

LIVE THE LOVE SONG

Now that we are moving into the next phase, I want to revisit the love song and dance imagery and remind you:

*His love is the music that draws us to the dance floor.
His Word guides our steps.
Our faith walk is the day-to-day dance.*

In a physical sense, dance steps take practice. The more you hear the music, the more the song becomes a part of who you are and guides your steps. Internalizing the music helps the dance to take shape.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. The more you encounter God's love (the music) in your daily life, the better you get at walking out your life of faith (the dance). Internalizing His love allows you to freely dance.

While you are practicing the dance, meaning each area of your faith walk, you will find the music of God's love grows only louder. As you continually turn your focus on the love of God in your day-to-day life, your steps will naturally align with the rhythm of His love. His love becomes more evident through your spiritual eyes and seeps like a lingering melody into your belief system, filling you with all the fullness of God.

"...to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."
(Ephesians 3:19)

The ease of the dance is this: The real work is on God's shoulders. Your part is to show up each day with God and allow Him to lead you in the dance. Be patient. Keep practicing. Utilize the takeaway at the end of each of the following sections. It's frustrating to read a book and by the end lose track of all the key points that resonated with you. The takeaway will allow you to track your key points by topic.

In each stand-alone section, we will cover various attributes of what it looks like to live loved. Our ultimate goal is to be conformed to the likeness of Christ Jesus. I was well into working on this book when a thought came to mind one Sunday morning: Jesus knew He was loved by the Father and acted out of that love every moment of every day. He calls us to abide in that same love.

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love." (John 15:9)

We can look at each of the topics in this book and see Jesus as our model. The question *What would Jesus do?* has become cliché, but it's still simplistic genius. Now we know the answer to that question—Jesus lived loved. It's more than us imitating what He did. It's who He is in us. We naturally live loved when we allow the holiness of Jesus to be exhibited in our lives. That comes from oneness with Him and from the sheer knowledge that He *is* love within us.

Outwardly, we can imitate anyone, a pastor or admired Bible teacher or friend. Inwardly, however, our motives may look nothing like that of our model. That was exactly me during my earliest walk, cleaned up on the outside but a hot mess in the deepest-down part of me.

While reading the topics to come, consider them a mirror to examine your heart (James 1:23-24). If you don't see your reflection in an area, then see it as a goal.

Paul says something compelling in Scripture about knowing Jesus and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings:

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." (Philippians 3:12)

Paul, the author of more than twenty percent of the New Testament, considered himself to be a work in progress. I'm just a wife and mom and daughter, and here I am trying to express this vast topic of living loved while still stumbling along on this journey. At least Paul's admission gives us the assurance that we believers are all pressing on toward a common goal together.

As you move through the following topics, you will be given an opportunity to stop and ponder at the end of each one. Some topics are brief; some are extensive, depending on the subject matter. You will find overlaps in areas since each stand-alone section covers a single theme. Principles that apply in one area may also apply to others. Many topics may have similar conclusions or takeaway concepts. Case in point: I will always lead you to Scripture as the solution. If that feels repetitive, then good. May I never be accused of thinking I have the answers apart from God's Word. You shouldn't either. Only God's Word is sharp enough to penetrate and divide soul and spirit and judge the attitude of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

When a topic resonates with you, take your time and consider each area of the takeaway. Even if it takes days or weeks during your quiet time, spend time praying and listening over that particular area. Watch for ways God might communicate with you through His Word, His Spirit, sermons, nature, and other believers. Illumination will come.

I can't think of anyone who has mastered all of these areas, but the mature believer continues working toward the goal of walking with God well. The astute believer knows where they struggle, where they need the most work, and they invest their time and attention to making strides.

I have work yet to be done in every area, but what makes me certain that God will accomplish the good work He's begun is knowing I am pliable. I'm often willing to view myself as I really am, all my faults and shortcomings included. I've learned to consider myself with sober judgment.

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."
(Romans 12:3 NIV)

Are you able to do that? I don't mean beat yourself up over the little things. I mean, are you able to look deep within at your heart and motives? Introspection is key to each topic. If you can't or won't look at yourself soberly, you will likely never grow. For any of us, unless we admit where we are, we won't take the next step in our journey; we'll never learn to dance.

If you discover an attribute of living loved is missing from your daily life, it's time to take notice. There may be something hindering your trust in God's absolute love for you in that area. You need to begin to work with Jesus in your quiet time. Only time alone with God and learning the lyrics of His Word can bring the hindrance to light.

While working through the takeaway, if you feel a question doesn't apply to you, then ask God for confirmation. Once given, move on. Since I am a blank-filler-inner, I can stall out trying to look inward on a matter when it's simply not my season to direct attention to it. If that's the case with you and you feel it's not the time to explore something, move on to another topic. Here's the caveat, though. Some issues you need to deal with can't be repaired until others are addressed.

Maybe you are hindered in an area due to some particular hurt from childhood or early adulthood. As an example: I shared earlier how the Gardener and I dug up some deep-rooted weeds from my life. My history of woundedness from my early years had me bound in nearly every area, especially that of trusting my Father. I needed healing from those wounds before trust finally came.

