

Experiencing A Deeper Relationship With God



“We love because
He first loved us.”

1 John 4:19

Book 4
Growing DEEP

Bill Loveless
Christ Is Life Ministries

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Book Four

“Growing Deep”

Bill Loveless

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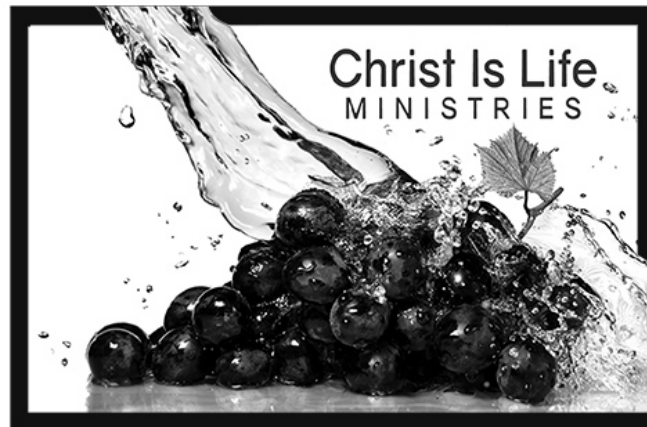
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Growing Up – Growing Out – Growing Deep Series

This is **Book Four** of the series which is designed to fulfill our calling as Christians:

“We are called to grow into Christ-likeness and experience our true identity in order to live life for others and experience a deep relationship with God.”

Growing UP

Book One - Growing To Become Like Christ

- What it means to grow up spiritually to become like Christ.
- The difference between living “A” Christian life versus living “THE” Christian life.
- What it looks like practically to grow to become like Christ.
- What are some of the hindrances to spiritual growth and how we overcome them.
- How becoming like Christ transforms every area of our lives.

Book Two - Experiencing Your True Identity

- How God exchanged our old identity for a new identity.
- What our true identity is in Christ.
- God’s transformation process to experience our true identity.
- How living from our true identity impacts our lives and the lives of others.

Growing OUT

Book Three - Living Life For Others

- What the overflow of Christ-likeness looks like in living life for others.
- Looking past the externals and seeing the heart of another person.
- What freedom looks like to love others with Christ’s love.
- Ministry to others from the overflow of Christ-likeness.

Growing DEEP

Book Four - Experiencing A Deeper Relationship With God

- How God feels about you and why He created you.
- What intimacy with God and God with us looks like.
- Key truths concerning intimacy with God.
- Engaging God to experience a deeper relationship with Him.

The Layout of This Study

Thank you for choosing to study *Experiencing A Deeper Relationship With God*. Before we begin, let's look at the layout of the study. The study contains six lessons, and each lesson has five daily readings (Day One, Day Two, etc.). If you are meeting weekly, this will give you seven days to complete the five daily readings. Throughout each lesson there will be **Questions, Scriptures for Meditation**, and an **Engaging God** section.

Questions

There are questions throughout the lesson and at the end of each lesson. They are primarily designed for you individually and for you to share with the group.

Meditation of Scripture

Throughout the study there will be several places where you will be asked to meditate on scriptures. If the idea of meditation is new to you, it means to engage the Spirit of God to give you personal revelation of a scripture(s). It involves being quiet before the Lord and allowing Him to insert whatever thoughts He wants to share. Meditation is a crucial part of the transformation process.

Engaging God

This section is designed for you to ask the Holy Spirit to give you personal revelation, understanding, and application of what you have just read. This is especially crucial when you come to truths that contradict what you believe. (If we don't seek God to reveal His truth, then we will never move beyond the false beliefs that we may be believing.) Therefore, be sure and take the time to engage God as you go through the study.

Information - Revelation - Application - Transformation

God provided His word primarily for four reasons.

- **Information** – for you to know intellectually what God's word says.
- **Revelation** – for God to give you personal revelation of His word.
- **Application** – depending on God to apply His truth into your life.
- **Transformation** – into Christ-likeness will be the result of information, revelation, and application.

Revelation

Since I will be using the word "revelation" throughout the study, I want to define what I mean when I use this word. "Revelation" simply means that God **supernaturally** takes His truth and makes it personal to you and to your life situations. Revelation takes you from intellectual understanding to spiritual understanding of God's truth.

Recommendation

Due to the depth of the content in each lesson, it is recommended that you take at least 12 weeks to go through the material. That would mean that you take the six lessons and divide them in half. This would give you more time to digest the content in a deeper way.

Experiencing A Deeper Relationship With God

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Lesson One

How Can We Know For Certain God Loves Us?

What Is The Proof of God's Love

DAY ONE

Introduction

When it comes to your relationship with God, where would you say you are in that relationship? Is there an ongoing hunger and thirst for a deeper relationship with God or do you feel there is something lacking? Maybe you struggle with connecting with God or receiving His love or loving Him in return? Wherever you are, the prayer is that as you go through this study engaging the Holy Spirit, He will:

- Reveal the height and depth of God's love for you.
- Show you the lengths He has gone to and will go to in order to win your love.
- Expose any false concepts you may have about God.
- Teach you how to overcome any obstacle to receive His love or love Him in return.
- Teach you how to experience the deepest possible connection with God.
- Draw you into a love relationship that you never thought possible.

Therefore, as you go through this study, please invite the Holy Spirit to reveal and teach you the truth and transform your heart so that your greatest desire for the rest of your life will be to love Him with all of your mind, your soul, and your heart. Let's begin by looking at the following quotes.

"We long for intimacy because we were made in the image of the perfect intimacy."

John Eldredge – *Sacred Romance*

"The deepest awareness I have of my life is that I am a man passionately loved by God."

Thomas Merton

"Our seeking, compassionate God is not filled with anger, but with love for us, and longs to be with us even in our weaknesses, failures and rebellions"

Larry Smith - *Christ Our Life*

"You may not realize it but the Father is ravished by you. You make Him smile. You make Him laugh. You make Him leap for joy. You make His heart beat faster."

S.J. Hill – *Enjoying God*

"One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD And to meditate in His temple."

David – *Psalms 27:4*

When you read these quotes, what conclusions do you come to about these men and their relationship with God? Do you have a sense they are experiencing a deep relationship with God? How do their thoughts impact you? Do any of these comments create in your heart a greater desire to experience God at a deeper level? If so, the question you may be asking is, “How did they get there or how do I get there?” Let’s lay the foundation for the answer to that question looking at the meaning of the word “is” and the lengths God has gone to and will go to in order to prove His love for you.

The Meaning of “IS”

God IS Love - It IS Who He IS

You are probably familiar with the last three words of 1 John 4:8:

*“... God **IS** love.”*

As many times as you may have read this verse, have you ever spent time just meditating on the word “is?” If not, please do so because this two-letter word holds the eternal meaning of who God is. The word “is” tells us that love is the total makeup of everything about God: His nature, His character, and His essence. If this is true, what is the result?

LOVE governs who God IS and everything He DOES.

Love IS the essence of God’s very LIFE.

Meditate on this thought for a moment. If this is true, then the motivation behind everything God does or does not do, allows to happen or not happen, is out of love.

A famous theologian, A. W. Tozer, put it this way:

“Nothing God ever does, or ever did, or ever will do, is separate from the love of God.”

A. W. Tozer

Meditate: on the word “is” and see what the Holy Spirit reveals to you.

What Kind of Love IS God?

Being finite humans, it is impossible to define the love of God. The best we can do is put descriptive words to it. As we discussed in Book Three – *Living Life For Others*, the love of God in the New Testament is called “*agape*” love. Here are some descriptive words for *agape* love:

Agape love is PERFECT, ETERNAL, UNCONDITIONAL,

IMMEASURABLE, UNCHANGING, and SELFLESS.

We could add more words to this list but wouldn't you agree these describe the essence and nature of God? Let's take a closer look at each of these words.

PERFECT – This means a love which is entirely without fault or defect. Because God is perfect, this is the only kind of love that can flow from God.

ETERNAL – is a love that has no beginning or ending. It is a love that has continued from eternity past and will last forever.

UNCONDITIONAL – Unlike man who can only love with conditions, God's love has no conditions, limitations, or expectations.

IMMEASURABLE – means too large, extensive, or extreme to measure. Therefore, God's love is limitless.

UNCHANGING – means God's love is always constant, stable, and continuous. As God is unchanging in His nature, so too is His love.

SELFLESS – since God, in and of Himself has no needs, it allows Him to love totally selflessly.

Meditate: on these six characteristics of God's love.

Engaging God: As you meditate on these six meanings, verbalize each characteristic this way: "God's love for me is: perfect, eternal, unconditional, immeasurable, unchanging, and selfless."

Let's look at two other key words to describe God's *agape* love: unfailing and unstoppable.

God's Love Is UNFAILING

*"O LORD, Your **unfailing love** fills the earth; teach me your decrees."*
Psalms 119:64

*"Praise the Lord, for he has shown me the wonders of His **unfailing love**...."*
Psalms 3:21

People fail us all of the time. We may be loved by someone today and that same person may reject us tomorrow. The thought of being loved with an unfailing love is so difficult because we are all prone to fail in loving others. However, God, being love, loves us with a love that never fails. Many Christians struggle with this truth because as humans we are conditional lovers who, apart from Christ, cannot and do not love one another unconditionally. However, God's love will never fail you, even when you:

- Sin
- Feel or believe God does not love you
- Are angry, upset, or frustrated with God
- Choose to walk away from God

How would it change how you feel about God's love for you if you truly believed His love for you would never fail regardless of what you did or did not do?

Meditate: on the truth that God's love for you will never fail regardless of what you do or do not do.

Engaging God: If you struggle with believing this truth, ask the Holy Spirit to begin renewing your mind to this truth.

Key Point: When you do sin, God's love for you does not change but it does affect your relationship with Him. The key is that it affects your relationship with Him, but not His love for you. For example, let's assume a happily married couple had a serious argument. They both selfishly were standing their ground. If they both continue living out of the flesh, it will negatively impact their relationship. They still are married but until repentance takes place, the harmony of the relationship is impacted. It is the same with God. When you sin, you are still in union with Him but the harmony of the relationship has been impacted. Therefore, when you sin, repent of that sin and the harmony of your relationship with God is immediately restored.

DAY TWO

God's Love For You Is UNSTOPPABLE

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing (unstoppable) love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,’ says the LORD, who has compassion on you.” Isaiah 54:10

The cousin to God loving you with an unfailing love is that God's love is unstoppable. God is determined to love you no matter what and will keep loving you for an eternity and there is nothing you can do, or not do, to stop it. Think about this for a moment. The determined God of the universe will never stop loving you. Imagine a tsunami. Once a tsunami gathers momentum and develops into this enormous wave, there is nothing that will stop it. It is the same with God's love. It is a non-stop flow of *agape* love that will continually flood your heart.

Engaging God: If you think there is something you can do, or not do, to stop God from loving you, seek the Holy Spirit to convince you of His unstoppable love for you.

God's Love According To 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Let's end this section by looking at God's love in light of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Since God is love, substitute the word “God” for the word “love,” and read through these verses.

“Love (God) is **patient** and **kind**. Love is **not jealous** or **boastful** or **proud**⁵ or **rude**. It **does not demand its own way**. It is **not irritable**, and it **keeps no record of being wronged**.⁶ It **does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out**.⁷ Love **never gives up**, **never loses faith**, **is always hopeful**, and **steadfast through every circumstance**” 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

Let's apply these verses to God's character in relationship to you.

God:

- Is patient
- Is kind
- Is not jealous
- Is not boastful
- Is not proud or rude
- Is not demanding
- Is not irritable
- Keeps no records of being wronged
- Rejoices over truth and not injustice
- Never gives up
- Never loses faith
- Always hopeful
- Steadfast through every circumstance

To make this more personal, let's look at some of these characteristics as they apply to you.

God:

- Is patient (towards you)
- Is kind (towards you)
- Is not demanding (of you)
- Is not irritable (towards you)
- Keeps no records of being wronged (against you)
- Never gives up (on you)
- Never loses faith (in you)
- Always hopeful (about you)
- Steadfast (with you) through every circumstance

Meditate: on these characteristics and how each one is born out of His love for you.

Exercise: Slowly go back through this list and make it personal by inserting the word “me” instead of “you.”

Now that we know the makeup of God is love, let's look at what He has done, is doing, and will do, to prove His love for us.

What Is The Proof That God Loves You?

You would think that based on the previous section that God does not have to prove His love because it is who He is. However, out of His love for you, He has, is and will continue to prove His love to you. Let's look at some examples that prove His love for you.

The GREATEST Proof of His Love

*“There is **no greater love** than to lay down one's life for one's friend.”*

John 15:13

Would you spend a few moments meditating on three words in this verse? “*No greater love.*” What Jesus is saying here is: “There is no greater proof of My love for you than going to the cross for you. It was a horrible, painful death but I love you enough that I laid down My life for you – even if you were the only person who ever lived.” The Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit so wanted to restore the lost love relationship that when there was no choice to be made other than a sacrifice, Jesus said to the Father and the Holy Spirit, “Here I am, send me.”

Even though our finite minds cannot comprehend the height and depth of His sacrifice, we must continue to seek the Spirit to take us deeper in our understanding of what happened on the cross. It wasn't Roman soldiers who drove the nails into His hands and feet; it was His love for you that chose the nails.

*“but **God shows His love** for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Romans 5:8

Have you ever thought that if you were the only person who ever walked on the face of the earth, Jesus' love for you is so great, He would have died on a cross just for you?

Meditate: on the truth that Jesus would have gone to the cross just for you.

Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to sink deeper into your heart the reality of Jesus' sacrifice for you out of His love for you.

Do you believe that the only thing God needed to do to express His love for you was go to the cross for you? The answer is "yes," but He didn't stop there. He did much more to persuade us of His love.

Out of His Love, He Chose The "YOU" Version of You To Be Born

You may not know this, but there are 500 million genetic possibilities at conception. God loved you enough that out of 500 million possible genetic combinations, God chose the "you" version of you to be born. Think about it. He did not want 499,999,999 other versions of you. He wanted you! David confirms this in Psalm 139:13-16:

"For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

Think about these words, "fearfully and wonderfully made." "You knit me together." God is telling us that the "you" form of you was personally chosen by Him and hand crafted to be exactly the form of you He desires – all because He wants to love you and no other form of you.

As you read this, do you sense the Holy Spirit persuading you that God loves this form of you and no other? How might that change how you see yourself if you believed you are fearfully and wonderfully made by God for God?

Meditate: on Psalm 139:13-16 above and you might insert this phrase "out of Your love for me" at the beginning of the verses.

Engage God: If you struggle seeing yourself as being fearfully and wonderfully made, seek the Lord to persuade you that He only wanted the "you" form of you.

God Could Hardly Wait Until You Were Born

"Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes." Ephesians 1:4

As a result of God choosing the "you" form of you to be born out of 500 million possibilities, He could hardly wait until you were born. With that in mind, can you imagine God's anticipation for you to be born? Do you know how excited He was the moment you came into this world? You

thought your parents were happy, but their happiness pales in comparison to the eternal happiness the Lord had (and still has) the day you were born. Why? Because even though He has loved you for eternity, the stage was now set for Him to start bringing you to Himself to reveal and express His eternal love for you personally.

Meditate: on the anticipation God must have had for you on the day you were born.

DAY THREE

He ADOPTED You Into His Own Family

At the point of your salvation, His love for you was so great He adopted you into His own family as we see this in Ephesians 1:5.

*“His unchanging plan has always been **to adopt us into His own family** by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure.”*

The first part of God’s unchanging and eternal plan was to adopt us into His own family. If you were adopted, especially out of a terrible situation and into a loving family, you have a better sense than most what a blessing adoption is. However, there is a difference between physical and spiritual adoption.

SPIRITUAL adoption is the act of leaving one’s natural family (the family of Adam) and entering into the RIGHTS and PRIVILEGES of another family (the family of God).

Let’s go back to the time when Paul wrote this because in the Roman world, adoption was a significant and common practice. Unlike today where we can choose who is a beneficiary in our will, in the Roman world, for the most part, a man had no choice but to pass his wealth on to his son or sons. If a man had no sons or if he felt that his sons were incapable of managing his wealth or were unworthy of it, he would have to adopt someone who would make a worthy son. These adoptions for the most part were boys and adult men. In some cases, the one who was adopted might even be older than the man who was adopting him.

When the adoption was legally approved, the adoptee would have all his debts cancelled and he would receive a new name. He would be the legal son of his adoptive father and entitled to all the rights and benefits of a son. A father could disown his natural-born son, but an adoption was irreversible. It is the same with spiritual adoption because once you are adopted into the family of God, it is irreversible. In addition, He gave you a new name, “child of God”, which means you have all the privileges and rights as His spiritual son or daughter.

How and when does spiritual adoption occur? It occurs the moment we believe and receive Jesus as our Savior. Look at the following verses to confirm this.

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.” John 1:12

“so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Galatians 4:5

As a result, we are now sons and daughters of God.

Meditate: on the truth that God loves you so much that He didn't just save you. He adopted you as one of His children with all the privileges and rights similar to a natural born son or daughter.

As A Result, You Are His BELOVED Son or Daughter

Not only did you become God's child, you are a beloved son or daughter of God according to Colossians 3:12.

*"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and **beloved**...." Colossians 3:12*

*"To those who are the called, **beloved** in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ." Jude 1*

The word "beloved" is an adjective that refers to "someone who is dearly loved and cherished." What person do you dearly love the most? Multiply the love you have for that person by eternity and that is how much God dearly loves you.

If you have come from a home of unloving or even abusive parents, the word "beloved" may be hard to receive. If this is true of you, please know that your heavenly Father will spend the rest of your life persuading you that you are His very own beloved son or daughter.

FYI: Another one of the Greek words for "beloved" is "favorite." You may not know this, but you are God's favorite.

How would it change how you see God if you understood how beloved you are to Him?

Meditate: on the truth that you are not only a son or daughter of God but a beloved son or daughter.

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit to persuade you in deeper ways the deep love God has for you, especially if you came from an unloving home.

He Made You His HEIR

Not only does God graciously adopt us as beloved sons and daughters, He makes us His heirs according to Romans 8:16, 17 and Galatians 3:29

*"The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, **heirs** also, **heirs of God** and fellow **heirs with Christ**, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him." Romans 8:16, 17*

*"And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, **heirs** according to promise." Galatians 3:29*

The Greek term translated "heirs" in Romans 8:17 refers to "those who receive their allotted possession by right of sonship." Have you ever received an inheritance? If so, what did you do to earn it and what rights did you have to it other than being a son or daughter? In like manner, when we became sons or daughters of God, God so loved us that He made us joint heirs with Himself. This means He gave us full rights to receive His inheritance. As His children, we have an

inheritance that is eternal, that will never fade away, and that is reserved especially for us according to 1 Peter 1:4:

*"We have **been born into a new life which has an inheritance that can't be destroyed or corrupted and can't fade away. That inheritance is kept in heaven for you.**"*

As a result of our inheritance, He has and is giving us every spiritual blessing according to Ephesians 1:3:

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.**"*

What does it mean to be an heir of God and what is our inheritance? We will see the answer to that question in the next section.

Meditate: on the truth that we don't deserve an inheritance, but God, in His incredible love for us, gave us an eternal inheritance that we share with Jesus.

WHAT Did You Inherit?

*"seeing that His divine power has granted to us **everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.**" 2 Peter 1:3*

When you read this verse, the key word is "everything." God so loves us that He did not expect us to live life on our own. He gave us everything we need (i.e., our spiritual inheritance) to live life. Our spiritual inheritance to live life is made up of three things: Christ's life, the power of the Holy Spirit, and a new identity in Christ.

DAY FOUR

1. You Inherited Christ As Your LIFE

*“And when Christ, **who is your life**, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.”
Colossians 3:4*

*“**To live to me is Christ....**” Philippians 1:21*

*“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is **no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;**
and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me
and gave Himself up for me.” Galatians 2:20*

*“We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, **are being transformed into His likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 3:18*

If you have been seeking and living from Christ as your Life since you went through Book One, would you say your life is being transformed? Are you experiencing any of these Christ-like characteristics?

Unconditional Love	Victory	Worth	Acceptance	Freedom
Patience	Strength	Peace	Forgiveness	Understanding
Security	Kindness	Wisdom	Discernment	Compassion
Christ-confidence	Adequacy	Humility	Boldness	Righteousness
Selflessness	Rest	Courage	Hope	Gentleness
Christ-control	Faithfulness	Power	Joy	Goodness

If so, how does this transformation change how you see God? Do you see more clearly His love for you? A love that no longer wants you to walk in pride but in humility – a love that wants you to live from Christ’s acceptance rather than rejection. Where would you be if Christ did not live in you or was not transforming you? Do you find yourself loving others more with the love of Christ? If so, are you getting a better idea of how much God loves you?

