



CHAPTER 9

Delving Deeper in God's Love

A Paramount Priority

At our core, we earnestly desire God's favor and crave His affection. God specifically designed us for love. That's where we came from, that's what we're doing here, that's how we should live, and that is our future. Love—it's our ruling passion. God's greatest commandment emphasizes all-out love—not duteous laws.¹ Jesus created us to embrace a passionate union with Himself.² He endowed our spirit, fortified our soul, and furnished our body to experience true love and to reciprocate authentic affection. Created in His image, our heart belongs entirely to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Dwelling anywhere else misses the mark of our divine design.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

(1 John 4:8 ESV)

Eager to espouse God's frame of reference, we exchange love on various levels. Based on four Greek words cited in the New Testament, we share *storge*³ love as an eternally bonded family, *phileo* love as best friends forever, *agape* love with unconditional self-sacrificing parameters, and *eros* love with spiritually refined romantic elements (not erotic) befitting us as the bride of Christ. Since God loves us, we are obliged to reflect *philautia* self-love. Based on the integrity and fidelity of our relationship, we also extend *pragma* love with devotion, commitment,

¹ Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27

² Colossians 1:16, 1 John 4:7-10

³ Cited in principle only; the word *storge* does not appear in the Bible.

honesty, loyalty, reliability, respect, patience, perseverance, and trust. Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm portrayed *pragma* love as “standing in love” rather than “falling in love”.

Connecting with God means connecting with His all-inclusive, comprehensive love. God and love are inseparable; He is the gold standard for long-term relational intimacy. Jesus woos our heart with enriched emotion and pursues our affection as an enhanced priority. He chose us because He wants and prefers us—just as we are and just as we will be. As the proverbial saying goes, “The One that knows us best, loves us most.”

God targets every aspect of our being with His magnificent love. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit collaborate in a passionate pursuit aimed at securing our response. As One, they offer infinitely more substance and extend infinitely more incentive than we realize. To gain our love, God implemented a radical agenda involving the passion of His Son. To retain our love, He leverages every influence in the universe and every resource at His disposal.

The Three-in-One Trinity connects with us during religious rituals, which guide our approach through carefully prescribed prayers, predetermined hymns, and prearranged statements. Nonetheless, when predictable routines stale in rote tradition, they slight God’s affection—despite the sincerity of our devotion. Limited as we are, we naturally underestimate the massive value associated with knowing God and experiencing His love. So, with subtle nudges or with awe-inspiring overtures, God initiates encounters that transcend saying and doing religion. He will not let us forget how much He cherishes us.

God does not confine His divine nature to our religious practice. Relegating Jesus to a separate part of our life is not only futile, but also unfulfilling. Reducing Him to a distinct category will never work. Our Heavenly Father will never be content occupying a sliver of our pie chart. He is far too big to comprehend, let alone contain within a fixed parameter. We are finite and He is infinite. When we try to accommo-

date eternal perfection, our mortal finitude shatters from cerebral overload. Simply adding some religion to the daily grind will not compensate for lopsided ambitions, devotions, and distractions.

In our deficiency of focus, the Holy Spirit escorts us into true love, which radiates from Jesus and our Heavenly Father. Connecting with God means connecting in love with a heightened awareness. We experience love beyond principles or philosophies. Jesus ignites a fervent response fortified with ardent affection. The intensity of God’s love combats every obstacle in our relationship. As Sovereign Judge, God evaluates, convicts, sentences, and executes everything that hinders love.

Jesus considers His followers to be more than disciples, friends, or brothers and sisters—we are His Bride. As such, He invites us to delve deeper in love—much deeper. Jesus proposed to us with an extraordinary covenant suitable for intimate communion—not for a brief visit or to ponder theology, but for permanent residency and perpetual occupancy. Jesus said, *“Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you”*.⁴ He said, *“Abide in Me, and I in you...”* and, *“If anyone **loves Me**, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and **We will come to him**, and make **our abode** with him.”*⁵

When we embrace Jesus, we connect with our Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit with as well.

*God has sent forth the **Spirit** of His **Son** into our hearts, crying, “Abba! **Father!**”* (Gal 4:6 NAS)

And He [Jesus] is the radiance of His [Father’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.... (Hebrews 1:3 NAS)

⁴ John 15:4 MSG

⁵ John 15:4 NKJ and John 14:23 NAS respectively

All or Nothing

Connecting with Jesus exposes all that we are to all that He is. Terminology for being “*in Christ*” occurs over 90 times in the New Testament while the concept of “*Christ in you*” appears less than 10 times. As we plunge all that we are, into all that God offers, He saturates the core of our being from every conceivable angle. As we respond to God’s inseparable love, He covers every facet of our soul with His affectionate favor.

