

# The Healing Power of Love

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Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another”. I know that we’re all aware of the importance of love. Love is the first attribute of the Holy Spirit that’s mentioned in Galatians. We know that God is love. We know that we are to love one another - we’re to love even our enemies. But today I want to focus on a practical aspect of love, and in so doing, my hope is that this will encourage us, in terms of what God is doing with us, how we can affect those around us, and how God is going to use us in the future. Because love is very powerful, and in fact, the title of my message is “The Healing Power of Love”.

I want to illustrate through a true story, and you can Google it – this actually happened. Most people are not aware of it. It’s not that highly publicized, although a book has been written about it. It’s well-known in certain circles. Until I had reason to research this subject a number of years ago, I had never heard of this. I think this story illustrates the healing power of love, even when it’s just human love.

Back in 1971, in San Jose, CA, a psychiatrist by the name of Dr. Loren Mosher began an experiment called the Soteria Project. “Soteria” is Greek for “salvation”. Now, Dr. Mosher got his undergraduate degree from Stanford, and he got his medical degree from Harvard - he was highly qualified. In 1968, he was appointed director of the Center for Schizophrenia Studies. That was his specialty – the study of schizophrenia. This Center for Schizophrenia Studies was part of the National Institute of Mental Health. So he held a very high position in the psychiatric community. At the same time that he was appointed director of this center, he wrote a grant to obtain funding for a different approach to treating schizophrenia.

We have, in this country, tried a number of different approaches to treat schizophrenia. In the 1930s, one of the approaches that was very popular was lobotomy. A lobotomy is simply a medical procedure that severs the ties to the prefrontal cortex, which is part of the frontal lobes of the brain. So in layman’s terms, basically a lobotomy is separating and cutting off that part of the brain where reasoning and thought takes place. We look back on lobotomy as being cruel and inhumane and horrific. We think “How in the world could we have done this to the people in our society that are the weakest and need help the most?” We thought the solution to their problem was to give them a lobotomy. And yet, the doctor that originated this procedure back in 1935 was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1949, believe it or not. You see, no matter how inhumane our approach has been to people that have mental difficulties, every time the doctors come up with a new approach, we think this is cutting-edge technology, that we’re on the edge of a new frontier and we’re about to solve this problem, which is rather pervasive in our society. You may not realize it, but 2% of the population in this country has been diagnosed as having schizophrenia, which is just one of a host of mental problems that afflict people in our modern society.

There was a doctor who theorized that the problem with these people was that they were being physically corrupted by having bad teeth, and that there was infection taking place. So his solution was to pull teeth. There were people that went into his mental institution and came out having all their teeth removed. This sounds ludicrous to us now, that anybody would think that this could cure somebody of a mental problem. And yet, at the time, he was featured in the American Medical Journal as being on the forefront and the cutting edge of science.

In 1938, we began to use ECT. It used to be called “electroshock therapy”, now they call it ECT, which stands for “electro-convulsive therapy”. It’s nothing more than a way of inducing seizures through the use of electricity. Now, this is really nothing new, in terms of the seizures. Doctors have been for a long time using various methods to induce seizures in people that had mental difficulties and mental problems to try to cure them. It’s just that now they figured out how to do it with electricity. Again, it seems rather barbaric. I will tell you that, as horrific as this is, ECT is still used to this day. There are people who are forced against their will to have ECT. And believe me, it is not a picnic to have that electroshock therapy, that electrically induced seizure.

