

Volume 3, Day 1: Swim in the River of God's Love

I hope you're beginning to believe and accept His unconditional love for you. It may not be perfectly clear at this moment. It usually takes years of walking this journey. Life is to be lived in love. Jesus summed up His whole ministry with His disciples, "Here's what I want you to do. Here's the new command. Go love others like you've been loved."

Jesus kind of set the tone for our relationship with Him. If we are to resonate with His heart, our life in this world must be about love. This is almost polar opposite to how most of us live. We were taught, or maybe concluded by experience, to live in our own self preference. We pursued living selfishly. We pursued our own personal pleasure, prosperity, popularity, applause, and power in controlling everything we possibly could. In other words, in any given situation I try to maximize whatever joy I can get out of it. I might be trying to be first in line or struggling to get the best thing on display. Conversely, I try to minimize whatever pain might be in the situation for me. So the natural spirit in me develops coping mechanisms to help me navigate life as if I'm not loved.

Jesus invites us into a love affair. Like a river, it's something we jump into. It's a reality. We swim in it. Our nature is always trying to get our own way in life. But Jesus invited us into a way of living loved. Peter expressed it this way in his letter in 1 Peter 4 he said, "Jesus went through everything you're going through and more besides, learn to think like Him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful selfish habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you'll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want. Swim in God's unconditional love!

Volume 3, Day 2: Tyranny of Desires

Here's a great contrast, a tyranny of what we want opposed to a delight in what God wants. We don't think of it that way. We think of our dreams and hopes and visions and desires as something that's very good, and we enlist God into our Army to help us fulfill those for us. However, Jesus is inviting us into a different pursuit: "Feel loved by God, right where you are in life, as it's already unfolded for you. Learn to live loved right here and now. Feel His presence within you. Know His passions. Believe that His desire is to use the very circumstances you're already in. When you feel His love for you in difficult places, you'll want to love others in the same way.

I remember being on a flight years ago and I was sitting in my seat on the aisle. Some lady was coming in with too many children, too many bags, too many car seats and banging into people. My attitude was like, what are you doing traveling alone? Can't you think this through before you get on an airplane? But the man next to me in the aisle seat across the way, jumped up from his seat, turned to the lady and said, ma'am, looks like you need some help. What can I do for you? And he helped get her children arranged in the seats, helped get her stuff up in the overheads, and I'm sitting in my seat feeling like a fool.

And I remember saying to God, "God, I don't want to be **this** guy. I want to be **that** guy. I want to live like that in the world. I don't want to be so focused on what I want and what I need, that I'm not aware of the needs of others. I want to be aware of others' needs and to be a blessing to others in the world, not someone who is fighting to have his own way." Essentially, I wanted God to transform me to be other preferring, like Jesus.

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Volume 3, Day 3: Love Frees Us To ...

So the first question might be, “What does love **free me to do?**” How does knowing I'm loved by God free me to care about others and to help others and to be in a situation where I am not just focused on **my** comfort, but very **aware** that there's more than me in the room. How can I be a blessing to them? The second question is, “What does love **lead me to do?**” If I'm in a situation where I'm not sure what I should do, if I truly knew I was loved, what would that lead me to do in response to the other people in it with me?

That opens some great doors for us to walk through. It invites us to live differently in the world. Now, what I'm talking about is not just, “Okay, I'm going to stop doing what I want and do what everybody else wants and try to please everybody around me. That's not the reality of love. I'm talking about living **in** His love. This means that I **am** loved. So I don't have to do things for other people in order to get their approval or to get God's approval. But since I am already loved fully by God, I can now turn around and love other people in a way that invites them into something greater than just human love.

See, what I think **living loved** does is, number one, it keeps us from being manipulated by others because God's love is not conditional. It's not based on what I do or don't do. Love is not doing what anybody else wants me to do for them. In fact, love learns to say no. Sometimes it realizes this is not my deal. I'm not in this. So I can respectfully say to someone, no thanks. I don't think this is for me. And the other thing love doesn't do is this. It doesn't manipulate others. We don't do things to or for other people just to satisfy their comfort or pleasure.

