

KNOWING GOD'S LOVE

A **MANNAHOUSE** RESOURCE



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this booklet is to awaken our hearts to the deep affectionate love that God has for each of us and His longing that we would return that love back to Him. Christianity is first and foremost a love story. God created each of us, through love, as special creations with the intent that we would live eternally in a deep committed, affectionate love relationship with Him.

Though we may all agree to this theologically, we are too easily detoured from making pursuit of this intimate relationship with God our priority. The pressures of life, our own sense of unworthiness, and a performance mentality are only some of the ditches into which we so easily fall.

There is nothing so spiritually liberating and so emotionally healing as living in a revelation of and a fellowship with the loving heart of God. It is the supreme cure for the confusions, stresses, hurts and fears that come with life on this planet. The purpose of this booklet is to inspire us and guide us into the ultimate pursuit: knowing the love of God.

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GOD IS OUR FATHER

“And because you are sons (children), God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying Abba, Father!” (Gal. 4:6)

Many of the religions of the world present an impersonal concept of a god that is either an abstract force or one that exists' in some state of unapproachable transcendence. The Bible is a record of the efforts of a personal loving creator to make Himself known to a world of men and women whose understanding has been darkened by sin (II Cor. 4:3,4).

The very instant we are born again by the Holy Spirit we begin our relationship with Him as 'Father.' Like the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32, our heavenly Father has been longing for our return to Him. He welcomes us with joy and compassion and begins to bestow upon us all the blessings that come with being restored to the family of God. The richest blessings flow from coming to know the Father's heart of love for us.

OUR DESTINY IN CREATION

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who . . . chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in Love.” (Eph. 1 :3,4)

Before the foundation of the world, the almighty, infinite, all knowing God, whose wisdom and foreknowledge is perfect, conceived us in His heart and imagination. He determined that human life would be created in His image (Gen. 1 :26), living under Him in headship over a new creation, with life-giving potential and the capacity to create within our earthly environment. Unique from other heavenly beings, but like our creator, we share the experience of parenting, nurturing, caring, loving and feeling pain.

We were destined to live before Him in love, fully accepted and enjoyed as precious children whose hearts would be set to please Him and enjoy His fellowship forever.

THE HEARTACHE OF THE FALL

“Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”
(Gen. 3:9)

The first man and woman who were created and set in Eden, a natural paradise (Gen. 1:8-9), disobeyed God’s commandments regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Their act of rejection of God brought the consequences of the fall (Gen. 2: 17). Their disobedience instantly broke their fellowship with Him and put all of humanity, as well as the natural creation, under the authority and dominion of Satan, who had been cast out of heaven because of his own rebellion. The fall of mankind brought us under the power of a fallen nature, with its selfish desires and lusts (Eph. 2: 1-3).

Genesis 3:9 is a heartbreaking picture of God, moving through the Garden of Eden, calling out to those He had created to enjoy eternal loving fellowship with Him. Our original destiny, to be “holy and without blame before Him in love,” would now have to be restored through the ultimate act of love on the part of the Father: the sacrifice of His own Son.

THE ULTIMATE ACT OF LOVE

“But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2:4,6)

The dominion of sin and the power of Satan over mankind was broken by Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, being born into this world as a man, living a perfect sinless life, and then giving his life in suffering and sacrifice to pay the debt of divine justice. Because there was no sin in Him, death had no legal hold on Him and He was resurrected by the power of God and then ascended to the throne of God (Heb. 10:12-14).

God’s great love for us is shown, not only in Christ’s act of redemption, but in His eternal identification with us in our humanity as the second Adam, the beginning of a new creation (I Cor. 15:45, 49).