Moving forward a little bit to the 1950s. Some of these things like lobotomies began to fade away, because now certain drugs had been discovered and synthesized that were taking the place of the lobotomy. I’m talking about drugs like Haldol, Clozapine and Thorazine, to name some of the more well-known ones. What these drugs did was, they made people who were schizophrenic or were having other types of mental difficulties manageable. They did through chemistry what used to be done through the scalpel in a lobotomy. Basically, the drugs interfere with the brain’s normal pathways, and isolate the frontal lobes of the brain where the reasoning and thought processes are. It has been referred to by a number of people as a “chemical lobotomy”. And yet, we’re told by the media and by the pharmaceutical industry, and by the medical doctors and the American Psychiatric Association, that these drugs and the next-generation antipsychotics are a cure. That someone who is having mental difficulties is experiencing a biological illness, which is characterized by a chemical imbalance in their brain, and that these drugs are correcting that imbalance.

In reality, the doctors are dealing with something they don’t understand. The human mind is a spiritual thing. People talk about wanting to become more spiritual. Some people in the world will describe themselves as spiritual. The reality is that every human being is spiritual, in the sense that we have the spirit of man, which imparts intellect. The doctors do not recognize that this spirit exists. They only know what they can see, smell, touch, observe and measure. Other than that, they don’t recognize anything. And so, they do not realize that when they’re dealing with the human mind, they’re dealing with something that is outside the physical. There’s a physical component to it - the brain is physical - but they’re dealing with something spiritual and they do not understand it, and so they continue to try to find ways to deal with the problems on a physical, biological level, and it does not work. Not only does it not work, it’s actually very harmful and very painful to the people that are subjected to this.

If you live in the greater San Diego area, and you have a mental breakdown, and you’re taken to the county psychiatric ward, and you’re out of control, the first thing they’re going to do is inject you with Haldol. It’s a very cheap drug, and it’s highly effective at knocking somebody out. What I discovered in my research is that in soviet Russia, back in the 50s and 60s, Haldol was used to torture political prisoners. It was common practice at that time for somebody who was a political dissident to be diagnosed as having a mental disorder, and then they would inject them with Haldol. Haldol, like many of the other neuroleptics, induces something called akathisia. Akathisia is something that is brought on by the normal pathways of the brain being disrupted. It produces a feeling inside the person that is partially actual, physical problems with their muscles – stiffness and soreness. But mostly it’s a feeling of discomfort, where you’re never comfortable. So if you’re sitting, you feel like you need to get up and walk around, and if you’re up walking around you feel like you need to go sit down. I’ve been to mental hospitals many times. Not as a patient, but to visit people that are there. I’ve always wondered “why are the patients just moving around?” They’re like pinballs, they can’t sit still. They’re just constantly in motion. That’s why.

Dr. Mosher was one of a handful of psychiatrists who decided that maybe the methods that were in vogue at the time, and that historically had been used, were not effective, and in fact maybe were harming people, and he decided to swim upstream. He opened this experiment in San Jose in 1971 called the Soteria Project. He envisioned a radically different approach to treating people who had mental disorders. This approach that he envisioned can really be encapsulated in one word, and that word is love. Granted, the type of love that people are capable of, apart from God's spirit, is just human love, but even human love is a very powerful thing.

I want to just pause for a moment in the story and briefly address schizophrenia. Because schizophrenia is one of those words that we've all heard, and we've all heard of people being schizophrenic, and most of us are not really sure what that is. The common misconception is that it's a split personality. Now, it's true that some people who are in mental hospitals, or who are homeless and wandering the streets, may have a demon. In fact, when there seem to be multiple personalities coming out of somebody, that's probably what that is. But schizophrenia is not a split personality. Schizophrenia is a mental condition that is characterized by hallucinations, paranoia, and confused thought processes.

With that understanding, what Dr. Mosher did was, he opened up a home where people could come who had been diagnosed as schizophrenic. He chose people who were between the ages of 18 and 30, that had been recently diagnosed as being schizophrenic, and were deemed to be hopeless cases. The method of treatment at Soteria House was very simple. It involved very little use of drugs, and in most cases no use of drugs at all. When they did use drugs, it was in very small doses, and typically it was in the beginning stages when somebody was out of control, in order to help calm them down to the point where they could be worked with. The program at Soteria House was not something that was done by people who were psychiatrists. The people who worked at Soteria House were just regular people who had no special training, but were chosen mostly on the basis of empathy, personality and patience. Each schizophrenic person who came to Soteria House to live was assigned one person to be their companion, 24/7. Basically, they were matched up with one person on the staff. It was a one-to-one ratio of staff to patients, and each patient had a person who was their friend. They were encouraged to take part in community activities such as household chores. They were encouraged to bathe regularly, get dressed – just basic, normal activities of life that we might all take for granted, but that a person who's suffering from mental problems might not do.