Volume 3, Day 4: I Wannabe Like That Guy

Love is having affection for them where they are, not pressing them into where we want them to be. And when you learn to live in that kind of love, an interesting thing happens. Jesus said, "As you feed someone who's hungry, offer a glass of cold water in His name or visit someone who's in prison, you are actually engaging them with Me."

That's an interesting statement. If you've done it for the least of these, you've done it to me. I find in my own life, when I make time for the needs of others, when I'm aware of what's going on around me, not only do I see them more clearly, I see Jesus more clearly. I see the way He's making changes in my life. Essentially what He's saying to me is more of an invitation than a command. He is inviting me to know Him and the fullness of His love for me. This is about learning to live a **life of love**. And to be sure, we are talking about an emotional affection which drives me to serve others.

Learning to love is a life-long process. It is learning to live motivated by genuine affection for others. Don't think you can do it overnight or 'just do it!' And it's not, "Oh, I'll start doing that tomorrow. The more you're aware of God's love and convinced of its unconditional nature the more you will love well in the world. And when Jesus invites us to love our enemies, it is because those same people are His people.

So make your mistakes. Find your way into this reality. And maybe you'll find yourself in a situation, like I was describing, "I don't want to be **this** guy. I want to be **that** guy." Jumping up to help instead of complaining

Volume 3, Day 5: Love Happens in the Present

Sociologists tell us that only 28% of the people are actually in the moment with you when you're talking with them. That means while you're talking, they're thinking about something that happened earlier in the day or something they've got going on later that day or into next week, or what they are going to say next, and they're not really present in the moment with us. Isn't that amazing?

And I think it's much worse when we talk about our relationship with God or trying to have a time of communication with Him. We're usually reflecting on our past somewhere or worried about something coming up in the future. We have talked about God inviting us into this river of love. I want to talk to you now about God inviting us into a different place. That is, God is inviting us back into the present moment. God is the God of the present. He's with us where we are in the reality of our life as it unfolds today.

And the sooner you can believe that and relax into this moment and let God lead you, guide you, touch you right here, the better off you'll be. Pain and regret always drag us back to the past. Failures, preoccupation with our sin take us back into the past. Traditions drag us back to the past. It may be something God did once and we're trying to get Him to do it over again for us now. We want to be doing something that makes us feel comforted by the tradition and this blocks Him out of our awareness and the way He wants to reveal Himself in the present moment. Programs, plans, visions and desires are the things that draw us into the future. These only produce anxiety and fear. Wait here with God and dwell on Him and His words to you. He will teach you amazing new things!

Volume 3, Day 6: Love Doesn't Fix, It Satisfies

I talk to so many people who really want a relationship with God, but until He heals this, fixes that, changes this circumstance, gets them a job, or resolves their depression, they don't feel like they can have a relationship with Him. And yet God is the God of the present. He is the God of what is happening to you right now. He is the friend who sticks closer than a brother! God's right with us where we are. In fact, the best things in life are where God makes Himself known right where we are.

I've been quite a worrier most of my life. Anxiety is one of those things that was very close to my heart a lot. When I didn't know I was fully loved, I naturally worried about things that might happen in the future or things I thought would happen. Surprisingly few of those ever did occur. In fact, when we're worried about our future, have you noticed this? When you're thinking about something that might happen, you might run out of money, you might not get enough of something that you want or your vision and ministry might not unfold the way you want them to, your anxiety about something in the future leaves you feeling like you are there all alone. He's not with you. Well, He is with you, but you are so not there that you can't feel His presence with you!

So when you are living either in your past and its regrets or the future and its worry-producing uncertainties, you cannot benefit from God's presence because you are leaving Him out of your current moment. If you want to feel the love of God or others, you must be present with them in your heart. We may even find it easier to do this with people than with God.

Vol. 3, Day 7: Curriculum of Learning to Be Loved

Someone said to me one time, and I love this thought, we don't have the capacity to imagine grace. So when we're living in our future, we're living in the present moment without God. We're living on our own resources, our own ability, our own knowledge, because we can't imagine how it is that God might make himself known to us as things unfold in the future. We are afraid that He might make a mistake. That's what I think it is to be in this relational journey with Jesus.