GOD'S HEART IN CHRIST'S PRAYER

"I in them, and you in me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have love Me." (Jn. 17:23)

On the night before His crucifixion, in one of His final prayers, Jesus prays the heart of God regarding humanity. He prays that those who receive Him (Christ) as their Lord and Savior would "be made perfect in one" and that we would know that the Father loved us even as He loved His precious Son, Jesus Christ. He continues to pray in John 17 :26, "that the love with which You (the Father) loved Me (the Son) may be in them . . . "

God's purpose in offering salvation is not just to provide us a place in heaven. His purpose is to restore us to an intimate fellowship and love relationship with Him. In order for this to happen our hearts and minds must be awakened to the passions and affections that are in the heart of God for us. The more our hearts are awakened to His love for us, the more our desire grows to return that love to Him.

WE WERE CREATED IN LOVE

"I will praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; . . . Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed, and in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them." (Ps. 139: 14, 16)

These verses reveal the intimate personal involvement of God in His unique design for each of us as individuals, long before we were ever conceived. He not only destined each of us to live eternally before Him in love; He chose to create us with the distinct personalities and individual qualities that we have. His love for us is so all encompassing that, as we set our lives in the course of doing His will, even our days on this earth are carefully fashioned.

Society sets up standards of reference and comparison that often cause us to dislike or even reject ourselves: our appearance, personality, abilities, career, etc. We must move away from these worldly reference points and build our lives, self esteem and security on the infinite love and wisdom of God in creating us to be who we are. Personal peace, security and joy flows from basing our self acceptance upon God's love and acceptance.

HIS THOUGHTS TOWARD US

“How precious also are your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand.” (Ps. 139: 17-18)

The imperfections and shame of our sin nature makes us feel unworthy of receiving the kind of love the Bible declares the God has for us. The above verse reveals that our heavenly Father daily has multitudes of precious thoughts toward each of us. In fact, so many, that they are more in number than the desert sand.

The best illustration for understanding this is to watch the way two loving parents cuddle and speak about their little baby. Their hearts are filled with joy, pride and love, even though this new life is significantly below them in development. They enjoy every cute noise and movement and lovingly plan for the baby's future. They feel and act like this because they were made in the image of God. God is our Father and His heart delights in us even though we are in no way His equal. His feelings and thoughts arise from a pure parental love and commitment.

THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (Mk. 12:30)

When Jesus was challenged by one of the scribes with the question of “which is the first commandment,” He did not recite the first of the ten commandments, but instead went right to the heart of what God is after: He wants our lives in passionate pursuit of Him. He responded with the above scripture, declaring it not only the first but the greatest commandment. Love for God should be the filter for our choices, motives, and direction.

This earthly life, with its demands and aspirations, is not to be lived in pursuit of our own separate desires and ambitions. Once saved by His grace, the deeper purpose of life becomes to know God, to please Him becomes both the compass for our direction and the fuel for our journey.

GOD'S LOVE WITHIN OUR HEARTS

"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

(Rom. 5:5)

The hope set before us, of knowing God and sharing a loving committed relationship with Him, can be fully realized because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Our own human love is so limited and easily misdirected. The fall took its toll on all of our capacities, including our capacity to love. The Lord, in His grace, has made up for our lack by pouring His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

This work of the Holy Spirit allows us to know and receive the love of God to ourselves and to give this love back to Him. One minister put it like this: "It takes God to love God." Only God's love can adequately love Him as He should be loved. This love is now in our hearts to give back to Him. The more we are awakened to the reality and depth of His love for us, the more passionate and responsive we become in loving Him.

SETTING OUR LOVE UPON HIM

“Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him . . . He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.” (Ps. 91:14a, 15).

This scripture pictures the excitement and joy that our heavenly Father feels when we set our love upon him. This joy gives way to a proclamation of a list of blessings that He will pour out on the one who gives his heart fully to the Lord. God’s desire for our love can only be understood by realizing that His very nature and being is love. “. . . God is love (1 Jn. 4:8).” His ultimate joy is found in a fellowship of love with His creation.