There was one patient who, early in his stay at Soteria House, was convinced that aliens were going to come, and he was to meet them at the park, and they were going to come and take him away in their spaceship. Rather than arguing with the guy and trying to talk him out of it, his professional friend (the guy that was assigned to him) said "Okay, let's go". So at 4AM they went, sat on the park bench and waited. Several hours went by, and finally the patient said, "Well, I guess they're not coming". It was a little, tiny baby-step back toward reality.

What they found at Soteria House was that the healing process was lengthy. It took sometimes one to two years of being in an environment that was quiet and calm, and where they were shown love. More than 70% of the patients that were taken in at Soteria House got better to the point that they were able to reenter society in a normal capacity, and did not have any relapse. In the world of psychiatry, that is an unheard-of percentage of success.

Unfortunately, this was very threatening to the American Psychiatric Association and to the pharmaceutical industry that was manufacturing all these drugs, and they shut it down.

I think that story is a very powerful illustration of what love can do, even just human love. I believe that God is doing the same thing with us. Those patients that were brought into Soteria House were not chosen because they were the best and the brightest. They were actually at the end of their rope. They were at the very bottom of the pile. And we have not been chosen because we are the best and the brightest. God says that he has not called the great of this world, but he's called the weak, in order that his power might be shown. It says that God commends his love toward us in that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. So when we, who are the weak of the world, were alienated from God – sinners – Christ died for us. And God first showed his love toward us through that. And then, we read that Christ said to the disciples, “I will not leave you alone, but I will send you the comforter”. He said, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you”. And just like those companions at Soteria House were with the patients twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, constantly - they never left them - Christ promises that he will never leave us. And we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. God the Father and Jesus Christ dwell in us through the Holy Spirit. Jesus called the Holy Spirit a comforter. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is symbolized in scripture sometimes by oil. Typically, in our experience in the church, olive oil has been used when anointing somebody, and praying over them asking for physical healing. Olive oil is a healing agent. I believe that's why the Bible uses oil a lot of times as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is an agent of healing.

Let's turn to Luke chapter 4, verse 18. This is the occasion where Jesus was at the synagogue, and he stood up to read from the book of Isaiah.

Luke 4:18-19: “The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

It's an interesting turn of phrase there, “to heal the brokenhearted”. One of the terms that came up when I was discussing this message with my wife, when we were talking about the people that are in the church of God groups now. The phrase that my wife used was “the walking wounded”. The world that we live in in general is a hostile place, in many ways. You compare where we live here in America with many parts of the world, and it's pretty peaceful. We don't typically have to worry about getting shot at, or that type of thing, although crimes do happen. But in general we lead fairly peaceable lives, and yet at the same time the world is not a friendly place. It is a world that is driven by competition, and all you have to do to see how hostile and aggressive people are is just get out on the road and drive.

I was talking to the group last night at dinner about the drive that we had coming from LA. We were on the 15, and I guess because it was a Friday afternoon and we were on the road to Vegas, was probably a lot of the reason why people were driving the way they were. Apparently there were some people that just could not wait to get to Vegas to give the casinos some of their money. I've driven the freeways in LA, which are the most congested in the world, and San Diego traffic can be bad sometimes. I have never experienced driving like I experienced yesterday, where people were just driving right up on your bumper, to where you think they're going to get in the trunk of your car, or swerving over suddenly in front of you, cutting you off and forcing you to hit your brakes. But this is just typical of the spirit of this world.