Paul posed a universal question that challenges conventional human reasoning.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
(Romans 8:35 NAS)

Paul answered this question with deep conviction based on his own life experience. He asserted that no circumstance, no one, and no place can ever separate us from the calculated intensity of God’s love.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:38-39 NAS)

A Faith Connection Supplemented by Feelings

Jesus accomplished His mission on earth with flawless precision. He lived as a perfect person unveiling the mystery of God’s passionate love. For the time being we cannot see His physical features, which display divine fullness; “*For in Him [Jesus] all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form.*”⁶ Though ever-present, Jesus typically remains invisible to our natural eyes. Except for rare exceptions, His audible voice remains silent to our natural ears. According to Jesus, the absence of His sub-

⁶ Colossians 2:9 NAS

stance and silence of His voice provide a unique advantage.⁷ This deliberate arrangement requires us to rely on His Spirit to lead, guide, and focus our attention where it belongs—on the invisible attributes that compose His divine nature.

Our Heavenly Father is not playing hide-and-seek to frustrate His emotional followers. The status of our love connection does not depend on sights, sounds, or feelings. No matter how much our emotions change, our standing with God remains the same. Feelings may influence the vitality of our relationship, but they do not define our connection. Whether we feel close or distant from God, feelings do not alter the fact that an indelible bond joins us together.

Perceiving God’s veiled presence may seem difficult at times, but He nonetheless offers an authentic real-time connection. Though we cannot use a ruler to measure the distance between God and us, He remains present and continuously active in our life.

Faith maintains a distinct advantage over feelings. Our bond with Jesus relies on a foundation fortified with absolute truth. Jesus personifies the truth with historical evidence and theological certitude. He initiates and sustains our connection with credible proof. Besides being persuasive, Jesus conveys emotional relevance to our experience. He forgives sins, assuages guilt, eradicates shame, comforts grief, and extends true love with joy and peace. These vital accomplishments determine reality because Jesus embodies the truth completely. Long after molecules in this provisional universe pass away, Jesus will remain unchanged—His divine nature is both transcendent and immutable.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
(Matthew 24:35, Luke 21:31, Mark 13:31 ESV)

⁷ John 16:7

Origin, Meaning, Morality, and Destiny

During a “*Veritas Forum*” at Ohio State University, author and apologist Ravi Zaccarias described how the life of Jesus Christ remains historically sound and logically consistent with His message.⁸ Jesus stands out among numerous imposters pretending to possess godhood. According to Zaccarias, only Jesus answers four quintessential life questions with coherent certainty:

- Where did we come from?
- What are we doing here?
- How should we live?
- What is our future?

Love is the concise answer to each of these questions—and God is love.

Elegant Clues Point to an Incomparable Creator

Omnipresence means that God is always present everywhere. Being ever-present distinguishes God as a most attentive lover. No one else has this capacity, not angels, not demons, not Satan. Connecting with a spiritual person who always occupies everywhere requires more than eyes and ears. It requires an entirely new frame of reference—a spiritual reference sustained by authentic faith and fueled by sincere love.

Our relationship with God remains spiritual (by faith) not spatial (by sight). That means we cannot measure how closely we are situated. Perceiving and then embracing the presence of God requires that we venture into a spiritual dimension of faith, hope, and love.

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”. (Hebrews 11:1 NIV)

A spiritual connection with Jesus does not imply blind faith. Faith bonds us to Jesus with a substance rooted in factual support and indelible affection. Christian apologist Lee Stroble asserts that faith does not

⁸ Ravi Zaccarias, "Constructing A Coherent Worldview" & "In Search of Meaning", The Veritas Forum, Ohio State University, 1993

believe in spite of the evidence. Instead, “faith is a reasonable step in the direction that the evidence is pointing.”⁹ What we see now, as limited as it may be, provides compelling evidence for what we will see in the future.

According to Canadian Astrophysicist and Christian apologist Hugh Ross, the “extraordinary complexity and sophisticated elegance” of the universe provides evidence of an intelligent designer.¹⁰ Everything God made is an extension of His love. The universe is God’s stunning love gift to us, bursting with beauty, elegance, and wonder. The link connecting us with our Creator relies on a bond of faith supported by verifiable facts and demonstrable love.

As sincere as our faith may be, the perception of our union vacillates. While the nearness of God remains constant (He always abides everywhere and especially within), our sensitivity to His presence fades in-and-out of consciousness. Sometimes we experience a heightened sense of awareness and become conscious of our Creator’s company. At other times, our spiritual acuity goes on the blink, and He seems impossibly out of reach. At moments like this, we rely on faith, hope, and love to activate His attendance.