We all have “a love to set.” Where we set it becomes the greatest responsibility of our life! There is nothing more powerful and important than human affections. We become like the objects of our affection. When we set our love upon Him, our soul begins to be conformed to His likeness and our hearts begin to share His heart.

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF HIS LOVE

“But we all with unveiled face, beholding in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (II Cor. 3:18)

This verse describes the beautiful work of the Holy Spirit in conforming us to the revelation that we see when we behold the Lord’s glorious qualities and attributes. These revelations come through an ever increasing relationship with Him. As we “see” Him in His majesty, love, and glory we are impacted and changed toward His likeness.

The heart connection that is established when we “set our love” upon Him dramatically increases our potential to receive revelation and experience His love. The Holy Spirit then uses this revelation and experience to change us according to the purposes and likeness of God. The following is a list of some of the major ways that God’s love impacts and changes us.

1. His Love Brings Forgiveness – *“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”* (Eph. 4:32) The revelation of how completely our Father has forgiven us and continues to relate to us in kindness, patience and forgiveness inspires us to relate in the same love toward those who have hurt or offended us.

2. His Love Removes Condemnation – *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”* (Rom. 8:1) God’s love never operates in a condemning, accusing manner. His love may convict us of sin but at the same time He encourages us onward in our calling as His precious children. We take His love out to others when we relate to them the same way.

3. His Love is Full of Mercy – *“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.”* (Eph. 2:4-5) God’s love is rich in mercy, full of kindness, compassion and forbearance and does not treat us according to what we deserve. The riches of His mercy are seen in the fact that He did not just forgive us our sins, He conferred spiritual blessing upon us through Jesus Christ.

4. His Love Brings Emotional Healing – *“Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”* (Mt. 11:28) Learning to rest in His love is one of the most healing things we can do for our souls. The Holy Spirit brings the comfort of His love to bear upon our hurts, wounds, stresses and fears and nurtures us back to inner peace and health.

5. His Love Inspires Us To Love Others – *“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (Jn. 13: 14) Knowing the love of Christ personally inspires us to express that same love outwardly to others. His compassion becomes our compassion. His patience becomes our patience. What we receive from Him we can give to others.

6. His Love Releases Faith – *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”* (Gal. 5:6) Neither outward religious acts or rituals in themselves mean anything to God. What pleases Him is *“faith working through love.”* Passionate love for God is the fertile seedbed for a crop of acts of faith.

7. His Love Overcomes in the Midst of Trials – “Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it.” (Song of Solomon 8:7) Waters and floods here are depictive of the trials and adversities that assault our lives. Jesus warned us that in this world we will have tribulations (Jn. 16:33). Adversities can cause the self centered heart to turn away from God but those who have learned to fellowship with His heart of love will be overcomers in the midst of trials.

8. His Love Shapes Truth – “but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ.” (Eph. 4: 15) Truth has the potential to either destroy or give life. When truth is handled in love, it expresses the wisdom of God and brings growth and edification to the hearer. Truth in God is always more than facts; it must express His loving and life giving intentions.

9. His Love is Behind Divine Discipline – “For whom the Lord loves He chastens.” (Heb. 12:6) Just as earthly fathers discipline and correct us for our intended good, so our heavenly Father, who sees our way perfectly, disciplines us according to our high calling as sons and daughters of God.

10. His Love Precedes Godly Service – “ . . . *Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving.*”

(Lk. 10:39), 40a) Every believer is called to a life of service and good works (I Cor. 15:58). However, the Lord desires that seeking Him precede serving others. If our lives are to know maximum fruitfulness and endurance then we must sit at His feet and fellowship His love through the Holy Spirit.

We come to fullness and strength in His love by continuing in the Word and in prayer. We can easily fall into the trap of being “distracted by much serving” through becoming overly committed to domestic responsibilities or spiritual ministry. Our priority must always be to stay full of His love and His Spirit.