People in general are hurting. People in general have a lot of pain in their heart, and carry a lot of pain around inside of them. Some experts believe that as many as 25% of the population are on antidepressants. Some people think it's higher than that. One thing I've noticed about the church of God

groups is that we seem to be affected in the same proportion as the world is affected. In other words, if 5% of the population are alcoholics, probably about 5% of the people in the church of God groups are alcoholics. Now, you might think “well, I don’t know any, I’ve been in the church and I don’t know anybody that’s an alcoholic.” Believe me, they’re there. They just don’t advertise it. My wife went to lunch last week with a friend of hers who she has recently begun to get to know, who attends one of the large splinter groups of the Worldwide Church of God. This woman began to open up to my wife a little bit, and she’s a recovering alcoholic. You wouldn’t have thought it.

My point is that we have a lot of the same hurts that the people in the world do. We have people in the church of God groups that came from abusive families, where they were molested, or where their parents were alcoholics, and that has an effect on people. All of our hearts have been damaged. We all are in need of healing to a certain degree, and part of what God’s doing with us is healing those wounds and those hurts. There’s a passage that talks about the Millennium, where it says that God will wipe away all tears, and all sorrow and sighing shall flee away. God’s in the process of doing that with us. Of course, God is doing more than just that, he’s developing his righteous character in us as well. The Holy Spirit is working in us to heal us.

I talked briefly about how the doctors do not understand the human mind. They don’t know what they’re dealing with. Prior to World War One, when a woman would have a mental breakdown, the doctors referred to it as hysteria. The reason they called it hysteria is because they thought it was something of biological origin having to do with internal female reproductive organs. “Hysteria” comes from the same root word as “hysterectomy”. Imagine the doctor’s surprise when, after World War One, our soldiers coming back from the war were exhibiting the exact same symptoms that these women were exhibiting that they had called hysteria. The soldiers were suffering from trauma. Today we call it post-traumatic stress syndrome. They were traumatized.

Different people have different thresholds to what they can handle, in terms of trauma. What traumatizes one person may not traumatize another. I believe, and this is based on a lot of research, and the fact that someone who was very close to me spent a lot of time in a mental hospital. I researched this, and I tried to figure out how to help this person. I came to the conclusion that people who have mental breakdowns, whether they’re diagnosed as bipolar, or schizophrenia, or schizoaffective – there’s a whole host of names that they come up with for people who have mental breakdowns. I came to the conclusion that the majority of them have been traumatized by something that has pushed them past the ability of their mind to handle it, and the mind turns inward.

Read with me, if you would, a passage in Proverbs 18.

Proverbs 18:14: “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?”

If you get sick or hurt, you know that you can get well, if you put yourself in the right environment. If you bind up the wounds, use some disinfectant, put something on it to help it heal, you know it’s going to heal up. You can handle that. If you get the flu, you know that if you drink plenty of liquids and get some rest, you’re going to get better.

I believe that the spirit in us can be wounded, hurt, damaged by things that happen to us, and sometimes we get pushed beyond the capacity of what we can bear.

At the beginning of the Millennium, there are going to be a lot of people that are suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. These are going to be people that have gone through the great tribulation,

God's wrath, the plagues. They're going to need our love, our comfort, to help them recover. We're going to be part of that process of wiping away all tears.

I think what this means for us now is not just that we have this hope in the future, that God's going to use us that way to help others, but I think we need to look for opportunities and ways to help other people now. I don't mean by that that we need to go searching out people and trying to stick our nose into their business, find out what their problems are. I'm saying that as we have opportunity, to do good unto all men.

We don't realize sometimes how much just a kind word can mean to somebody who's hurting. I know people in the church who have gone through severe depression, and who have even attempted suicide. They've told me that one of the things that made it difficult for them was that no one offered anything. Not a single person ever said "Hey, you look like maybe you're down a little bit. Is there anything I can do? If you ever need anybody to talk to, I'm here for you." That ought not to be!

