

## Experiencing God's Love

Dear Friend,

Do you realize that before you were ever born, God established your real worth by choosing you and dying for you! The Bible says, "He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight" (Eph. 1:4).

First John 4:9-10 tells you how God showed His love for you. There it says, "this is how God Showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. In this is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

If I believed everything written on the World Wide Web about myself or what is said about me I could get really down on myself. That is why I must do what Proverbs 4:23 tells me to do. There it says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."

We guard our hearts, which is our emotions, will, and desires, by deciding who or what we choose to believe. Are we going to look for our self-esteem from what others say or from what God says? He declares in Isaiah 66:2, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word."

If I don't guard my heart by watching what I think about, and what I choose to believe, I will start sounding like the writer of Psalm 31:11-12 when he says "because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors; I am a dread to my acquaintances. Those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery."

If you see yourself that way you will find yourself increasingly withdrawn and hostile. You will start believing everyone is out to get you, like Psalm 73:21-22 says, "when my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant: I was a brute beast before you."

This type of thinking causes us to believe when we face threatening circumstance that we only have one of the following three options available to us. These include; 1. Fight or get even, 2. Flight or get going and 3. Freeze or get hurt. The Bible says Jesus gives us a fourth option which includes a new, powerful, overcoming heart. This promise is laid out for us in Ezekiel 36:26 where God says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you: I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

Receiving this new heart involves letting Jesus take the idols of our self-made gods out of our hearts. These idols include anything that demands more of our attention than God does. For that reason in Ezekiel 14:6 He says, "Repent, turn away from you idols, and turn your faces away from your abominations."

It is idols and abominations that keep us from believing in the midst of our hurts, pains and feelings of rejection that God "heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds," as Psalm 147:3 says.

I know God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds but I still feel the pressure, and see those who would love to destroy me and the work God has given me to do. For that reason I must read and meditate on scriptures like Psalm 139. If you will join me in doing that you will also discover the following the following seven principles that Psalm 139 shares. The insights from this Psalm will help us to be effective and productive in all God is calling us to do.

As we study Ps. 139 we will:

1. Realize that God knows all about us! He is well aware of our strengths and weaknesses as He calls us to serve Him (verses 1-6).
2. Remember that God is always with us! The realization He is with us gives us the faith and power to continue in spite of the obstacles (verses 7-12).
3. Respect the fact God has created us. By realizing we are fearfully and wonderfully made as verses 13, 14 bring out, we can rise above our insecurities and truly believe we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.
4. Recognize that God has uniquely designed us and He has also equipped us and empowered us for the task at hand as verses 15 and 16 bring out.
5. Receive God's loving thoughts toward us. Psalm 139:17-18 reminds us that God not only created us and equipped us but even at this moment He is thinking about us and our needs.
6. Renounce God's enemies knowing that He will deal with them. Verses 19-22 make it clear that those who want to shut us down have no power over us because God is in control.
7. Respond to God changing us. Each trial and each tribulation is bringing us closer to our Living Loving God. As Psalm 139:23, 24 brings out, He is using these difficult times to search us and lead us into everlasting life.

We see that we are loved by God to such an extent He even sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins and be resurrected from the dead. The over and over in the scriptures we are told who we are in Christ Jesus and "can do all things through Him who strengthens us" (Phil. 4:13).

One of the greatest hindrances to experiencing God's love involves bitterness and unforgiveness. As long as we continue to hold on to bitterness and unforgiveness, we will continue to see ourselves as victims. Yes we may have been deeply hurt in the past, but we cannot change the past. What we can change is our perception of it and the feelings which enslave us in the present and keep us from being channels of God's love.

Joseph, (Genesis, Chapters 37-50) is the one who received terrible mistreatment, yet he refused to accept the role of victim. After being thrown into a well by his brothers and sold into slavery, Joseph ends up in prison as a result of the lies of his master's wife. In spite of all this Joseph still refused to resume the role of a victim locked in the prison of hatred. When he becomes a leader in the land of Egypt with power to destroy the brothers who mistreated him, Joseph told them in Genesis 50:20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them."

