



TRUTH: GOD LOVES YOU

His deep, passionate love for you is not based on your performance or personal sense of worthiness. You cannot influence God's love for you in any way. He loves you right now, to his fullest possible extent.

Did anyone memorize a verse affirming his love? If so which verse?

How did you do this past week in remembering that God loves you? Did it make any difference in your week?

Was there a time this past week when you questioned God's love for you? Why?

What types of situations might one encounter that could possibly tempt them to distrust God's love?

Let's look at a variety of biblical scenarios to determine how the lie of not being loved fully by God impacts our actions.

EVE IN THE GARDEN

Genesis 3:1-6 (NIV)

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴ "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

What was the emotional lie that Satan was subtly telling Eve in verse 5?

Satan was essentially telling Eve that God was withholding his best from her. He convinced her that her life would be better if she distrusted God's love and took responsibility for life into her own hands. Eve concluded that God was not giving her the full life she deserved and, as a result, ate the fruit.



Have you ever felt that God was withholding his best from you? Did you take matters into your own hands? Explain.

In what ways does Satan tempt us to be discontent with the life God has given us?

Eve thought she was getting “more” by disobeying God and in the end she got much less. Can you share a time when you turned from God thinking you could get more, but ended up with less?

ISRAELITES AT MERIBAH

Exodus 17:1-7 (NIV)

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

² So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?"

³ But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

⁴ Then Moses cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

⁵ The Lord answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.

⁶ I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.

⁷ And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

What lies, regarding God's love, did the Israelites buy into while in the desert?

They obviously felt God's love was short lived, fickle or insufficient. Because he was not meeting their needs as they expected him to, they began to question that God was even among them.

They questioned God's ability or care for them to provide and sustain them in the wilderness.

They questioned his ability or commitment to fulfill his promise to take them to the Promised Land.

This is especially striking because just back in chapter 15 they had a similar tension with a lack of drinking water and they grumbled then as well. At that point God then showed them he had a plan in place and led them to an oasis that had twelve springs and seventy palm trees.



You would think the Israelites would have learned, from God's previous provision, to trust him. Why do you think past experiences of God's faithfulness fade so quickly?

In what ways might we sometimes doubt God's love and provision like the Israelites?

What are we ultimately saying about God and our relationship to him when we worry about our needs being met?

At these times we, subconsciously or consciously, believe God has either forgotten about us or that he simply does not care. We start thinking that we're not important to God; he cares about other people, just not me. As a result, we start to put up emotional defences that say to God, "I don't trust you!" and that I must take care of myself.

Matthew 6:25-34 (NIV)

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

What does it mean to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness?

Seeking the kingdom first means we put the concerns of God ahead of our own. When we seek to meet our own needs first and then focus on God with left over time, resources and energy, we put ourselves before him. This approach to life is rooted in the fear that my needs might not be met. As we surrender our lives to him and focus on serving him first, then he will meet our needs for us. He frees us to continue doing his kingdom work without being sidetracked with pursuing the basics needs of life. We don't need to worry about anything. Non-Christians worry about these things – not mature believers.

Whenever we worry, we affirm the lie that God does not love us and will not provide for us. It is also in direct disobedience to the command of Jesus to trust God and not worry.



DEATH OF LAZARUS

Jesus had delayed coming to Bethany for four days when he heard Lazarus was ill.

John 11:17-21, 28-37 (NIV)

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Why do you think Mary stayed home when Martha went to greet Jesus?

Mary was hurt that Jesus did not come as soon as he heard Lazarus was ill. Had he truly loved them, he would have come immediately and healed Lazarus. As a result, Lazarus died. She is in a state of grief, confusion and she's angry with Jesus. At these times of loss it is very easy to believe that God does not care.

Did Jesus' lack of action and refusal to heal Lazarus indicate a lack of love for them? What indicators do you see that Jesus still loved them deeply?

Jesus did eventually come and he wept over the loss of a friend and the grief Mary and Martha were experiencing.

Jesus eventually raised Lazarus from the dead; this was his plan all along. If he knew what he was going to do before he did it, why did he weep with Mary and Martha?

