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How can I know God loves me?

In this chapter, seven people tell how they learned to know God loves them, personally.

One of my great discoveries in the life of prayer—which is communicating with God—is the simple fact that God loves people. Good or bad, strong or weak, young or old, rich or poor, black or white, He loves them all. I had to discover that His love included me regardless of whether I considered myself good or bad.

“I don’t believe God loves me,” declared a young woman from the back seat of a car in which we were riding. I turned and looked at her, for it was the first time I’d ever heard anyone make such a statement. She had, I learned, experienced an unhappy and bitter childhood. The early treatment to which she had been subjected had so inhibited her, she was unable either to accept love or to express love.

Since then I’ve met others like her. Their reactions

always seem to involve a parent unable to give love to the child. Rejection and an accompanying lack of love-security is expressed in a person's face. It shows in the set of the mouth, and is often revealed by bitten finger-nails and nervous gestures.

Do you know and believe God's love for you?

Do you ever say to yourself when you arise in the morning, "A new day! God loves me! Thank You, Father!" When you walk do you lift up your head, and let the smile on your face show God and others you're glad? When you truly learn the magnitude of God's personal love and concern for you, then your entire being can and should reflect the joy of being alive, the happiness of being loved.

Since my discovery that God really loves each of us regardless of what we may think of ourselves, I've tried to help others make this same discovery.

Because of what they've done, think they are, or have become, many people can't believe God loves them. Often these people cannot love themselves, let alone others. They consider themselves hypocrites because of the false front they feel forced to display before the world.

Nevertheless it is true. God loves them. And Jesus loves them.



"Thank you for showing me Jesus loves me," wrote a friend. "Not only me, but everyone. I guess I never realized He loves people just the way they are. Now I'm looking at everyone I meet through different eyes. Now it seems so right to say in my heart (as I look at others), 'God loves you, and so do I.'"

Another wrote: "That morning you spoke, you repeated over and over, *God loves you, just as you are*. I saw Christ in you, loving me. It was so new to

me, I couldn't forget it. A few months later my heart was completely open, and I met Christ as my personal Saviour."

Still another: "I guess it's because I've never been able to accept myself, nor feel others would accept me, that I believed I was not good enough to be accepted by Christ. I have asked Him to come into my life, but I never felt loved. How could He love me, when I don't love myself? You were so convincing, when you said Jesus loved *me*. It was when we were sitting in that car, and you mentioned how Christ loved the different people who passed by, and how everyone meant so much to Him no matter who they are, or what they do . . . it was then I realized that in spite of all my weakness, He wanted to give me his love too. The love I have since received from Him has been wonderful."

A brilliant woman in Honolulu came to see me one day. The first thing she said was, "Now, tell me what God is like." So well-masked was her quiet desperation, I couldn't have chosen a better place to start than by answering her question.

"Probably not what you think He's like, and certainly not at all like many so-called Christians." She was so relieved—the tension left her and she began to relax. Our conversation continued over a period of time, during which she discovered God had not stopped loving her simply because factors in her own life and conduct made her believe He no longer cared.

People remember and hold things against themselves. People remember and hold things against each other. God, however, casts all our sins into the deepest sea, the sea of His forgetfulness. Corrie ten Boom, author and speaker, says, "And we should put up a sign, *no fishing!*" This means also, *no diving*, be-

cause once God has forgiven us it is a sin against His love for us to either bring up our own or the sins of others.

"I attended one of your recent prayer workshops," wrote M.D. of Ohio, "and left with a great blessing. We have your record album and have used it in prayer meetings where it was not only enthusiastically received but helped many to revitalize their prayer life. I never before really felt God's love. I had trusted Him as my Saviour but wondered why my heart seemed so cold. Now that I understand His love and respond to it, I'm able to share it with others. Instead of carrying my own burdens and nearly breaking under the load (because I thought God sent them) I'm beginning to turn them over to Him."

The personal experiences and discoveries just related may not convince some of you. You probably consider your problems uniquely different. But they aren't really. And even if they were, God still understands them. It's your heart, not your mind, which needs reassuring before you can solve them. When your heart is assured of God's love for you, your mind will become convinced. Make the latter receptive and assurance will follow. All it takes is your co-operation.

Making my own discovery

I once believed God loved only those who obeyed Him—that He punished all others.

As a young Christian, John 14:21 was one of the first Scripture verses I memorized. The emphasis it places upon love given as a result of obedience profoundly influenced my thinking. I reasoned that when I was good and obedient I was loved; when I was disobedient (willfully so, or accidentally so) I was rejected and unloved. Consequently I became in-

creasingly adept at rationalization. I didn't want to think of myself as unloved by God. Further, I unconsciously began to view all unbelievers as outside the realm of God's love.

The day came when I awoke to the realization that I didn't really love people at all. I thought all Christians were like myself—putting on a good “face” for the world to see. I thought all non-Christians were in a sorry state without God's love and I didn't love them either!

