

God Wants You To Experience His Love

What could be more powerful than the prayers of the Lord Jesus – the Creator of all Heaven and Earth? He created all that exists by simply saying **words**. His prayers are simply more of those powerful words.

In the last hours of His life here on earth the Lord Jesus prayed for all those who would believe on Him. It was a very personal prayer and was the expression of His deepest desire.

Righteous Father ...I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known, in order that the love you have for me may be in them And that I myself may be in them. John 17:25,26

Think of what was happening. The Lord Jesus, in the fearful shadow of the cross, was concerned about us – not Himself! His concern was for our spiritual welfare. He wanted us to know – to experience – the meaning of His love and His presence in our daily life.

I want to be honest with you and tell you that there has never been a greater problem in my life than the problem of trying to experience the love of God

For most of my life this has been struggle Number One – and no matter what I tried to believe and no matter how I tried to live, the experience was not there. What was there was a sense of failure, a deep awareness that I must not measure up, a guilty feeling for something I must have done, a burning shame for existing in God's Kingdom without being able to believe God when He said, *"I love you."*

Happily this is not a problem for some Christians. A few – a blessed few – were raised in a home where there was genuine love. If they only knew how blessed they are. For the rest of us we have learned not to talk about it, or perhaps pretend. For some their Church may not allow them to have such a problem and therefore they must bury it along with other hurts and pain – out of fear or hopelessness.

God does want us to experience His love and has many powerful ways to reach us. However it took many years before His healing love touched my spirit. The only way I can explain why it took so long is to recognize that He has given His Church gifts to bring healing to its people. But, when the Church doesn't understand this and therefore doesn't have Spirit filled people who do healing prayer – people in the congregation live without healing and eventually without much hope.

While experiencing God's love is primarily a spiritual matter and not an intellectual one, it is often helpful to consider the many factual evidences – that He does love us and wants us to be overwhelmed by it. Try to consider the "weight" of the following "Divine Proofs." Think of each one for a moment before you hurry on to the next.

God's Love is Demonstrated in the Fact of Your Creation

God created you – not your mother and father. They gave you your body and human nature – but God was there at the moment of your conception to make you into a person (personality, person-hood) and to give you life.

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I
know that full well. Psalm 139:13,14*

The striking thought about God creating us – is that God doesn't have to do anything – He doesn't want to do. He is under no compulsion to anyone nor to any kind of law apart from Himself. So when He created you it was purely His own choice – He simply did what He wanted to do.

Why is this important? It is because an important and essential part of genuine love is that we **want** the person we love. We want to be with them, to talk with them, to give them something, to share our hearts and life with them.

God demonstrates His love for us by choosing to create us – because **He wanted us**. If He didn't want us, He would never have created us! It's as simple as that. We can't get around this evidence of His love. We may not experience His love today – but we're going to have to accept the **fact** that He wants us and loves us, because He created us. Think about it.

God's Love is Demonstrated in the Fact that He Wrote Your Name in His Book

The book I'm talking about is The Book of Life. It's just about the most important book of all time. Those whose names are in that book – can enter Heaven.

"However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Luke 10:20

In this passage we're told how the Lord Jesus sent 72 believers out on a preaching mission. When they returned they were excited that they had been able to set some people free from demonic oppression.

While He was very glad for their success, He wanted to remind them that He had given them something much more important than His gifts of authority and power – it was their salvation. The way He described that was to say *"Your names are written in heaven."*

The people sent on that mission, were people just like us. They probably had the same problems and questions that we have. However, they had made the choice to believe in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God and as their Savior – and that is why the Lord Jesus described them the way He did.

Salvation is a gift as we're told in Romans 6:23. And those of us who have chosen to receive it, as described in John 1:12, are reminded that *"Our names are written in heaven."* Why did God offer us such a wonderful gift and enable us to receive it? It's because He wants us – and loves us. As stated earlier, God doesn't have to do anything He doesn't want to do.

Think about it for a moment. If you have chosen to believe in the Lord Jesus, your name is *"written in heaven."* Even if you are not a believer, consider the great truth that God **wants to write your name in His book.** The truths about that Book of Life is a factual demonstration that God wants you and that He loves you.

God's Love is Demonstrated in the Fact that the Lord Jesus Died for You.

While we know very little about what happened to the Lord Jesus when He was suffering in our place on the cross – there are a couple truths that have been revealed to us.