He invites us into the present. He wants to make himself known to you right where you are. He doesn't need to fix this first. He doesn't need to change that in your life first. He just wants to be in your awareness today, with the challenges, with the things that are already confronting you. Now, I notice when people start going on a love journey, and we've tried to avoid it here, they design lots of curriculum pages and pages of duplicated notes and theologies and doctrines and things you need to understand. They assume that when you try to wrap your head around a certain way of thinking that's going to help you.

You know what I found out? I found that the curriculum God's using to transform us is the collection of the circumstances already in our life. It's not something we need to study out there and then try to apply it to our life here. It's God making himself known right where we are. What He wants to do in you now probably has to do with the fear you're having, the doubt you're struggling with, the questions you have in your mind, the emotions that are kind of wracked and stressed out about things while you are striving to obtain peace.

Volume 3, Day 8: Living This Moment Is Enough

It's not about Bible study. It's God making His word real in the present moment. It is God making the words of scripture real right inside your own life and heart. The curriculum really isn't about something I need to learn outside myself, but learning to listen to God and letting Him make Himself known right where I am today.

Maybe that's the hard part, sitting in our chair, going for a walk, trying to get our thoughts away from all our regrets of the past, trying to get God to change our future and presenting ourselves to Him and just saying, "God, what do you want to do in me today? God, what do you want to say to me? God, what next step do you want me to take?" This life is lived one step at a time, one day at a time. And if we forget that we'll spend most of our time either regretting our past failures or worrying about what might happen in the future.

When my wife's parents were living with us for a time and they were both terminally ill and going through great stress in their life. Sarah and I both came back to living one day at a time. We couldn't imagine how we were going to do this for another four months, six months, year or two. Every time we'd think out into the future, we'd be exhausted by our own fears and worries. God kept inviting us back into the moment like the manna He gave Israel every day. Don't store it up. I'm going to be there tomorrow to give you the same thing. Do you have enough today? God asked us that question a thousand times in our anxieties and worries, do you have enough today? And we'd say, yeah, we do have enough today. We have enough grace. We have enough resources to live inside this moment and that's all we need.

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Volume 3, Day 9: Just One Small Step

Whatever God wants for your future is going to unfold right there. I've said to people, "I think the best way for God to not get me where He wants me to be in six months from now is to tell me where He wants me to be then. Because when he tells me where he wants me to go, I'm actually going to try to get there for Him. And I'm going to do it my way. And I'm going to end up lost and not **in** the very thing God wants me to be."

The very way for God to get you where he wants you in six months from now is for you to simply follow the step He gives you today and then in each tomorrow follow that step. As we respond in the moment to each thing God brings before us, we're going to find ourselves down the road standing exactly in the middle of what God has in mind for us. So don't try too hard to get that healing. Don't try too hard to get rid of your despair. Just open your life to him and ask God what's next? And when he nudges you, follow him.

The psalmist, David said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." The analogy is this. In those days of lamps for night travel, very little light was produced for this night time guidance. It shone only about one step or so ahead. It would have been foolish to run, unless you wanted to stumble and get bloody. The lamp's light could let you see enough of the path not to wander off of it. But it wasn't possible to take more than a single step at a time. Our problem is sometimes we think we have a brighter light which lets us hurry. But in the present moment only a little light will suffice. Just take it slow and easy. Stay in the light of God's lamp. Take just one step, then another and another.

Volume 3, Day 10: Finding a Better Way

I think it is interesting how we've learned to live this Christian walk. For the most part someone taught us a set of principles we ought to believe and things we ought to do. Then we try to wrap our heads around it. And then we try to do those things to the best of our ability.

When we reflect on how few people we have brought to faith in Jesus and how miserably we have done as Christians, we want to see Christianity as less performance-oriented. We want it to be something more of life in the spirit and spontaneous. But if this is attainable we need a radically different set of beliefs.