I grew up in Pasadena. My folks came into the Worldwide Church of God when I was five. I attended Imperial School till I was in the tenth grade, when the school closed. Later I went to Ambassador College. Throughout that whole time, my father was dying. I don't have time in this message to go into all the details, but he had some physical problems that were incurable, and his health slowly declined over a period of about twenty-two years. When I was a teenager, it was to the point where he was pretty much an invalid. I lived with this, and I can tell you that it's very difficult on family members to be around somebody that's that sick. I needed help. I was a kid, and when you're a teenager you think that the environment that you're in is normal. You may not like it, you may feel distress, but you don't really realize the extent of it until you become an adult and you look back on it later. As an adult looking back on it, I realize that that was a very difficult situation to be in. The thing that struck me was, even though I was brought up at "God's headquarters", and I went to Imperial School, which was the instrument of the church, and I went to Ambassador College, I never had a single teacher, minister, or administrator during that time ever offer me any help. My father was well known in the church. What he was going through was well known, the health problems that he was going through were spoken of from the pulpit numerous times. People were asked to pray for him. Not a single person ever said "Hey Dave, that must be really tough on you. Do you need anything? Is there anything we can do to help? Do you need somebody to talk to?" I ascribe part of that to just ignorance. There was a lot of empathy for my dad, but people didn't realize how it affects the family members.

Part of it is simply that we have not exhibited the fruit of love enough in the church of God. I should say the churches of God. The church of God is those who are led by the spirit of God, and I believe that those who are led by the spirit of God will exhibit love.

If somebody that we know needs our help, we should offer it. Again, I don't want to imply that we should be going around looking for people's problems and sticking our nose where it doesn't belong, but sometimes an opportunity presents itself where there's somebody that you know well, and you know them well enough to know that they're having a problem or difficulties. Aside from that, just in our everyday lives and our interactions with other people, we ought to be kind. We ought to show love. And sometimes, just a kind word can make all the difference in a person's day, or even in their perspective on life.

Jesus says that we are the salt of the earth. We are to let our light shine.

Turn with me to 1 John chapter 2.

1 John 2:7: “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning.”

The old commandment is what Jesus quoted when he was asked “what is the great commandment?” He said that the first one is to love God with all your being, and the second is like unto it, to love your neighbor as yourself. So we had this commandment from the beginning.

1 John 2:7-8: “The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you –“

Jesus said to his disciples, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another”.

1 John 2:8-11: “...Which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

I mentioned before the phrase “the walking wounded”. The sad thing to me is not just that we in the churches of God are affected by the society that we have all grown up in, just like people in the world are. What really saddens me is that some of the wounds that we carry with us are inflicted by people who are in and part of the church of God groups. Sometimes it’s by those who are the so-called ministers of those groups. I think that hurts even more because these are people that we thought we could trust. These are people that are supposed to be looking out for us. I think it is an apt description to say that in many cases, the people in the church of God groups are the walking wounded. We all can tell stories of things that have been done to us, in the course of being associated with the church of God groups.

The final thought that I want to leave you with is this. One of the ways in which we can heal from these hurts and wounds is by loving other people. When you go out of your way to try to help somebody else, it not only helps them but it helps you. Love is in fact the way to heal not only others, but ourselves, by showing love.

I’m in the field of sales, and one of the sayings we have in sales is “No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care”. As Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 13, even if we knew everything about prophecy, and even if we had all knowledge, if we don’t have love, what good is it? If we want to affect, in a positive way, the people around us, if we want to be shining lights, if we want to be the salt of the earth, if we want to preach the gospel, the first thing is, we have to love the people around us. Because until they know how much we care, they don’t care how much we know.

In conclusion, I just want to paraphrase what Jesus said to his disciples: “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another”.