

God's Love Has Your Name On It

John 15:9

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.”

Tonight, I want to talk about a desperate need and a misunderstanding.

We have a desperate need here to be loved. Desperately inside, we are screaming out “Love me.” Some of you may not want to admit it but it is a deep need to be loved. **The misunderstanding that we have is that many of us do not fully understand that God's love is personal for us.** **We have heard it before: God's love is big.** God's love is universal. **But is it personal? Does it have my name on it?**

Some of might be thinking, “Another study on God's love,” and if you aren't careful, you might just write it off and say, “I have heard all of this stuff before!” **I realize that a lot of people have heard about God's love.** But I have found that very few people understand the depth of God's love. **And even fewer live their life as if God's love has invaded them, as if they have experienced God's love.** Some people think a message on God's love is very poetic and neat. But they do not necessarily feel like it is personal. **Some people would say, “When I hear a message on God's love, it is inspirational!”** but they never stop to think that it is transformational, that it has the ability to change their life.

I realize that with all of us here tonight, we are all in different stages of our spiritual journey. There might be some of you here tonight that are not saved. You are trying to find out if this God-thing is real and you are looking for answers. **A summary statement of the Christian faith is this: God loves you very much right now just as you are.**

Some of you might say, “I know that I have been saved by the grace of God, but I am struggling with my faith.” **And in your struggles you have concluded that you must not love God enough.** And I would say to you tonight, that is not your problem. Your problem is that you don't understand how deeply God loves you.

Some of you might say, “I know that I am saved, and can truly say that I am not struggling. My problem is that sometimes I forget just how personal God's love is. That God's love has my name on it.”

No matter where you are in your spiritual journey, my prayer for tonight's message is that when you leave, you would not leave the same person. That this segment of study would not be poetic but that it would be personal. That it would not just be inspirational, it would be transformational. **Why? Because we are spinning around in a love starved world.** We see it every day in the newspaper. And people who are growing up in this world are not getting better and sweeter. They are getting more bitter and more violent.

Therefore, the question is this: “What's the answer?” **Is the answer a best selling book? Another seminar? Is congress going to legislate an answer for this? Is the marketplace going to come up with a business plan and then try to sell it to us?**

The Bible boldly proclaims there is only one love in the universe that has what it takes to meet this love-starved need. And it is God's love. You can try to fill it with whatever you want but there is only one answer and it is God's love.

Jeremiah 31 says, “The Lord said ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with a loving kindness.’” God says, “I have drawn you.” **Some of you might wonder why God has put you here at Mountain Grove Church.** It is because God's love is drawing you to Him. God loves you very deeply and He wants you to know it tonight. He has drawn you here.

We are doing this series on “How God Meets Your Deepest Needs.” There are a lot of deep needs that we have - but to be loved hits at a very basic human need. Your greatest need is *not* money. Your greatest need is *not* success. Your greatest need is *not* fame. Your greatest need is *not* another job. Your greatest need is to be loved. Not sentimental love, not sexual love, but God’s love. And because we so desperately want to be loved, we are willing to do desperate things to get love. And out of our desperation we put on what I call Love Masks. What are Love Masks? Love Masks are things we put on to disguise our real need for love, but when we wear these Love Masks we really do get a little bit of love.

The first Love Mask that we wear is that of performance. When I achieve and I perform there are some people in our lives that are going to say, “Look what he did.... Look what she accomplished...” and we get a little bit of strokes, a little bit of value, a little bit of love.

The next Love mask that we wear is that of people. Oftentimes we get love and affirmation and value from other people. Whether it is our kids and they do really good at school and we put bumper stickers on our car – “My kid is a star at school.” We make sure that our kinds excel in sports so we can vicariously live through them. If my kids are good at sports then people will think better of me. Or if my spouse is attractive it is, “Look at me! I’m with her!” With people we get our affirmation.

The next love mask that we wear is pity. There are those folks who will put themselves down, or highlight their unfortunate circumstances, when they are in a crowd. Then people will come up to them and pat them on the back saying, “You really do not resemble a toadstool to me, you are just fine the way you are.” And so, they get a little bit of love and affirmation by playing on some else’s pity.

The next love mask that we wear is *position*. The world is filled with people who have the idea, “If I can just get that next manager position ... that CEO, ...that next spot on the ladder, then I am going to be valued and loved.” Therefore, they find their *value* and *acceptance* through *position*.

The next love mask that we wear is *physical affection*. Our society is filled with people who equate contact with love. They have this warped concept that says, “I will show my love by having sex...” That is great if you are married, but it is a counterfeit if you are single.

The next love mask that we wear is *pleasure*. There are many people, today, that try to find their fulfillment in life’s pleasures. They think, “If I could just have that next vacation ... that next high ... that experience.” They substitute pleasure for love.

The next love mask that we wear is *possessions*. Please do not misunderstand what I am saying, for *I really believe that God wants you to have the best of life’s blessing*. But there are folks who say, “If I could live in that house ... if I could live in that neighborhood ... if I could drive that car ...” Material things were designed to make your life easier, not make you life!