Engaging God: Take a moment and thank God for loving you enough to put His life in you and for transforming you into Christ-likeness.

[Note: If you have not gone through Book One – *Growing Into Christ-likeness*, please do so because this study focuses on Christ as THE Life, what it means for Christ to live His life in you, and how to be transformed by His life.]

You inherited Christ’s life, but it did not stop there.

2. You Inherited The POWER of The Holy Spirit

*“Now to Him **who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think**, according to the **power** (of the Holy Spirit) that works within us.” Ephesians 3:20*

Have you experienced some level of victory from a sin pattern in your life? Have you been set free at least in part from a fleshly behavior? Have you experienced some change in how you think, feel, choose, behave, or believe? If so, please know that without inheriting the Holy Spirit and His power none of these things would have taken place. It is crucial to understand that eternally more than you want to live in freedom and victory, God wants you living there as well. That is why in His never-ending love for you, He put His power in you.

Can you imagine what your life would be like if you were trying to overcome sin, set yourself free, or transform yourself apart from the Holy Spirit's power?

Meditate: about where you would be without the power of the Holy Spirit transforming you. As you do, remember that His power was given to you because of His immeasurable love for you.

3. As Part of Your Inheritance, He Made You A NEW CREATION

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." 2 Corinthians 5:17

What we learned from Book Two is that at salvation, God crucified our old identity (Romans 6:6) and gave us a new identity in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). If you have been seeking the Holy Spirit to renew your mind to the truth of your true identity, is the Spirit persuading you that in Christ you are unconditionally loved, selfless, worthy, accepted, etc.? If you are being transformed into experiencing your new identity, how does that change how you view God? Where would you be today if God did not give you a new identity?

God did give you a new identity as one more expression of His boundless love for you. Once again, He did not have to do this, but He did it because He knew that through giving us a new identity, we would not only have the spiritual capacity to receive God's love, but also to love Him in return.

Meditate: on the immensity of God's love for you that He made you a new creation.

Engaging God: Seek God to reveal to you in deeper ways that He gave you a new identity out of His love so that you could experience His love at the deepest levels.

[Note: If you have not gone through Book Two – *Experiencing Your True Identity*, please do so as this study will give you an in-depth understanding of your new identity in Christ.]

He Put Himself In UNION With You To Love You At The Deepest Level

One of the greatest ongoing proofs of God's love for you is that He put Himself in union with you. We see this union relationship in the following verses.

*"In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."
John 14:20*

"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual

*blessing in the heavenly realms because **we are united with Christ**.” Ephesians 1:3*

Remember from Book One, that the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit put themselves in union with you. The word “united” in Ephesians 1:3 means “in union with.” If you recall, these verses mean we have been united with Christ in our human spirit.

Remember, from our union with Christ, we receive revelation from the Spirit about His word and about Himself, we worship God, and we commune with Him at the deepest levels. When God entered into union with us, He restored us to the same union relationship He had with Adam and Eve before the Fall. Why did He do this? So that we, like them, can experience a love relationship with God at the deepest level. Think about it. God cannot get any closer to you than He is right now.

Meditate: on your union with God as being the deepest expression of His love for you.

Engaging God: If you struggle on some level with God’s love for you, seek Him to persuade you that He united Himself with you because His greatest desire is for the same loving relationship with you as He had with Adam and Eve.

Conclusion

Has this section helped you see what lengths God has gone to and will go to in order to prove and persuade you of His *agape* love for you? If not, go back through this section engaging the Holy Spirit to give you spiritual eyes to see what you may have missed the first time through.

Let’s answer one more question before we end this lesson.

DAY FIVE

How Much Does God Love You?

*"See how **very much** our Father loves us...."*

1 John 3:1

Think about the two words "very much." It begs the question, "how much is *very much*?" Would that make a difference in your willingness to receive God's love if you knew how much He really loves you? As you go through this section, seek the Holy Spirit to persuade you in deeper ways the height and length and depth of His love for you.

God Loves You As Much As The Father, Jesus, and The Holy Spirit Love Each Other

*"and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that **the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**" John 17:26*

*"I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and **that you love them as much as you love me.**" John 17:23*

Have you ever thought about how much each member of the Trinity loves the other two members? It is impossible for our finite minds to fathom the depth of the love between them, but the key truth is they love you as much as they love each other.

Meditate: on the love the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit have for each other.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to take you deeper in your understanding of the love the members of the Trinity have for each other.

He Loves You So Much He Made You His BRIDE

*"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and **His bride** has made herself ready." Revelation 19:7*

The Bible tells us that Christ, the bridegroom, sacrificially and lovingly chose the church to be His bride. As a husband and wife are in union with each other in their marriage, so too are we, the bride of Christ, in union with Christ. Our spiritual union is like a human marriage in that we are to experience intimacy, harmony, and oneness with Christ. As with a human marriage, our spiritual marriage is designed to experience the eternal depth of God's love that He has for us.

Meditate: on how personal this is for the Lord to call you His bride.

He So Loves You That He Wants To Spend EVERY MOMENT With You

"You know when I leave and when I get back; I'm never out of your sight. You know everything I'm going to say before I start the first sentence. I look behind me and you're there, then up ahead and you're there, too—your reassuring presence, coming and going. This is too much, too wonderful—I can't take it all in!" Psalm 139:2-6 – The Message Bible

Have you ever thought about God putting Himself in union with you in order to show you how much He wants to spend every moment with you whether you are awake or asleep? Imagine when you get up every morning that Jesus is sitting there anticipating your coming awake so that He can be with you, engage you, and love you throughout the day. We are constantly seeing and leaving people throughout the day, but with God you are never out of His sight. He simply loves to be in your presence.

How does the thought of God wanting to spend every moment with you change how you see God?

Meditate: on the truth that God's love is so great for you, He wants to spend every waking moment with you.

He Wants To Spend ETERNITY with You

*"Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and **gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.**" Titus 3:7*

Not only does God want to spend every moment with you while on earth, but He also wants to spend eternity with you. When you think of heaven, what thoughts come to mind? A heavenly body with no more pain or struggle? Or having a wonderful reunion with loved ones? When God thinks of eternal life, He is thinking about how He will be able to spend the rest of eternity with you. Think of it. We will be face to face with the God who created us out of love, to be loved and to love. There will be no hindrance to our love for Him and from Him. This truth alone should overwhelm us. The very moment we die and come into the presence of God, we will spend eternity loving and being loved by Him.

God's Love For You Is So Great, He Will NEVER Allow You To Be Separated From It

*"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, **will be able to separate us from the love of God** that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38, 39*

Isn't this great news? No one, nor anything else, will ever be able to separate you from the love of God. This is an amazing promise because some people think they can commit some horrible sin that will result in God no longer loving them or worse yet, in losing their salvation. Therefore, realize there is NOTHING that you can do (or not do) to minimize God's love for you or separate you from His love.

If you struggle in this area, how would it change what you believe about how much God loves you if you believed this truth?

Meditate: on the truth there is nothing you can do to change God's love or separate you from it.

Engage God: If you believe that there is something that you can do to make God stop loving you, ask Him to destroy that lie and to replace it with the truth that there is nothing that will stop Him from loving you. If you struggle with the false belief that you can lose your salvation, meditate on the verses above and ask God to begin persuading you that you can't ever be separated from His love. As a result, you can never lose your salvation.

Because of His Great Love For You, He LAVISHES His Love On You

*"How great is the **love the Father has lavished** on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."*

1 John 3:1

The word "lavish" means "to bestow something in generous or extravagant quantities." We don't use this word often but the closest example of this word in human terms is the love a mother lavishes on her newborn, firstborn baby. Would you mothers agree? As wonderful as that may be, God lavishes His love on you in extravagant, endless, and infinite quantities. It is hard to imagine and even harder to grasp as finite human beings. Nevertheless, it is true.

Meditate: on God lavishing His love extravagantly, endlessly, and infinitely on you.

Engage God: Seek the Holy Spirit to deepen your spiritual understanding of God lavishing His love on you.

CONCLUSION

These are just a few examples that reveal the magnitude of God's love for us. As a result, has the Holy Spirit given you new insight and understanding about the enormity of God's love for you?

Therefore, keep seeking revelation of God's love because it is boundless.

Exercise: Below is a summary of this lesson listing the key points along with the scriptures. Please take a few minutes to go back through these main points. As you do, seek the Lord to give you deeper understanding of all that He has done and is doing to persuade you how much He loves you.

How Do We Know God Loves Us?

- **The CROSS - The Greatest Expression of His Love:** "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friend." John 15:13
- **Out of His Love, He Chose The "YOU" Version of You To Be Born:** "For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well." Psalm 139:13 & 14

- **God Could Hardly Wait Until You Were BORN:** “Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes.” Ephesians 1:4
- **He ADOPTED You Into His Own Family:** “so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Galatians 4:5
- **You Are His BELOVED Son Or Daughter:** “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved.” Colossians 3:12
- **Through His Love He Made Us His HEIRS:** “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.” Romans 8:16, 17

What Did You Inherit?

- **You Inherited Christ As Your LIFE:** “And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.” Colossians 3:4
- **You Inherited The POWER of The Holy Spirit:** “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power (of the Holy Spirit) that works within us.” Ephesians 3:20
- **He Made You A NEW Creation:** “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17
- **He Put Himself In UNION With You To Love You At The Deepest Level:** “All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.” Ephesians 1:3

How Much Does God Love You?

- **You Are Loved As Much As The Father, Jesus, and The Holy Spirit Love EACH OTHER:** “and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” John 17:26
- **He Loves You So Much He Made You His BRIDE:** “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” Revelation 19:7
- **He Loves You So Much He Wants To Spend EVERY Moment With You:** “You know when I leave and when I get back; I’m never out of your sight.” Psalm 139:2
- **He Loves You So Much He Wants To Spend ETERNITY With You:** “Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.” Titus 3:7
- **His Love For You Is So Great, He Will Never Allow You To Be SEPARATED From It:** “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present

nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38, 39

- **Because of His Great Love For You, He LAVISHES His Love On You:** “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” 1 John 3:1

Discussion Questions:

1. What key truth(s) impacted you the most in this lesson? Why?

2. Which truths from the *What Is The Proof That God Loves You?* section most impacted you? In what ways did they impact you?

3. Which truths from the *What Is The Proof That God Loves You?* section did you struggle believing? Why do you think that is?

4. Which truths from the *How Much Does God Love You* section most impacted you? In what ways did they impact you?

5. Which truths from the *How Much Does God Love You* section did you struggle believing? What might be the reasons for that?

Lesson Two

How Does God Feel About You?

God's Divine Invitation

In this lesson, we will look at the following topics:

- How does God really feel about you?
- God pursuing you with His love
- God's greatest desire
- God's divine invitation

DAY ONE

How Does God Really Feel About You?

Introduction

In addition to how much God loves you, have you ever thought about how God feels about you? Some people struggle with thinking about God having feelings because they see that as possibly bringing God down to our human level. However, since God created emotions as part of our human makeup and we are created in His image, this means God has emotions, too.

Scripture clearly shows that not only do we have feelings of love, joy, peace, anger, grief, compassion, etc., but God has these same emotions as well. Remember in Book Two, we talked about Jesus who had emotions of grief, joy, surprise, and excitement. Therefore, in this section, we are going to look at the truth concerning how God feels about you. Please invite the Holy Spirit to persuade you in a deeply personal way God's feelings for you.

God EXULTS (Leaps For Joy) Over You

Do you typically connect God with being joyful? Look at the following verses.

*"You will make known to me the path of life; **In Your presence is fullness of joy**; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever." Psalm 16:11*

*"Glory and majesty surround him, power and **joy** fill his Temple." 1 Chronicles 16:27*

There is no doubt God is full of joy, but is He joyful about you?

*"The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. **He will exult over you with joy**, He will quiet you in His love," Zephaniah 3:17a*

We see in this verse that God exults over you with joy. We all can experience human joy from time to time but think about the kind of joy God experiences for you. An eternal, continuous, unending joy. Not only that, but one of the definitions of “exult” is to “leap for joy.”

Can you visualize God leaping for joy over you? We can imagine children leaping for joy but for many of us, it is hard to grasp the eternal God of the universe leaping for joy over us. Why would God be so joyous over you? Because you are His personal creation. One of a kind, created to be loved by Him. The truth is you bring Him great joy by being you. And no sin you commit will ever change God’s joy for you.

Meditate: on the truth that God feels so much joy for you that He is leaping for joy.

“You make God smile. You make Him laugh. You make Him leap for joy. You make His heart beat faster. He loves your uniqueness. He loves the smile that only your face can radiate. He looks at you and grins.” S. J. Hill – Enjoying God

God Is HAPPY With You

*“according to the glorious gospel of the **blessed (happy) God.**”
1 Timothy 1:11*

*“And as a bridegroom is happy in his bride, **so your God is happy with you**”
Isaiah 62:5 – The Message Bible*

Have you thought about God being happy? He is because the word “blessed” in the verse above means “happy.” God is not only happy in and of Himself, He is openly happy with you. Imagine the happiness a groom has for his bride on their wedding day. Multiply that happiness times infinity and that is God’s happiness over you. Human happiness for one another will ebb and flow based on how someone behaves, but God’s happiness is not based on behavior. Rather, it is based on the fact that He created you and you bring Him great joy. Think about the following quote:

“The word ‘ravished’ best communicates the emotions Christ has for us.....Our Savior, overcome with emotions for us, tells us we have stolen His heart. Just one glance of our eyes toward Him brings Him great joy and delight.” Larry Smith - Christ Our Life

How might it change how you see God if you believed that He is happy with you?

Meditate: on Isaiah 62:5 and think about how much happiness you bring God.

God LIKES You

*“For the **LORD takes pleasure in His people....**” Psalm 149:4*

God not only loves you, but He also likes you. Many people have said that God loves them, but when asked, “Does God like you?” they hesitate because they are not convinced God likes them. We do this because when we look at other people, we base how much we like or dislike them on such things as their behavior, their personality, or their beliefs. However, unlike people, God likes you regardless.

Can you envision a God who really likes you? He likes everything about you: your face, your smile, your personality, your interests. Everything. Why? Because you are His creation—unique, one of a kind (even if you are an identical twin). Think about the day you were born and visualize God elbowing the angels and exclaiming with great joy, “There is my boy/girl!”

How would it change how you feel about God if you believed He likes you?

Meditate: on the truth that because you are His unique creation, God likes you.

He Wants To Be Your BEST Friend

*“No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you **friends**.” John 15:15*

Have you meditated on this verse and realized that the eternal, all-powerful God of the universe wants you as His friend? What an amazing truth. However, not only does God want you as His friend, He wants to be your best friend.

When you think of your best friend(s), what are the qualities that make him or her your best friend? What do you enjoy most about them? Their personality, their hobbies, their beliefs, or their passion for God? As your best friend, you will overlook some of their faults or quirky habits, or even some of their fleshly behaviors. Whatever the attraction, you love them and want to be with them.

As great as any human friend can be, eternally more than that, God desires to be your best friend. There is nothing you can do to change how He feels about you. You may have lost a good or best friend because of a disagreement or misunderstanding. However, that will never happen with God. Why? Because He will never stop loving you and desiring your friendship. Not only that, unlike your best friend, God is with you every moment of the day.

Meditate: on the truth that God wants you to be His best friend.

DAY TWO

You Are His FAVORITE

Remember one of the meanings of “beloved” in the last lesson is “favorite.” Have you ever thought about God not only wanting to be your best friend, but that you are also God’s favorite?

Look at these verses in Psalm 139:13-15 to explain.

*“Oh yes, **you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother’s womb. I thank you, High God—you’re breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration—what a creation! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something.**” The Message Bible*

You may be asking, “How can I be God’s favorite in light of the billions of people who have walked the earth?” When we think of a favorite person, that person stands out among all the rest. We typically have favorites based on how much they like you or that you are attracted to their personality. However, God, being God, sees you as His favorite because you were uniquely created by Him and for Him according to Psalm 139 above.

Have you ever thought that you are God’s favorite? Not because you are favored more than someone else. Rather, because you were uniquely and exclusively created by Him and for Him.

Meditate: on the truth that you are God’s favorite.

God Is SINGING Over You

We now know from the first part of Zephaniah 3:17 that God is leaping for joy over us. However, it does not stop there. Look at the last part of Zephaniah 3:17:

*“...He will **rejoice over you with loud singing.**” Zephaniah 3:17b*

Not only is God leaping for joy over you, but He is singing over you as well. Is it possible that God has not only written a song just for you, but He sings it over you as well? Can you imagine what the words of that song might be that apply to you and you alone? If you have read this verse before, have you stopped to think what it must be like for God to sing? What a beautiful, heavenly voice He must have. However, not only is He singing over you, the verse says He is singing loudly. How loud must His singing be over you? Loud enough that all of heaven can hear?

As you know, the beautiful thing about singing is that it enables our hearts to express deeply-felt emotions that mere speaking can’t communicate. Singing does what words can’t accomplish. With God, words are not enough to express how He feels about you so He sings over you. Take a moment and think about God singing over you right now.

How does God singing loudly over you change how you feel about Him? How does it change what you believe about how God feels about you?

Meditate: on God singing continuously and loudly over you.

He LONGS To Be With You And Be Gracious To You

*“Therefore, the LORD **longs** to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who long for Him.” Isaiah 30:18*

As a result of everything you have read in this lesson so far, can you see how God feels an ongoing longing for you and a longing to be with you? The words “longs for” in the original language means “to strongly and greatly desire” something. In this case, as a result of God’s love for you, He greatly desires your heart. He proves this by pouring out His grace to you. As we know, grace comes in many forms: His life and power in us, answered prayers, needs being met, or transforming us to experience His love, peace, compassion, etc. The key is that God is not struggling to be gracious to you. Rather, because of how He feels about you, He longs to pour out His abundant grace on you.

Meditate: on the phrase “longs for” and how this applies to God’s desire for you and His desire to pour His abundant grace into your life.

God’s Feelings For You As It Relates To The FRUIT of The Spirit

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control**; against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22, 23*

From our past studies we know that the fruit of the Spirit is a group of nine characteristics of Christ-likeness. What we discovered is that all the other fruit in the verse flow from love. If we are living from Christ’s love, we will be joyful, peaceful, patient, etc. Let’s look at these characteristics in light of the truth that God’s essence **is** love and apply them to how God feels about you.

Because of God’s love for you, He is continuously and consistently:

- Overjoyed about you
- At total peace with you
- Patient with you
- Kind towards you
- Good to you
- Faithful to you
- Gentle towards you

Not only can we experience these Christ-like characteristics ourselves, but they are wonderful examples of how God feels towards you.

Conclusion

Has the Holy Spirit persuaded you in deeper ways how God feels about you? There is so much more that could be said about this topic but hopefully, through this part of the study you are being persuaded that God:

- Exults and rejoices over you
- Is continuously and loudly singing over you
- Is happy with you
- Likes you
- Wants to be your best friend
- Thinks of you as His favorite
- Longs to be gracious to you

Engaging God: Look back over this section and seek the Holy Spirit to persuade you if there are any of these things God feels about you, you really don't believe.

DAY THREE

God Is Pursuing You With His Love

Introduction

God is not content with just proving His love for you and revealing to you how much He loves you. He is in a non-stop pursuit of you with His love. Why?

***ETERNALLY more than you may want a deep relationship with God,
He DESIRES and is SEEKING the deepest possible relationship with you.***

God's PURSUIT of You

The Bible is clear that God loves you, but did you know He also pursues you with His love?

"Surely, goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life."

Psalm 23:6

"Pursue" in Hebrew means "to run after." Can you imagine the God of the universe because of His immense love for you is running after you like a loving parent who is running after his/her child? God's love towards you is not passive. Rather, God is very actively loving you by pursuing you and He will not stop until He has totally captured your heart.

You may be asking why would God be pursuing us since He is present everywhere at the same time. The key is that it is a pursuit of our heart. To better understand this, let's go back to the Garden of Eden for a moment. Before the Fall of Adam and Eve, think for a moment what the relationship between Adam, Eve, and God must have been like. What words might you use to describe their relationship?

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve experienced the love relationship and perfect intimacy they were created for. All three – God, Adam, and Eve – had an unquenchable desire to be in each other's presence. Can you imagine the intensity of their continuous experience of God's unconditional love?

However, at the Fall, everything changed. Adam and Eve made the independent choice to disobey God and their relationship radically changed. As we know, they went from spiritual life to spiritual death. They were no longer in union with God because they were now separated from Him. Finally, the continuous love by them for God was broken. As a result, God began His non-stop pursuit of man to win back his love. We know that God could make us love Him, but He has

given us a free will choice to love, or not to love. Therefore, He had no choice but to pursue us out of His love in order for us to be loved and to love.