Paul Tournier's book, *The Meaning of Persons* (Harper, 1957), helped me to accept myself as I am. Only then did God's love become personal for me. Dr. Tournier writes: “Integration is not at all a simplification of the mind. On the contrary it is a progressive realization of one's secret propensities, and a lucid and courageous acceptance of the totality of one's being, with all its complications and contradictions” (p. 61).

A further contribution was made to my need when a Christian in all kindness asked a simple question: *For how many of your sins did Christ die?* In a flash I saw the truth: Why, for all of them—past, present, future! Before I ever sinned a single sin, Christ died for me. His death and resurrection were God's way of saying, “You're mine now. I've taken care of your guilt and your sin. That's how much I love you.” Love like this assured me of acceptance as well as forgiveness. Even my Bible became a new book as I searched it with newly opened eyes.

At once I was able to accept others and love them, good or bad, Christian or non-Christian. Being loved by God and knowing what to do with sin and failure (i.e. Jesus Christ has already carried them all for me), I could with authority say to any person on

earth: *God loves you.* I could say it because I knew He loved and accepted me, and because it is true.

The day I began to more fully comprehend God's love for people I was driving an old car from California to Idaho. The catch on the hood was damaged and the wind kept pulling the hood up in the air. I stopped again and again to tie it down, but there was a refrain going on in my heart and mind all day long, over and over. It rang when I passed a farm house or a tractor crossing a half-plowed field; it sang as I passed other cars, or drove through small towns.

"I wonder if the people living there know God loves them. Do they know how much God loves them? God loves you, sir. God loves you. I wonder if you know that God loves you."

I didn't know them, would never meet them nor speak to them face-to-face. But one thing I did know: God loved each one of them. Jesus died for them. He longed for them to know this. To the extent they didn't know, they were both spiritually blind and crippled.

All the while I was driving north I literally felt God's love flowing into me and enabling me to let it pour out from my own heart in an ever-widening river of love for others.

Someone may still ask, "Does God really love the disobedient?"

What about the children you know? Aren't they both obedient and disobedient in one single day? Do parents stop loving them when they are naughty? No, and neither does God. He loves us, His children, in whatever state we may be. In every situation we can think of, His love remains constant. Read Romans 8:31-39 in the New English Bible for one of the most powerful passages in the Scriptures concerning God's love.

"Thank you," wrote a friend, "for giving me a clearer picture of Christ's love. Even when I fight and kick and try with all my might to run away, He never gives up on me. He just goes on loving me. His love is the most powerful weapon in the world. He always conquers me with love—and I can be pretty touchy sometimes! But like you, I belong to Him and I'm His forever."

Christ's life on earth revealed His love and mercy and kindness, for people who had lost their way and knew it. His severity was for those false at heart.

I have a new appreciation for the story of the prodigal son—with whom I would never have been caught associating (notice the past tense)—ever since I discovered the reason Jesus told it. Read the 15th chapter of Luke. To the religious people, who drew their skirts away from sinners and criticized Jesus for keeping such company, He told three stories. I wonder if they ever got the point!

I think I love the story of the lost sheep best of all—that foolish, not-meaning-to-get-lost sheep who just wandered and wandered until he was hopelessly confused and alone. How eager, how anxious is the shepherd! Listen! He is calling, waiting, searching until He finds it. There! He gently lifts it to His shoulders, holding it close to Himself, caressing and talking quietly until it stops trembling. See with what delight and joy He takes it home with Him!

This is what God is like.

This is how Jesus loves you.

Then Jesus tells of the lost coin, over which the owner mourned until she found it, whereupon there was great joy.

Lastly, He relates the story of the lost son—that son who purposefully and willfully got lost, but whose father was waiting, longing, hoping for his re-

turn. In these three stories there is joy and also rejoicing.

Each of these stories tells us what God is really like, because God reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. They tell us what we are like and what He intends to do about us: *love us and find us!*

Can God love us as we are?

Indeed yes! He loves us just as we are!

How can you believe it?

Be willing to change your mental attitude about Jesus Christ, and about yourself.

Be willing to consent to let Him love you even if you consider yourself unworthy.

This is belief.

This is faith.

Your response makes the gift yours.

What are you waiting for?

Make your answer honest.



Prayer is your heart
responding
to the fact of God's love.



Review and study questions

1. How does God convince people that He loves them?
2. Discuss: What God is like—His nature. The life and death of Christ as a basis for personally accepting His love.
3. Study the following Scriptures to learn that God's love and blessing are not wages which we've earned, but gifts beyond all we deserve: Ephesians 1:5, 6; 2:4-10. Romans 3:23-28; 5:5-11; 8:31-39. Matthew 5:45; 7:7-11. I Corinthians 2:9-12. I Peter 2:22-25. John 10:27-30.

4. What you put into words soon becomes truth for you. Try this experiment using the following:
God loves you. Jesus loves you. And I love you. Tell God that whenever these words come to your mind, you will express them. Then do it. You can do it silently as you look at another. You can do it audibly if it seems right. If you don't think of it, you obviously can't do it. If you remember—know that God is there, reminding you, reaching for you, caring for you—and for others through you.