The problem with these love masks is they are *temporary*. They are all temporary forms of love, temporary pleasure, temporary value, temporary acceptance, and temporary appreciation. The problem is that they always dry up. Love masks will dry up because there is a limit to human love.

That’s where God’s love is so different. God’s love says, “There is no limit.” Ephesians 3 reads like this, “I pray that you may be able to feel and understand how long, how wide, how deep and how high His love really is and to experience this love for yourself.” Notice the word “experience.” Many of us have heard that God’s love is long enough

to last forever, and that it is wide enough to include everybody. We have heard that God's love is deep enough to reach into our pain and despair and high enough that we cannot take anything over it.

But my question to you tonight is, have we experienced God's love? Have you experienced God's love in your own life? Have you experienced that God loves you, really, really loves you on your good days? **And God loves you, really, really loves you on your bad days?** Why? **Because that is all God can do.** The Bible tells us that, "God is love."

"God is love," not these "P" words, these love masks. **It does not say Possessions are love.** It does not say Physical affection is love. It does not say Pleasure is love. It says, "God is love."

Please allow me to make this personal for you. I want you in your mind right now to think about one of these. Think about which one that you fall in the most.

In this series, we have talked about the names of God in the Old Testament. The one we are looking at tonight just briefly is "Jehova Roi," which means, "I am the God who shepherds you."

Therefore, because God refers to Himself as a shepherd, and because He cares for us we have no wants. Psalm 23 says, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want..." Jesus, in the New Testament, Jesus, the God-man, God in flesh also called Himself a shepherd in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd is willing to die for the sheep." A love that is willing to die, a love that leaves us with no wants, that is the type of love that God has for us, and the type of love He wants you and I to experience. He was willing to die for us that we might live life with no wants.

The only thing I don't like about these verses is that you and I are referred to as sheep. Sheep are dumb! Very dumb! **Let me ask you**

this question, have you ever seen sheep in a circus? No. They are too dumb. Have you ever seen sheep run? They do not bend their knees because they don't have knees. Sheep are just dumb! And hundreds of times in the Bible we are called sheep. It is as if God were saying, "You want to know how the body of Christ works? Study sheep." A sheep farmer will tell you this: *Sheep require endless attention because they easily stray.*

When we get our arms around God's love and we know that it is personal and that it has our name on it, we can live life with no wants. I can live my life with no wants because God *knows me* and *He still loves me just like I am.*

In John 10, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd and I know My sheep." The fact that He knows me and still loves me answers some of the fundamental questions that we have: "Does God know me? Does He know I exist? Does He care about my problems or are they too petty for Him?"

Nothing is too petty for God. Matthew 10:30 says, "God even knows how many hairs are on my head." Psalm 145 says, "The Lord is loving toward all He has made." Notice the word "all." That includes everyone. God's love is an unconditional love because "God is love." He can do nothing but love. His love for us is not based on whether we respond to it or not. God is love. It is unconditional. No strings attached. The biblical truth is that God would love us as if there were only one of us to love. Some would say, "How could He do that with so many people?" What we often do is put our finite thinking and our finite expectations on an infinite God. The Bible says in Romans 11, "God's riches are very great and His wisdom and knowledge have no end. No one can explain the things God decides or understand His ways." The Bible teaches that God has the ability to love each of us separately. You see, when God is loving me - He does not stop loving you. That is the way God works.

Let me try to give you an example of what I am trying to say to you tonight. Very often, when our children sing, parents will bring their video cameras, and when they are videotaping, they will zoom in just on their kids. They just want to see your child on the tape when they get home. **That is kind of what God does with each of us.** He just zooms in on our lives to guide our footsteps, to make our crooked paths straight, and to make all things work together for good in our lives. He does that because His love has our name on it!

1 Peter 5 says, “He is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you.” **You do not have to put on masks.** God loves you just like you are. He *knows you*. **He knows your pain.** He knows your *past*. He knows your *sin*. And yet, **His love has your name on it!**

I can live my life with no wants because God also protects me. He protects me just like a shepherd protects the sheep. The idea here is very consistent with scripture is that God is in control. **If I am a child of God, I have nothing to worry about.** You might be thinking, “I am about to sink! I am in despair, deep trouble, deep stress, deep problems, deep finances.” As we have already said in our previous studies, God wants to give you His power to get you out of situations, to help in situations, to help you live your life. God wants to *protect us*.

Psalm 40 says, “My only hope is Your love, for my problems are too big for me to solve and are piled over my head.” David is simply saying, “When it all boils down, with everything that is going on, my only hope is Your love. It is the only thing I have going for me.” God wants to protect us so that we will have no wants.

I can live my life with no wants because, like a Good Shepherd, God also guides me. We have this promise in Psalm 32:8, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shall go; I will guide thee with mine eye.” Ladies and gentlemen, God knows that life is too

difficult to be lived on its own and He wants to guide us in our decisions and direction. Romans 8 says, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.” **If you are a Christian, God wants to guide you.** He wants to direct you. You can count on His leadings to move you more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Now, let me ask you this question - Do you sense His guidance? Can you look at your life and know that He is guiding you? Do you feel His leadings? **Do you hear and/or feel His leadings?** The Bible teaches us that He has good plans for your life. Plans that you might live and prosper. **Therefore, He is always trying to lead us.** The question that faces us is are we listening?