One of those truths is that He died in our place and suffered our judgment, because He loved us – He wanted us.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

The Apostle Paul indicated how important that demonstration of God's love was to him when he said, *"I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me,"* Galatians 2:20

The way Paul described the death of the Lord Jesus, *"Loved me and gave himself for me"* would indicate something very personal – not only for him but also for the Lord Jesus. It seems to point to the fact that when the Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, He was aware that His death was, in some special way, for those who would believe on Him as their Savior.

Perhaps His Father had made known to Him the names written in His Book of Life. That may be what the Lord Jesus had in mind when, near the end of His life He prayed, speaking of Himself, *"For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him,"* (John 17:2).

We know very little about these great mysteries but the factual and historical evidence is overwhelming. To have a person give their life so we could be rescued from harm's way would be life-changing indeed. But to have the eternal Son of God, come into the world, live as one of us, and then suffer the judgment our sin deserves – experience our hell – is undeniably the greatest demonstration of love of all time. All the sacrificial acts of love among us, if we would add them up, could not even rate the least percentage, when compared to the way the Lord Jesus proved His love by dying for us.

We must ask the question of “Why.” Why did the Lord Jesus do this for us? The answer from the Bible is profoundly simple – He loved us and wanted us. Even though we may not feel His love today and our circumstances may seem to disprove it – we cannot say that He doesn’t love us.

God’s Love is Demonstrated in the Fact that He Revealed Himself to You.

Left to ourselves we would never have known that God loved us, wanted us, and died on the cross for us. Our salvation with its wonderful forgiveness, acceptance and assurance of Heaven can only be traced back to the time when the Holy Spirit started to speak to us, to convict us, and finally to bring us to the place of repentance and faith.

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.
2 Corinthians 4:6

The wonder of God’s revelation in nature and in Jesus Christ – would have been largely meaningless to us without that personal work of the Holy Spirit – shining the light of truth into our hearts.

If intelligence, creativity, gifts, and scientific investigation would lead us to the Lord Jesus – then we would expect all smart and educated people to be Christians. The odds against us believing in the Lord Jesus, by ourselves, is overwhelming.

We not only have the effects of sin within us that causes us to be born into the world ignorant of God, unable to understand His revelation in nature, and with a heart that intuitively rejects God – we have Satan, the god of this world, doing his work of blinding our minds.

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ 2 Corinthians 4:4

In spite of it all – we have believed! Little did we know of the great work the Holy Spirit was performing in speaking God’s truth into our blinded minds and hard hearts. In the day of our salvation we simply made the choice to acknowledge our need of salvation and chose to receive the Lord Jesus as our Savior. Simple indeed – but it was the result of great spiritual activity from the divine side.

Why did God do this for us? It’s because He loves us and wants us to be a member of His family! He doesn’t have to do anything He doesn’t want to do – but He spoke to us and brought us to Himself. It’s a fact – a fact demonstrated by our salvation – God wanted us because He loved us, and therefore won us for Himself.

God's Love is Demonstrated by the Fact that He Gave You His Holy Spirit

One of the great events that accompanied our salvation was the entrance of the Holy Spirit into our life. He was the gift of our Heavenly Father.

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." Galatians 4:6

What an amazing fact – God the Holy Spirit dwells within us – we are His temple! Think of it, there was a time when we were dead to God in our sinfulness (Ephesians 2:5), without hope of heaven (Ephesians 2:12), and described as "darkness" (Ephesians 5:8). But not anymore – now we are the holy temple of God Himself.

What caused the dramatic change? What great power came into our life so that we were taken away from Satan our father (John 8:44) and united to Jesus Christ our new Father (Matthew. 6:9)? What happened that caused us who were sinners, ungodly by nature, and the enemy of God (Romans. 5:6-10), to be forgiven, cleansed and reconciled to God (Ephesians. 1:7; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor. 5:18)? What has so changed us on the inside that even in the midst of our most painful, devastating and depressing trials we still believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and our Savior?

The answer again is profoundly simple – the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit came into our life and gave us the gift of salvation. In that gift was the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus. In that moment the benefits and power of His Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost were all written into our spiritual bank account. The effects of that moment were so astounding that now we are described as "Holy," "Blameless," the "Heirs of God," and "The co-heirs with Christ," (Ephesians. 1:4; Romans. 8:17)!