The questions about 'how to' live in the new way are endless. The problem is that we want to figure it all out before we even start on the journey. And there's just no way to figure it all out first. Jesus didn't give us a plan to follow. And God didn't give Abraham a destination when He told Abe to get up and go. Imagine that!

Jesus didn't give His disciples commands to follow except one. "Love each other like I love you!" He also said, "I'm going to give you My Spirit and He will lead you into all truth (and life). That's in John 16. Yet in our day we've assumed that we're going to get truth if we follow the right pastor, author, or guru. Or we're going to follow Him by following the scriptures. And as valuable as the scriptures are, without tuning in to the Holy Spirit, we misinterpret them. And they're not our way to follow him because unfortunately we end up misinterpreting the scriptures. The scriptures are great until we start misinterpreting them and then they're a bit of a mess.

Volume 3, Day 11: Faith's Gravitational Pull

What we need to **follow** is **the Holy Spirit** who lives in us. And that's what Jesus said. I'm going to give you Him to be in union with your spirit. He will guide you into all truth. Now, to be sure, even the John 16 explanation of the role of the Holy Spirit is largely wrongly taught. We hear that the Holy Spirit convicts the believer of sin, righteousness and judgment. However, that role of the Holy Spirit applies to unsaved persons. Further down in the chapter Jesus says that the role of His Holy Spirit is to **guide the believer to the truth** (correct interpretation of scripture and the ugly truth about ourselves).

So this journey, "walking in the Spirit," is not about obedience to rules or principles. It really is about following the Holy Spirit as He makes the will of the Father known within us. Here's an illustration. We're going to consider the gravitational pull of the **earth** and the **moon**. We're being pulled by two forces. The gravitational pull of the earth (**like our natural ways**) holds us here. The moon (**like the Holy Spirit**) with its gravitational pull isn't as strong as this, but we still feel it, or at least see its effects when our tides are high and low. The pull of earth is stronger until we move close enough to the moon for its pull to be stronger on us. So this new journey might be like our space flight to the moon. The pull of the distant new truth (moon/Holy Spirit) will not overwhelm the old truth (earth/our nature) until we are well into the flight.

Walking in the Spirit is a vastly different life than walking in the flesh (trying hard not to sin). It is as different as the earth walk is to the moon walk. Let the Holy Spirit teach you how to **release your control** to Him and peace will be yours as you let Him do the work.

Volume 3, Day 12: Us Living Life or God Living It

Let the Spirit of God draw you into the life of the Father. The old way of thinking was given to us by well-meaning family and friends, peers and pastors. You might even say that we all live by relative truth because we got it from our relatives. However, "You can't be wrong, sincerely enough, to be right!" This journey is rethinking many things which we have tenaciously held onto as truth without due diligence in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The way of the world and the way it thinks and the way we were trained to live in the world have left us hungry for more of the Holy Spirit and life. We have become twisted and sometimes miserable because the Christian life has not been like we were told it should be. Even Jesus' own declaration, "Come unto me and I will give you rest," doesn't always let me feel rested. At times it even seems harder to be a Christian than not to be. Trying to live in the power of my own strength (flesh) is the very religion that twisted me even further

As we start here and we begin to come alive in the Spirit, the Spirit begins to draw us into a different orbit, into a different life. But it's very faint. Sometimes we just hear the beck and call, but it is actually following that Spirit that Jesus wanted us to do. And sometimes we feel a nudge this way a little bit. But it still seems like the old way is so hard to resist and the new seems so weak and distant in our lives. But here's what I want to encourage you. **The more we move in the Spirit, the less pull the flesh has.** That lets us live in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. And that's what the Holy Spirit is doing. He's drawing us to God. The more we are pulled by our desire for God, the more blessing **is His presence** and not our circumstances.

Volume 3, Day 13: Selfish to Selfless

The idea of laying your life down somewhere for someone is so remote that you would never have thought of it or never wanted to do it. But when we seize the moment and we take the risk to follow what's in our heart, that's how we learn to keep moving this way where this attraction to selfish prosperity, popularity and power gets less, and this attraction to selflessly laying down your life for another gets greater until we find our way to live constantly and consistently this life of the Holy Spirit.