Though unable to wrap our senses around God, we can experience the world that He made. Our senses provide a natural connecting point with divine reality. What we know about Him is clear because a universe of evidence points to the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. (Romans 1:19 NIV)

*“For since the creation of the world **God's invisible qualities**—his **eternal power** and **divine nature**—have been **clearly seen, being understood from what has been made**, so that people are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20 NIV)*

⁹ Lee Stroble, *The Case for a Creator*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2004.

¹⁰ Hugh Ross, PhD Astronomy and Astrophysics, The Veritas Forum, Ohio State University, 1993

While our glimpse of the universe is limited, telescopes and microscopes notwithstanding, the quality of the finished product speaks for itself. Everything we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell conveys a credible message that validates God's love for us. As intelligent beings, we recognize with awe, the complex life-sustaining features that He designed and made. With precision and wonder, the created realm highlights God's supernatural expertise. It sets Him apart in a place of infinite distinction.

A Love Connection

Connecting with God involves so much more than a belief system from which we hang our trust. The life Jesus offers extends beyond information. Connecting with Him involves a relational intimacy that surpasses reason. Jesus holds our relationship together with a bond of Love cemented in absolute truth.

Emotions do not make up the foundation of our connection, but they are nonetheless extremely important. Our faith evokes very strong feelings. Peter assures those, who like us, have not seen Jesus.

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him [faith] and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy [emotions]". (1 Peter 1:8 NIV)

While our faith connection is most prominent, we should not trivialize our emotional connection. The ruling passion in our relationship with Jesus is not doctrinal accuracy or theological precision. It is love. Jesus did not come here to help us say and do religion better. He came because *"God so loved the world"*.¹¹ Love dominates our core craving. *"God is love"* and He made **us** in His image.¹²

Reducing God to a scholarly teaching or philosophical treatise leaves us short-changed. Jesus will not abandon us to a cerebral monastery isolated by intellectual barriers. A strictly academic connection prevents

¹¹ John 3:16 NKJ

¹² I John 4:8, 16 NKJ

us from embracing the comprehensive bond that He offers. Human reason remains compromised by partial knowledge, flawed information, and personal biases. Without faith, hope, and love, human reason imposes conflicts of interest and limitations to our relationship with God.

Any separation from the One who loves us so passionately is difficult to bear. Our heart longs to feel close to the One who loves us so perfectly, so immensely and intensely. We respond to Jesus' love by desiring a more consistent awareness of His presence. Sensations of separation are unpleasant and at times, unbearable, even in the drift of our imagination.

Discontentment sums up the sporadic sense of divine notice that most of us feel. All too often, God seems hard to find. In practical everyday life, Jesus is too far away. A sense of distant awareness generates frustration and anxiety.



A telescope allows us to see stars better, but it does not bring them closer. Likewise, a doctrinal lens with state-of-the-art hermeneutics allows us to understand God better, but it does not bring Him closer. Despite rational explanations, which satisfy our curiosity, intellectual discourse merely gives an illusion of relational intimacy. Information alone falls short of the emotional connection that we crave. We long for heart-to-heart encounters, not just theological concepts or religious ideals. Our soul aches for reconciliation and restoration more than it desires data about a faraway deity.

We Need More Than Answers

Contemplating God has merits, but in and of itself, it's insufficient. Meditating on His divine nature is a step in the right direction, but we want God Himself to come closer—to rend the heavens of our perception. We long to connect with Him beyond conceptual logic. Our frail

human heart relies on an intimate union with Jesus the perfect person. We yearn for rapport with our Heavenly Father, a relational rapport that transcends occasional manifestations. The foundation of our faith-connection cries out for spiritual validation. We long to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit—a presence rooted in the core of our reality.

Knowing that God’s silence does not confirm His absence, we concentrate on the spiritual venue that He offers. Sights and sounds represent a fraction of reality. Optical illusions prove how unreliable eyes can be. Dogs and bats hear sounds that we cannot hear, even though they exist. Our fallible senses are unreliable, and our emotions are capricious. To connect with God, we do not need to see, hear, touch, taste, or smell Him. God is always present despite sensory propaganda, which implies He is not.

Someday we will extend beyond our mortal limitations. New eyeballs and eardrums will offer resurrection-quality perception. For now, however, we connect in ways that surpass the natural senses. With the Holy Spirit’s help, we commune with God as He makes Himself known on His terms. God is Spirit and He deliberately reveals Himself from the inside out. He restores our soul and renews our mind in spiritual realms that are more reliable than our natural senses.

Wishful thinking is not the solution to our separation problem. Neither is positive thinking. The remedy does not exist in our brain but in our heart. By waiting on the Lord in hopeful anticipation, we engage our faith to connect directly with Jesus and His unquenchable love. Connecting on His terms, we fall in love and then renew our strength to stand in love—here, now, and in the future.