Why did God do this for us? Simply stated: He did all of that for us because He wanted to. It was His choice because He wanted us – because He loves us. It is a fact, and the change in our thinking and life testifies to the reality of His presence in our life.

God's Love is Demonstrated by the Fact that He wants to be with You.

When you love a person one of the first and clearest evidences is that you have a compelling desire to be with them. Most of us have experienced those desires.

One of the first things God told Moses to do when He had delivered His people from Egypt was to build a tabernacle. He clearly stated why He gave those instructions, He said,

And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. Exodus 25:8 KJV

Consider how many times our Lord states in Scripture that He is with us. It is really hard for us to believe that He would have such a desire, knowing the kind of people we are, unless we are willing to accept the fact that He wants to – because He wants us and loves us.

Love makes the difference. Even in our own limited understanding, when we fall in love with a person, it is not their appearance, or their abilities, or their possessions, or what they can do for us – that makes the difference. We look beyond all of those – to the person. We love the person and we're willing to overlook a good deal that's different from our life style, because of the reality of our love. Secondary things really do not matter in the presence of real love.

How different we are from God and how different our life style. All of us do many things that must be highly offensive to God. However, in His love, God makes a clear distinction between who we are as a person and what we do. He loves us as a person even though we may do many things that displease Him.

God wants to be with us because He wants to – He wants us in His life and wants to be involved in our life – because He loves us.

God's Love is Demonstrated by the Fact of the many Promises He has Given You.

Love always involves action. And much of the action of love revolves around promises. One of the great moments of life, for those in love, is when they exchange promises that we call "Marriage Vows." We could call them "Marriage Promises," as well – for that is what they are.

The promises of God are overwhelming. They cover every area of our life and time. God has bound us to Himself and He to us in what could be called "Divine Marriage Vows." We can say this because of how He describes the salvation relationship that He gives us – as a marriage with Him (Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:14)! Consider just a few of these promises.

"Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." Hebrews 10:17

God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

Why would God make such promises as these? Why would He put Himself under such obligation for those who once were His enemies – and even now often displease Him. The answer is clear and simple – He wants to because He loves us – amazing but true.

There are many more factual evidences that God wants us, and loves us. These facts should overwhelm each of us so completely that we would never doubt His love again. For some reason we are not so overwhelmed. Why? Perhaps I can make that clear in the next chapter.

God Wants You to Experience His Love (2)

Since we know it is God's express will that we experience His love, and we have factual evidence of His love us, and we know His love is constant, why do we not experience it (Him) more? It's a question I've asked for years.

His admonitions regarding His love may give us a suggestion or two. He tells us:

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain (abide) in my love." John 15:9

Keep yourselves in God's love.... Jude 21

It's pretty clear that there are some things that we need to do – in order to experience His love. Allow me to give you a few pages out of my own life that has made the love of God a more constant experience.

Why We May Have Difficulty in Experiencing God's Love

- *We may unconsciously be trying to earn the love of God.*

Many times I've found myself trying to earn the love of God – while intellectually believing that all aspects of salvation were based on the gift of His grace. Something would happen that would trigger the legalism in which I'd been raised to reassert itself.

Grace is something God wants us to understand and practice. In fact it is so important to God that one reason why He sent the Holy Spirit to us is that we would be assured that His gifts were free. Paul emphasized that truth when he said,

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 1 Corinthians 2:12

Philip Yancey echoed that truth when he said,

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more, and there is nothing you can do to make Him love you less.

Grace is the context in which we practice our relationship with God. Every good thing in our life is due to His free gift. When we try to live so that we merit God's love we introduce elements into our life that is like static on the radio or television.

- *We may have a wrong idea of God.*

Many who tell me they do not experience the love of God – are not able to do so because they have made God over in the image of their parents, or pastor, or someone else. Many years ago J.B. Phillips taught us how easy it was to do so.

The image of God many of us have had – that stood between us and His love – was that God was a cold, hard-hearted dictator. When we read the Bible we read that concept into the Scripture. The source of such error could usually be found in our past along with a lot of help from the Devil.

What is needed is a time with a Spirit-filled person, with whom we can talk out our past, and receive some loving instruction and healing prayer. If you don't have such a person available, then write out the hurtful experiences of the past, relive them emotionally in God's presence and prayer, and learn to reject the misconceptions through confession and worship. The affirmations I'll talk about in the following paragraphs will help a great deal.

