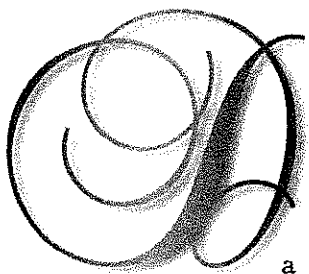




IF YOU LOVE ME

“IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS.”

John 14:15 NKJV



Don't you just love having plants around the house? There's something about a green and growing thing that seems to make a home homier! Now, there are two kinds of gals when it comes to keeping plants. There are those God has gifted with a green thumb. They were born to nurture and care for growing things. They've learned all about emulsions and fertilizers, soil composition and watering techniques. Always puttering over their plants, they're plucking, pruning, spritzing and singing. Under their care, orchids and ivies flourish and thrive. Their homes are verdant with lush foliage. Then there are those of us who are better off buying the kind of plants you have to dust



CLEARING + THE + COBWEBS

Why are children
always told they



need to prove
that they are
responsible
enough before
they can have
a pet?



This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

2 John 1:6 NKJV

instead of water. Despite all our best intentions, plants wither under our touch. We over-water. We under-water. We forget to water. Leaves turn brown and drop to the floor. We have no idea what we did wrong, but every fern, African violet and philodendron that crossed our threshold wound up in the dumpster a few weeks later.

We may love having plants around the house, but love isn't enough for a plant to live on. They need simple things, like water, fertilizer and sunlight. And they need more complicated things, like dividing, repotting and pruning. You can't say you love your houseplant if you don't do the practical things loving your plant requires. That's a little like loving God. It starts out so simple. God loves me, and I love Him, so we can live happily ever after! But love comes with certain . . . obligations. Love isn't just a feeling. Love has very practical consequences in every life.

1. What does John say love should look like, according to 2 John 1:6?

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2. John said this commandment has been heard since the very beginning, so let's go back to the Old Testament and the giving of the Law. What did Moses tell the people they must do?

Deuteronomy 10:12—“What does the LORD your God _____ of you, but to _____ the LORD your God, to _____ in all His _____ and to _____ Him, to _____ the LORD your God with all your _____ and with all your _____” (NKJV).

Deuteronomy 11:1—“Therefore you shall _____ the LORD your God, and _____ His _____, His _____, His _____, and His _____ always” (NKJV).

Deuteronomy 11:13—“_____ My commandments which I command you today, to _____ the LORD your God and _____ Him with all your _____ and with all your _____” (NKJV).

3. There are different ways to say it: “Walk the talk.” “Put your money where your mouth is.” “Practice what you preach.” How does 1 John 3:18 put it?

You don't have to pretend with God. Risk being absolutely honest. Wrestle with your faith. Live your life authentically, always remembering that you are loved forever.

Sheila Walsh



It's easy to lose joy in life. We get to the stage where we take ourselves too seriously or are afraid to make mistakes. But when we know that we are loved by God, loved beyond measure, we can dive in and take a chance.

Sheila Walsh

4. Read John 14:21–23. What is Jesus' expectation for those who love Him, according to verse 21? And then, in verse 23, what is the promise made to those who truly love Him?

Now this may seem a little strange. After all, we just got done saying that God is love and God loves all of us unconditionally. All this talk about keeping commandments and doing good deeds smacks of conditions! We like to know that God loves us—it makes us feel good. We'd just as soon take that promise and rest on it. But remember, God loves because He is God. He shows the same mercy, grace and kindness to all. "For He is kind to the unthankful and evil" (Luke 6:35 NKJV). We *don't* need to earn God's love. He couldn't love us any more or any less than He does now. But what we're talking about here is *our* love for God. We believers claim to love Jesus. But how do we show that love? Is it just warm fuzzy feelings about our Creator? I should say not. We say we love God. But how do we return His great love? Simple. We live to please Him. We do as He asks of us. We obey Him.



5. First John 5:2, 3 has much the same message as the other verses we've looked at so far today. But what note of encouragement is tacked onto the end?

6. Paul makes an interesting request in 2 Corinthians 8:24. What is it?

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

1 John 5:2, 3 NKJV



I have learned that pain has purpose, which, at the peak of excruciating discomfort, brings me little consolation. Hindsight, though, has often proven pain's value. In fact, I have found pain to be one of life's most effective teachers. It gains one's full attention. It takes lessons down to the bottom line.

Patsy Clairmont

7. Now there's no denying that obedience doesn't always come easy. We all undergo testing, trials and temptations. These are opportunities for us to prove the steadfastness of our love. What does James tell us along these lines in James 1:12?

8. What attitude did Paul have, which helped him to live out his love for Jesus?

"I have been _____ with Christ; it is _____ I who _____, but Christ _____ in me; and the _____ which I now _____ in the _____ I live by _____ in the Son of God, who _____ me and _____ Himself for me." — Galatians 2:20 NKJV



DIGGING DEEPER

God calls for His people to obey the commands He gave to them. These were not hardships, and often carried with them the promise of blessings when obeyed.

- Psalm 103:17, 18
- John 15:10

PONDER & PRAY

Love has its intentional side. Our actions demonstrate the love we carry in our hearts. They're the proof, the evidence, the verification of what we claim. This week, pray for the eyes to see the practical side of love. In your relationships with people and your relationship with God, take note of the things we do because of our love. Make a conscious effort to excel in demonstrating your love in tangible ways.



TRINKET TO TREASURE

This week we compared our love for God with our love for houseplants. Just as we cannot expect a plant to survive without taking care of its practical needs, we must accept that there are practical consequences to loving the Lord. So this week's trinket is a plant mister. A houseplant needs constant nurturing in order to grow and mature. Our love for God, in order for it to mature, must be accompanied by



Receiving God's Love

obedience. "If you love Me, you'll keep my command-ments."

† NOTES & PRAYER REQUESTS †

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