous amount of patience and forgiveness). Nothing hurts like having your love thrown back in your face by the person you offered it to; especially cruel is it when that person accuses you of selfish motives.

#### What is the opposite of love?

Many people think the opposite of love is hate, being defined as actively seeking harm for a person. But the same problem of frame of reference applies to hate—if you try to hurt someone by an action you consider as hateful, the person may not even notice what you've done. Your icy silence, meant to wound, is simply perceived (if at all) as you being shy, or tired.

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In both love and hate, you are emotionally tied to the object of the strong feeling and active desire to help or harm. In that way, love and hate are similar. In fact, hate may be seen as love gone evil.

Perhaps the real opposite of love is indifference.

### **Does love need to be reciprocated?**

This is the heart of love, and an answer to its mysteries.

Real love has, in effect, almost nothing to do with the loved one and almost everything to do with the lover.

Using God as a model, we can easily see that He loves us in spite of our failings. He loves us when we are most unlovable, sunk deep in sin. His love is perfect, not dependent on how much, if at all, we love Him back.

If you love someone and that person doesn't "love you back," most likely it's not your faults and flaws that have produced the situation. Maybe that person is not ready or able to love, for various physical, psychological or spiritual reasons.

By the same token, when someone loves you, in all probability this love has less to do with your intrinsic "lovability" than with the person's ability to love. You can stop preening yourself on your success in gaining love. You didn't do it.

### **So what?**

All this love talk may seem obvious to you.

In your head, this makes sense. But in your heart, do you really understand that your being loved has very little to

do with you? This is a liberating idea, yet insulting at the same time.

We want to be loved for our beauty, or goodness, or accomplishments. We want to be loved because of who we are. But the truth is, we are loved because of who the lover is.

On the up side, this means that we can stop trying to be perfect to win or keep someone's love. We can relax and accept any love we receive as being totally undeserved and quite beyond our control. Then we can respond to the love without anxiety and jealousy—we can simply be good to the lover out of joy and even gratitude.

On the down side, this means we can't maneuver someone into loving us. Teenagers and single people, looking for love, often go to great lengths to create scenarios in which their love object will notice them and love them back. These scenarios are embarrassing, and rarely work. It's better to love non-obsessively, letting go of the loved one if necessary, not letting the love sour and turn to hate.

### **Who can love?**

I'd like to say, as a practicing Christian, that Christians are better at loving than those who don't follow Christ.

But this isn't true.

I've been in the presence of people who know how to love, and they've had nothing in common except the love itself. Some were Christian, some Jewish, some Muslim and some nothing at all, religion-wise. I don't know how anyone gets the gift of being able to love, but I do know it's the only gift worth having.



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