- *We may not recognize that our life is in a growth pattern.*

God wants us to grow in our relationship with Him. Growth causes new dimensions to develop that must be dealt with. We may suddenly become aware that a long-standing relationship needs serious revising. Or it may be a practice that has characterized our life – but now must be laid aside. Perhaps there is something we must start doing that we've neglected.

Our relationship with God is likened in Scripture to what we find in a family. Nothing remains the same. There are always adjustments that need to be made – and some of them may be serious. So it is in our walk with God. At such a time we may not be conscious of the intensity of God's love as we would like.

God loves us too much to allow us to remain where we are spiritually. He always treats us as a valuable person, with respect and dignity. He has our best interest in mind and is therefore very conscious of His responsibility for our development.

- *We may be distracted from an experience of God's love by the presence of "groaning."*

Scripture reminds us that we are not in Heaven yet. While the Kingdom of God is here now – it is not here in its fullness. We still live in a fallen world, have a fallen body, a fleshly nature, and are subject to the attacks of our enemy.

Because of the presence of sin, with its constant pressure and limitations – we often find we're engaged in a spiritual "groaning." Paul spoke clearly of this problem.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Romans 8:23

For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 2 Corinthians 5:4

This spiritual groaning is due to the limitations we feel – due to the fact that we cannot do what we honestly want to do. Most believers want to love God much more fervently, worship Him with much more creativity, and serve Him much more powerfully. Because we try – and are usually frustrated – we “groan.”

In such a situation, which often occurs when we’re in some trial, we may be confused and overwhelmed with a sense of hopelessness. Such a condition often so fills the horizon of our life that we’re preoccupied with the trial and not able for the moment to experience or respond to the love of God.

The way out is by making some hard choices in which we do what we know we should do but for which we have only minimal desire. Such choices may include confessing our need to some Spirit-filled intercessors and receiving healing prayer. Or it may involve a period of giving thanks for the benefits God has bountifully given us. Often a determination to worship God with a steadfast refusal to be preoccupied with the trials and feelings of rejection is extremely helpful.

- *We may be so preoccupied with our experience that we neglect our relationship with God.*

Love is primarily a relationship that far transcends our spiritual and emotional awareness. When we center our thinking on our experience instead of on God – our emotions have a tendency to capture most of our thinking. When that happens we usually fall into “testing” our spirituality and even the love of God by how we “feel.”

Many times a trial or a harsh and critical word will trigger such a response. We start to test ourselves by examining our prayer life, our Bible reading, and our witnessing for signs of imperfection – and we can always find plenty!

We are warned not to put God to the test and not to test ourselves by superficial means.

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 1 Corinthians 4:3,4

We should not test the Lord, as some of them did.... 1 Corinthians 10:9

It is quite significant that Paul speaks of this truth – not testing or judging ourselves by our experience, whether by emotions or gifts – because that was one of the traps into which the Corinthians had fallen. They were trying to prove to themselves and others in the Church how spiritual they were.

The writer of Hebrews gives us the perspective we need – when we start to examine our spirituality by looking at ourselves. He said,

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.... Hebrews 12:2

- *We may be making our experience and walk with God too private.*

God never created us or saved us to live the Christian life alone – on a spiritual island.

One of the most important and instructive prayers in the Bible, regarding the love of God, was prayed by the Apostle Paul. In the center of the prayer he made the following statement:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.... Ephesians 3:17,18

We need the involvement of other believers in almost all the important facets of our walk with God. While we are not ultimately dependent on other Christians for our spiritual health, it is clearly God's will that we pray, help and encourage one another.

Even those we classify as giants in the faith needed the prayers, support and encouragement of others. Moses needed Joshua, David needed Jonathan, and Paul need his co-workers of whom he spoke in such glowing terms.

Alone – we are highly vulnerable to the temptations, deceptions and pressures of this world, let alone the enemy of our souls. We are a part of a family and an army. This is a lesson I've had to learn the hard way. We must seek out those who are Spirit filled and like minded, and unite with them in living for God.

Those skilled in the teaching of Scripture often speak of believers as a “*Divine means of grace*.” By that terminology they simply mean that one of the principles of God's Kingdom is that He has chosen to distribute His grace, love and power through the prayers and lives of His people. When we isolate ourselves from other godly believers – we are only proving our lack of understanding of God's plan – not our spirituality.

