

God Is Love

Love is not a wage to be earned. It is a house to live in.

The God Narrative Challenge

The narrative we have been handed	The narrative Jesus tells
<i>God loves the version of me I present, not the one I actually am. Love is conditional and performance-based, so I manage what God sees. Somewhere underneath, I believe that if God knew the whole truth, the love would cool.</i>	<i>As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Whatever passes between the Father and the Son is what is being extended to us, and the invitation is not to achieve it but to abide in it. Perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment, and where the love is trusted the fear has nothing left to stand on.</i>

The challenge this week: This week, notice what you hide from God, and try telling God about it directly rather than managing it. Watch whether the love actually cools.

Quotes for Reflection

“Becoming the Beloved is the great spiritual journey we have to make.”

– Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*

“Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down; fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.”

– Charles Wesley, 1747

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”

– 1 John 4:18

Scripture for the Week

Read: John 15:9–12, 1 John 4:16–19, and Romans 8:38–39

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

John 15:9

The verb John gives us is abide, and in Greek it is a domestic word rather than an athletic one. It means to stay, to remain, to make your home in a place. Jesus does not say achieve my love or deserve my love or keep up with my love. He says live in it the way you live in a house, which is to say without thinking about it most of the time. And the measure he offers is almost too much to take in: as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Whatever we imagine passing between the Father and the Son, that is the thing being handed to us. The writer of First John draws the practical conclusion. Perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment, and if there is no punishment coming there is nothing for the fear to feed on. Wesley called this the witness of the Spirit, the inward assurance that we are children of God, and he was careful to insist it is not a feeling we work up. It is a gift we receive.

Questions for Conversation

1. When do you most feel that God's love depends on your performance?
2. What would it mean, practically, to abide in love rather than to achieve it?
3. Is there someone whose love for you feels unconditional? What has that person taught you about God?
4. Name one fear you carry. If love were fully trusted, what would happen to it?

THE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: Lectio Divina

Lectio divina is reading scripture at the pace of prayer instead of the pace of study. Wesley named searching the scriptures as one of the means of grace, the ordinary channels through which God's love reaches us. This is that, slowed down until the words have time to do something.

- Use John 15:9–12 all week. The same short passage every day.
- Read. Read it slowly, out loud, twice.
- Reflect. Notice which word or phrase catches on you. Do not analyze it. Just stay with it.
- Respond. Say back to God whatever rises, even if it is an objection.
- Rest. Sit in silence for two or three minutes with nothing required of you.

Bring the word or phrase that kept catching. It is often the same one all week, and it is usually not the one you expected.

Notes and What I Noticed
