

BE LOVED

It stands to reason that in order to live loved you must be loved. You are. That's a given. Your state of being is loved. Not only are you loved, you will always be loved, and nothing can take God's love away from you. Paul expresses God's steadfast love in this way:

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(Romans 8:38-39)

You. Are. Loved. Thing is, most of us either don't feel loved or we underestimate the love God has for us, which drives our actions. It's merely a clinical practice to know in your head that God loves you. Knowing it in your heart and experiencing it daily is what actually transforms you. Love is the key to every locked door in your soul. It's a divine thing to know God's love, a happening only the Holy Spirit can ensure.

I pray Ephesians 3:17-19 over you now, that Christ may dwell in your heart, that you would be rooted and grounded in love and comprehend what is the width and length and depth and height of it, to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

Since feelings lie, I am reluctant to use the word *feel* when I say you must feel loved. What I actually mean is that it must become real to you, feel as in experience and receive and absorb and believe.

To know that I am loved shapes who I am and what I do and how I live out my kingdom purpose. It will for you, too. You look different when you are loved. You act different when you are loved. You are different when you are loved well by the One who created you to desire His love above any other.

The God who is in the midst of us is not just in the midst of the collective us. He is in the midst of us as individuals. He is dwelling in us personally, loving us in the exact way we each need to be loved. He knows what you need long before you do.

To feel loved by God isn't usually an overnight process, something that necessarily happens along with salvation. It didn't happen that way for me, and many people I know experience the same thing. The sense of being loved unconditionally actually came after watching Him love me unconditionally through my worst failures. His faithful love was evident when He never gave up on me, no matter how many times I turned from him. Devoted love was there day after day as I healed after a destructive season while walking apart from God. Even when I pushed Him away, He took another step closer. His perseverance and patience in waiting for me to come around eventually unraveled me.

I returned to Him covered in the mire of this world. The fact that I had turned my back on God at all forced me to take an honest look at my heart when compared to the verse: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind” (Matthew 22:37).

I didn't love Him with my all or even with my most. I wanted to. Because of my history of a desperate need for human love, my perspective was skewed, and I found it hard to believe that fulfilling love was possible with Jesus. My approach was, as I said before, clinical. It was a mental assent that I gave to loving God. I loved Him as in I revered Him. I saw Him as holy. I loved Him as much as my heart was able to at the time. But deep down, I didn't love Him with all my heart, soul, or mind.

That eye-opening revelation, the fact that my lack of love for Him was responsible for my walking away from Him, started me on a journey. I was determined to love Him. I sat with Him and told Him that He was to be my pursuit and that I wanted to be real or nothing at all. I chased after Him in every way I knew how. I began each day reading my Bible, even when it didn't give me any new insight. I listened to sermons, like, *really* listened. I worked to apply what I was learning to my life.

This new pursuit of mine was just like my old way of doing things before walking with God. I believed I could actually do it on my own as if it were up to me. I was pretty well versed in my Bible at the time but never considered the passage that says we love because God first loves us (1 John 4:19). Come to find out, I didn't need to chase what had been there all along: His love.

I love the title of this chapter, *Be Loved*, since those two words eventually converged and gave me my new name. It was actually through a work of fiction where the main character called his wife Beloved that the word began to resonate with me. I found it followed me long after the story ended. It banged like a drum in my head and was all I could hear, no matter what was going on around me. I would be in the middle of a conversation or watching TV and hear, "Beloved, Beloved, Beloved." Until then, I had experienced very few moments where I was certain I was hearing the voice of God.

From that point on, the word was everywhere: in sermons, devotions I was reading, and my daily Bible reading. Maybe my awareness was simply heightened, but the word chased me relentlessly until finally I succumbed to the truth of it. I was God's loved one, His beloved. I went from being a lifelong unloved woman to a woman loved, knowing I was loved and experiencing His love. Other than salvation, nothing has impacted my life in any greater way than discovering I was loved by Jesus. All my years of searching, all my years of disappointing, wounding human love led me to true love, to Jesus. No matter what happens in this tragic world I live in, I know one thing: I. Am. Loved.