Have you ever thought about the truth that God does not need you, but because of His boundless love for you, He will continuously seek after you to bring you back to Himself according to Ephesians 1:5?

How might believing this truth transform how you see God and His love for you?

Meditate: on Psalm 23:6 and Revelation 21:3 below and meditate on the truth that God will not stop pursuing you until He has totally captured your heart.

*"I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, 'Look, **God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.'**"*

Revelation 21:3

"Where Are You?"

The intimate love relationship between God and man was to be for an eternity. However, in one moment, that eternal bond of love was broken. Not only was the bond broken but God's heart was broken as well. Have you ever lost a loved one to death? Wasn't your heart grieving because you could no longer hug them and tell them you love them? Wasn't there a hole in your heart because they were gone from your life? Is it possible that this is what happened in God's heart when Adam and Eve sinned?

Take a moment to think about God's feelings at that moment. Can you picture God weeping and grieving over the loss of this love relationship with His precious creation? It was a grief so great we can't possibly begin to imagine it.

At that point, since God created man for a love relationship with Himself, He had no choice but to pursue man out of His deep love for him. Therefore, His pursuit of man began with this question to Adam and Eve:

"Where are you?"

Genesis 3:8

Why did God ask this question? Because after Adam and Eve sinned, they did not run towards God; they ran away from Him, hiding themselves. However, God was not asking this question because He didn't know where they were. He knew exactly where they were. When God asked the question, "Where are you?" He meant, "What have you done? Why did you choose to break our eternal bond of love because we were experiencing a perfect love relationship?" He was asking this question not out of frustration or anger. Rather, He was asking through tears caused by a broken heart because they had destroyed their eternal bond of love with Him.

Can you imagine if your young son or daughter or loved one went missing? Wouldn't your heart be breaking not knowing where they were? Wouldn't you do anything and everything to get them back? This is exactly how God felt about Adam and Eve and this is how He feels about you.

God's heart and divine PURPOSE from that moment on was to PURSUE man's heart and RESTORE the LOVE relationship that was lost.

"God pursues us by showering us with His great love. He woos us by giving us divine revelations of the beauty, splendor, glory and character of Himself and His Son. When we see Him as He is, our minds become fascinated with Him. He supernaturally reveals to us how special we are to Him, and how He takes great delight in us." Larry Smith - Christ Our Life

God's Plan Was To RESTORE The Lost Relationship

After Adam and Eve made a sinful choice to disobey God that led to spiritual death, He was grieving because His creation chose death over a deep personal relationship with Him. Is it possible that God felt rejected? Think about it. He provided a perfect environment for them to live in forever. No sin and no conflict. He provided for and met every spiritual, physical, and emotional need Adam and Eve had. There was nothing they had to do to meet their needs because He provided it all. Why did God do all of these things?

Because of His ETERNAL, IMMEASURABLE, and UNCONDITIONAL love for them.

Therefore, God put a plan in place to restore the relationship that was lost. From the Fall of mankind until the end of this world, God's heart and plan is to bring us back to Himself as Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:5:

"His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure."

God was not surprised by Adam and Eve's sinful choice. He had an eternal plan in place and that plan is to restore the mutual love relationship that we were all created for. His plan was put in place and from that moment on, out of God's eternal desire to experience a relationship with you, He began seeking you the moment you were born and drawing you to Himself.

Meditate: on the truth that from the moment you were born, God began seeking You because of His endless love and desire for you and Him to experience the same relationship Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden before the Fall.

DAY FOUR

God's Pursuit of Us Is The HEART of The Bible

Have you ever thought that the pursuit of man is the heart of God throughout the Bible? Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we see the extent God will go to in order to win our hearts. There is no better place to see this than through Jesus' parables. Let's look at three of them.

1. Parable of The Lost Sheep

*³ So Jesus told them this story: ⁴ "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and **go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?** ⁵ And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. ⁶ When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.'"
 Luke 15:3-6*

This parable illustrates God's relentless love for us by seeking us out to save us. However, it does not stop there. God also searches out those who are saved in order to express His love for them and draw them to Himself through that love.

2. Searching For The Lost Coin

We also see God's heart towards us in the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8, 9:

*"Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, **does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?** When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!'"*

Have you ever lost something that was very valuable to you? Because of its value you looked for it non-stop until you found it. If it took you a long time to find it, do you remember how you felt when you did? Was it joy or relief or both?

Since you are of inestimable value to God as His chosen creation, can you understand why God seeks you non-stop? God was not waiting for you to come to Him. He pursued you out of love to bring you back to Himself for salvation, but more importantly to restore the lost love relationship.

3. The Prodigal Son

One of the best examples of God's pursuit of man is the parable of the prodigal son. If you have been a Christian for a while, you have read this story in Luke 15:11-24. There is no greater story in the Bible that reveals God's pursuit of us because it reveals how much God the Father loves us and continues to seek us out regardless of our sin and failures. As we go through this parable, seek the Holy Spirit to give you deeper insight into the heart of God and His love for you. Let's start with verses 11 and 12.

11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the **share of the estate that falls to me.**' So he **divided his wealth between them.**

When the younger son came to his father to demand his inheritance, the father could have insisted that he could not have his inheritance until he (the father) died. However, out of his love for the son, the father gave it to him. In like manner, our heavenly Father could wait until we die and get to heaven before we get our inheritance, but out of His love for us, He gave us part of it the moment we were saved as we talked about in the last lesson.

13 "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there **he squandered his estate** with loose living.

14 "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he **began to be impoverished.**

How can we squander our "spiritual" estate? By continuing to live from our fleshly behaviors, our false beliefs, and our unbelief. We can also squander it by not walking in the truth of God's promises for us (i.e., freedom, victory, transformation, etc.). The result will be spiritual poverty.

15 "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and **he sent him into his fields to feed swine.**

16 "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.

We can all identify with the son, because when our flesh rears its ugly head, we end up in our fleshly prodigal pigpens. While the young man tried to fill his stomach with pods the swine were eating, we try to fill our souls with all of what the world is offering to us: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life according to 1 John 2:16.

17 "**But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!**

18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "**Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;**

19 "**I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."**

Much like the son coming to his senses, we too, eventually come to our spiritual senses when we see the "death" and the stench of our fleshly pigpens. He was physically dying due to hunger, but we are "soulically" dying as long as we choose to wallow in our flesh, unbelief, and false beliefs.

We see the son's willingness to repent to his father. However, he believes that due to the depth of his sinful behavior, he is no longer worthy to be a son. When we realize our sin and turn back to God with a repentant heart, we can be tempted to beat ourselves up in self-condemnation or feel we are no longer worthy of the love and grace of our spiritual Father to be called His sons or daughters.

20 "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, **his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."**

The son was coming home with a repentant heart. The father had not written his son off and he was not passively sitting inside his home waiting for his son to come back. Instead, because he so missed his son, his heart ached. He loved him and wanted him back in his presence so much so that he was on the front porch constantly searching the horizon for his son's return. Can you see your heavenly Father doing the same with you? Does His heart not ache when we turn to sin and the flesh? Is He not on the porch of your heart drawing you to repentance and returning to His love?

As the father was constantly looking for his son, can you imagine how his heart leaped when he caught the first glimpse of him? His first thoughts could have been of anger or bitterness because his son left home, but we see that his heart was so full of love for his son, that he ran to him with a heart of compassion, embraced him and kissed him. This is the heart of your heavenly Father as well. Regardless of the depth of your sin, He is non-stop pursuing you with His love until you repent – and when you do, imagine Him running to you, embracing you, and kissing you.

21 ***"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'***

What the son does not realize is that his sonship has nothing to do with his behavior. Whether a good or bad son, he is still his father's son. So, it is with us. Our sin will never change the truth that we are and will forever be sons or daughters of our heavenly Father.

22 ***"But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet;***

Look at the father's response to what his son said. Instead of scolding him or letting his son continue wallowing in his self-condemnation, he immediately called for the servants to bring out the royal robe, the ring, and the sandals. In like manner, God will never scold or condemn us when we sin. Instead, He will be overjoyed when we repent and come back to Him. Imagine God putting the royal robe on you and the ring as a sign of His never-ending love for you.

23 ***and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;***

24 ***for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.***

When we go prodigal and eventually come back to God, He celebrates because He knows He could coerce us to repent of our sins, but He gives us free will to make that choice. Therefore, when we see the death of our sin and come back to THE Life we have in Jesus, there will be a heavenly celebration.

Key Truth: The key difference between the earthly father and our heavenly Father in this story is that from the moment you go to your fleshly pigpens, He will not be waiting for you to repent. He will be pursuing you all along the way until you come to repentance. This is the pursuing love of God.

Meditate: on this story. What is the Spirit telling you about how this story applies to you? If you doubt the love of your heavenly Father, has this story on some level persuaded you that He loves you no matter the sins you have committed or are committing now?

The Bible Is A LOVE Letter

We see throughout the Bible how God is constantly pursuing man because of His immense and never-ending love for us. Therefore, instead of seeing the Bible as only a collection of biblical truths and promises, see it as a love letter from God's heart to yours. His heart is to draw you into a love relationship and experience His love at the deepest levels. Since He knows all about you, He provided the Bible for you to know Him and His heart for you. If you do, it will forever change how you see God and His love for you.

"The lover of your heart was pursuing you even when you didn't realize it. He was working behind the scenes, proactive in the circumstances of your life, bringing you to a place where through His grace you could experience Him. This is both a humbling and profound truth. How can someone who is "blind" to the beauty of God have the scales fall from his eyes and his heart awakened to intimacy apart from the Lord touching and drawing him?"

S. J. Hill, Enjoying God

DAY FIVE

God's Greatest Desire

What God Wants MOST

Up until now our focus has been on God's love for you. However, God's greatest desire is this:

A MUTUAL love relationship with YOU.

Stop and think about this for a moment. This amazing, majestic, all-powerful God who does not need us, created us so that not only can He love us, but so that we will love Him. He pursues us not only to love us, but for us to love Him with that same love. This is why Jesus said the greatest commandment is this:

"...love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind."
Matthew 22:37

Think of a lovesick man who is pursuing the woman he so loves and wants to marry. At some point, his desire is for her to stop running from him and turn around and fall into his arms. What a beautiful analogy of God's pursuit of man. He will pursue you all the days of your life but at some point, He wants you to stop, turn around, and fall into His arms. Why? Because in that moment your unbelief turns into belief that God so loves you, your greatest desire will be to love Him. At that point, you won't see Matthew 22:37 above as a command. Rather, it will become your one and only desire.

***When you finally SEE and UNDERSTAND the depth of God's love for you, your
GREATEST desire for the rest of your life will be to love HIM.***

This is where God is taking us. This is why He pursues us because one day we will have spiritual eyes to see His greatest desire is for us to love Him in return.

There Is Only ONE Way We Can Even Love God

"We love because He **first** loved us...." 1 John 4:19

This verse is so significant because it confirms the truth that we can't love God apart from His first loving us. We have talked in previous curriculum about God being the initiator and we are the responders. We see this in Philippians 1:6:

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began [initiated] a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

Remember this key truth from those previous studies:

***The truth is we cannot INITIATE anything towards God.
We can only RESPOND to His initiation.***

God initiates everything in us and towards us. He draws us to Himself for salvation; He puts His life in us; and He gives us the desire to depend on Him, obey Him, and be transformed by Him. It is not different with God's love. When it comes to His love, He initiates by pursuing us, revealing His love for us, and giving us the desire to respond to His love.

This should be good news because it means it is not up to you to initiate the desire and willingness to love God. Not only that, we are off the hook to "try," in and of ourselves, to produce the love for God that is impossible for us to produce.

This is why God has to be after your heart because if He does not initiate, then you will never be able to respond to His love and love Him in return. As a result, He is pulling out all of the stops to love you in so many different ways that at some point you will see His love, experience it, and seek the same relationship with Him that He has with you. Aren't you thankful that the Lord is in this love-driven, non-stop pursuit of us because the only way we can truly love God and love Him from our hearts is for Him to show us the depth and enormity of His love towards us?

Now that we understand this, it leaves one final question to be answered:

***Will you CHOOSE to respond to His initiation and His
DIVINE invitation into a mutual love relationship?***

"He deeply yearns for your affection and this is why He invites you into an intimate relationship with Him." S.J. Hill – Enjoying God

The Divine Invitation

God Is INVITING You

"God is continually calling to that deep place within the human heart as He seeks to manifest Himself to those He Loves. There is a place within you - a deep place - that only God can touch. It is in that place that God's echoing invitation emerges and penetrates your spirit. It's the invitation not only to experience Him but also to enjoy Him. This call comes out of an even deeper place, a deeper longing, in the heart of God. As much as you may want Him, He wants you more." S.J. Hill – Enjoying God

Do you remember getting an invitation to a party, a wedding or a gathering like a family reunion? It was an invitation that you very much wanted to go to because you would be with close friends or family. In like manner, God is inviting you into a mutual love relationship. It will never be retracted but it does require an RSVP. Will you, or won't you, accept God's invitation? Think about this before you answer this question. Why wouldn't you accept the invitation knowing the One who sent it? The One who:

- Loves you unconditionally
- Wants to be your best friend
- Considers you His favorite
- Can't wait to spend every waking moment with you
- Wants to spend eternity with you

If we can see the priceless, unfailing love that David experienced in the following verse, there is no doubt we would accept His invitation.

*"How **priceless** is your **unfailing love**, O God!" Psalm 36:7*

Why Can We Accept His Invitation? Because He Gave Us A New HEART To Love Him

*"Moreover, **I will give you a new heart** and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." Ezekiel 11:19*

We see in this verse that the moment we trusted Jesus for salvation, He gave us a new heart. Why was that necessary? For two reasons. First, the heart we inherited from Adam was dead to God, alive to sin, and incapable of loving God (Ephesians 2:5). Second, the new heart would be the same as Adam and Eve's hearts before the Fall, giving us the same capacity to love God as they had.

The ultimate purpose of God giving us a new heart is to restore the intimate love relationship that existed in the Garden between Adam, Eve, and God. God intended everything—beginning with salvation, imparting His life in us, giving us a new heart, and transforming us—to be about only one thing: returning the same love to God that He has towards us.

We see this in Jeremiah 24:7:

*"**I will give them a heart to know Me**, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart."*

The new heart we received at salvation is designed for us to intimately "know" God. Not merely to know about Him because God wants more than theologians and biblical scholars. He wants lovers. Divine lovers who seek Him to know Him intimately. Please pause a moment and think about the following statement:

***Within every Christian is a new heart whose ULTIMATE desire is
to know and love God at the DEEPEST levels.***

Meditate: on the fact that the key reason God gave you a new heart is so you would be able to love Him in the same way Adam and Eve did before the Fall.

Conclusion

In light of everything you have read thus far, we have focused on God's love and heart for you. However, on some level we all struggle receiving God's love and loving Him in return. Therefore, in the next two lessons we will look at the origins of why that is as well as how to engage God to be transformed in our beliefs.

Discussion Questions:

1. What key truth(s) impacted you the most in this lesson? Why?

2. Which truths from the *How Does God Feel About You* section most impacted you? In what ways?

3. Which truths from the *How Does God Feel About You* section did you struggle believing? Why do you think that is?

4. When you think about the story of the prodigal son as it relates to your relationship with God, did it change how you see God? If so, in what ways?

5. What are some reasons we might struggle with accepting God's invitation into a mutual, love relationship?

Lesson Three

The Impact of Our False Concept of God

In this lesson, we will look at the following topics:

- The difference between our theological God versus our experiential God
- The impact of our false concept of God
- Engaging God to transform our false concept

DAY ONE

Your Love For God Is Based On What You Believe

Introduction

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.”
Isaiah 55:8

Why is what you believe about God directly related to your receiving or giving love to Him?

Because how you FEEL about God and what you BELIEVE about Him will determine the DEPTH of the relationship you will have with Him.

This is the ultimate question because your answer has everything to do with how you will relate to God, especially in times of pain, suffering or conflict. Is He the God of unconditional love or is He an angry God? Is He a caring, compassionate God or is He the God of indifference who really doesn't care about the impossible situation you are in? Or perhaps, the God of judgment who is waiting to punish you when you step out of line? Can He be trusted? Is He dependable? Is God safe? Is He a loving Father or a stern taskmaster who you must perform for to earn His love and acceptance?

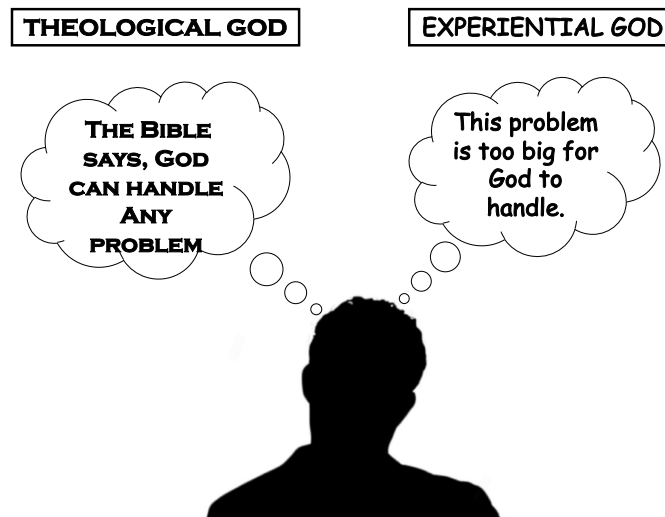
We are going to look at three obstacles that prevent us from receiving love from God and giving love to Him. The first obstacle we will cover in this lesson and the second two obstacles will be covered in the next lesson. Before we look at the first obstacle, let's lay a foundation by looking at the difference between our “theological” and “experiential” God.

The Difference Between Your “Theological” God and Your “Experiential” God

We all have two Gods. One God is what we will call our “theological” God. This God is the One we know about theologically based on our intellectual knowledge of biblical truth about God.

Our second God is called our “experiential” God. Our experiential God is based on not only what we **know** but what we truly **believe** about God. People tend to equate knowledge with belief

and they are not one in the same. To illustrate, let's assume that you are faced with a major problem. Look at the illustration below to reveal the difference between a "theological" God versus an "experiential" God.



Concerning our theological God, we know God can handle any and every problem because He is God. However, our experiential God knows but does not believe that God can handle this problem because what we know about God does not always translate into what we believe about Him.

Another key truth when it comes to our two Gods is that having a "theological" God results in not experiencing a personal relationship with Him. Without experiencing an "intimate, personal" God, we are left with a sterile, impersonal relationship with Him. Think about it for a moment. In marriage, two people don't get married just to know the "facts" about each other. The real desire in marriage is to experience an intimacy of relationship that transcends the "facts." So too, with God. This is why Paul wrote what He did in Philippians 3:8:

*"I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of **knowing** Christ Jesus my Lord."*

"Knowing" in this passage is a personal, intimate, experiential knowing of Jesus.

Therefore, as you look at this section concerning your concept of God, the question you need to ask yourself is this: "Do I truly believe what God's word says about Himself, or is it just intellectual knowledge?" We can easily fall into the trap of "I know this" but the real issue is, do you really believe it? Please keep this in mind in this section and throughout the rest of the study.

OBSTACLE #1 - Your False Concept of God

How Do You Really See God?

Our concept of God determines everything about how well we do or do not receive God's love or how we love Him. Before you read the following list, please take a few moments and ask the

Holy Spirit to reveal to you which of these on some level you believe. You may know theologically that none of the statements below are true, but let the Spirit reveal to you if you really see God in any of these ways.

Do you see God as:

- **A conditional lover:** “He only loves me if I do something for Him.”
- **Condemning:** “When I sin, I know He is condemning me.”
- **Not good:** “He is not good when He doesn’t meet my expectations of Him.”
- **A judge:** “He punishes or threatens to punish me when I don’t do the right things.”
- **Indifferent:** “He doesn’t really want to be close to me because of my sinful behavior.”
- **Unaccepting/Rejecting:** “I can never quite measure up to His expectations of me with the result that He rejects me or finds me unacceptable.”
- **Impatient:** “He usually wants me to get my act together more quickly than I seem to be able to.”
- **A traffic cop:** “God is always waiting to punish me when I break the rules.”
- **A divine Santa Claus:** “He exists to give me what I want and to meet my expectations.”
- **A killjoy:** “He is always wanting to take the fun out of life.”
- **Distant or cold:** “He doesn’t make Himself truly available to be intimate with me.”
- **A taskmaster:** “God expects me to do certain things, and I better do them or else.”
- **Unforgiving:** “I can’t approach Him easily because He still holds things that I have done in the past against me.”
- **A rejector:** “God has or will reject me like everyone else has.”
- **A manipulator:** “He controls the events of my life, not for my good but to get me to do what He wants.”
- **Angry:** “He is frustrated and even angry with me when I make mistakes and sin.”
- **Not trustworthy:** “I can’t rely on Him to do what I need Him to do.”
- **Not a protector:** “He really won’t protect me.”
- **Too busy:** “God is too busy with other more important people to spend time with me.”
- **Disinterested:** “God is not really interested in me or what is going on in my life.”