Just because Jesus knows the outcome of our circumstances, does not mean he does not sympathize with us in our sorrow. Jesus loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and he too grieved with them in their loss, and his loss of a good friend.

When we experience tragedy, the temptation is to think that since God did not intervene and stop it, he must be indifferent to our suffering. The precise opposite is true; God joins us in our suffering and weeps along with us. He truly does love us and deeply cares about all that we go through.

JUDAS AND PETER

Matthew 27:3-5 (NIV)

³ When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." ⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Matthew 26:69-75 (NIV)

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. ⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. ⁷¹ Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" ⁷³ After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." ⁷⁴ Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

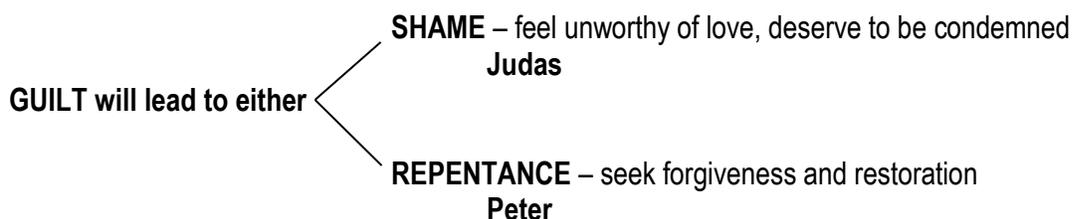
John 21:15-17 (NIV)

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Both Judas and Peter felt extreme guilt for how they betrayed their friend. How did their perception about the love of God influence how they dealt with their failure?

Judas felt that his sin was too great to be covered by God's love. Judas operated on the principle that those who fail are unworthy of love and deserve to be condemned. Instead of waiting for God to condemn him, he judged and condemned himself. He did not apologize; he did not repent; he simply ended his life.

Peter knew he had failed his friend and it too grieved him deeply. Peter however did not hide from Jesus and the rest of the disciples after his failure. He returned to the community of Christ trusting that there was forgiveness and hope of restored relationship. Peter did not rely on his performance to determine God's acceptance, he simply trusted God's love was big enough to cover his sin. Later, Jesus gave him the opportunity to reaffirm his love for him and the relationship became even stronger.





We all feel righteous guilt at times. How would you explain the difference between shame and repentance as a reaction to guilt?

Shame traps you in your guilt. With shame there is neither repentance nor reconciliation. Shame demands the person continue to punish themselves with no possibility of forgiveness. It leaves you with a sense that you are a defective person.

Repentance frees the person to receive forgiveness and be restored to relationship. The past wrongs are no longer held against them and they can continue forward with joy.

Have you ever questioned the limits of God’s love for you when you failed?

Have there been times in your life when you felt you were not a “good” Christian?

How do these perspectives hinder our lives?

1 John 4:18 (NIV)

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

What is the correlation between fear and love? How does God’s perfect love cast out all fear?

Fear is present when love is not. If someone truly believes God deeply loves them and is looking out for their every need, then there is absolutely nothing to fear in life. Fear only comes into play when I do not believe God will take care of me.

What statement am I making to God every time I experience fear, worry or anxiety?

At these times I am declaring God to be unloving and not to be trusted to care for my future. I redefine the very nature of God himself.

Share some times when it is common to worry. How is the lie at work in those specific situations?

As you go through this next week, start to notice how often you experience any of these emotions.

DISBELIEVE GOD’S LOVE → Fear, Anxiety, Anger

BELIEVE GOD’S LOVE → Peace, Contentment, Joy



AT HOME:

Each day take one of these verses and spend time reflecting on all its implications. Ask God to help you understand the full extent of his love and to point out areas where you have difficulty accepting it.

God will meet your needs

Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

God will be your safety

Psalms 23:4 (NIV)

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Psalms 46:1 (NIV)

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

God will comfort you

Deuteronomy 31:8 (NIV)

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

God sympathizes with you in your trials

Psalms 103:13 (NIV)

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;

Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. ¹⁶ 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.

God loves you even when you fail

Romans 5:6 (NIV)

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Determine which verse speaks the loudest to you. Why do you think that is?

Start each day this week affirming the fact that God loves you and wants the best for you.