# Loving the ‘unlovely’

## Teachers share their response

**Yvonne Judd**
Teacher, Lillydale Adventist Academy, Vic



The Christian teacher’s response to ‘Loving the unlovely’ barely differs from that of teachers of any belief or non-belief system. All teachers regard the individual as paramount to their creed of providing equitable access to educational resources. Enabling students to capture a sense of their intrinsic worth regardless of stereotypical propaganda serves to establish an environment where learning can at least attempt to flourish. In that respect, the Christian teacher really has no differentiating approach to interacting with those who, for whatever reason, do not easily integrate into our societal norms of behaviour, appearance or demeanour. But there are some compelling reasons for the Christian teacher to seriously consider this issue.

By permitting the adage of ‘unlovely’, we are admitting that a standard of ‘loveliness’ exists. Charging an individual with ‘unloveliness’, we are referring to some stated or unstated criteria of ‘loveliness’. This standard can only be based upon subjective and idiosyncratic agendas. There is no collective standard as to what constitutes ‘loveliness’, or for that matter, ‘unloveliness’. It is our personal response to another that enables us to assess the extent to which that individual is inculcated into the norms we hold dear. This assessment of another’s behaviour or appearance fails to present as a valid measurement because the aspects being tested cannot be identified, measured or objectively clarified.

> ***“Loving the ‘unlovely’ takes on a different slant when we perceive that we are the ‘unlovely’”***

As Christian teachers, we are bound by another creed which states that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). It is the Christian dogma which highlights that all of us are indeed, ‘unlovely’. Regardless of our status, age, gender, education or presentation of societal norms, Christians believe that in the sight of our Creator we are all equal. Therefore, even if Christians adhere to the existence of ‘unloveliness’, according to our beliefs, the label applies to ourselves. Loving the ‘unlovely’ takes on a different slant when we perceive that we are the ‘unlovely’. It is always a different outlook when we adopt the aspect of the other. Biblical teaching also denounces judgement of others (Luke 6:37). It does not stipulate or qualify the judgement; it is simply a command not to judge.

Christian teachers cannot differentiate between the ‘lovely’ and the ‘unlovely’. Biblical truth does not expound the norms that society holds dear; it only asks that we “love the Lord our God with all our hearts and our neighbour as ourselves” (Mark 12:30–31). Simple but all encompassing. Our creed also presents us all as in need of serious correction, none of us can afford to ‘point the finger’ because we are all ‘unlovely’.

**Craig Vogel**
Teacher, Avondale School, NSW

The old saying, “To err is human, to forgive divine”, may influence us to believe that true forgiveness is impossible for mere mortals. Is “loving the unlovely” also impossible for mere mortals and thus educators?

It is the end of a long term, two days before holidays and the students have already been on vacation mentally for several days. You are under pressure to complete a unit of work that has gone overtime. The lesson has been meticulously planned, with strategies and activities all focussing on the prescribed outcomes. Students arrive in a festive mood more suited to celebration than learning. You gain control of the class and proceed with the lesson. You are highly focussed. One student then proceeds to sabotage everything you do and destroys the tone with rude and inappropriate comments. You remove the student from class. The student begins to argue irrationally and make personal comments about you and your anatomy, using language borrowed from the local building site. Truly an unlovely moment, but is this student unlovely and undeserving of our love?

1 John 4:7–21 speaks directly to the question of whom we should love and why we should love. “We love because God first loved us” (v. 19). In

verse 21 it clearly states, “The command that God has given us is this: whoever loves God must love his brother also.”

It is clear then that we must “love the unlovely”. However, we don’t have to accept the unacceptable behaviours. Often the line between a student’s unacceptable behaviour and that student as one of God’s children gets very blurred. Our greatest task is to maintain a clear vision so that the person can be loved whilst the unacceptable is dealt with. To achieve this, I believe we need a continuing relationship with our God, a God of love.

**Neva Taylor**
Principal, Hurstville Adventist School, NSW

To love a student who is labelled as “unlovely” … What does this mean?

Many things could cause educators to classify their students as unlovely. This category may include those that are unattractive, have a behaviour problem, have a physical or intellectual disability, have pushy parents, are from a disadvantaged family, are from a different cultural or religious background, lack confidence or are simply obnoxious. All these labels can influence a teacher’s feelings of love for a child.

It was in Year 3 that I decided I wanted to become a teacher. Why? I wanted to help children feel loved and cared for and to have confidence in themselves. I wanted them to enjoy school and have a love of learning. As a young student, I had a love of learning but never had confidence in myself and never felt valued by the teacher. At the tender age of nine, I was determined to show the world how to teach with love and compassion for my students! Well, I don’t know whether I have truly achieved that, but I try, and it is something that is foremost in my mind each day as I deal with children.

One thing I have told myself for the past 30 years as an educator is that all my students are equal and all are loved by Jesus, even those whom we may think are unlovely. As Christian teachers, our mission should be to love all students that God makes a part of our lives. His love is unconditional and He doesn’t choose which of us He will love. “We love because God first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

We can make a difference in the lives of our students by going out of our way to help those whom we consider unlovely. Why might a particular student be unlovely? Maybe they have never experienced love so do not know how to show love to someone else. Maybe a lack of confidence hinders them from participating in class activities and forming friendships.

Students need to feel our love now more than ever. Who knows, school may be the only place they feel secure and the teacher the only example of love. How might we show our love for the unlovely?

- Have a spirit of forgiveness—give them chances and opportunities to prove themselves rather than demean them.
- Discipline in private.
- Show a spirit of acceptance.
- Give praise and respect where and when it is due. My father would always remind me that if I wanted respect from my students, I would have to earn it by showing respect to them.
- Nurture confidence so they can progress through life with a feeling of achievement.
- Ask for Divine guidance. Pray with and for those we find unlovely in our class and ask God to help us love the unlovely so that His love can shine through us to those in our care. Ask Him for guidance to know what each child needs.

In conclusion, the impact and success that we as Christian teachers have on these students may not be seen in the short term. Furthermore, success is not necessarily witnessing a change in the students’ lives, although we pray it will be, success is doing what God wants us to do. By grasping God’s unconditional love and continually demonstrating it to all our students, success will be ours.

“The way you give to others is the way God will give to you.” (Luke 6:38). TEACH



> ***“Our greatest task is to maintain a clear vision so that the person can be loved whilst the un-acceptable is dealt with”***




[“Teaching is...”: Lanelle Cobbin]