Exercise: Go back through the list above and write down any of these beliefs about God that you feel in part may be true as you relate to Him.

Write down some of the feelings you have towards God based on what you wrote down.

DAY TWO

Your False Beliefs About God

Read carefully through this section making a note of any of these beliefs that you feel or believe are on some level true of you. Fill in the blanks with any other false beliefs that are not on the list.

I believe God, on some level, IS:

1. Judging me
2. Waiting to punish me for my sin
3. Cold and distant
4. Frustrated with me
5. Unhappy with me
6. Angry with me
7. Condemning me
8. Not merciful
9. Indifferent
10. Not in control
11. Like my earthly parents in that _____
12. _____

Distortions: God on some level ISN'T:

1. Safe
2. Loving
3. Secure
4. Willing
5. Merciful
6. Trustworthy
7. Caring
8. Able
9. In control
10. _____
11. _____

These beliefs on some level make me FEEL that:

1. I am not loved.
2. I am not acceptable.
3. I am not worthy.
4. I am not secure.
5. I am condemned.
6. I must solve the problem with my own resources.
7. I don't matter.
8. I must perform for His love.
9. _____

As a result of my false beliefs, I DON'T:

1. Trust Him at all
 2. Trust Him fully
 3. Want a relationship with Him
 4. Want to entrust my struggles to Him
 5. Want to abide in Him
 6. Want to seek an intimate relationship with Him
 7. Believe He will _____
 8. Believe He will deliver me from or through _____
-

Your Functional View of God

For each of the following statements, respond to the choice that best describes how you function with God.

1=mostly		2=somewhat		3=not sure
strong		neutral		strong
1	2	3	2	1
1. God is distant.		God is close.		
2. God is unapproachable.		God is approachable.		
3. God is hard to talk to.		God is easy to talk to.		
4. God is hard, cold, and aloof.		God is gentle and warm.		
5. God is impatient and irritable.		God is patient and kind.		
6. God doesn't listen to me and doesn't understand me.		God listens to and understands me.		
7. God is disappointed with me.		God is pleased and delighted with me.		
8. God is too busy to be involved with me.		God is very interested in my life.		
9. I am unimportant to God.		I am God's favorite.		
10. I feel abandoned if I need help.		God is there when I need help.		
11. God is slow to forgive—He reminds me of past sins and errors		God has totally forgiven me—He does not keep a record of past sins.		

12. God gets frustrated with me
when I fail or make mistakes.

God allows me to fail and
learn from my mistakes.

13. I feel God's anger when
corrected or disciplined.

I feel loved and affirmed
when disciplined.

What did this exercise reveal or expose concerning your relationship with God?

DAY THREE

How Was Your False Concept of God Formed?

Introduction

Hopefully through the last section, the Holy Spirit has revealed to you some of your feelings towards God or your false beliefs about Him. The question we want to answer in this section is how were our false concepts or false beliefs about God formed. The focus of this section is to expose how four sources in your life might have helped shape your false beliefs. They are your parents, adverse circumstances you may have experienced, what you have been taught by others, and Satan and his demonic forces' influence in your life.

1. Putting Our Parents' Faces On God's Face

Our initial concept of God is shaped in large part by our parents. The repeated spoken and unspoken messages that you received from them about you, the way they treated you, and other factors helped shape what you believe about them (loving, angry, caring, indifferent, etc.). Our tendency is to transfer these beliefs from our earthly parents to our heavenly Father.

For example, if you had a father who was angry and controlling, then, on some level, you might transfer what you think about your earthly father to your heavenly Father with the result that God is also angry and controlling.

However, you could have come from a family where both your mother and father were very loving and encouraging and this is how you see God. Most people come from a family where they received mixed messages such as "I love you but I am disappointed in you." As important as our parents' messaging was, how we perceived their feelings for us is just as important. Your parents might say they love you but you never really felt their love.

Based on what you read, do you see God more through the lens of your mother or father? As a result, what is your view of God based on how they parented you?

Let's look at some negative parenting models and how they may have distorted our concept of God. Keep in mind as you go through these different models that your parents may have had a positive influence on you as well, but still exhibited some of the characteristics below which negatively impacted how you see God. Also listed are some possible results of these false concepts of God.

1. The AUTHORITARIAN Parent: more concerned with compliance than relationship. These parents insist on things being done their way. They are not as interested in their children's opinions,

desires, or goals as they are their own goals and objectives. They desire no real intimacy with their children—only obedience.

Distorted View of God: “God expects me to do things His way and if I don’t there will be repercussions.”

Result: This view might cause us to rebel against God’s authority or try harder to please Him.

2. The ABUSIVE Parent: deliberately inflicts pain on their children, hurting them emotionally, mentally, physically, and/or sexually. This type of relationship destroys their children’s sense of worth and robs them of their natural ability to trust. They see themselves as someone to be used rather than valued in relationships. Abuse is not always overt. People can feel abused by what is not said as much as by what is said. Example: Your father never told you he didn’t love you; he just never verbalized that he did love you.

Distorted View of God: “God is out to inflict pain and suffering in my life. He is the cause of that pain and suffering.”

Result: We will do anything to keep from being punished by God.

3. The DISTANT/PASSIVE Parent: expresses little affection. These parents may be good providers but interact very little with their children. They rarely show emotion or say “I love you.” They don’t share in their children’s joy or pain.

Distorted View of God: “God is not concerned, nor does He want to be uninvolved in my life.”

Result: We distance ourselves from God or do something to earn His affection.

4. The ACCUSING Parent: critical and judges every failure. These parents think this will motivate their children to do better and try harder. They rarely give encouragement or affirm them.

Distorted View of God: “God is angry with me and judging me and is never satisfied.”

Result: We try harder to do whatever it takes to keep God happy and to not be judged by Him.

5. The ABSENT Parent: one who is absent because of death, divorce, work, or disinterest. Unlike the passive parent who is there but never communicates, the absent parent is just not there. His children feel abandoned and neglected not only by their earthly father but by God as well.

Distorted View of God: “God is neglecting me or He has abandoned me.”

Result: Trying to gain His attention by working harder for Him.

6. The PEOPLE-PLEASING Parent: one who does whatever is necessary to win your love and affection. They are so needy they feel that by meeting your needs (healthy or otherwise) they will earn your love.

False Belief about God: “God will do everything I want to make me or keep me happy.”

Result: When we realize that God is not a people-pleaser like our parents, we can conclude He doesn't really care or doesn't have your best interests at heart.

Question: Which one (if any) of the parenting models in part describes your parents while growing up? Write down any other negative ways your parents parented you that are not listed above. What might be some of your false beliefs about God that resulted from your parents' negative impact on your life?

Engaging God: Begin seeking God to reveal to you how your parents may have shaped your false beliefs about Himself.

Key Point: It would be very easy at this point to blame your false beliefs about God on your parents. Please don't do that because if your parents were not walking in and parenting from God's truth, then they were parenting from their fleshly behaviors some of which, they learned from their parents and are just passing them down. This does not excuse their sinful, fleshly influence on you but hopefully it helps you understand why they parented the way they did.

DAY FOUR

2. What We Have Been FALSELY Taught About God

*“So the **LORD’s anger** burned against Israel, and **He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the entire generation** of those who had done evil in the sight of the Lord **was destroyed.**” Numbers 32:13*

In addition to your parents’ influence in shaping your view of God, the other great influences in your life are pastors and teachers who taught you about God. How was God described to you by a teacher or by a pastor? Was He portrayed as a loving God or an angry, condemning, punishing, or distant one? Were you taught that you must do or accomplish certain things for God in order to earn His love, acceptance, and worth?

For example, a pastor or teacher can take a passage like Numbers 32:13 above and build a false case for an angry God who’s waiting to judge and condemn you the moment that you step out of line. These false concepts that you may have been taught can make a deep impression on your belief system about who God is and His love for you.

A large part of what we know about God is a result of what we were taught by trained and “qualified” people. Since we trusted these teachers and pastors, we had no reason to doubt what they were teaching was true. The question we need to ask today is, “Were they really teaching the whole truth, partial truths, or were they drawing false conclusions based on their understanding versus what really is the truth?” Any distorted truth taught can result in a distorted or negative view of God which can lead to a struggle in receiving God’s love.

(As with parents, this is not to condemn or be critical of pastors or teachers that may have taught you falsely about God. In most cases they were passing down the false beliefs that they themselves were taught and believed.)

Question: In what way(s) has what you were taught about God negatively impacted how you feel or what you believe about God?

Engaging God: Ask God to reveal to you any falsehoods about Himself that you have been taught and how they negatively impact your concept of God.

3. How ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES Impact What You Believe About God

*“Concerning **this (thorn)** I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me.”
2 Corinthians 12:7*

Your interpretation of circumstances in your life affects your beliefs about God. For example, because of the divorce of your parents, you were left with feelings of abandonment. You may not

feel that you can draw close to God or receive His love because He might abandon you just like your parents did.

A lady shared that she had always felt unconditional love from God until her husband died prematurely. From that point on, she has had great doubts about God's unconditional love because He allowed her husband to die. Therefore, through a distorted grid concerning our beliefs about God, we can draw false conclusions as a result of circumstances that occur in our lives.

Question: Write down any events in your life that might have negatively impacted how you feel or what you believe about God. How have those events affected how you feel or what you believe about God?

Engaging God: Ask God to reveal to you any events in your life that may have resulted in false beliefs about Him. Ask Him to reveal how those events have negatively impacted what you believe about Him and His love for you.

What Will Be The Results of Our False Beliefs About God?

We will end this lesson by looking at some of the results of any false beliefs we have about God and some of Satan's strategies to keep us in bondage to our false beliefs. As you read through these, seek the Holy Spirit to reveal any of these that apply to you.

1. You will DISTRUST God

How do you feel about another person when they have betrayed your trust? It can be difficult in some cases to ever trust that person again. It is no different with God. If we conclude based on our false beliefs that God is not trustworthy then we will eventually choose to quit depending on Him and quit seeking Him to be our Source to renew our minds to the truth and transform our lives. As we know, distrust in human relationships will create a roadblock to experiencing deeper relationships. It is no different with God because desiring a love relationship with God comes as a direct result of how much we trust Him.

Example: Since I don't trust God, I will figure out how to resolve my marriage problems by myself.

Exercise: Fill in the following blanks if you struggle on some level with trusting God.

Because of my false beliefs, I have a problem trusting God concerning _____.
_____. Since He is not trustworthy, I will choose to _____.
_____.

In what ways do you think it will negatively impact your relationship with God and receiving His love in the areas that you struggle trusting Him?

2. False beliefs will lead to UNBELIEF

*“As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore.”
John 6:66*

There is a direct correlation between false beliefs and unbelief. For example, if I have a false belief that God is condemning me then I won’t believe He will ever love me. If I believe that God might abandon me, then I don’t believe He will be there to comfort me in times of trouble.

Exercise: Fill in the following blanks if you struggle with trusting God.

Since I have a false belief that on some level God is (is not) _____,
then I don’t believe that God _____.

3. You DOUBT God

*“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘**Did God really say**, You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”
Genesis 3:1*

In the Garden before the Fall, Adam and Eve were in total harmony with God. They only heard one voice day after day and that was God’s voice. It was a voice that they trusted. They lived in total dependence upon God because that is all they knew to do. Then one day, there came another voice. It was the voice of Satan.

The first words from the voice of Satan were, “Did God really say?” It was this voice that introduced a new word to Adam and Eve’s vocabulary: **DOUBT**. Up until that time Adam and Eve had no reason to doubt God. However, when their belief system was challenged, doubt crept in and destroyed their relationship with God.

It is no different with us. On any level that our false beliefs create doubting God, it will result in going back to ourselves as the source and will prevent us from deepening our relationship with Him. Doubt is like a cancer in our soul because it diminishes or stops our trusting God for anything.

Example: Since I believe God is frustrated with me, I doubt He will ever love me or even like me.

Question: List some of the doubts that you have about God concerning your life, your marriage, your job, your kids, health, finances, etc.

Exercise: Fill in the following blanks if you struggle with having doubts about God:

Since I have a false belief that God is _____,
I doubt that He _____.

4. You develop an unhealthy FEAR of God

We need to understand that there are two kinds of fear when it comes to fearing God. One definition of “fear” is a “reverence and awe” of God. This is a healthy fear in that this flows from believing the truth about God. Look at an example of this fear in the first part of Genesis 22:12:

*“He said, ‘Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him;
for now I know that you **fear** God....’”*

However, there is an unhealthy fear of God which flows from your false beliefs about Him. For example, if you do not truly believe that you are forgiven for all your sins, you may be fearful that God will punish and condemn you when you sin. Or you may be fearful that God will cause some tragedy or adversity in your life. This unhealthy fear driven by your false beliefs can feed on itself by creating greater fears about God. Fear, like doubt, can rob you of your faith walk and can be a roadblock to developing a deeper relationship with God.

Question: What are some “unhealthy” fears you have of God concerning yourself, marriage, kids, job, health, or finances?

Exercise: Fill in the following blanks if you struggle with having an unhealthy fear of God.

As a result of being fearful of God, I believe (don’t believe) _____
_____.

DAY FIVE

Engaging God To Overcome These Obstacles

Earlier we studied how to engage God to transform our false beliefs. Let's apply what we have learned for the Holy Spirit to renew our minds to the truth.

Example #1: False Concept/Belief: You believe God is condemning.

Obstacle: You will never believe God loves you because you believe He is condemning you, especially when you sin.

The Truth: Since God IS love (that is His essence), how can God possibly condemn you? The truth is He can't.

Engaging God: "Lord, I am believing the lie that You are a condemning God. Renew my mind to the truth that You can't possibly be condemning because love makes up Your total essence. Set me free from my false belief."

Example #2: False Concept/Belief: You see/believe God as a conditional lover.

Obstacle: You believe God only loves you when you do something for Him, when you are pleasing to Him, when you are not sinning, or when you are seeking Him.

The Truth: The only kind of love God can exhibit towards you is unconditional because unconditional love is His nature. The truth is that not only does God love you unconditionally, He is pursuing you non-stop with His unconditional love.

Engaging God: "Lord, I have a false belief You are a conditional lover. I am asking You to persuade me of the truth that the only kind of love You have towards me is unconditional because that is Your nature."

Exercise: From the exercise on page 41 select one of those examples that you believe on some level is how you see God and write it below. Then write down the truth about God you have learned.

False Concept/Belief: You see God as _____.

The Truth: _____.

Engaging God: "Lord, I see You as _____. The truth is _____. Therefore, I am seeking You to renew my mind to the truth and set me free from my false belief."

Remember the diagram below from our previous studies? Moving from our false concept of God to the truth is a supernatural process. Depending on how entrenched the false belief is will determine how long it will take to be set free.



Moving From Our FALSE CONCEPT of God To The TRUTH

Referring to the *Functional View of God* list on pages 43-44, let's look at some examples of our false beliefs, the truth associated with those beliefs, and how to engage God to be set free from them.

Example #1

False Belief: "I am unimportant to God." Believing this is true, you conclude He doesn't really love you.

The Truth: You are of eternal importance to God because out of His eternal love for you, He chose the "you" version of you to be born out of 500 million possibilities. You are not only important, but you are also His favorite. He is omnipresent which means He is always in your presence.

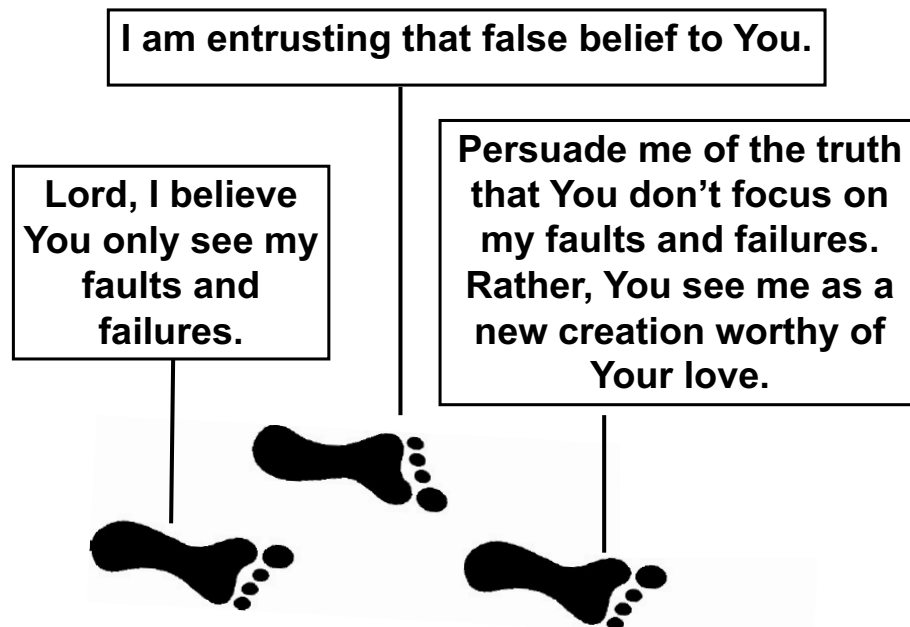
Engaging God: "Lord, I have this false belief that I am unimportant to You. You chose me out of 500 million possibilities to be born. The truth is that in Your omnipresence You are ever present with me. You say I am Your favorite even though that is hard for me to believe. I am entrusting this false belief to You and asking You to transform me from believing this false belief to believing the truth."

Example #2

False Belief: “God only sees my faults and tears me down. Believing this is true creates an obstacle that God can’t possibly love me because of all my sins and failures.”

The Truth: God sees you as a new creation (Holy, righteous, child of God, etc.). It is because of that truth He loves you and will never focus on your sins and failures because they no longer define who you are.

Engaging God: See diagram below.



Exercise: Fill in the blanks below.

False Belief/Concept: I believe _____

The Truth: _____

Engaging God: “Lord, I believe _____.

The truth is _____. Therefore, I am asking
You to renew my mind and persuade me of the truth.

Conclusion

Has this lesson been helpful in revealing some of your false beliefs or false concepts of God? Can you see how our false beliefs directly correlate with how we feel about God? In the next lesson, we will look at the next two obstacles to our receiving love from God and giving Him love in return.

Discussion Questions:

1. What key truth(s) impacted you the most in this lesson? Why?

2. What did the exercises reveal about what you believe about God?

3. In what positive or negative ways did your parents impact how you see or what you feel about God?

4. What are some things you were taught falsely about God?

5. In what ways can your distrust, unbelief, doubt, and fears about God negatively impact your relationship with Him?

Lesson Four

How God's Love Flows Through His Nature and Character Unrealistic Expectations Concerning God's Nature and Character

In this lesson, we will look at the following topics:

- **How God's love flows through His nature**
- **How God's love flows through His character**
- **Obstacle #2 – Unrealistic expectations concerning God's nature and character**
- **Obstacle #3 – Satan**
- **Engaging God to deal with the unrealistic expectations and Satan**

DAY ONE

How God's LOVE Flows Through His NATURE

In this first section, we will see how God's love flows through His nature. We will not go through all the characteristics of God's nature but we will look at three key characteristics that should give you a deeper understanding of how God's nature is inseparable from His love.

God's Love and His IMMUTABILITY

"I am the LORD, and I do not change...." Malachi 3:6

*"And he who is the Glory of Israel will not lie, nor **will He change his mind**,
for **He is not human that He should change his mind!**" 1 Samuel 15:29*

"Immutability" means "unchangeable and the quality of not being subject to or susceptible to change." This applies to God in that He cannot change, nor can He be changed. Being immutable applies to all of His nature and His character. This should be comforting news if you know and believe God's character. Especially His love.

When it comes to God's love for us, God's immutability is wonderful news. Nothing you can do or not do will change His love for you. Therefore, what does God's love through His immutability look like?

God's love is:

- Unchangeable
- Unshakeable
- Reliable
- Constant

How does it impact you knowing that these words describe God's love for you?

Meditate: on these four words above as they connect to God’s love for you.

God’s Love and His OMNIPRESENCE

“Omnipresence” means “all-present or present everywhere.” God can be both present to a person and present in every part of His creation at any given time.

*“The LORD looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race. ¹⁴ **From his throne he observes all who live on the earth.**” Psalm 33:13, 14*

Although God is present in all time and space, God is not locally limited to any time or space. God is everywhere and in every “now.” God is present in every molecule and even in entire galaxies and yet He is not confined to time or space. This is difficult for our finite minds to understand but it ties directly to His love for us.