It was James who summarized this truth well when he said,

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man (person) is powerful and effective. James 5:16

It is highly significant that two important words in that verse are commands. They are “*Confess*” and “*Pray*.” Perhaps the weakness that is so prevalent among us is due to our failure to obey God – and our failure to seek out godly people with whom we can share our victories and sorrows.

- *We may have unresolved issues and wounds from our past.*

It's almost impossible to consistently experience the love of God when we have sinful relationships from our past or in our life now – that are unresolved, not confessed, or put aside. Nor can we consistently enjoy the love of God when controlled by anger, bitterness or some questionable obsession.

God doesn't demand perfection – but honesty is high on his list of values. When we are dishonest we grieve the Holy Spirit and shut Him out of important areas of our life. To live like that deprives us of the experience of God's love.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God ... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Ephesians 4:30,31

It is in this very area of life that we need godly people to help us. The verse we have just considered, from James, tells us what to do: *"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*

We all have a tendency to complain to God that He is not caring for us as He promised when the real reason is our pride. It is simply our pride that keeps us from doing what we know we should do – confess our sin and ask for prayer – so the power of sin and the enemy can be broken in our life.

The same principle holds true for the wounds from our past. Such wounds give the enemy opportunity to accuse and condemn us. Many of us have been taught we don't measure up and will always be a failure. Or perhaps we were spoiled and taught to be self-centered and how to manipulate people in our selfishness – that's a terrible wound. We may need a lot of cleansing and healing before we can experience the love of God with consistency.

Am I advocating earning the grace of God? No. These principles from the Bible teach us how much we need to cooperate with God – to live a life in harmony with Him and His love. We cannot experience God's love and grieve Him at the same time.

- *We may not be aware that we are under some attack of the enemy.*

The Devil does not want us to experience the love of God. He knows how powerful that love is and has been defeated many times by humble believers who have learned how to keep themselves in God's love (Jude 21).

We are under attack because the Devil hates the Lord Jesus – but can't attack Him – so he attacks us. If he can hinder us from growing in the Christian life, and discourage us in our service for God – then he can limit the glory that we could have brought to the Lord Jesus. Or if he can tempt us and get us to violate the will of God in some way – then he can use us to tarnish and stain the reputation of the Lord Jesus. How Hell much cackle with laughter when we fall for the Devil's fantasy.

The enemy has many schemes that can keep us from enjoying God. One favorite attack, that all Christians experience, is his ability to insert a thought into our mind – a blasphemous, or sexual, or critical thought. And, when we start to think about it then to insert another thought: *“If you were a Christian you wouldn’t be thinking a thought like that!”*

When that happens most of us will confess the thought to God, ask Him to forgive us, and to remove the thought. What happens? Nothing! God cannot forgive us when the thought wasn’t our fault. Because we get no relief, then the enemy can say to us, *“I told you that God doesn’t love you.”*

Another favorite attack is to accuse us of something that has already been forgiven and settled. When he does that we often confuse his accusations with the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We may again go through the process of prayer and confession only to come up empty.

Many believers are vulnerable to the enemy because they do not *“Put on (practice) the full armor of God,”* (Ephesians 6:11), do not use *“The sword of the Spirit,”* (Ephesians 6:17) and are disobedient to our Lord’s command to *“Resist him,”* (1 Peter 5:8,9).

Some Practical Suggestions Regarding Loving God and Enjoying His Love

The following suggestions are pages out of my own life. In no way should they be construed as a legalistic approach of attempting to earn the grace of God or make ourselves worthy of His blessing. I present these only because they have been a great help to me.

- *Choose to accept and believe – by faith – the indisputable truth (fact) that God loves you.*

Our lives are based on fact. We live our daily lives depending on many realities which cannot be proven scientifically, and which we do not fully understand. Even with those facets of our lives that we count dangerous – we proceed with hardly a momentary hesitation.

Stepping into an elevator, boarding a plane, scuba diving, bungee jumping, getting onto a roller coaster, all serve as examples of almost blind faith – as well as driving in heavy traffic. We have learned by experience and most of all – by the word of “experts” that it is safe.

I accept the truth that experiencing the love of God is not very similar to the above examples. However, we must face ourselves with how easily we engage in such activities, simply because someone told us it was safe, or because others are doing it and we believe by their example. We take these “experts” at their word and almost never ask for proof.