Until you trust God's love for you, many areas of growth will be hard to come by, especially ones which require you to step out in faith. In my case, trust came much later in my relationship with God. When it did come, it was the source of major transformation in every area of my life: parenting, ministry, and facing everyday life struggles. Answering my call was long overdue since I hadn't trusted the One calling. That is a good illustration of how one attribute, living in trust, is interwoven with another, living out your call. I didn't dream of stepping out in faith until I trusted God would catch me if I fell on my face.

Here's another case where healing had to occur before progress could be made in other areas. This one has an honesty alert attached! I love telling stories of miracles. This is one for sure.

After my fall and return to the Lord, I came back bound again by alcohol. It had been something that had gripped me for most of my adult life. My Christian friends had no idea I even drank since I hid it so well. It was a secret solace I ran to in order to quiet the chaos in my mind. My mind was so clouded by my self-medicating that little progress could be made toward my actual healing. Looking back now, I see why the Healer had to begin there. I needed a clear mind, a clean slate for God to work with.

When I had first begun to walk with God with any level of consistency, I stopped drinking without problem. It just happened that way, and I didn't give much thought to it. After my return, however, it wasn't that easy. I prayed for God to take the taste for it away. I begged. I kept trying to stop on my own, but still I drank.

One day on vacation at the beach, my favorite time to drink a cold beer, I opened one that tasted bad. Beer drinkers call it "skunk beer." I passed it to my husband who said it tasted fine. I opened another—same thing. It tasted just like a skunk smells. It struck me like a bolt of lightning. God had taken the taste away just as I had prayed, so I passed that beer off to my husband and haven't touched a drop since. Somehow, I know if I ever drink again, I won't get another free pass.

What's your skunk? What has you so hindered that progress can't be made in other areas? If you sniff around long enough—pun intended—you will smell it. Until you allow the Spirit to address and heal those issues, you won't make the progress you need. You, too, need a clear mind for God to work with.

Like it was for me, the topic we will cover first is a stumbling block for many, a place where the relationship with God stalls. If that's the case with you, then it's time to take an honest appraisal of your heart and plan for the love song to play.

CHAPTER TAKEAWAY

Key Point

The more you encounter God's love (the music) in your daily life, the better you get at walking out your life of faith (the dance).

- 1) After spending the past weeks focusing on the importance of knowing you are loved and experiencing His love throughout your daily life, are you watching for and encountering His love in new ways?
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Next Steps: Look and listen for the music of His love. Ask God to open your eyes and ears each day to His pursuing love of you. Start a special page in your journal to keep track of these love encounters. These will be invaluable some day when life knocks you down and leaves you wondering where Love is.

- 2) Living loved is more than just "knowing" you're loved. Is the love of God beginning to trickle down from your head into your belief system?
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- 3) Read Ephesians 3:17-19 and write verse 19 in the space below.
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Verse 19 above states that until you go from knowledge to surpassing knowledge, something remains empty that needs to be filled. You were asked in an earlier chapter if you've ever wondered if there's more to your walk of faith than what you're currently experiencing. The answer to that question is always yes. We can be certain there is always more.

- 4) As much as you may feel rooted and grounded in love (v. 17), there are no limits to the depths (v. 18) of God's love for you. Does it excite you to know that all your life can be spent going deeper still, and that as you do, your dance of faith will reflect that?
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To gain a new view of God's love for you takes time. Our world-shaped minds (and hearts) must be transformed (Romans 12:2). Remember, like holding up a diamond to the light, there are many facets of God's love for you, each uniquely shaped to love you exactly as you need to be loved.

Key Point:

The real work is on God's shoulders. Your part is to show up each day and allow Him to lead you.

- 5) Read Philippians 2:12-13. Paul addresses his readers as "_____." What two words make up this term of endearment? _____ + _____.

Paul's words are not his own but Spirit inspired, so the word choice here isn't simply referring to Paul's love for them, but more specifically God's love for you. The Word Himself also considers you (His disciple) to be His beloved, the one whom He loves (John 13:23).

- 6) Be. Loved. This is a state of being and living, not a state of doing, other than through your cooperation with the Spirit. What have you been taught “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” means, that this is referring to sanctification (becoming more like Jesus) or actual salvation (being born again, saved from sin)?

John 3:16 states that God, because of His love for you, sent Jesus to do the work “of” your salvation. Working “out” your salvation has to do with your cooperation as you are being transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

- 7) Remember, in Philippians 2:13, we are told it is _____ who is at work in you. Apart from Him, you can do nothing (John 15:5).

Key Point

Like Paul, we are all still a work in progress and need to press on (Philippians 3:12).

- 8) Read Romans 12:3. Are you pliable? (Pliable: supple enough to bend freely or repeatedly without breaking – Webster) Can you think of yourself with sober judgment and admit where you struggle?

- 9) How can you strike a healthy balance between honesty before the Lord and harsh personal criticism?

- 10) In what areas of your faith walk do you feel you are making the most progress, and in which areas are you still a hot mess?

- 11) What assurance does Philippians 1:6 give you about your hot-mess struggles?

Key Point

Some issues you need to deal with can't be repaired until others are addressed.

I shared in the book chapter about my skunk. I talked in the video about the feeder root, that “thing” that needs to be addressed so that God can work on other areas of your life.

- 12) Can you think of any areas where my skunk imagery might apply to your life? Do you have something “big” that needs to be addressed so that the smaller things can work themselves out?