His omnipresence means that He can be fully in your presence at any and every moment. In fact:

***God is so PRESENT to you, it is as if there is NO ONE else
in the universe but you.***

Think about those words for a minute: “no one else in the universe but you.” Can you imagine having the **total** attention of God? Wouldn’t that be evidence of His great love for you? Any and every moment, God is there, available to you. Especially in times of struggle. His presence in your life equals His desire to love you.

How would it change how you feel or what you believe about God’s love if you believed this is true?

Meditate: on the truth that you have God’s undivided attention every moment.

DAY TWO

God's Love and His OMNIPOTENCE

*"Ah, Lord God! **It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.**" Jeremiah 32:17*

God is omnipotent. This means:

- God is all-powerful.
- God's power is unlimited.
- God can do anything.
- All things are possible with God.

From creating the earth out of nothing to creating man from the earth to subduing Satan and his demonic forces, God's power is limitless. He can do everything that is in harmony with His character. Concerning our study is this key truth:

God's love is INTERCONNECTED with His power.

This is true because as you depend on Him, out of His great love for you, He will use His power to renew your mind to the truth, set you free from your fleshly behaviors, heal your woundedness, and most importantly, transform you into Christ-likeness and to live from your true identity. You and I can't do any of these things but because of God's immense love for you, He, through His power, will transform your life to experience the abundant life He promises. More importantly, He will use His power to draw you into a deep, personal relationship with Himself.

Have you thought about how God's power to transform your life is always driven by His love for you? What difference would it make if you were persuaded of this truth?

Meditate: on the truth that the motivation behind all that God does to transform your life is driven by His love.

God's Love and His SOVEREIGNTY

*"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰ I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, '**My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.**'" ¹¹ From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. **What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do.**" Isaiah 46:9-11*

*"... the Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and **His sovereignty rules over all.**"
Psalm 103:19*

God being “sovereign” means all things are under His rule and control and there is nothing that happens without His direction or permission. Another definition is God’s absolute right to do all things according to His will. He has supreme power and is totally free from external control.

God has the power and knowledge to prevent anything He chooses to prevent, so anything that does happen must, at the very least, be allowed by God. This includes evil. He uses certain evil events to allow His purposes to unfold, such as when the greatest evil of all took place –the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus.

God has the ability to do anything, to take action and intervene in any situation, but He often chooses to act indirectly or to allow certain things for reasons of His own. His will is furthered in any case. This holds true even if certain specific things are not what He would prefer. The right of God to allow mankind’s free choices is just as necessary for true sovereignty as His ability to enact His will, wherever and however He chooses.

We tend to assume that, if God is not directly, overtly, purposefully driving some event, then He is somehow not sovereign. However, God’s sovereignty remains intact regardless of what He allows to happen or not happen.

Even though God is sovereign, His love is manifested towards us through His sovereignty because in His love for us, He allows us to have free will and make free will choices. We see this in Deuteronomy 30:19:

*“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. **So choose life in order that you may live....”***

We see this in the Garden of Eden when man initially chose to obey God by not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, we also see man’s free will when he chose to disobey God and sin.

When it comes to our free will and God’s love, He gives us the free will choice to love or not love Him. Think about this. In His sovereignty, God could make you love Him. Instead, He lets you make the choice. This, in itself, is one of the greatest acts of love. That being said, His heart above everything else is for you to love Him.

Think about God’s choice to give you free will. Can you see how this can be one of the greatest acts of His love towards us? The question is:

Will you use your FREE WILL choice to love Him?

How does it impact you, knowing that God could coerce your will but out of His love for you, allows you free will choice?

Meditate: on what our lives would be like if we did not have free will choice.

DAY THREE

How God's Love Flows Through His Character

In addition to seeing how God's love encompasses every aspect of His nature, we will now look at three examples of how His love flows through His character. Let's begin by looking at God's goodness.

God's Love and His GOODNESS

*"For **the LORD is good** and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." Psalm 100:5*

*"O taste and see that the **LORD is good.**" Psalm 34:8*

We see from these passages that part of God's character is that He is good. Easton's Bible Dictionary defines God's goodness this way: *"The perfection of God's character which he exercises towards his creatures (i.e., benevolent, merciful, compassionate, long-suffering, patient, giving, forgiving and full of grace)."* Just reading through these characteristics, can you see His love through His goodness as being benevolent, merciful, compassionate, full of grace, etc.?

God's love is also manifested through His goodness, by providing the way of salvation, putting His life in us, transforming our lives, and blessing us spiritually and physically.

When you look over your life, in what ways have you experienced God's love through His goodness starting at salvation?

Meditate: on the truth that God's love and goodness are inseparable.

God's Love and His FAITHFULNESS

*"**The Lord is faithful**, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one."
2 Thessalonians 3:3*

*"The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. **He will NEVER fail you or forsake you.** Do not fear or be dismayed." Deuteronomy 31:8*

The meaning of "faithfulness" is to be "reliable, steadfast, and unwavering." The Bible speaks often of God's faithfulness. Over and over, we learn that when God says He will do something, He does it (even when it seems impossible). When He says something will happen, it happens. This is true for the past, the present, and the future.

When it comes to God's love, He expresses it through His faithfulness to us by keeping His promises in our lives, showing us favor as we walk dependent on Him, and giving grace when we don't deserve it. He is even faithful in His love for us when we choose to not love Him according to 2 Timothy 2:13.

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”

We should rejoice that unlike man, God is consistently and continuously faithful. It is one of the greatest expressions of His love for us.

What thoughts come to mind when you think of God never leaving or forsaking you because of His great love for you?

Meditate: on God being ever faithful to continue loving you regardless.

God’s Love and His GRACE

“The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.”
Psalm 145:8

“The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 1:14

What is grace? It is the fullness of God’s life and power that is available to you every moment. Grace is embodied in the life of Christ in us. From God’s grace, we receive salvation, transformation, and the future hope of being with Him forever. What is behind all the grace He extends to us? His *agape* love is the motivation for all the grace He extends towards us.

Read the previous statement one more time. Doesn’t it make sense that His love and grace are inseparable?

Meditate: on the truth that His greatest motivation for grace towards us is His great love for us.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this section has given you new or deeper insight into the relationship between God’s love and His character and nature. You may struggle with some of these truths but that does not change the fact that they are true. Having said that, we all tend to have unrealistic expectations about God’s nature and character which can cause us to doubt His love for us. This can become a real obstacle if we don’t believe the truth. Let’s look at some of our unrealistic expectations.

DAY FOUR

Obstacle #2 - Unrealistic Expectations Concerning God's Nature and Character

What Are UNREALISTIC Expectations?

A second great obstacle to giving and receiving love is our unrealistic expectations concerning God's nature and character. Let's start by defining the word "expectation." It is a belief, certainty, or presumption that something will happen. In light of this definition, look at the meaning of an unrealistic expectation concerning God's nature and character.

An UNREALISTIC expectation is ANY expectation we have about God, His nature, and His character that does NOT line up with God's truth.

Let's look at a biblical example of an unrealistic expectation in Matthew 16:21, 22:

"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'"

Since Jesus was the Messiah, the expectation by the disciples was that Jesus had come to reign as Deliverer and King while on earth. When Peter heard the prophetic words of Jesus in Matthew 16 concerning His death on the cross, he was shocked because he had an expectation that was unrealistic because it did not line up with the truth. He never expected that Jesus would hang on a criminal's cross and die a horrible death. When he heard Jesus utter these words, he went straight to the flesh by rebuking his Lord.

Part of Our Unrealistic Expectations About God's Love Is Our DEFINITION of Love

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD."
ISAIAH 55:8*

On some level we all struggle with God's love, especially as it relates to His nature and character. The primary reason we struggle is:

Our definition of God's love is DIFFERENT than God's.

Look at some examples of God's love that may contradict what you believe a loving God should be like:

Example #1 – God in His love for you allowed man to crucify His Son.

If you had a son or daughter and were told to give them over to evil men as a sacrifice for others, would you call that love? Certainly not love in human terms. Yet, God the Father did just that. He allowed evil men to crucify His holy, righteous Son who did not deserve death but He did it out of His immense love for you.

Example #2 – Jesus loved the money-changers and the Pharisees as much as He did the little children.

We can identify with the love Jesus had for the little children because He is love. Since in His essence He is love, was He not loving the money-changers with the same love as the little children? It is difficult to understand in light of what He did in the temple in Matthew 21:12.

“And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.”

Was Jesus loving the Sadducees and Pharisees when He called them “vipers” in Matthew 3:7?

“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’”

The answer to both questions is “yes.” On the human level, we define and differentiate in how we love someone depending mostly on their behavior. We have difficulty understanding God's love because in some ways God defines His love similar to ours but in other ways, He defines His love in ways we can't possibly comprehend.

***Even if OUR definition of love DOES NOT line up with God's,
it does NOT change the truth that God IS love.***

However, because of differences in the way we define love, we are tempted to set unrealistic expectations on what God's love should look like. Let's look at some examples.

Unrealistic Expectations Concerning God's Love

Here are some examples of unrealistic expectations concerning God's love:

- If God really loved me, He would not have let my father abuse me.
- If God really loved me, He wouldn't have allowed me to get cancer.
- I expect God not to love me when I sin.

Have you ever had any unrealistic expectations like these about God's love? Please write them down.

Unrealistic Expectations Concerning God's Sovereignty

In our walk with God and His love and sovereignty, we sometimes struggle with questions like these. If God is truly a loving, sovereign God:

- Why did God allow my parent(s), siblings, or friends do what they did to me?
- Why does He allow so much evil in the world?
- Why did I lose my job?

What are some of the unrealistic expectations you might have or have had about God's love and His sovereignty?

Unrealistic Expectations Concerning God's Goodness

Here are some examples of unrealistic expectations regarding God's goodness and His love. If God is loving and good:

- Why does He allow bad things to happen to good people?
- How could a baby being born in this terrible condition be good in God's sight?
- Why does a good God allow so much pain and suffering in the world?

What are some of the unrealistic expectations you might have or have had about God's love and His goodness?

Unrealistic Expectations Concerning God's Omnipotence

If God is loving and all-powerful:

- Why doesn't He stop all the pain and suffering in the world?
- Why can't He heal me of my cancer?
- Why didn't He prevent my child from dying in the accident?

What unrealistic expectations would you add?

Unrealistic Expectations Concerning God's Omniscience

If God is loving and all-knowing:

- Why is He withholding telling me what I need to know?
- Why didn't God tell me this situation was coming?
- Why doesn't He answer my "why" questions?

Can you add anything else to this list?

Where Can Our Unmet Unrealistic Expectations Take Us?

Similar to our false concepts about God taking us to doubt, distrust, unbelief, and fear, so too our unrealistic expectations can take us to the flesh and fleshly behaviors. We see this from the previous passage concerning Peter's response to when Jesus announced that He was going to the cross.

*"But Peter took Him aside and began to **rebuke** Him. 'Never, Lord!' he said.
'This shall never happen to you!'" Matthew 16:22*

His knee-jerk reaction was to get angry and rebuke Jesus. We could point our fingers at Peter, but we too are tempted to go to the flesh when our false beliefs and unrealistic expectations about God's love, His character, and His nature are not met. Here are some examples of what that looks like:

- **God's Love**: "I am so **resentful** because a loving God would not have allowed my pain and suffering."
- **God's Goodness**: "It makes me **angry** that a good, loving God would allow my innocent baby to be born in this condition."
- **God's Omniscience**: "I get so **frustrated** when God who is loving and all-knowing does not answer my 'why' questions."
- **God's Omnipotence**: "I can **no longer trust** God because He has the power to save my child but He didn't do it. How can He call Himself a loving God?"

- **God's Sovereignty**: "I am **walking away from** God because a loving, sovereign God wouldn't let this happen in my family."

What might be some of your fleshly responses concerning your unmet expectations about God?

DAY FIVE

Overcoming Your Unrealistic Expectations and Being Set Free From Your Fleshly Behaviors

What does it look like to engage God to overcome your unrealistic expectations concerning God's love, His character and nature?

Let's use the previous examples to illustrate.

Example: "If God really loved me, He would not have let my father abuse me."

Fleshly Response: "Since God allowed this abuse to happen, I am angry at God and will never be able to love God again."

Truth: God only allowed your abuse to take place because we live in an evil world controlled by Satan and because God has given man free will choice. Through God's love for you, He promises to heal you of your woundedness and will set you free of your anger.

Engaging God: "Lord, I am angry that You did not prevent me from being abused. However, I am entrusting my anger towards You to You and I am asking You to heal my woundedness and persuade me that Your love for me does not change even though this happened to me."

Example: I expect God not to love me when I sin. Especially, concerning the worst sins I have committed.

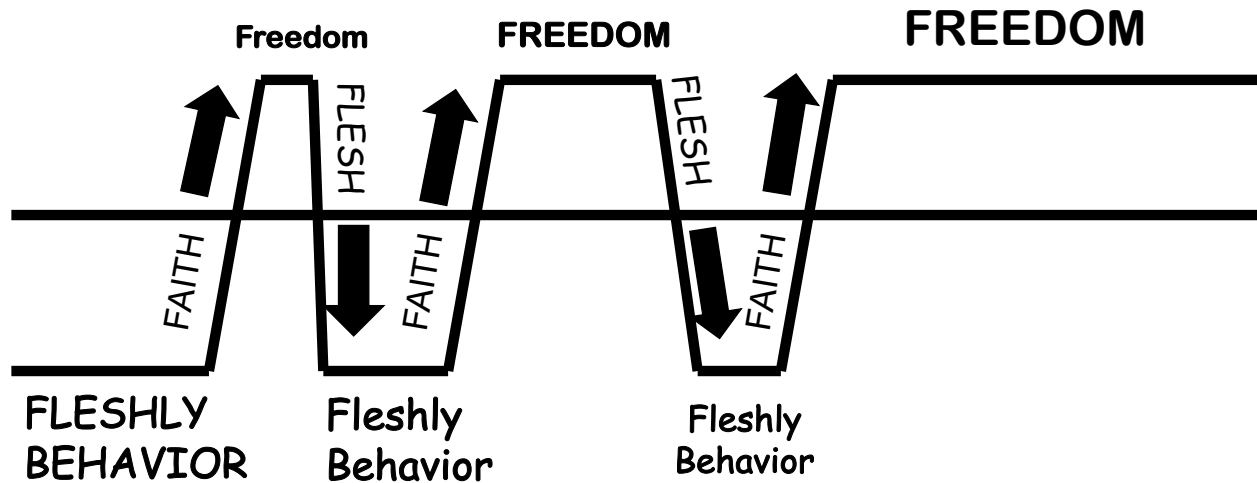
Fleshly Response: "I feel unworthy of God's love because of how bad the sin was that I committed. I am filled with guilt and shame."

Truth: Christ died for all your past, present, and future sins. He did this to remove the sin barrier and He also did this so that no sin you have ever committed, no matter how ugly, will ever stop His love for you.

Engaging God: "Lord, I am confessing my unworthiness, guilt, and shame due to these sins. I am repenting of these sins and I am seeking You to renew my mind to the truth that You love me unconditionally and my sin will never change that."

The only way to be set free from unrealistic expectations and the fleshly behaviors that result is to seek God to persuade you of the truth concerning your expectations. As we have said many times before, it is a process which may last some time because of the grip your expectations have on you.

Being Set Free From Unrealistic Expectations



Exercise: Fill in the blanks below using your unrealistic expectations.

Engaging God: “Lord, I have an unrealistic expectation _____.

As a result, I am or I feel (fleshly response) _____ towards You.

The truth is _____ . Therefore, I am asking

You to renew my mind and persuade me of the truth.”

Let’s look at a true story example of how a man engaged God and was set free from his unrealistic expectations.

True Story Example

There was a very qualified and capable businessman who was gifted to walk into struggling businesses and turn them around financially. He was very successful in rebuilding these businesses but each time he did, he would eventually lose his job. Not because he was not successful – because he was. His expectation was that he would play a key part in running the business once it became profitable. However, time after time, the owners told him he was not needed since the business had become profitable.

The problem was there would be a lengthy time between jobs and during that time he often was close to running out of money. Even though God would always bring a new job at the right moment, this man became very angry at God because he believed that a loving, good God would not allow this to continue to happen. He would say, “Why does God have to always let me get to a place where I am almost out of money before I get another job? Why would a loving God who is supposed to be in control, let that happen?”

He felt “afflicted” and “perplexed” like Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:8. What he didn’t realize is that God through all these job losses was building his faith. He wasn’t punishing or not loving him. The man wanted to quit on God and walk away many times but he realized that quitting on God meant continually living with his anger. Therefore, in spite of his unmet expectations, he kept trusting God until the Holy Spirit renewed His mind to the truth that even though God was not meeting His expectations, God was still loving, good, and in control.

How about you? What will you choose to do when it comes to your unmet unrealistic expectations? You can stay stuck in your flesh which could lead you at the very least, to not trust God, or at the worst, to walk away from Him. Even though you may go to the flesh many times, will you engage God to use your difficult or seemingly impossible situations to persuade you of the truth about His nature and character? Here are some examples of what that would practically look like.

Another key issue in being set free from our unrealistic expectations is our history with God. The longer we walk with Him, the more our minds will line up with His truth and the less we will react to unmet expectations.

Obstacle #3 - Satan

Satan Is Working Non-Stop To Prevent You From Experiencing A Love Relationship With God

*“The thief comes only to **steal, kill and destroy...**” John 10:10a*

Satan has one objective when it comes to your relationship with God: to steal, kill, and destroy it. As we have talked about in previous studies, Satan clearly knows God’s word. Because of that, He knows how God feels about you and how much He wants a love relationship with you. As a result of Satan’s knowledge and his hatred of you, he is strategizing non-stop to keep you from ever experiencing the love relationship that God promises.

He accomplishes this by:

- Reinforcing your false concepts about God.
- Using your unmet expectations to keep you frustrated or angry at God so that eventually you will walk away from Him.
- Persuading you that you are justified concerning your unrealistic expectations.
- Continually deceiving you into believing that you are not worthy of God’s love.

Another strategy of Satan is to try and woo you to lovers other than God – such false lovers as money, material things, work, your reputation, pornography, etc. Satan tries to persuade you that his false lovers will be the perfect substitutes for God’s love. Busyness is another tool in his toolbox to keep you from spending time getting to know God intimately.

Remember that Satan's strategies are carried out primarily through our thought life. He is constantly inserting thoughts in first person to keep you from receiving God's love and loving Him in return. How do we overcome Satan and his strategies?

Overcoming Satan's Strategies

Remember from Book 2 – *Experiencing Your True Identity*, we learned that God has not left us defenseless because He gave us three spiritual filters to take every thought captive: 1) the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16); 2) His word; and 3) the Holy Spirit.

*"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are **taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.**" 2 Corinthians 10:5"*

Let's review some of the key truths to engage God to not take ownership of Satan-induced thoughts.

- Learn God's word in order to recognize the truth versus false or lying thoughts from Satan.
- When Satan inserts false and lying thoughts into your mind about God's love, seek the Holy Spirit to reveal to you whether or not that thought lines up with the truth.
- If it is a false or lying thought, entrust it to the Lord and refuse to take ownership of it.
- Seek the Holy Spirit to continue renewing your mind to the truth about God's love.

Let's now look at some examples of how to engage God to defeat Satan-inserted thoughts about God's love.

Example #1: You feel God can't love you because you are not meeting God's expectations.

Satan Inserts A Fleshly Thought: Remember, they come in first person in your own voice, saying, "I can never quite measure up to God's expectations of me with the result that He doesn't love me and not only that, He rejects me or finds me unacceptable."

Holy Spirit Inserts The Truth: "The truth is that God loves you and accepts you regardless of whether you are or are not meeting His expectations."

Steps of Faith: "Holy Spirit, thank you for reminding me of the truth. I am entrusting this fleshly thought to You and I am asking You to renew my mind to the truth that Your love for me is unconditional and not contingent on anything."

Conclusion

Hopefully this section has not only revealed some of your unrealistic expectations about God's nature and character but has exposed your fleshly responses to those expectations. If so, begin engaging God to renew your mind to the truth of who God really is. Without doing so, we will stay locked away in our false beliefs and unbelief which create doubt about God's true nature and character. Whenever doubt creeps in, the flesh and Satan will use it to derail you from seeking the truth about God's love with the result that you will not grow in your love relationship with God.

Discussion Questions:

1. What key truth(s) impacted you the most in this lesson? Why?

2. Which of the characteristics of God's love through His **nature** impacted you the most or which ones did you struggle believing? Why?

3. Which of the characteristics of God's love through His **character** impacted you the most or which ones did you struggle believing? Why?