How much more should we believe God – simply because of His unchangeable character. He is True and Faithful. His Word for each of us is clear and on record.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love...." Jeremiah 31:3

"I have loved you," says the LORD. Malachi 1:2

"For God so loved the world...." John 3:16

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you...." John 15:9

It is helpful to make an affirmation – purely by faith – whereby we would declare that we accept and believe God when He states so clearly that He loves us. Perhaps it could be something like the following.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I declare by faith – that I accept and believe the truth that God loves me. By this declaration I choose to reject all types of doubt about God, His Word and my relationship with Him. I believe God in spite of my thoughts, emotions, and circumstances.

In the following paragraphs I'll explain a bit more about the power of Biblical affirmations.

- *Choose to state your belief – by faith – that you believe God is truthful and loves you.*

Affirmations are the way we take a stand on God's Word and indicate what we believe. Such affirmations are one of the ways we compliment God, perhaps even the greatest way.

The Bible records many such affirmations and by that underline their importance. Perhaps the most well known would be Psalm 23. In that Psalm, David developed a way to affirm what he believed regarding his relationship with God.

It is not difficult to imagine how David thought up the different statements of this favorite Psalm. As a teen-age boy caring for sheep he was often alone in the woods. At night it must have been scary indeed, particularly when we remember how he told King Saul about the lion and the bear (1 Samuel 17:34-36).

As David thought about his relationship, as shepherd, to his father's sheep, he was undoubtedly led by God to see a comparison of how God was related to him. It must have been a comfort for him to understand and then to say, *The LORD is my shepherd.*

Was it the next hour or was it days before he began to enlarge on his affirmation and then to declare, *I shall not be in want?* We wonder how long it took for him to develop the whole Psalm. God was so pleased with David's affirmation that He caused it to be written into the Bible so we could learn to follow his lead.

When in times of stress I've found it to be exceedingly helpful to make affirmations such as I've suggested in the above section. Try it yourself. Write out your own declaration and say it aloud, in a firm and authoritative manner – first thing in the morning and often during the day. You'll be surprised how much easier it is to enter into the experience of God' love.

- *Choose to take time to receive the love God is constantly giving you.*

Of all the suggestions this one has meant the most to me. It grew out of a time, some years ago, when I was again trying to solve the problem of why I experienced the love of God only in brief moments. It was early in the morning during breakfast.

As I was eating breakfast, and reading a couple short selections in a booklet – the Lord spoke to me. It was very clear and somewhat unnerving. He simply said: “*Victor – why don’t you let me love you like I want to?*”

In the next few days I came to the conclusion that what He wanted was for me to take time to definitely receive – simply by faith – what He said He was giving me.

Early in my Christian experience I began to value a daily quiet time for worship, prayer, Bible reading and study. However I’d never included a time, to do nothing but – receive by faith – what God wanted to give me. It took time for me to learn how. And I had to learn not to test God whether I was in fact receiving His love, by my emotions or any other area of my life.

I learned to lay everything else aside, to relax, to concentrate on God, and to think only of Him. It was a help to use one of His names, or promises, or provisions and to occasionally say “*Thank You,*” or “*Praise You,*” as well as “*I receive Your love.*” Those moments have turned my life around. I continue to learn how to cooperate with Him.

The Bible talks a good deal about receiving the benefits of grace that God has provided for us and wants to give us. Receiving is our response of faith – to God and His promises. It is not enough to read and memorize the promises He has given to us – or even to cry over them. He wants us to respond by faith and deliberately accept, believe – declare it so – and then choose to receive what He is giving us.

In the moment of our salvation – we received the gift that He wanted to give us and for which we’d asked him. John states it clearly.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12

The words in that verse “*receive*” and “*believe*” are related. It would seem that John is presenting them as two aspects of one action. Perhaps it would even be better to say that receiving is the evidence of believing. To paraphrase the verse we could say “*They received Him because they believed on his name,*” or “*Receiving Him was an evidence that they believed on his name.*”

However we look on that verse, it is clear that “receiving” is something God wants us to do. This is clearly taught by Paul in his instructions to the people at Colosse. He said, as recorded in Colossians 2:6,

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.

While the primary emphasis here is on living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, Paul shows that we carry that out that instruction in our daily life by an attitude of surrender. And then we practice that surrender by receiving Him, inviting Him, into all the areas of our life – to reign over us.