There are three things that God wants us to do with His love with our name on it.

1. First of all, we must receive God’s love. It is a gift. I cannot imagine what my life would be like if God removed His love for me. **When you understand God’s love, it includes a forgiveness capacity that will strain anyone’s imagination.** God’s love is an endless, unconditional gift that He extends to each of us. You might be thinking, “I am not worthy of that type of love.” My response is, “You are exactly right, that is why it is called good news.” We do not deserve it, that is why it is a gift.

Romans 5:8 says, “God has shown us how much He loves us. It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us.” God does not say, “Clean up your act first and then come to Me.” God says, “Come just as you are and receive my love.” Thank God for His wonderful love!

I have this image that wanders in my mind of God’s love and what it might be like someday when I meet Him. Imagine with me for a minute. If you had to write down every bad thing you had ever done in your entire life in notebooks and let’s say God gave you the ability to remember everything you had ever done wrong – every bad

thing, every sin you had committed, and you've had to write it down. **Some of you are thinking,** "That is a lot of notebooks!" **You are right.** Imagine you take your notebooks to God and He puts His hands around your hands and then He drops them and He kicks them over to a pile that says "**Forgotten**" and then He walks you into a party, a celebration. There is music playing and streamers and people are laughing and singing. **You might be thinking,** "Preacher, how do you know it will be like that?"

I know, because Jesus has told us some stories. He tells three stories about a lost coin, a lost sheep, and a lost son. **And guess what happens when all three – the "coin," the "sheep" and the "son" are found?** God rejoices. **Now God does not rejoice because all the problems of the world have been solved.** He does not rejoice because all human pain and suffering are over. God does not rejoice because thousands have been converted and are now praising His goodness. **He rejoices because that which was lost has now been found.** Because one of His creations has been found. **And if you are not saved tonight, tonight is your day to be found.** Tonight you can respond to God's love, and receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

2. Secondly, we must refill ourselves with God's love. This needs to be done on a daily basis. **Picture your life as a bucket, and picture God's love like a fountain.** **If you have been a Christian for a while, do you know when your bucket is empty?** We have this commandment in Ephesians 5:18, "And be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Have you come to that place and understanding in your life where you have realized that you needed to be refilled?

You say, "How do you do it?" **For me – and we are all wired differently so what works for me may not work for you but it may give you some ideas:**

1) Spend some time early in the morning (when you first get up) reminding yourself of God's love and grace. Remind yourself that God has commissioned "goodness and mercy" to follow you around all the days of your life. Remember that God's love for you is very real and very unconditional.

2) Find some time during the day to read the Bible. I am not saying that you have to have a Bible study every day. Sometimes I don't even read chapters of the Bible every day. I might read one verse. I might find one verse I have highlighted that speaks to a particular need or problem that I am facing. Find a promise for your situation and read it out loud. This is one of the ways that God communicates His love to us.

3) Get the junk off your radio and listen to Christian music or sermon tapes as your drive down the road. Fill your mind with the things of God through music and sermons.

4) Spend as much time as you can being around God's people who are positive. When I am around God's people who are positive, I feel God's love. Do you know why? Because God will express His love to you through other Christians.

These are some things that I have to do to refill myself with God's love. How does your bucket get filled? This is very important to discern. It's a very important element of the Christian faith and your next growth step.

3. Thirdly, we must reflect God's love to others. Give it away. Jesus put it this way in John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love have love one to another." People all around you are dying for love. When you begin to understand God's love for you, when you embrace God's love, you begin to see people in a different light. Something begins to rise up on the inside of you, and that thing is called compassion.

If you want to experience God's love in a different way - Give it away. There is something about giving love away that when you give it away, you get it back. You are going to leave here in a couple of minutes. **You have a baton of God's love.** Give it to somebody tonight or tomorrow and then watch what happens. You will immediately begin to sense God's love. **I don't know how it works in God's grand economy of things.** That is just how it works.

Some of you have grown up in legalistic backgrounds. You have been taught that to be a good Christian is to avoid life's little nasties. You had better not do this. **You had better not do that.** And in your mind you have a list of things that you must do, and a list of things that you cannot do. That list is human made. **Jesus, the God man, right before He was going to be crucified, He did not have many hours left, let alone words.** So, He pulled His closest followers together and said, "I am giving a new command to you now. Love each other just as much as I love you. Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are My disciples." **When you love one another, that is a display of God's love.**

Would you pass the baton to somebody tonight or tomorrow? I challenge you to do it. Maybe you just need to go home and grab your kids and look them in the eyes and say, "I love you." Maybe you just need to call your parents and say, "I just called to say I love you." Maybe you just need to call a friend that you have not seen for a long time and say, "I just called to say I love you." **When you give that love away, you get a little bit of glimpse of God's love for you.**

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a God in heaven who loves you and His love has your name on it. Whether you like it or not, whether you deserve it or not, He is crazy about you. These love masks that keep us from living will fade away, but the Bible tells us that God's love will last forever.