So I guess what I want to encourage you to do is learn to listen to that quiet inner voice of the Spirit. It may be faint, it may be incredibly weak and you're not even sure sometimes if it is the Spirit or your own desire. But if what you're feeling nudged to do isn't mean spirited, isn't going to hurt someone else, isn't demanding someone else serve you, but in fact seems kind, seems generous, seems wise, not by earthly standards necessarily, but by Godly standards, then go ahead and give it a whirl. There is no risk. If indeed the Holy Spirit does not desire it to happen, He will twist your gut.

Take that step forward. The more we learn to respond to this, the freer we're going to be. In the initial days, yes, I can tell you, we're always being pulled back toward religious ways of thinking. We're always pulled back to the way we indulge our flesh. But if you'll just keep walking, just keep listening to the Spirit, you will reach a point at which the gravitational pull of the flesh is less than the gravitational pull of the Spirit. And that's when this journey gets really, really fun. Now, selfishness doesn't draw me back so much anymore. In fact, I don't even want that. I want to live here in the awareness of the Spirit.

Volume 3, Day 14: Faith through Eyes of Trust

I think that early in my journey I misunderstood what **faith** was. Read scriptures like, “without **faith** it is impossible to please God,” or “if you have enough **faith**, you can move this mountain.” And I had the idea that **faith** was something I needed to produce for God. I needed to come up with enough **confidence that God would do things the way I wanted** and if I could, God would actually do them. And so **faith** to me just became another religious work, like all the other things you've got to do to keep God happy.

In the last few years of my journey though, I've been learning that **faith** is something quite different. Maybe if we used a different word for **faith**, it would help us understand that **faith is not some internal willingness to believe** something or pretend I do, even if I don't on the inside. If you use the word **trust**, it would take us to a different dimension because **trust** makes it more of a relationship word.

There really isn't a word in the English language that matches the Greek verb for **faith**. That's why we talk about **faith** as a noun, but not **faith** as a verb. We don't **faith** something, but we do **trust**. I think **trust** is a better word here because **trust** is essential in relationship. **Trust** is not how much I'm willing to believe someone. **Trust** is the foundation of relationship. The more I know someone, the more I know they love me, care about me would lay down their life for me, the more I would know what things I could **trust** them with. Trust is the byproduct of a growing relationship, and I don't think it's meant to be any different with Jesus either. He meant to lead us to **trust** Him completely with our very lives! You can't demand it.

Volume 3, Day 15: Trust That I Am Loved

It's a scary thing when someone has to demand that you trust them to prove your loyalty, to prove your faithfulness to God. Whether it's a spiritual leader or someone else, you've got to know that they don't understand trust. And because they don't, they're probably not worthy of it. Trust isn't given. Trust is won. And God began at the cross to win us back to Himself that we could trust that He in fact loves us and He's willing to walk in life with us and He's willing to lead us into His reality, His truth, His life, the way He wants us to have faith.

If it's just a religious work from our standpoint, then we're going to try to manipulate God to give us what we want. And I guess that's why a lot of people have a difficult time with trust. They've read scriptures about God that made Him seem scary. And so our misinterpretations of scripture don't lead us to be endeared to the Father in a way in which trust would grow. Also, a lot of believers have a lot of unanswered prayers and unmet expectations (hopes and dreams). And it's tough to trust God if He doesn't do the things we think He should do or the things we think love would compel Him to do.

But trust doesn't grow on that basis. Trust doesn't grow by getting God to do what I want. Trust grows when I live inside a relationship with Him, come to know I'm loved enough that I can put my whole life into his hands and believe that whatever He wants to do, whatever He has in the mind for my life, it will spill out and it will happen. And I found out that his ways of working are entirely different from my own.

Volume 3, Day 16: Trust! Don't Pray It Away

In my early days, I wanted life to be certain. I didn't want there to be pain and brokenness. I didn't want other things in my life. And so I would try to pray all the pain, all the need, all the risk out of my life, all the fears even of uncertain futures and trying to get my future in a way where I ultimately wouldn't have to trust Him. And people who go on this journey who have a fear of uncertainty or are anxious about it, I always say to them, "You are on the wrong journey if what you were hoping what God would give you is increased certainty." What God gives us instead is an increased rest in Him in the midst of the uncertainty and the chaos of living in this age.