Another helpful verse has to do with prayer. The writer to the Hebrews emphasized that prayer is not simply asking God for what we need – but also a choice to receive. He stated,

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:12

What I am suggesting has nothing to do with being a passive kind of a Christian. The receiving that is advocated in these and other verses is a receiving by faith – an aggressive laying hold of the provision God has made for us in His love. It is what the Lord Jesus invites believers to do as recorded in John 7:37,38

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

The relationship of the words, “drink” and “believing” is significant. It is the same emphasis that we’ve seen in John 1:12. It could be said that drinking is an evidence of believing, or that believing is practiced in drinking.

If you are not in the habit of receiving God’s grace and love, try to do so for a few days. You will be surprised of the result.

- *Choose to have a daily goal – a goal to please God.*

One of the evidences that we love a person is the desire to please them. Love is an action and anyone who has known genuine love, will remember how eager they were to buy a gift for their lover. Pleasing the one you love is a spontaneous and joyful activity, even though it would involve sacrifice.

The Bible emphasizes the importance of such a daily goal. The Apostle Paul spoke of it many times. When he taught people how to please God he was talking about something he had learned himself. He said,

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 2 Corinthians 5:9

Paul taught his converts to have a goal of pleasing God.

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 1 Thessalonians 4:1

That verse opens a window for us into the heart of Paul's ministry. When he would win a person for the Lord Jesus – he set about teaching that person how to please God. He knew from experience that if they would follow his lead they would grow and prosper in the Christian life.

The Apostle exhorted all believers to find out what pleased God and then to do it.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...and find out what pleases the Lord. Ephesians 5:8-10

Paul made it a point to pray for his converts and friends that they would please God.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:9,10

The importance of having this goal of pleasing God is underlined by the Apostle John who related it to our prayer life.

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. 1 John 3:21,22

A further confirmation is given in the Book of Hebrews. The writer concludes that Book with the following benediction. He reminds us that God has a goal for us and is constantly working in our life so we can please Him.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
Hebrews 13:20,21

It has been a great help to keep this goal before me day by day. For some time now I try to make it one of the first prayers of the day. Often, when I first wake up, I'll greet the Lord, thank Him for the new day, and then tell Him that I want to please Him that day – no matter what happens.

As the day progresses there are often times when I'm reminded of that prayer. When something unpleasant happens I recall that I can either please the Lord in how I respond to what is happening or I can displease Him. When I choose to please Him, then I am often aware that God is there with his grace, love and wisdom so I can fulfill the vow I made in the prayer.

We need a very practical way of expressing our love for God – whether we are experiencing His love the way we want to or not. Pleasing Him is one important way. Having such a daily goal has made it much easier for me to enter into the wonderful experience of His love.

- Choose to practice the love God is giving you – by faith.

Love is a personal relationship involving two people. Separated from a relationship, love is only a word, l-o-v-e- as empty and powerless as the symbols we use to write it.

Love cannot be understood, or enjoyed, or given, apart from two lovers. It is a particular and unique characteristic of very few relationships. Most relationships are not characterized by love. They may be good, helpful and enjoyable as two people who have agreed to work together, take a trip together, or even live together. Love is not necessary for most satisfying, enjoyable or even profitable relationships. Some degree of compatibility will initiate and maintain such relationships very well.

God wants more than compatibility with us. Unfortunately, many Christians have settled for only that. They may be true believers and care about God, and want Him to care for them. But compatibility is enough. They may even desire some degree of friendship with God, as long as it's not too close.

We have to make up our mind as to what we want. We can be a true believer and shut God and His love out of most of our life. We may have done so out of hurt, anger, shame, misunderstanding, frustration or simple laziness. Most of us want God to get us to Heaven but we don't care enough about Him to pay Him much attention now.

Every believer has some gratitude and even affection for God. But for most of us that is about as far as it goes. An occasional tear on Good Friday or when we partake of the Lord's Table seems to be enough.

If we had even a faint idea of what pain we cause God - because we do not receive His love and give Him our love - we would be shocked indeed. There are few things in life that are more painful, than having a person we genuinely and deeply love, not love us in return – and walk away from us. It takes many years - if ever - to recover from a situation like that.

God's love for us is full of truth, it's genuine and everlasting. He makes a clear distinction between who we are and what we do. We may do many things that displease Him, but that does not interrupt His love for us - as a person, even when we force Him to discipline us for what we do or do not do.

God wants you to receive His love in all its fullness and to obsessively love Him in return. He is passionate about you. You are the delight of His heart. He was not satisfied with only giving you life and the universe for your enjoyment - He wants you! And He was willing to suffer all the Hell you deserve to get you.