Healing from the mistreatments in our past begins once we realize that we no longer have to justify ourselves. We don't need to do this because we have already been justified by Jesus Christ on the Cross. Romans 3:24 says that you and I have been "Justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Throughout the story of Joseph, we see the words, "the Lord was with Joseph". The fact is, the Lord is also with you. The same Jesus who declared, "Lo I am with you always even to end of the world" is with you right now in the middle of that hurt and bitterness over the mistreatment of the past. At this very moment, make the promise of Romans 8:28 your very own, "...in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

We know this is possible because of the forgiveness provided through Jesus Christ. This forgiveness frees us to forgive those who have mistreated us. As a result, this forgiveness releases us from the bitterness which locks us into being victims of that past and frees us to receive the promise of the future.

Now we are no longer victims of the past, but victors of the present. As we forgive those who have hurt us, we discover, because of Christ's forgiveness and His justification, our emotional well-being is not dependent on the response of the offender. Our responsibility is to forgive and move as victims of the past to become victors in the present who are God's agents of love. This frees us from the tyranny of self and enables us to be creative forces of good in a hurting world.

It's much easier to forgive our offender when we see that in many cases, they too are broken people who are victims of their past. Jesus, recognizing this, was able to declare from the cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do".

As we choose to release the past and forgive, we in turn allow God to regain control of our lives and our future. The fact that Joseph did this is reflected in the names he gave his sons in Genesis 41:51-52. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my troubles, and all my father's household". The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering".

When you encounter the resurrection freedom provided through Jesus Christ you discover the ability to be set free from bitterness, discouragement, fear, guilt and a host of other problems. As 1 Corinthians 15:57 declares, "He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" Experience this victory! First allow Jesus to be your Lord and Savior. Then let God's love give you the strength to change your priorities as Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble".

In Isaiah 41:10, we are told, "Fear not; for I am with you: be not dismayed; for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, and I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness". The Bible goes on and tells us that "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love, and a sound mind", (2 Timothy 1:7).

When it comes to loving that difficult person, we are further promised in Philippians 4:19 that “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”.

As God’s love is channeled into us through the Resurrected Christ we are changed to the point we are willing to put the needs of our wives, husbands or children ahead of our own. This love also frees us to share the love of God with the fatherless, widowed and homeless. It is a love that involves trusting Jesus as our Lord and Savior and obeying Matthew 25:31-46. These fifteen verses explicitly state that Jesus of Nazareth comes to us in the form of a homeless, hungry, thirsty stranger. The same Jesus who says it is impossible to receive God’s forgiveness unless we forgive others, tells us clearly that it is also impossible for us to receive God’s hospitality unless we extend hospitality to others.

Sharing the love of God does not mean taking our left-over canned goods, old clothes, broken furniture, or any other junk we might have and dumping it on the poor. We won’t do that, unless we believe that is the kind of hospitality God dumps upon us.

The big question is, will we accept Jesus to the extent we will let His love change our priorities and do His will?

What is God’s will? Micah 6:8 tells us to “do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.” This involves sharing God’s hospitality with others. It includes receiving the hungry, the homeless, and the needy into our midst, as we are receiving Jesus.

Frequently Jesus may come in the form of a dirty, unstable sick person who tries our patience. Scripture makes it quite explicit, that for the true believer, opening one’s life and church to the homeless and needy is not optional. “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2).

By opening our lives to the homeless we allow God to invade our privacy in a special way. When we are patient with those whom society considers outcasts, we get first-hand experience of God’s patience towards us.

Through these precious homeless people, Jesus gives us deep insight into the patience, love, justice, and mercy of God the Father. As we keep reaching out even when we aren’t always appreciated by our guests, then we will truly understand the patience of our Divine Host towards us.

For those who feel alienated and embittered toward others, let’s take another look at Galatians 5:13-15 and apply it when it says, “Through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’. But if you hate and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another”.

Instead of giving into hate and devouring one another, let us pray that each day we will experience God’s love as we let His love change our priorities.

Yours in Christ,

  
Larry Rice