11. His Love is Enduring – “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” (Heb. 13:5) God’s love is enduring because He is love and He is a covenant keeping God, true to His people and His purposes. He is immensely understanding, merciful and patient, desiring all of us to come into our full inheritance. He will stand with us in our worst trials and darkest seasons. His love is constant and will be a strength to those who draw from Him.

LOVE IS THE BOND OF PERFECTION

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.” (Col. 3:12-14)

As children of God, we should express His nature, attributes and ways in our relationships with others. Our calling is to show humility, meekness, longsuffering, forgiveness, etc. But towering above our efforts to walk in these other attributes is our calling to “put on love which is the bond of perfection.” The heart of Christianity is simple: we are to passionately love God with our whole lives and we are to love others as ourselves (Mk. 12:29-30). If we enjoy a rich bond of love between ourselves and God and seek to live in that bond with others, we are on the road of perfection and will more easily satisfy the other related behavioral callings of the Christian life.

HINDRANCES TO RECEIVING GOD'S LOVE

Many individuals have a difficult time relating to or receiving the love of God. In spite of the Biblical truth of His love, mercy and forgiveness, their confession is, "I just don't feel as if He loves me." Their inability to receive the love of God is often due to what the Bible calls 'strongholds' of the mind or spirit. In ancient times strongholds were fortresses surrounded with thick walls to defend against an enemy.

We often have mental and spiritual strongholds in our lives that resist the truth. These strongholds have been erected by the work of our enemy, Satan, whose primary strategy is to keep us from a true knowledge of God. He will use the poor relationships or experiences of our lives to create 'strongholds' of unbelief, misconception or emotional barriers that then restrict our ability to believe and receive God for who He really is. After we are born again there is a process of spiritual growth and breakthrough that we must go through to have our minds renewed in a true knowledge of the Lord. Colossians 3:10 exhorts us to "put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him . . ." Following are two main areas that produce strongholds.

1. Faulty Concepts of God – There are two main contributors that produce a faulty concept of God: our own sense of unworthiness and poor authority figures, especially our fathers.

If we fail to fully appropriate Christ's forgiveness to our lives, our conscience will keep us in a state of guilt and condemnation because of the working of our old sin nature. Our relationship to authority figures, especially our father, can create a faulty concept of God. Many have had fathers that were either distant, authoritarian, abusive, absent or accusing. Our relationship with our father usually has a significant impact on our concept of God and His relationship with us.

2. The Hurts of Life – Many things can happen to us in life that cause us to shut down emotionally: traumatic childhood events, abuse, peer rejection, broken relationships, divorce, etc. Serious incidents leave us with emotional scars. We are deeply wounded, feel hurt and betrayed. Our response begins as self protection but results in creating a handicap in our capacity to love God and others or to receive love.

LIVING IN THE LOVE OF GOD

“And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” (Jn. 17:26)

Jesus expressed His greatest concerns in prayer to the Father on the night before His crucifixion. Among these concerns was the passionate cry for us to know the same love of the Father that He knew. He prayed that this love would be in us, that we should know it personally and live each day in its comfort, strength and blessing.

In His prayer, Jesus was expressing the heart and will of God regarding His eternal purpose for us, that we *“should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”* (Eph. 1 :4) The Father is at work right now in each of our lives, through the Holy Spirit, to perfect His love in us. Following is a list of what we can do to increase our capacity to live in the love of God

1. Receive a True Concept of God – We must humble our own human ideas and concepts before the revelation of God presented to us in the Bible and in the person of Jesus Christ. The Bible presents a picture of an awesome, holy, omnipotent God who is full of mercy, compassion and tender love for His creation. John 1: 18 tells us, *“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”* Hebrews 1 :3 describes Christ as *“the brightness of His (God’s) glory and the express image of His person.”* The sacrificial, compassionate, loving nature of Jesus in His earthly life reveals the heart of God for His people.