4. How have your unmet unrealistic expectations negatively impacted how you feel or what you believe about God?

5. What will be the consequences if you continue living in the fleshly behaviors that result from your unrealistic expectations?

Lesson Five

Experiencing A Mutual Love Relationship With God

In this lesson, we will look at the following topics:

- **Is a love relationship with God conditional?**
- **The levels of intimacy with God**
- **Men and women after God's heart**
- **How to experience a mutual love relationship with God – Part One**

DAY ONE

"This is God's divine order. Understanding His love for us will awaken passion in us to love Him and His Son.....If men could only see the seeking, compassionate love of their Heavenly Father, they would be set free to respond and return that love." Larry Smith - *Christ Our Life*

Introduction

In this lesson, we turn the corner to focus on how to experience a mutual love relationship with God. We have seen the many ways God loves us and is drawing us to Himself for relationship. But what does it mean for us to have this relationship with Him? Let's begin by looking at our part in developing this relationship.

Our part in experiencing a MUTUAL love relationship with God is to seek to KNOW, BELIEVE, and EXPERIENCE the love of God and to SEEK to love Him at the deepest possible emotional and spiritual level.

Knowing the truth about God is crucial to our relationship with Him. However, an intellectual knowledge is not enough to experience a mutual love relationship with Him. Similar to a marriage relationship, it is not enough just to know the facts about a spouse. Marriage is experiencing a love relationship and intimacy at the deepest emotional, physical, and spiritual level possible.

God's deepest desire is that we must move beyond mere knowledge about Him and seek to love Him on the deepest soulful (with our mind, emotions, and will) and spiritual levels. This is the definition of intimacy with God. We see this desire in the heart of David when he said:

*When You said, "Seek My face," **my heart said to You**, "Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."*
Psalms 27:8

Notice that David said “my heart said to You,” not my head. The motivation to seek an intimate relationship with God was not intellectual. Rather, the motivation to seek God came from David’s heart. The same applies to us because:

God wants HEART lovers, not HEAD seekers.

[**Note:** Before we go on, the word “intimacy” is typically a harder word for men to relate to than for women. Most men would agree it is not a word we use that much in our vocabulary except in the context of sexual intimacy. However, as you have just read, God wants an intimate love relationship at a soulful and spiritual level. This word may be difficult for men to embrace but we will see in this lesson that David was experiencing intimacy with God at a very deep level.]

Before we go any further in how to experience this love relationship, let’s answer the following question.

Is A Love Relationship With God CONDITIONAL?

John Eldridge wrote a book called “*Get Your Life Back.*” In this book, Eldridge makes a profound statement:

***God’s love and acceptance towards us is UNCONDITIONAL but
EXPERIENCING a love relationship with God is CONDITIONAL.***

This may sound confusing, but Eldridge draws on James 4:8 to further make his point:

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you....”

Eldridge compared a relationship with God to our human relationships. Human relationships are based on mutual, reciprocal love. We are to unconditionally love all people with the love of Christ including those who don’t like us or even hate us. However, we can only experience a mutual love relationship with someone who responds with love towards us. Why would it be any different with God? Look at Proverbs 8:17 to further confirm this truth:

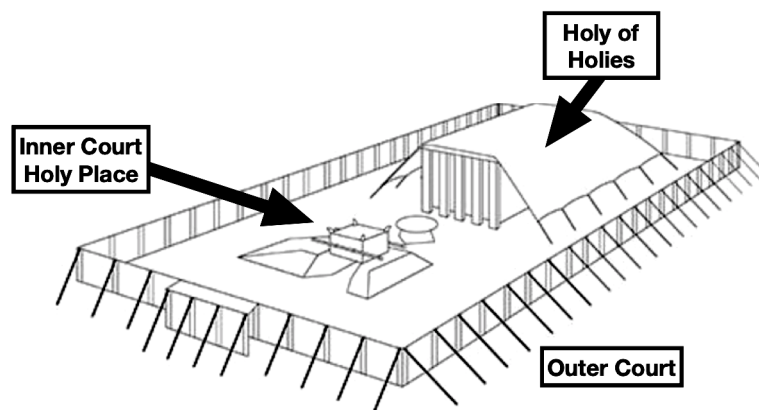
“I love those who love Me; And those who diligently seek Me will find Me.”

Even though this verse sounds like God loves us conditionally, we know that is not the case because God’s essence **is** love. He continually loves us with an unconditional love. This verse is saying that if we want a mutual love relationship with God, we are to love Him in return. Then and only then will we experience intimacy with God versus just being loved by Him. Let’s finish this section with this key truth.

God has put it in each of our hearts to DESIRE and LOVE Him and we will never be fully SATISFIED until we do.

Engaging God: If you struggle with the truth that intimacy with God is conditional, seek the Holy Spirit to persuade you of this truth.

What Are The LEVELS of Relationship With God?



To answer this question, let's use the tabernacle to illustrate. If you are not familiar with the tabernacle of Moses, it was the temporary place of worship that the Israelites built according to God's specifications while wandering in the desert. It was used until King Solomon built the temple. The word *tabernacle* is a translation of the Hebrew word "*mishkan*," which means

"dwelling-place." The purpose of the tabernacle of Moses was to provide a dwelling place for God where the people could come and worship Him. There were three parts to the tabernacle. The outer court, the inner court called the Holy Place, and the third part was the Holy of Holies.

In case you are not familiar with the layout of the tabernacle, the **outer court** is where the priests sacrificed animals on the altar. Everyone was allowed in the outer court, but only the priests could go inside the inner court, the **Holy Place**, where the bread of the presence, the continually burning lampstand, and the offering of incense were located. The **Holy of Holies** was reserved for the high priest only because this is where he, and he alone, communed with God and heard from Him.

Let's use these three parts of the tabernacle to relate to the three levels of relationship we can have with God. For example, the **outer court** is the first level of relating to God. It is for those who only have an intellectual knowledge about God and His love for them but are not seeking to experience a love relationship. The **inner court** is for those who are experiencing and receiving God's love but are not seeking Him for a mutual love relationship. The **Holy of Holies** is the place of the deepest intimacy with God. In this place, we are intentionally seeking to know God's heart and are experiencing a mutual love relationship.

When you look at this analogy, where do you see yourself? In the outer court, the inner court, or the Holy of Holies? If you don't see yourself in the Holy of Holies, would you like to be there? This is God's heart's desire for every believer. To live in the Holy of Holies requires not only receiving His love but becoming men and women who are seeking after God's heart to love Him.

Engaging God: If you feel you are in the outer or inner court, but desire is to be living in the Holy of Holies, seek the Holy Spirit to draw you into that place of a deeper relationship with God.

DAY TWO

Are We To Be AFTER God's Heart?

Before we answer this question, it is important to understand the meaning of God's heart.

The HEART of God is the essence of who He IS (i.e., love), what He DESIRES, His WILL, and His PURPOSES.

We have established that God's greatest desire is for an ongoing love relationship with us. Therefore, His greatest desire is that we become men and women after His heart as we see in 1 Samuel 13:14:

*"... the LORD has sought out for Himself a man (woman) **after His own heart....**"*

God's love for us is so great that He is constantly looking for anyone who will seek after His heart. If we do, here is a wonderful promise in the second half of Proverbs 8:17:

*"I love those who love Me; And those who **diligently** seek Me will find Me (my heart)."*

When it comes to loving God, here is a description of a man or woman after God's heart.

One who DILIGENTLY and INTENTIONALLY PURSUES God to KNOW Him and to LOVE Him at the DEEPEST possible level.

The heart is the nature of a person, and to know the heart of someone is to know that person's innermost character, feelings, or desires. It is no different when it comes to seeking after God's heart because as we said previously, our greatest desire should be to love God at the deepest possible level.

You may be thinking that since we are in union with the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, we don't need to seek after God's heart. However, look at what Jesus says about this in Matthew 7:7:

*"Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. **Keep on seeking, and you will find.**
Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you."*

Jesus is echoing what God said earlier through His prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:13:

"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."

From these two verses we see there is an active seeking of God and His love. If you do, you will find His heart and His love for you. How do we actively seek after God's heart? Seeking God means active dependence on and an ongoing conscious desire to love God.

What will we find when we seek God's heart?

We will find a God who, ETERNALLY more than WE desire a relationship with Him, wants a DEEP, PERSONAL, intimate relationship with us.

Let's look at three biblical characters who were men after God's own heart.

David's Heart For God

There is no doubt David was a man after God's own heart according to Acts 13:22:

*"But God removed Saul and replaced him with David, a man about whom God said, 'I have found **David** son of Jesse, **a man after my own heart**. He will do everything I want him to do.'*

"A man after My own heart." This is the label God gave to David which is astonishing in light of all David's sins and failures. Let's look at two of them. The first sin was that David committed adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, according to 2 Samuel 11:2-4. Secondly, when Bathsheba became pregnant as a result, David tried to cover up his sin. When that did not work, he orchestrated Uriah to be killed in battle so that he could marry her. As horrible as these sins were, why would God call David, of all people, a man after God's own heart? The answer is that in spite of his sins, David never stopped pursuing God's heart.

Think about this. He could have said, like many people do because of their sins, "I am unworthy to be loved by God and to love God because of the terrible sins I have committed." There were no doubt consequences for David's sins, but his sins and failures did not stop him from seeking God to experience a deep, intimate relationship with Him. In addition, as we said in the previous lesson, his sins did not stop God from loving him.

Look at the results in David's heart as a result of pursuing God.

*"You **satisfy** me more than the richest feast. I will **praise** you with songs of joy." Psalm 63:5*

*"O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul **thirsts for** you; my whole body **longs for** you in this parched and weary land where there is no water." Psalm 63:1*

*When You said, "**Seek** My face," my heart said to You, "Your face, O LORD, I shall **seek**."
Psalm 27:8*

Think about the words in bold in these verses: "satisfy, praise, thirsts for, longs for, and seek." Can you see through these words the results of David being a man after God's heart? In spite of

his sins, he has a thirst for and a longing to know God's heart and will never be fully satisfied until he does.

When you read these passages, can you see David's joy, passion, and deep love for God? Do they on some level create in you a stronger desire to be a man or woman after God's heart?

Meditate: on the four verses and seek the Holy Spirit to sink them deep in your heart.

Engaging God: Can you identify with David in that you think that your sins may be too great for the love and forgiveness of God? If you do, seek the Holy Spirit to persuade you that His love for you does not change regardless of what sins you have committed or will commit.

This Is For The Men: Was David A REAL Man?

As we discussed earlier, "intimacy" is not a word that most men use freely because it is not considered a "manly" word. If you do struggle with this word, think about David for a minute. Would you accuse David of not being a real man or not being manly? As a young man, he fought lions, bears, and giants and, as king he led victorious armies against his enemies. No one would deny that he was a mighty warrior and a man's man.

As manly as David was, he was not timid or ashamed to declare his affection for the Lord. We see this in Psalm 27:4:

*"One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, **To behold the beauty of the LORD** and to meditate in His temple."*

Can you see David's emotion and great passion for the Lord? If you are a man, when was the last time you uttered to God your desire to behold His beauty? Do you know why David said these words? Because of his burning desire to love this amazing, astonishing, and beautiful God who loved him and wanted him for Himself. Because of this, God called him a "man" after His own heart. Therefore, God is looking for real men because:

***A REAL man of God is a man who FERVENTLY and
PASSIONATELY seeks after the heart of God.***

Engaging God: If you, as a man, struggle with the idea that fervently and passionately seeking after God is not manly, please read through the passages in Psalms at the end of this lesson and seek the Holy Spirit to persuade you of the truth of what is a real man of God.

DAY THREE

Paul Was Also A Man After God's Heart

When you read Paul's letters, do you think of Paul as more of a theologian than a lover of God? It is easy to conclude that he was more of a theologian based on the depth of the truth the Holy Spirit spoke and wrote through him. However, if you were to ask Paul what he would rather be known for, he would probably choose lover of God over theologian. How do we know this? Because we see his great love for Jesus in Philippians 3:8:

*"Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the **infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and **become one with him**."*

Here is the same verse from the Amplified Version of the Bible.

*"But more than that, I count everything as loss compared to **the priceless privilege and supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord [and of growing more deeply and thoroughly acquainted with Him—a joy unequaled]**. For His sake I have lost everything, and I consider it all garbage, so that I may gain Christ."*

Can you imagine the emotions Paul must have been feeling for the Lord when he wrote these words considering where Paul came from? He may have been weeping when he wrote them because before he was saved, he hated Jesus and His followers enough that he had His followers murdered.

Can you see from this passage the amazing transformation the Holy Spirit accomplished in Paul to move him from being a hater and murderer to a man who had a deep, passionate love for God? What is just as amazing is God's unconditional love and forgiveness towards Paul despite all the blood on his hands due to his part in murdering followers of Jesus.

Put yourself in Paul's position for a minute. Wouldn't you be weeping if God continued to pour out His unfailing love and grace on you in spite of you being a hater of God and a murderer of His people?

Paul's burning desire for Jesus is so great that he repeats himself in Philippians 3:10 when he says:

*"... that I may **know Him**...."*

The Greek word for "know" in this passage is *ginōskō*, which describes knowing someone at the deepest possible personal level. Paul's greatest passion was to intimately know and love God which is why he was a man after God's own heart.

God's transformation of Paul's heart was so great, He chose to write through him 1 Corinthians 13 which is the greatest chapter in the Bible concerning love.

*"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but **do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.**" 1 Corinthians 13:1*

Exercise: Read through 1 Corinthians 13 keeping in mind the amazing transformation of Paul from being a murderer to a man after God's heart.

Meditate: on Philippians 3:8 above.

Engaging God: After meditating on that verse, seek the Lord to give you the same heart Paul had for intimately knowing God.

John: The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

*"Peter, turning around, **saw the disciple whom Jesus loved** following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper...." John 21:20*

Peter and the rest of the disciples recognized John the Apostle as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." John was the son of Zebedee and brother of James. He was a one of the inner circle of three whom Jesus made His closest friends and shared His deepest experiences. Early on John was proud, self-confident, striving for honor, impulsive, and harbored an ongoing desire for retaliation. Look at Luke 9:54 as an example.

*"When James and John saw this, they said to Jesus, **'Lord, should we call down fire from heaven to burn them up?'**"*

However, what Jesus saw below this hostile exterior was a passionate, honest, and loving heart. Over time, John was transformed to become a deep lover of Jesus which continued to burn purer and brighter in his heart than in the hearts of his fellow disciples. He truly had the most intimate relationship with Jesus.

The greatest evidence of this was when Jesus entrusted His own mother's care to John as He hung upon the cross (John 19:25-27). (By the way, John was the only disciple at the cross while the rest of the disciples were huddled in fear in the upper room.)

Other powerful evidence of John's love for God was all the Holy Spirit wrote through him describing what a mutual love relationship looks like. We see this throughout his writings. Especially in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. Here is a wonderful example in 1 John 4:16:

*"We have come to know and have believed **the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.**"*

Conclusion

Through the lives of David, Paul, and John, can you see the supernatural transformation of the Spirit to not only persuade them that God loved them, but also that He moved them all to a place of seeking after and experiencing a deep, personal relationship with God? If we seek after God's heart like these men did, we will come to the place David did in Psalm 73:25:

"Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth."

Meditate: on the lives of David, Paul, and John and how God transformed them to be men after His own heart.

Engaging God: Seek God to continue transforming your heart so that you too will become in deeper ways a man or woman after God's heart.

DAY FOUR

Experiencing A Deeper Relationship With God

We will spend the rest of this chapter and the next looking at how to cultivate and experience a deeper relationship with God.

The FOUNDATION For Experiencing A Love Relationship: COMMUNION

The foundation for cultivating a love relationship with God is communion with God. Since this word is not used often, let's look at its definition as it relates to a love relationship with God.

COMMUNION is spending time in the PRESENCE of the Lord in order to GROW and EXPERIENCE a deep, abiding LOVE relationship with Him.

When you read this definition, does it tend to draw you or push you away? Many Christians struggle with the idea of communion because we are living in a fast-paced society with endless demands and countless opportunities to keep us from slowing down to commune with God. Because of our busyness, there are many things in our lives that distract us and prevent us from experiencing genuine communion with God.

That being said, communion with God is a deep need for every human, whether we acknowledge the need or not. We see this being true with David in Psalm 16:1:

***"You will make known to me the path of life. In Your presence is fullness of joy;
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever."***

Like David, living in and from the presence of God is how we are made to function, and it is the key to experiencing a love relationship with God. Why? Let's use the marriage relationship as an example. How can a couple know each other intimately unless they spend personal time in each other's presence? It is no different with God. Communing with God in His presence will move our relationship with Him to depths of intimacy we never thought possible.

Engaging God: If you feel that all that is going on in your life is a higher priority than communing with God, ask Him to persuade you that there is no greater priority in life than seeking and being in His presence. Seek Him to give you a willingness to make that a priority and a necessity.

Cultivating A Love Relationship Starts With Being INTENTIONAL and DILIGENT

When it comes to growing a deep relationship with God, there are two key words that are essential – "intentional" and "diligent." Let's explore why these two words are so important in growing a relationship with God.

INTENTIONAL

Being intentional means:

***A DELIBERATE and FOCUSED pursuit of God to reveal, persuade,
and draw you into a deeper intimacy with Him.***

Another word that reinforces the truth of being intentional is the word “seek” found in 1 Chronicles 16:10, 11 in the Amplified Bible.

*“Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those who **seek** the Lord rejoice. **Seek** the Lord and His strength; **Seek** His face continually [longing to be in His presence].”*

The definition of “seek” in the Bible means “a deliberate search for or a requirement for something.” Therefore, to seek God is a deliberate search for God with the objective of experiencing a love relationship with Him. Another way of looking at being intentional is found in 1 Chronicles 22:19:

“Now set your mind and heart to seek the Lord your God.”

In both the Old and New Testaments seeking is also a “setting of the mind and heart” on God. It is the conscious choice to fix or focus our mind’s attention on and our heart’s desire on God. We know that setting our mind and heart on God is a work of the Holy Spirit. As we seek Him, He produces the willingness to direct our hearts to the love of God as we see in 2 Thessalonians 3:5:

“May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.”

Our human diligence will only go so far, but as we seek the Holy Spirit, He will continuously transform our hearts to be intentional in seeking Him and in directing our hearts towards God.

Engaging God: If you struggle with being intentional, seek the Lord to become more intentional in seeking the heart of God.

DILIGENCE

Being spiritually diligent means:

An EARNEST, STEADY, and PERSISTENT pursuit of God.

Let’s look at a couple of verses to explain. Let’s look again at Proverbs 8:17:

*“I love those who love Me; And those who **diligently** seek Me will find Me.”*
Proverbs 8:17

We will never know the heart of God and His love for us without an earnest, steady, and persistent pursuit of God. Another passage that reveals a diligent pursuit of God is Matthew 7:7 that we looked at previously.

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.”

“Keep on” means “a consistent and persistent pursuit.” Without it we will never experience the depth of relationship we are called to. As with being intentional, we must seek the Holy Spirit to produce the diligence we may be lacking.

Engaging God: If you struggle in being diligent, seek the Holy Spirit to transform your heart to become more diligent.

To expand on the meaning of communion with God, let’s look at some keyways we can practically experience it:

- Meditating on God’s word, on God Himself, and on Christian books
- Praying through scripture
- Being in stillness before God
- Listening to God
- Thanking and praising God
- Worshiping God

We will look at the first two of these in this lesson and will look at the rest of them in Lesson Six.

MEDITATION

*“Let the words of my mouth and **the meditation of my heart** be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.” Psalm 19:14*

One of the key ways to commune with God in growing a mutual love relationship is through meditation. In case this is a new concept for you, look at the definition and how it applies to seeking God.

Meditation is REFLECTIVE or DEEP thinking on something or someone.

The focus of meditation for Christians is GOD Himself and His WRITTEN word.

In this section we will focus on three kinds of meditation: meditating on God’s word, meditating on God Himself, and meditating on Christian books that focus on God’s love.

DAY FOUR

1. Meditating On GOD'S WORD

*"My eyes are awake throughout the night watches that I may **meditate on Your word.**"*

Psalm 119:148

What does it mean to meditate on God's word as it relates to loving God?

Meditation is engaging the Holy Spirit to CONTEMPLATE or think DEEPLY on God's Word so that the HOLY SPIRIT can work through it to TEACH you, APPLY it to your life and TRANSFORM your heart to become a LOVER of God.

A good practice is to begin making a list of the scriptures that focus on loving God and being loved by God. Here are some thoughts on what meditation on God's word looks like practically.

