

"KNOWING THE LOVE OF GOD—TAKING IT PERSONALLY"

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE "LOVED" BY GOD?

We often emphasize to our counselees that "We love Him (God) because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19). This is what enables us to fulfill the greatest commandment, which is to "love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mk. 12:30-31, paraphrased). However, even with this truth in hand, we find that many struggle with what it really means to be "loved" by God—or for that matter—to be loved by anyone. One problem is that we use the word "love" in so many contexts. We "love" Mexican food. We "love" our new laptop computer. We "love" to travel. The list goes on and on. With a word used so frequently in so many different ways, it makes it hard to fully appreciate what it means to be "loved" by God. We also find it difficult for people we work with to be able to differentiate between "acts of love" versus simply "knowing we're loved." For example, in an effort to help people connect with barriers to loving God, self and others, we often ask the question, "When you were growing up, how did you know that your mom and dad loved you?" Many times we hear something like, "I just know they did," even when there is very little that the person can identify as being "loving" in words or actions.

GOD'S LOVE IS SPECIFIC AND PERSONAL

Instead of asking someone if they were "loved" as a child, we might ask them if they "felt loved, special, precious, prized, valued and significant—that they were deserving of the very best." We might ask them if they "felt celebrated for who they were; if they felt they had a special place in the family; if they were cared for and affirmed through appropriate touch." This difficulty that many have identifying what it really means to "be loved" is aggravated by the fact that so many have a "love deficit" from early childhood and struggle with feelings of being alone, inadequate, insignificant or unworthy. As a result, they have an even greater problem with receiving and giving love. So what can we do to "internalize" true love—particularly the love of God—into our hearts? Although we know that ultimately a revelation from the Holy Spirit is necessary for a person to "understand" the love of God, we have found that if we replace this word "love" with other expressions that help us understand it more personally, it can bring more clarity to our wounded hearts. For example, expanding on the meaning of the Scripture, "We love Him because He first loved us," we would say "I choose Him because He first chose me." "I desire Him because He first desired me." "I pursue Him because He first pursued me." "I delight in Him because He first delighted in me." "I adore Him because He first adored me." "I am passionate about Him because He was first passionate about me." "I celebrate Him because He first celebrated me." As we personalize these loving actions of the Father, we are also being very consistent with Scripture. The Bible is abundantly clear as to the loving heart of God and how He sees us. As one reminder of these truths, we recommend meditating on the "Father's Love Letter," a letter from our true Father to us personally, taken entirely from Scripture. This letter can be found at <http://www.fathersloveletter.com/fltextenglish.html>.

PRAYER

As we approach this Christmas, we remember the ultimate expression of a Father who loved us first—by giving us the gift of His Son, Jesus. As we celebrate this act of love, remember that He first celebrated you! Please join us in prayer . . .

Father, thank You for loving, pursuing and delighting in me, your creation—even before I turned my heart towards You. I want to have a deeper revelation of this type of love—Your personal love for me. Forgive me for the times that I resist and turn away from Your loving heart towards me. Continue to reveal those places that need your healing touch. I give You permission to do this and by Your grace, I allow You to work in those deep places. I want to love the way You love. Thank You for Your ultimate gift of love--Jesus—who has come to bring us life, now and forever. Awaken my heart again to the magnitude of this gift. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

From the Father's Heart,

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