2. Identify Stronghold Areas in Your Life – Saturate yourself in the revelation of God’s grace and forgiveness in order to silence your own sense of guilt or unworthiness. Consider any negative impact of prominent authority figures, especially your father, upon your life. Forgive them where it is necessary. How have these relationships affected the way you relate to God as your heavenly Father? Does He seem distant and unconcerned, legalistic and demanding? Recognize any wrong concept and adjust it according to the truth.

Ask the Lord to show you those painful incidents in your life that have brought wounds and scars or that have caused you to shut down emotionally. Be willing to go to prayer or seek help for healing with these areas.

3. Determine to Pursue Intimacy With God – Put the goal of intimacy at the top of your list of priorities and objectives for your life. It cannot be just one of your goals; it must become your chief desire. We must be like the man who found a treasure in a field and sold everything to purchase the field (Mt. 13:44). Knowing the Father's heart and fellowshiping with His love is the ultimate eternal treasure.

4. Ask the Holy Spirit For Increase – The Holy Spirit has put the love of God in our hearts (Rom 5 :5). He is longing to give us increase in both revelation and experience with His love. If we ask, seek and knock He will answer and bring that which we sincerely desire (Lk. 11 :9-13). Be patient in your pursuit and trust Him to lead you, teach you and impart to you through such things as your prayer and worship times, circumstances, etc.

5. Practice Personalizing His Love – Practice imagining God’s love for you personally. Picture God feeling love for you the way you do for your child, mate, close friend, etc. Then realize that your experience is only a small taste of what God is capable of feeling. Meditate on scriptures that express His love and apply these scriptures to yourself (Isa. 49: 15; Jn. 3: 16; Jn. 17 :20-26). Take time during your day to imagine your heavenly Father looking down on you with love the way a parent would look at their child.

6. Express Your Love Back to Him – Attempt to grow in your freedom to express affection and love to God in worship and in prayer. When you are considering His love for you and you feel your heart warmed by His Spirit, speak your heart and feelings back to Him. The Lord longs for intimate relationships with us and takes pleasure in our expressions of love for Him. Christianity is in the first sense a religion of the heart. We should seek to cultivate a heart to heart interaction with God. Put your heart into your worship and prayer times and allow the Holy Spirit to bring you into new freedoms of expressions.

7. Guard Your Hearts – *“Keep your hearts with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”* (Prov. 4:23) Our hearts are susceptible to many influences: wrong motives, negative emotions, worldly temptations, selfish ambitions, etc. The enemy is always attempting to sow bad seed into the soil of the believer’s heart. We must ask the Holy Spirit to act as a guard or watchman over our hearts and be committed to self examination frequently. Anything that interferes with purity and our priority to please Him is a weed that must be pulled up by the roots.

8. Giving His Love Out – “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” (I Jn. 4: 12) The love of God is more like a river than a lake. It’s waters stay fresh and even increase when they are allowed to flow through us and out upon the lives of others. We are not to love only in word but in deed and in truth. (I Jn. 4: 18). Growing in love requires that we give His love out even as He has given His love to us. The Holy Spirit actually increases our experience of God’s love as we give it out to others. This is how His love is perfected.

THE PURSUIT THAT LEADS TO FULLNESS

“ . . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph. 3:17-19)

The path to being filled with the fullness of God in our Christian lives is walked by those who are pursuing intimacy with the Lord. The heart of Christianity is not principles and programs, do's and don'ts it is developing a personal love relationship with our creator. We begin by receiving a revelation of His deep love for us. The Holy Spirit works this revelation into an experience in our hearts. We begin to know a joy, peace, and comfort that our souls long for. This leads to a stronger pursuit, which is rewarded with a greater heart connection. As this process continues, we come to know the strength of His love at ever deeper levels, through good times and bad. Our hearts become addicted to Him and our lives become His, our souls have found their home in God!



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**SCAN FOR SUNDAY
SERVICE TIMES**

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