Love is a choice. If we want what God wants - a love relationship - then we have to make a choice. Because of the effects of sin upon us we must recognize that we do not intuitively and spontaneously love God. We must learn how. This may not be easy for some of us. And we have to keep in mind that the Devil is dead set against us ever learning how to experience God's love and loving Him.

When two people fall in love they seek out one another, they listen to one another, they respect one another, and they want to sacrifice for one another. Lovers seek the good of the other and most of all they give away their hearts to one another.

The decision we have to make is to choose - by faith - to give Him access to our heart. We must be willing to be taught the meaning of love and not be satisfied with mere affection. We must learn to practice what it means to thirst for Him and to seek Him – and to do so simply by faith. We are promised that we will find Him and His love - when we do so with and all our heart. (Jeremiah 29:13) Does this mean trying to earn the love of God? Not at all, it is our cooperation with God, a cooperation by faith.

Everyone who has fallen in love has learned that the easiest way to destroy a love relationship is by simple neglect. When we fail to make choices and take time to love God we suffer the serious consequences. Our neglect of Him pushes Him and His love out of our life.

When the Lord asked me to take time and wait upon Him so He could love me the way He desired, it was these steps of simple faith, without testing Him by how I felt, or by my circumstances, that proved so helpful.

- *Choose to obey God by practicing His love toward others.*

One of the most powerful ways we hinder our enjoyment of God and His love is through unloving attitudes and activity toward other believers, as well as unbelievers. His commands and admonitions in this area are very clear.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34,35

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God, forgave you." Ephesians 4:32

It is not easy to live without being angry with those who treat us without respect and love. Our first response is to hold a grudge against them and to treat them in the way they are treating us. We cannot live that way and obey God. We must learn how to practice His love toward even our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

When we honestly seek to forgive, and love those who choose to offend us, He will be there to help us. To live out His love toward others may be one of the most difficult areas of our life. However, it brings great rewards.

The graces of forgiveness and love begin as simple decisions of faith. They are implemented as choices, volitional choices - without feelings of love or compassion whatever. Once we honestly desire to obey God, He is there with His support and grace. For those who have hurt us deeply, we may have little more than a volitional decision to love and forgive them, and we may have to be content with that.

Problems in our relationships with one another should not hinder us from expressing God's love toward them. Making it a matter of daily prayer and choosing to be open and caring for people goes a long way. Some have been greatly helped by praying a prayer that goes like this: *"Dear Lord, enable me to love those I meet today. Shine through my eyes, smile through my lips, and speak through my voice. Give me opportunities to share Your love and mine in some practical way. Amen."*

In conclusion I want to summarize the suggestions that have meant so much for me. Once I started to put these into practice they became a part of my life. They may look to you as though they would take a good deal of time. I have not found it to be so. They all revolve easily around a few minutes in which I receive God's love. The rest of them become attitudes of faith that determine how choose to practice God's love. His love is powerful and transforms every area of life.

Choose to believe the truth that God loves you.
 Choose to state your belief that God is truthful and loves you.
 Choose to take time to receive the love God is giving you.
 Choose to have a daily goal – to please God.
 Choose to practice the love God is giving you.
 Choose to obey God by loving others.

I'm sure your first thought is, "I don't have time to do all of that!" Let me assure you that once you've thought through it and made a decision to practice it – you can get it done each day in five minutes. Most of these issues are attitudes that take almost no time to put into practice. The first – believing – is a simple decision, although of great importance. The second – affirmations – is what we do when we pray or worship or when we think about God. It is stating something like: "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Or to say, "I believe God is faithful and I trust Him." Make up your own and see how powerful they are.

The third will take about five minutes. Learn to receive His love and then enlarge on it to receive mercy and grace (Hebrews 4:16), His life (John 14:6), His wisdom (James 1:5-7), and whatever you need in the will of God.

The fourth – pleasing God – will take a 30 second prayer and then the attitude of faith to practice it. The fifth and sixth – practicing the love of God – are attitudes and priorities that structure our relationships with God and others. They will become a part of all we do and essentially are timeless.

God wants you – and He wants you to receive His love and fellowship. Give Him your whole heart in worship, adoration, surrender gratitude and trust. Don't keep testing how you're doing by appealing to your emotions. Do what is right. Cooperate with Him. He will surprise you with His love – now and forever more.

Victor Matthews