Out of the overflow of His love for me, I was able to finally love Him in return. I love Him with all my heart and soul and mind. I don't always do a good job of it, but I love Him. He gives me grace when I get it wrong and teaches me lovingly. I love Him better now than I did ten years ago. I have no doubt that I'll love Him better ten years from now.

At the time I began that journey, I assumed everyone already felt loved by God. I assumed the believers around me loved Him with their all. When in Sunday school or women's studies, I was certain I was the only one who hadn't "gotten it" all that time. Of course, I was too embarrassed to share my story at first. I never asked anyone how someone as broken as me could love and be loved by a Holy God. Following my usual pattern, I did what I had always done and tried to figure it out by myself.

Now, all these years later, I know others are feeling what I felt, as if something is missing. They are faking it through this thing called a faith walk just like I did. So many settle for a cup when an ocean of soul-quenching love is offered.

Beloved of the Lord, take hold of His love and draw it so deep into your longing soul that you refer to yourself as the disciple whom Jesus loves—present tense. Hear it echo in your heart and soul and mind. That's what takes you captive, His intimate Love.

This topic of being loved strikes you one of two ways. You shout, yes, this is what I've found, and the world needs to know it! Or you whisper, that's exactly what I need, to be loved as I am. Either way, before you move on, take some time to consider the following questions with great intention. Take as much time as you need. Spend time with God in prayer. Don't just ask yourself these questions. Ask God His truth. If you struggle with believing you are loved, cry out, "Help me overcome my unbelief!" You can believe God's priority is for you to know His love with certainty.

CHAPTER TAKEAWAY

Key Point

Your state of being is loved.

- 1) Has the enemy ever convinced you that your actions in the past have lessened or removed God's love for you?
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- 2) Have fears over what you may or may not do in the future ever caused you to wonder if God will stop loving you? How might this fear hinder you, and what does the enemy gain when he convinces you that God may stop loving you?
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- 3) What does Romans 8:38-39 promise to combat those fears?
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- 4) You. Are. Loved. says: "Love is the key to every locked door in your soul." What are some of your locked doors? Think of hurts, disappointments, doubts, unmet needs, etc.
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Key Point

To know that you are loved shapes who you are and what you do.

- 5) In what ways can God's unconditional love reshape who you are inside and how you think?
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- 6) In what ways might confidence in God's unconditional love affect how you live out your kingdom purpose?
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Key Point

Fulfilling love is only possible with Jesus.

- 7) How have you tried to fill the void only Jesus' love can satisfy? (Consider people, children, careers, wealth, success, homemaking, reputation, ministry, etc.)
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- 8) What have you learned that proves human love or worldly possessions can never quite satisfy?
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Key Point

We can only love Him out of an overflow of His love for us.

- 9) Is loving God something you thought you were responsible for doing (feeling) on your own? Look up 1 John 4:19. How does this verse counter that thought?
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- 10) Have you tried to love Him in your own strength? How did that work out for you?
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“From that point on, the word (Beloved) was everywhere: in sermons, devotions I was reading, and my daily Bible reading.” – You. Are. Loved.

In the quote above, notice that I had positioned myself to encounter God and His love through time with Him. This is about intentionality and making time for Him.

- 11) What are some specific actions you can take to pursue the One who’s pursuing you?
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“So many settle for a cup when an ocean of soul-quenching love is offered.” – You. Are. Loved.

Personal Reflection

Unless you would like to bring up your answers to the questions below, you will not be asked to discuss the following portion in your small group.

Write out Matthew 22:37 in the space below:

Time to answer the BIG question honestly and openly. Do you love God with your all: all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind?

Remember, no guilt here. This is simply a quick heart check to diagnose the real ailment: You need His love to open the doors of your heart to Him. If you don’t love Him with your all, all, all, you are not the only one who feels this way. Most people around you are likely faking it too. I faked it very well.

Rather than additional questions, I’m sending you on a mission, one of the most critical missions of your life. I want you to sit with the Lord and talk to Him about your answer above. (Like He doesn’t know the answer already.) If you find your love lacking or even waning from what you once felt for Him, tell Him. Be open with Him. Ask Him to pour out His love for you in torrents until you’re so saturated that you can only love Him in return. He’s waiting for you, calling for you to walk with Him in His love as if in the cool of the day. Beloved, Jesus wants you to know and experience your own love story with Him.