- Come with an open and receptive heart to what the Holy Spirit wants to reveal to you in a passage.
- Seek the Holy Spirit to guide you to words or phrases in a passage that He wants you to focus on.
- Listen for what He might say to you concerning those words or phrases.
- Ask questions of the Spirit such as:
 - What is it You are saying to me personally through this verse(s)?
 - Is there something You want to reveal or uncover in me through this verse?
 - Is there some false belief or area of unbelief that I am believing that You want to transform?
 - How does this verse apply to experiencing a love relationship with God?

Let's use a verse to apply these principles.

*"O God, you are my God; **I earnestly search for you.** My soul **thirsts for you**; my whole body **longs for you** in this parched and weary land where there is no water." Psalm 63:1*

- "Holy Spirit, I am coming to You with an open and receptive heart. My desire is to experience a deep love relationship with God."
- **"What words or phrases do You want me to focus on?"**

Answer: "I want you to focus on/meditate on the phrases: 'I earnestly search for You. My soul thirsts for You and my whole body longs for You.'"

- “What is it You are saying personally to me through this verse(s)?”

Answer: “I want this to be your heart for Me. Earnestly search for, thirst for, and long for Me.”

- “Is there something You want to reveal and uncover in me through this verse?”

Answer: “I want you to be more intentional in seeking a love relationship with Me.”

- “Is there some false belief that I have that you want to transform?”

Answer: “You believe your sins are too great for Me to love you or because of your sins, you are unworthy to seek Me. These are false beliefs.”

- “How does this verse apply to experiencing a love relationship?”

Answer: “Seek Me to grow in you a greater thirst and longing for a love relationship with Me.”

Exercise: Go to the end of this lesson and find one of the Psalms on unfailing love that you would like to meditate on and then apply these principles to that verse.

2. Meditation On The Truth About God

*“When I remember You on my bed, I **meditate on You** in the night watches.”*

Psalms 63:6

In addition to meditating on God’s word for intimacy with God, meditate on God Himself. Below are some principles to remember when meditating on God.

- **Meditate on God’s character as a way of drawing closer to Him.**

Below are some characteristics of God you can meditate on:

Unfailing love	Grace	Mercy	Compassion
Patience	Sovereignty	Goodness	Righteousness
Forgiveness	Faithfulness	Acceptance	Empathy
Understanding	Kindness	Wisdom	Power

Example: Meditate on God’s love being expressed through His **mercy, compassion,** and **patience** with you or meditate on how **faithful** God is to love you and draw you to Himself.

- **Meditate on what God has done to persuade you of His love for you.** (From Lesson One)
 - The cross which is the greatest expression of His love.
 - Out of His love, He chose the “YOU” version of you to be born.
 - God could hardly wait until you were born.
 - He adopted you into His own family.
 - You are His beloved son or daughter.

- Through His love He gave you an inheritance.

Example: Meditate on Him loving you so much that He chose the “you” version of you out of 500 million genetic possibilities.

- **Meditate on how God feels about you.** (From Lesson Two)
 - God leaps for joy over you.
 - God is happy with you.
 - God likes you.
 - He wants to be your best friend.
 - You are His favorite.
 - God is singing over you.
 - He longs to be with you and gracious to you.

Example: Meditate on the truth that God loves you so much He rejoices and sings over you. Think about Him wanting to spend every waking moment with you or that you are His favorite.

Meditate: Choose one attribute of God’s character or one thing He is doing, or has done, to persuade you of His love, or meditate on how God feels about you.

3. Meditate On Christian Books That Focus On Intimacy With God

There are several wonderful Christian books that focus on our relationship with God. (There is a list of some of these books at the end of the study.)

When meditating on Christian books, keep these things in mind:

- Instead of reading the book just with your mind, engage the Holy Spirit as you read.
- Be sensitive to the Spirit as you read in case He stops you to point something out to you.
- When the Spirit reveals something, take a moment and meditate on that word or phrase.
- Seek the Spirit as to how this word or phrase applies to your life.
- Engage the Spirit to persuade, renew, or transform you concerning what you read.

Let’s use an example from a book we have quoted before called *Enjoying God* by S.J. Hill:

“God is continually calling us to that deep place within the human heart as He seeks to manifest Himself to those He loves. There is a place within you—a deep place—that only God can touch. It’s in that place that God’s echoing invitation emerges and penetrates your spirit. It’s the invitation not only to experience Him but also to enjoy Him. This call comes out of an even deeper place, a deeper longing, in the heart of God. As much as you may want Him, He wants you more.”

- **“I am engaging You Holy Spirit, as I read this book.”**
- **“Make me aware if there is something I am reading that You want me to stop and meditate on.”**

- **“What is it you want me to focus on?”**

Answer: “Focus on the phrase *‘It’s the invitation not only to experience Him but also to enjoy Him.’*”

- **“Why do you want me to focus on this phrase?”**

Answer: “I want you to understand how much I enjoy you. I enjoy being with you and I enjoy everything about you. Spend a few moments meditating on this important truth.”

- **“How does this apply to my life?”**

Answer: “During the day, remind yourself that every moment I am enjoying you fully and completely.”

- **“I am seeking you to persuade me of the truth, renew my mind to believe the truth, or transform me by the truth I am reading.”**

Engaging God: Take S.J. Hill’s quote and go through the same exercise on your own.

DAY FIVE

PRAYER

We have already looked at prayer through the lens of meditation. Let's look more specifically at other forms of prayer to nurture a love relationship with God.

1. Praying Through SCRIPTURE

In addition to meditating on scriptures that portray God's love, pray through them as well. Here are some thoughts concerning what that might look like.

- **Simply make a biblical prayer your prayer.**

Look at this prayer from Isaiah as an example:

*"My soul **yearns** for you in the night, in the morning My spirit **longs** for you."*
Isaiah 26:9

- **To better understand key words in a verse, Google the biblical meaning.**

For example, let's look at the biblical meaning of "yearning" and "longing."

Yearning – to desire, wait longingly for, wish for, want, crave

Longing – great affection for, to strain after, to greatly desire to have something or someone

The meaning of these words can expand how you pray through a verse. Rather than just praying to yearn or long for the Lord, you might pray, "I wait longingly for You; I have great affection for You; I strain after You."

- **Pray the Holy Spirit will transform you through a scriptural prayer.**

For example, look at Psalm 73:25:

*"Whom have I in heaven but you? **I desire you more than anything on earth.**"*

Example prayer: "Lord, continue to persuade me that there is nothing on heaven or earth that compares with loving You and being loved by You. Give me a deep and abiding desire to know You, love You, and walk with You throughout the day."

Here is another example.

*"I love those who love Me; And those who **diligently seek Me will find Me.**"*
Proverbs 8:17

Example prayer: “Lord, move my heart in deeper ways to love You and transform my heart to diligently seek You so that I can discover and experience the height and depth of Your love for me.”

Engaging God: Using these verses or others that focus on our relationship with God, seek the Lord to use them to draw you into a deeper love for God.

2. Praying For EYES To See

We talked about in Book Three – *Living Life For Others* – that we have spiritual cataracts when it comes to seeing others in 3D and loving them. It is not different with God. Our spiritual cataracts will prevent us from seeing and receiving God’s unconditional love. Therefore, we can apply the same prayer as we did before in 2 Kings 6:17 in seeking a deeper relationship with God.

“Then Elisha prayed, ‘O LORD, open his eyes and let him see!’ The LORD opened the young man’s eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire.”

Example prayers might be:

- “Lord, give me eyes to see the depth of Your love for me.”
- “Lord, give me eyes to see all that You have done to persuade me of Your love.”
- “Lord, give me eyes to see the evidence of what You are doing in my life today to express Your love and draw me to Yourself with Your love.”

Engaging God: In what ways would you like for the Lord to open your eyes concerning your relationship with Him? Pray through each of those that come to mind.

We will finish the key elements in experiencing a deeper relationship with God in the next lesson.

Discussion Questions:

1. What key truth(s) impacted you the most in this lesson? Why?

2. Was the analogy of the tabernacle helpful in understanding the different levels of love we can have for God? In what ways was it helpful?

3. Why do you feel meditation on scripture is essential in growing your love relationship with God? What might be the consequences of not meditating?

4. If you don't already do so, in what ways do you think praying through scripture might help you in experiencing a mutual, love relationship?

5. Concerning the section on praying for "eyes to see," write down what you want the Holy Spirit to give you "eyes to see" concerning your relationship with God.

Lesson Six

Experiencing A Deeper Relationship With God - Part Two

The Results of Experiencing A Deeper Relationship With God

We will cover the following topics in this lesson:

- **Experiencing a deeper relationship with God – Part Two**
- **The realities of the journey**
- **The results of experiencing a deepening relationship with God**

DAY ONE

Experiencing A Deeper Relationship With God - Part Two

LISTENING PRAYER

*“A time to tear and a time to mend. **A time to be quiet and a time to speak.**”
Ecclesiastes 3:7*

How many close relationships do you have where all you do is talk to someone and don't listen to them? The very definition of relationship is both people talking and listening. It is no different with God. How else will we know His personal thoughts, desires, will, or heart for us if we don't listen?

Many Christians confess to spending very little time, if any, listening to God. Rather, they spend most of their time talking to Him. Others don't even believe God speaks to them anymore because they believe everything God wants to say has already been said in the Bible. The truth is that God is still speaking to us as evidenced by the following verses.

*“for He is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. **Today, if you hear His voice**, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah....” Psalm 95:7-8a*

*“I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. **They will listen to My voice**, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.” John 10:16*

*“Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone **hears My voice** and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20*

There is no doubt that God speaks to us. In fact, since He lives in us, He is probably speaking to us non-stop. When it comes to cultivating a love relationship with God, it is crucial to listen for the many ways He is personally revealing His love to you.

Even though some people say they have heard an audible voice from God, for the most part, God speaks through our thoughts. The key is having ears to hear His voice, and this occurs as we draw closer to Him. Why?

The CLOSER we draw to God, the CLEARER our spiritual hearing will become.
With INTIMACY comes CLARITY.

There is a direct correlation between our closeness to God and our spiritual hearing. This is part of the meaning of James 4:8 we studied before which says, “*draw near to Me and I will draw near to You.*” As we draw closer to God in seeking an intimate relationship with Him, He will draw nearer to us so that over time we will recognize His voice more clearly and more consistently.

Meditate: on the verses above if you struggle with the truth that God still speaks to us today.

Engaging God: Seek to spend more time in the Lord’s presence and ask Him to give you ears to hear His voice.

STILLNESS

Another key element in growing a deeper relationship with God is the “holy habit” of being still as we see in Psalm 4:4:

“Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.”
Psalm 4:4

Psalm 46:10 tells us that stillness is crucial to knowing God at the deepest possible level.

“Be still and know that I am God....”

One of the hardest things for Christians in our culture to do is to be quiet and still in God’s presence. And yet, it is an essential part of experiencing intimacy with God. Why? Reread Psalm 46:10 and think about what the converse of this verse might be. If you are not still, you won’t know God. In other words, there is a deeper level of knowing God and intimacy with Him that can only come from being quiet and still before Him.

Stillness is so foreign for most of us because our lives are moving at warp speed. The problem is that constant “busyness” keeps our minds in endless turmoil. With thousands of thoughts running through our minds all the time, we all seem to have a form of spiritual ADHD, chasing after one thought and then another. We also need to keep in mind that Satan will do everything he can to distract you from being still before the Lord because he clearly knows how being still will draw you into a deeper relationship with Him. Therefore, he will work overtime to keep your life busy so you will never be still.

When it comes to being still before God, what does it look like practically?

- Find a quiet place that is as free of noise as possible. (Use earplugs if necessary.)
- Sit before the Lord and begin resting in His presence.
- Being still is different from meditation and prayer in that you are simply being in the presence of God without talking to Him or seeking to hear something from Him.
- Early on, you will have a thousand thoughts running through your mind. It is important to let them go in and out of your mind. Don't try to control them.
- To settle your mind, focus on a word like "Jesus" or "peace" or focus on a phrase like "be still."
- Start out with doing this for one minute and then add more time each time you spend with God.
- Over time, you will find yourself more quickly focusing more on God rather than your thoughts.

Why is this spiritual exercise so essential?

- You will commune at levels of intimacy between your human spirit and the Holy Spirit that will never happen if you are not still.
- If the Holy Spirit chooses to speak to you during your time of stillness, your spiritual hearing will improve as your soul comes to a deeper place of peace and rest.
- The Holy Spirit may choose to bring thoughts to your mind that He might not otherwise bring unless you are still.
- You will experience a depth of intimacy with God that can happen in no other way except through stillness.

Think about how much it means to God that you would want to be still in His presence. This is one of the greatest expressions of love towards God because you are not coming to hear something or ask for something. Rather, out of love for Him, you are simply choosing to be still in His presence.

Meditate: on the truth that apart from being still, there will be a knowing and experiencing God you will never otherwise experience.

[Note: When we can't focus on the Lord with our wandering minds, we tend to become frustrated. If you feel that frustration coming up, simply entrust the frustration to the Lord and ask Him to BE your peace. Early on you may have to be more intentional about entrusting your frustration to Him. However, at some point you will find your mind more consistently focused on Him. Remember that you may get frustrated with your lack of focus on Him during your times with Him, but He never gets frustrated with you. Why? Because you made the loving choice to spend time with Him.]

Engaging God: Start in practicing being still before God. As was mentioned, start with one minute and then add time each time you do this. If the Lord does bring thoughts to your mind, you might want to journal those to meditate on them at some point.

DAY TWO

COMMUNING WITH THE LORD DURING THE DAY

*“You will show me the way of life, **You fill me with joy in your presence** with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” Psalm 16:11*

Are there people you really enjoy spending time with because they make you feel loved and valued? There is no one who can do this better than the Lord Himself. And the beauty of it is He is in you and with you every moment.

As we grow in our intimacy with Him, our desire to commune with Him throughout the day grows as well. You will find yourself talking with and listening to Him while you are walking or driving. The more you seek to spend time with Him, the greater the desire and love for Him will grow.

We can't stay focused on the Lord all the time because we are easily distracted. However, the closer we become to God, the more focused we will be on Him.

Is it possible that God feels great joy when you choose to commune with Him throughout the day?

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to bring Himself back to your mind throughout the day.

THANKING and PRAISING GOD FOR HIS LOVE FOR YOU

When you think about all that you have read about a mutual love relationship with God to this point, are you developing a greater heart of thanksgiving and praise for God? Why is this important?

THANKING and PRAISING God are two of the GREATEST expressions of your love for God.

Everything He has done and is doing to draw us into an intimate relationship with Himself is worthy of our thanksgiving and praise. Eternally more than you appreciate someone who thanks you for doing something for them, God rejoices when you thank and praise Him because these are two of the greatest expressions of love towards Him.

Here are some example prayers of thanksgiving and praise:

Example prayer of thanksgiving: “Lord, thank You for Your unfailing love. Thank You for all that You have done and are doing to persuade me of Your love. Thank You for continuously drawing me to Yourself.”

Example prayer of thanksgiving: “I am thanking You in advance for how You will renew my mind to the truth, replace my false beliefs with the truth, and transform me so that I will be more consistently searching for, thirsting for, and longing for You. Thank You that You never stop loving me and drawing me to Yourself for this mutual love relationship I was created for.”

Example prayer of praise: “Lord, like David in Psalm 31:21, I praise You for showing me the wonders of Your unfailing love.”

*“Praise the LORD, for he has shown me **the wonders of his unfailing love....**” Psalm 31:21*

Engaging God: What comes to mind that you have read in this study that you can thank and praise God for? Take a few minutes and do that right now.

Conclusion

You will discover that as you develop the “holy habit” of communing with God, it will move from being an option to becoming a necessity. You will find yourself making time with God one of the highest priorities in your life. Why? Because your greatest desire will be to be rooted and established in God’s love and to know the height, the length, the width and the depth of His love as we see in Ephesians 3:17-19:

*“And I pray that you, **being rooted and established in love,**¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how **wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,**¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge....”*

Here is a final thought:

Because you will experience such INTIMACY with God, there is NO other place you would rather be than in His PRESENCE.

The Realities of The Journey

In addition to obstacles to our relationship with God, there are spiritual realities that we must be aware of as well. It is important to not only understand what they are but how to deal with them.

Feeling Versus FAITH

As you read this sentence, are you feeling God’s love? Assuming you are not, right now, this very moment, God is pouring all of His love into you. It is a non-stop flow of love. As you move deeper into your bond with God, there will be times of intense experience of God’s love. Those are moments you want to hold onto, but they will not last. Why? Because for the most part we will be walking by faith, knowing and believing God loves us without necessarily feeling it.

Busyness Creates DISTRACTIONS

Life is full of busyness which will create distractions at the very least or at the worst rob us of our desire to deepen our relationship with God. What we may not realize is that if we choose busyness over choosing to deepen our relationship with God, we are being deceived by Satan and/or the world that there is something or someone more important than God. The truth is that your relationship with God is your highest priority. Without it, you will never experience the love relationship God intends.

ADVERSITY

If you have lived long enough, you have experienced some form of adversity such as health issues, financial struggles, or loss of a spouse or child. Depending on the severity of the adversity, it will determine your attitude towards God and His love for you. These times are testing times for us. They are designed to stretch our faith and to move us to believe the truth even though our experience is telling us otherwise.

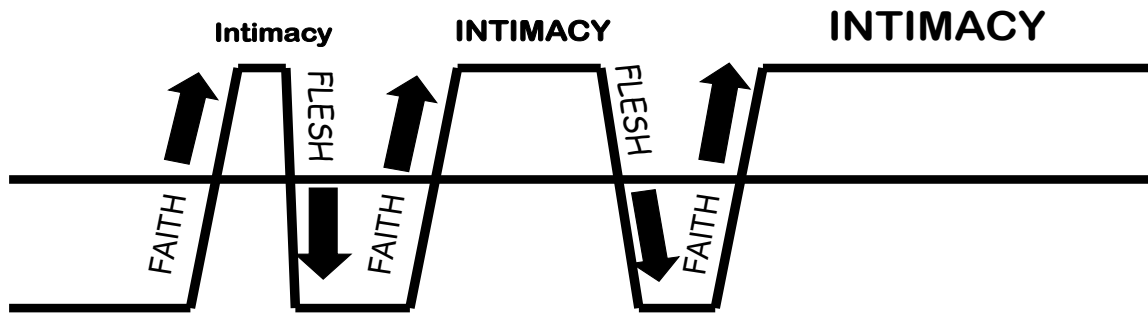
DARK Night of The Soul

The *dark night of the soul* refers to “a period of spiritual depression, pain, or a dark season of life that produces intense feelings of despair, sadness, and grief.” Even the most faithful and strongest Christians in their faith have gone through dark nights of their souls. Throughout the Psalms, we see David struggling with dark nights that caused him to lose sleep, not eat, and grow weak. It is during these times it is easy to doubt God’s love for us, but it is also during these times we learn to trust God in the midst of the struggle (i.e., “but God”).

The truth is that God has not moved even though you may feel He is distant. His love for you has not changed even if you don’t feel it. Because of His love, He is faithful to walk with you through these dark nights. What you will discover on the other side of the dark night of the soul is that it was necessary for you to go through this in order to increase your faith and therefore increase your love for God.

We Will Fall Below The Line, BUT...

Everything you just read, can cause you to fall below the line and consciously or unconsciously move you away from your desire for intimacy with God. However, similar to when our fleshly behavior takes us below the line, we take another step of faith and move back above the line to continue developing intimacy with God. Over time, your greatest passion in life will be to live above the line because of the depth at which you are experiencing intimacy with God.



**Busyness - Distractions
Adversity
Dark nights of the soul**

As With Any Relationship, It Takes WORK

“Work” in this context, is defined as an ONGOING pursuit of the Holy Spirit to GROW our desire and willingness to love God and to CREATE an ongoing thirst for Him.

If you are or have been married, you know the work it takes to sustain a loving relationship. Many sacrifices have to be made in order to nurture a loving marriage. It is no different with God. We have to work at our relationship with God because of the obstacles and realities we just read about.

If we are willing to do the work, we will see in the next section what the outcome will be.

DAY THREE

What Will Be The Results of A Deepening Relationship With God?

Introduction

Where will a growing relationship with God take us? What can we expect? We will finish this study by looking at some wonderful results that flow from a deepening intimacy with God.

The Lord Becomes More IRRESISTABLE

*When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You,
"Your face, O LORD, I shall seek." Psalm 27:8*

When God told David to "Seek My face" David didn't hesitate or balk at God's call. Those words were like a divine magnet that he couldn't resist. David immediately responded with "Yes, Lord, I will seek Your face." David couldn't resist God's call because of how irresistible God became to him. It will be no different with us. The more we pursue Him, the more our walls of resistance (i.e., false beliefs, unbelief, unmet expectations, etc.) are being torn down. The capacity and desire to love God becomes greater with the result that we will find Him more and more irresistible. You will not be able to, or want to, help yourself. More than anything in life, you will want to be in His presence, loving Him and being loved by Him.

