



From the Pastor's Heart

February 2009

Dear friend,

This is the time of year when everything from television programs to magazine articles to outdoor advertising is centered on one thing—love. We see ways to show our affection to others wherever we go.

This usually is a very happy season with all the reminders of devotion and friendship. But sometimes our attention isn't on all the love we are receiving, it's on what we are lacking. Our thoughts are focused on the family members, friends, and relationships that we have lost, are separated from, or that are absent for whatever reason. We can fail to recognize the tremendous blessings God has provided for us because we are burdened by the pain that comes when someone's love is missing from our lives.

Are you experiencing this? Is celebrating Valentine's Day difficult because a loved one has passed away or is no longer part of your life? Perhaps many miles separate you from someone you love. Or maybe your hurt comes from a relationship you've always longed for but never experienced. Sometimes God allows us to walk through these difficult situations and circumstances so you and I will realize how much we need His over abundant, sacrificial love.

Love is the most important emotion we can experience, but we were not created to express it only to one another. We were made to love God and have an intimate relationship with Him. Human love will never fulfill all of our needs, no matter how much we try to make it do so. It will always fall short. And whenever we seek acceptance from people instead of the Lord, our passion for Him will grow cold and suffer for it. The only way to stop this is to focus so absolutely on Jesus that we care for others because of His overflowing, unconditional love in our lives, not out of our own need for affection.

So how do you make sure that your passion for the Lord is all it should be? First, feeling that longing and emptiness inside is a good indicator that you have not sought and received God's love as fully as you can. The Father's grace is sufficient to sustain you, no matter what you face in life. It will drive out your fears and bring you peace in the storms of life (1 John 4:16–19).

(over please)

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Second, evaluate how you feel about the Lord by the way you treat His Word. Have you begun to neglect the Bible—His love letter to you? The Word of God is as important to your relationship with Him as fuel is to a fire. You cannot live an effective, faithful, loving life without it. If you want to keep your passion for the Father strong, you must stay in His Word (John 14:21).

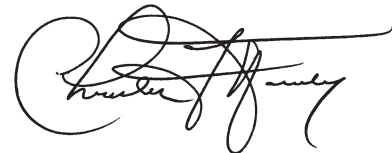
Third, you cannot have a relationship without communication, so you must examine your prayer life. Perhaps you pray, but you no longer feel as if God is listening. Or maybe you just don't go before the Father very often anymore. However, it is crucial that you continue seeking the Lord in prayer—communicating and deepening your intimacy with Him (Hebrews 4:16).

Fourth, are you consistent in your church attendance? Love for God always translates into love for His people (John 13:34–35). If you are always thinking up excuses to avoid the fellowship of other believers, there is definitely a problem. Your love and devotion to Jesus is not all it can be. To rekindle your passion for the Lord, you must reconnect with the Body of Christ.

Fifth, make sure you are obeying God in every way you know how. This includes repenting for your sins, giving as the Word directs, and serving in whatever capacity He calls you to (John 15:5–11). If you feel as if you cannot afford to obey Him or that you must compromise your loyalty to Him to be accepted by others, then your passion for the Lord needs readjusting.

Your intimate relationship with the Father is the most important bond you will ever experience. It determines the impact, fruit, and quality of your life because only God can fill you with the love that never ceases. So focus on the Lord, and you will overflow with His love. May our heavenly Father bless you abundantly as you learn to love Him more and serve Him faithfully.

Prayerfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles F. Stanley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "S".

Charles F. Stanley

P.S. Thank you so much for the love and dedication you have shown in helping In Touch share the gospel worldwide. I pray for the love of God to continue overflowing in your life and that others would be drawn to Him through your faithful example.