God Will Continue To REVEAL More of Himself To You

"... 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.' ¹⁰ But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets." 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10

Like any human relationship, the greater the love and trust we have in someone and they in us, the greater the depth of relationship. It is through love and trust that people are more willing to share their hearts with you. It is no different with God. God is like a multi-faceted diamond with each facet being a characteristic of His nature. As you seek a love relationship with Him, He will reveal facets of His character and personality that will come as a result of a deeper mutual love and trust. As we draw closer to Him, He will share things about Himself with us "which no mind has imagined." This is part of the reward referred to in Hebrews 11:4:

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

You Will See God As Your PERFECT Father (Abba)

*"and I will be a (perfect) Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,
says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:18*

Depending on what kind of a father you had, God saying, “I will be a Father to you” can be well received or troubling since we tend to put our earthly father’s face on our heavenly Father’s face. Regardless of how loving or unloving a home you came from, we all have (or had) imperfect fathers (and mothers). What God will do as we continue to seek Him, is reveal to us what a perfect, unconditionally loving father looks like.

He will bring us to the same place of intimate relationship that the Father and Jesus have in Mark 14:36 when Jesus calls His Father “Abba.”

*“And He was saying, ‘**Abba!** Father! All things are possible for Thee; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt.’”*

“Abba” was a common way young Jewish children addressed their fathers. It is a term of intimacy and endearment, much like we might use the term “dad” or “papa.” In the context of this verse, it reveals the intimate relationship between our Lord and His Father. Think about it. The almighty, sovereign God of the universe so loves you, He wants to bring you to the place where you will call Him “Abba.” It does not get any more personal than that.

If you did not have a good father figure, then it may be difficult to understand just how much your heavenly Father loves you. Begin seeking the Father to reveal to you the truth that He is the perfect “Abba” that you have been looking for.

You Will Have A Greater AWARENESS of His Presence

As the Lord gives you spiritual eyes to see, the result will be a greater awareness of His presence. Some days it will be experiential, but other days you will have a “faith” awareness of His presence. Faith awareness is a spiritual knowing of His presence versus a feeling. Over time, your awareness of God’s presence will grow greater and greater.

You Will Make Him Your HIGHEST Priority - “Only One Thing Is Necessary”

Remember the story about Mary and Martha from Luke 10:38-42?

*38 “Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister called **Mary, who was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word.** 40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.’ 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 but **only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.**”*

We see Martha in the kitchen preparing a meal for her Lord. Even though she was serving the Lord, the problem was not what Martha was doing, but it was the attitude of her heart while she was doing it. Her heart is revealed initially by the word “*distracted*.” As a result of her distraction, she came up to the Lord and said, “*Lord, do You not care?*” She was totally focused on herself and the importance of what she was doing over what Mary was not doing to help her. As a result, she was frustrated. His response to her fleshly frustration was this:

*“Martha, Martha, you are **worried and bothered** about so many things;”*

Make no doubt about it. Martha was being scolded by her Lord. Why? Because all her preparations (“so many things”) were a greater priority than the “one thing.” Martha did her work to earn approval from the Lord. When He rebuffed her, her heart was exposed; she goes into self-pity by saying, “*Lord, do you not care?*” This is how we know Martha’s heart was not right. She was doing something **for** God expecting something **from** Him. Martha’s problem was not a “works” problem. It was a heart problem.

Then there is Mary “*who was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word.*” What a contrast. She didn’t think it was necessary to be in the kitchen with Martha. She didn’t even give it a thought. Why? Because the “One thing” was in her presence. In His presence, she lost all other sense of reality except the divine reality sitting in front of her. I can see her gazing at His face, His hands, and His feet in total fascination, wonder, and awe.

When Jesus says “*only one thing is necessary,*” what is He referring to? What is the one thing that makes everything else irrelevant and pale in comparison? The “one thing” is simply focusing our hearts on Jesus. Mary gave up all other things for the “one thing.” Her highest and greatest priority was her heart for Jesus which is on full display in this passage. He was the object of her divine fascination. The “one thing” was not only “necessary,” it was her necessity because nothing else would satisfy. Everything she wanted and needed was totally fulfilled in His presence; Mary was totally satisfied. Her only desire was to knit her heart to His. Martha Kilpatrick in her book *Adoration* sums it up very well.

“Mary’s choice to choose Jesus was the outward result of her secret motivation, the point of her power to bow, to hear, to see and most of all to be still. Her power was from her choice. In the midst of possibilities, of different opportunities, of myriad options, Mary had chosen Him as her highest treasure....”

As you seek the heart of God, you, like Mary, will see Him as your highest treasure. As you do, you will hear the same words from our Lord that He spoke to Mary:

*“(You) have chosen the **good part.**”*

DAY FOUR

You Will More Easily Come To The Place of “BUT GOD”

Remember these two words from Book One? Let’s look again at the definition of “but God” in light of our study.

“BUT GOD” is the place where we will BELIEVE God loves us REGARDLESS of our FLESHLY responses to our false beliefs, adverse circumstance or our unmet expectations.

Here are a few examples of BUT GOD:

Example #1: “Lord, I am struggling believing You are a loving and good God because of what You let happen to me. I am tempted to get angry BUT I am seeking You to persuade me that You are loving and good even though You allowed this to take place.”

Example #2: “I am so angry because You didn’t prevent this from happening. I just don’t understand why You allowed it. BUT I repent of my anger and I am coming to You, asking You to renew my mind to the truth about who You are in spite of my temptation to get angry. Remind me that this may be a journey and not a sprint.”

Example #3: “My financial situation never seems to get any better. I am frustrated that a loving God would continue to allow me to continue being in this situation. BUT I am entrusting my frustration to You and seeking You to persuade me that even though I am in this situation, it does not change the truth that You are a loving God who is trying to teach me to trust You regardless.”

Paul can identify with us because look at what he faced in 2 Corinthians 1:8, 9a:

*“We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. **We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it.** ⁹ In fact, we expected to die....”*

Can you identify with Paul? Have you been to places where you feel crushed and overwhelmed? Think about this for a moment. Couldn’t the next words out of Paul’s mouth have been, “How could a loving God allow these terrible things to happen in my life. If He was truly in control, why would He let these things happen to me. Surely a good, loving, and sovereign God would prevent them.” However, these were the next words out of Paul’s mouth.

*“... **BUT** as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and **learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.**”*

The key to this part of the verse is what Paul was learning through his adversity. Even though Paul was crushed and overwhelmed and probably a bit frustrated at God, the point of all this was

to learn to walk by faith and trust God regardless. As you grow deeper in your relationship with Him, God will be faithful in moving you to this place of “but God.” What will be the result?

Our CHRIST-CONFIDENCE in God’s love for us will GROW.

You WILL BE Satisfied and YET You Will Still Want More

Think of your favorite rich dessert. As with any rich dessert, you have to slowly eat it one bite at a time. Even though each bite satisfies for the moment, you find yourself wanting more. It is no different as you go deeper in your relationship with God as we see with David. On one hand, David is satisfied:

*“You **satisfy** me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy.”*

Psalm 63:5

And yet David wants more:

*“I lift my hands to you in prayer. I **thirst for You** as parched land thirsts for rain.”*

Psalm 143:6

This is like a two-sided coin. You are fully satisfied with God’s love on one side, but you are thirsting for more of Him on the other.

You Will Experience An INEXPRESSIBLE Joy

*“and **though you have not seen Him, you love Him**, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, **you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.**” 1 Peter 1:8*

The definition of “inexpressible” is “to be too strong to be described or conveyed in words.” As the depth of relationship grows, a supernatural, inexpressible joy will begin to manifest itself in you. It may be a joy you feel from time to time, but for the most part it is a joy that you experience in your human spirit that is without feeling and yet very real. It is a joy that says, “In spite of what I am going through, nothing or no one can rob me of this inexpressible joy.”

You Will Experience A Deeper Heart of PRAISE and THANKSGIVING

*“I will bless the LORD at all times; His **praise shall continually be in my mouth.**” Psalm 34:1*

*“Sing to the LORD with **thanksgiving**; Sing **praises** to our God on the lyre.” Psalm 147:7*

As a result of the Lord drawing us into a deeper relationship, we will find ourselves praising and thanking God more often for the depth of His love, His non-stop pursuit of us, and His eternal desire for mutual intimacy.

You Will Be Living In The “WOW” of God

*“... Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in **awe of Him.**” Psalm 33:8*

Have you ever made a list of words that describe God? If not, you might start with the list below which might help you understand what it means to live in the “wow” or awe of God. Take a moment to go through this list.

Great	Wonderful	Loving	Satisfying
Awesome	Marvelous	Glorious	Precious
Beautiful	Powerful	Exalted	Splendid
Sublime	Incredible	Majestic	Magnificent
Extravagant	Exquisite	Resplendent	Spectacular
Phenomenal	Immeasurable	Unspeakable	Unimaginable
Inexpressible	Incomprehensible	Astonishing	Amazing
Stunning	Thrilling	Exciting	Exhilarating
Fascinating	Captivating	Heart-stopping	Breathtaking

As a result of reading this list, is there something in your heart that says you want to see God in the same way? Would you say you would be living in the “wow” of God if this is how you see Him? Consider repeating this list over again and as you do, seek the Holy Spirit to move the words from “mere” words to a heartfelt expression of how you see God and how you feel about Him. As these words become a reality in your soul, you will say with David:

“O LORD my God, you have performed many wonders for us. Your plans for us are too numerous to list. You have no equal. If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds, I would never come to the end of them.” Psalm 40:5

Dr. Che Ahn in the book *Catching God’s Heart* put into words what intimacy with God looks like for him.

“I know of no greater joy than the hours I spend beholding the Lord in His beauty and His majesty as I meditate upon Him. There is incomparable joy as I am filled with wonder, awe, and gratitude as I gaze intently on His face. I love to hear His voice, His direction, His heart. I love to know He cares about my heart and that He shares my dreams and listens to me. It is not a one-way relationship, but a deep oneness.”

We will end this study with one final result of experiencing the depths of God’s heart.

DAY FIVE

You Will Develop The Heart of Mary

Introduction

One of the most profound events in the Bible to illustrate what intimacy with God looks like took place in Bethany. This event might seem insignificant but Jesus didn't think so when He said,

"Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, **what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.**" Matthew 26:13

The Opening Scene

Who was this woman and what had she done? Why did Jesus promise that this story would be spoken of until the end of time? What was the significance? To begin answering these questions, look at John 12:1, 2:

"Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they (Mary and Martha) made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him."

The scene is set with Mary and Martha serving supper to Jesus, Lazarus, and the disciples. Serving meals to Jesus and His disciples had occurred many times before but this story will be different in that Mary was about to do something that would stun, amaze, and even agitate the disciples who were in the room that night.

Imagine the scene. As with any gathering of good friends, the room was filled with conversation and laughter. However, in one moment the room came to dead silence because they were about to witness someone who was about to perform the greatest act of love towards her Savior that will forever define the deepest expression of love for Him. The room stands still watching what Mary was about to do.

"While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, **there came a woman with an alabaster jar of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.**" Mark 14:3

Mary walks towards Jesus with this alabaster jar of expensive perfume and right before their eyes she breaks the jar and pours all of it out on the head of her dear Savior. Can you imagine the collective gasp in the room? What had just happened? What had they just witnessed? Why did Mary do this extravagant act? Before we answer those questions, let's look at an analogy between Mary, the alabaster jar, the perfume, the breaking of the jar, and the pouring out of the perfume.

The Alabaster Jar



Alabaster is a fine-grained, translucent form of gypsum that is typically white. The jar typically had a long neck and was sealed at the top. Because of the seal, the jar had to be broken before the contents were poured. Once the jar was broken, there was no resealing the jar.

The jar symbolizes Mary's heart. As beautiful as the alabaster jar must have been, it paled in comparison to the beautiful heart of Mary. Therefore, as she approached Jesus, she was not only about to give Him her most prized physical possession, but she was about to give Him her most prized spiritual possession: her heart.

The Perfume

As beautiful as the jar must have been, it was the perfume in that jar that had the true value. How expensive was it? Taking the median income of the American household today, the perfume was worth over \$31,000.

The perfume in our analogy represents the contents of Mary's heart. Can you imagine what was in her heart after following, listening, and taking to heart the personal teachings of Jesus? A heart full of Life, love, and thankfulness.

The Breaking and The Pouring

*"... she **broke** the vial and **poured** it over His head."*

Can you imagine how she felt in a room that just went silent knowing that every eye in the room was on her? As Mary approached Jesus with all eyes on her, one of the questions the disciples might have been asking themselves is, "What was she going to do with this expensive perfume?" The potential for judgment was followed by the verbalized judgment by these men but this did not dissuade her. Her love and passion for Jesus superseded herself. Her love was so intense for Him and His irresistibility so great that there was no other choice but to perform this loving and sacrificial act.

Many of us might have hesitated and turned back but not Mary. Her eyes were fixed and totally focused on Jesus. She went without hesitation and distraction. Her love for Him was so intense it blinded her to anyone else in the room except Jesus and her. Her heart was fixed on her King and nothing or no one was going to stop her from worshiping and honoring Him. Her heart dictated her actions. In that moment, Mary didn't reason with herself or have any second thoughts. Without any hesitation she emptied the entire contents of the jar on the head of her beloved Savior and dearest Friend. What a scene that must have been. Can you imagine the look on the disciples' faces when the perfume fell from the jar onto the head of Jesus?

What did the breaking and pouring out symbolize? The breaking of the bottle signified Mary's full commitment to Jesus because when she broke that jar, there was no turning back. She was fully committed to expressing her love and devotion to Jesus. Her pouring out of the perfume was signifying to these perplexed and even agitated disciples, "This is how much I love my Lord. I am pouring out to Him all of my heart, soul, and mind."

The Scent of The Perfume

Can you imagine how quickly the fragrant aroma of the perfume filled the room? It overwhelmed every other smell in the room. This fragrant aroma symbolizes the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:14 when he said:

*“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and **manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.**”*

Just as the wonderful aroma of the perfume filled the room, so did the sweet aroma of Christ in and through Mary. She had such a deep and loving relationship with Jesus that His life and love through her filled the room with a “divine” fragrance. Wouldn’t everything she did up to this point prove her love for Jesus? One would think so but in the next moment we find her at Jesus’ feet.

The Feet of Jesus

*“Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and **anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair**; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”*

John 12:3

Unlike with any other person in the New Testament, we often find Mary at Jesus’ feet. She sat at His feet for instruction. She fell at His feet in suffering. She anointed and wiped His feet in thanksgiving. Why? Because it was a posture of humility and honor. After breaking the vase and pouring the perfume on Jesus’ head, she, in humility, immediately went to His feet because it was not only being at His feet that was honoring to Him, but it was also from this lowly position that she was able to touch the heart of Jesus with hers.

By humbling herself in this position, she touched the Divine like few do. She saw Jesus in ways so few people ever will because it is only from humbling ourselves at His feet that we can truly see His heart. Now you understand why Jesus said these words about Mary.

*“Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, **what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.**”* Matthew 26:13

CONCLUSION

Would you take a moment to read the quotes we started this study with?

“We long for intimacy because we were made in the image of the perfect intimacy.”

John Eldredge – Sacred Romance

“The deepest awareness I have of my life is that I am a man passionately loved by God.”

Thomas Merton

“Our seeking, compassionate God is not filled with anger, but with love for us, and longs to be with us even in our weaknesses, failures and rebellions” Larry Smith - *Christ Our Life*

“You may not realize it but the Father is ravished by you. You make Him smile. You make Him laugh. You make Him leap for joy. You make His heart beat faster.” S.J. Hill – Enjoying God

“One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD And to meditate in His temple.”
David – Psalm 27:4

Do they have a deeper meaning to you after having gone through this study?

I pray the Holy Spirit has used this study to give you the heart of love that David, Paul, John, and Mary had for God. This is where the Lord is taking you because He so wants you to have eyes to see and a heart to receive the immense, eternal, and intimate love that He has for you. When we open our eyes in heaven, we will fully embrace and be embraced by the all-encompassing love of God, but He does not want you to wait. His greatest desire and hope is that this side of eternity you will diligently seek Him, draw near to Him, and let Him wrap His loving arms around you and you with Him. If you do, this will fulfill the eternal purpose for which He created you.

*“and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that **the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**” John 17:26*

Discussion Questions:

1. What key truth(s) impacted you the most in this lesson? Why?

2. Why is listening prayer so crucial to your relationship with God?

3. Which of the characteristics in the last section, *What Will Be The Results Of A Deepening Relationship With God*, most impacted you? Why?

4. How did the story of Mary and the alabaster jar story impact you? Does it give you a greater desire to seek a deeper relationship with the Lord? Why?

5. If you were to choose three truths that have changed the way you see God's love for you throughout this study, what would they be?

Verses To Meditate On

Below are verses to meditate upon that will nurture and grow your intimacy with God.

God's Pursuit of Us

"Surely, **Your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me** all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever." Psalm 23:6

"His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family **by bringing us to Himself** through Jesus Christ. And this **gave Him great pleasure.**" Ephesians 1:5

"**I will give them a heart to know Me**, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for **they will return to Me** with their whole heart." Jeremiah 24:7

"... 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined **what God has prepared for those who love him.**" 1 Corinthians 2:9

Our Pursuit of God

"When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You, "**Your face, O LORD, I shall seek.**" Psalm 27:8

"O God, **You are my God; I earnestly seek; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You**, In a dry and weary land where there is no water." Psalm 63:1

"**My soul yearns for You** in the night, **my spirit within me earnestly seeks You.....**" Isaiah 26:9

"As the deer pants for the water brooks, **so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God**, for the living God....." Psalm 42:1-2

"But from there **you will seek** the LORD your "God, and **you will find Him if** you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul." Deuteronomy 4:29

"**You will seek Me and find Me when** you search for Me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:13:

"Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Seek the Lord and His strength; **Seek His face continually [longing to be in His presence].**" 1 Chronicles 16:10, 11 Amplified Bible.

Experiencing God

"**Be still and know** that I am God..." Psalm 46:10

"O **taste** and **see** that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!" Psalm 34:8

"Whom have I in heaven but you? **I desire you** more than anything on earth." Psalm 73:25

"You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy." Psalm 63:5

"One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, **To behold the beauty of the LORD** And to meditate in His temple." Psalm 27:4.

"See (discover) how very much our Father loves us..." 1 John 3:1

"Because of **Your unfailing love**, I can enter Your house; I will worship at Your Temple **with deepest awe**." Psalm 5:7

"Praise the LORD, for He has shown me the **wonders of his unfailing love**." Psalm 31:21

"For Your **unfailing love** is as high as the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds." Psalm 57:10

"Whom have I in heaven but You? I **desire** You more than anything on earth." Psalm 73:25:

"I will bless the LORD at all times; **His praise shall continually be in my mouth**." Psalm 34:1

Mutual Love Relationship With God

"I love those who love Me; And those who diligently seek Me will find Me." Proverbs 8:17

"Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you!" Psalm 63:3

"You will make known to me the path of life. **In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever**." Psalm 16:1:

"and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that **the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them**." John 17:26

"and **though you have not seen Him, you love Him**, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory." 1 Peter 1:8

One Thing

"But the Lord answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only **one thing** is necessary, for Mary has chosen the **good part**, which shall not be taken away from her.'" Luke 10:41,42

Remember the "one thing" Jesus is talking about is experiencing a deep, intimate, mutual love relationship with God. Therefore, continue seeking the Lord that He will continue to nurture and grow this "one thing" in you for the rest of your life.

Where Do I Go From Here?

There are several books on the subject of growing a deeper relationship with God – some of which were quoted in this study. They would be a great follow-up to this study.

S. J. Hill, *Enjoying God: Experiencing the Love of Your Heavenly Father*, Charisma House, 2012.

Larry Smith - *Christ Our Life*, Christ our Life Ministries, 2005

Martha Kilpatrick, *Adoration*, Seed Sowers, 1999.

David Ravenhill, et al., *Catching God's Heart; the Wisdom and Power of Intimacy*, Destiny Image Publishers, 2020.

John Eldridge, *Get Your Life Back*, Thomas Nelson, 2020.

S.J. Hill, *What's God Really Like: Unique Insights Into His Fascinating Personality*, Energion Publications, 2018.

Ruth Hayley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*, IVP Books, 2010.

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Baker Books, 1989.

Chris Tiegreen, *Feeling Like God: The Emotional Side of Discipleship – and Why You Can't Fully Follow Jesus without It*, Saltwater, 2008.

Jeanne Guyon, *"Experiencing The Depths of Jesus Christ."* Christian Books Publishing House, 1981.

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(2025-06-18)