I guess it was my hope as a younger man that if I really loved God, believed him, He would bless me and my life wouldn't have chaos in it. At 60, I'm a little wiser than that. Despite some of my best decisions at times, and despite some of my most ardent passions, life doesn't turn out the way we want it to. God was never planning to fix all of our chaos. What He wants to do is to be in the chaos with us. What He wants to do is invite us into a different way of living where we wouldn't be so zeroed in on man's interest.

What I think. What I want. How I want to accomplish it. These are natural. But if we'd really be focused in on how God makes Himself known in the world and how God works in me, knowing that what he wants to do in my life is far better than anything I would even choose for myself. At this season of my life, I will tell you I'm not doing anything I imagined I'd be doing as a young man with all the vision and passion I had.

Volume 3, Day 17: Trusting God is Living with God

What I hoped God would do in my life has sorted out very differently than I dreamed. But I wouldn't trade anything that God has brought into my life today for anything I hoped for back in the past. This life, as God's allowed it to unfold for me, was far from perfect, far from everything I wanted, but it has enabled me to know Him in the ups and downs in life, to trust Him as things unfold, to not have to arrange every detail of my life. I don't even get rental cars and all those things nailed down when I leave anymore because I ended up on too many trips with other people who were driving me somewhere who wanted and needed the conversation. And those conversations were very powerful for us.

So I want to encourage you. Don't try to give God your faith. Don't try to get more faith. Don't try to go into that routine because even scripture declares that just a little bit will do. All it takes is faith the size of a grain of mustard seed. What our faith needs to do is be based in God and who He is. It is faith **in** Him. It is **trusting** that Jesus **is** the **author** and the **finisher** of my faith. This brings me into a deeper reality that grows over time. When you follow Him, you don't try to save yourself. It is then that He does something amazing.

The reason I don't book six months or two years out on my travel schedule anymore is because I would miss things God wants me to experience. Wayne trying to provide for himself had over planned everything. If you want to grow in trust, if you want that to be a reality that happens in you, just follow His agenda. When you stop trying to save yourself, then and only then will you find the most incredible joy of learning to live **with** Him.

Volume 3, Day 18: Trusting God is Ultimate Freedom

I hope to help those of you who are from religious backgrounds mostly about standards and expectations and rules to follow. You likely were feeling guilty if you didn't keep the rules. You may have been wondering what you should do or shouldn't do. Maybe you even missed the simplicity of listening to God to let Him lead you on. Instead, you tried to meet God's expectations or those put on you by others.

In Galatians chapter five Paul describes those who were giving up their freedom in Christ, that is, simply believing what the Holy Spirit was showing them, and instead trying to fit back into the rules and laws of the past. He wrote to them said, "Don't let go of your freedom. Don't give it up for anything. Don't take on any yoke of slavery or burden. The only thing that counts is faith that expresses itself through love."

If that's the only thing that counts, then that gets to wipe out everything else such as expectations, laws or principles. Instead of following those things, what he's encouraging us to realize is this. Something happens in the human heart when faith begins to take hold in us, where we **fully trust** His love for us. Then we'll find ourselves loving other people around us more freely. We'll find that love will affect in us all the change that God wants to do. In fact, Paul says at the end of Galatians five, "Love fulfills the whole law. If you get the loving right, then everything God wants to come out of your life will come out. The whole of the Christian life is 'Christ in you' doing His own work and will. Trusting self in any way is not helpful. Trusting God completely and His Holy Spirit is all.

Volume 3, Day 19: Trust in God, Never Yourself

So here's how those things have worked out in my life. When I was feeling tempted, like maybe I should do something, or wondering, "What if I'm wrong about this journey," I kept coming back with this. This is the only thing that counts. It doesn't count when I'm working hard for God. It doesn't count just because I'm doing things that other people expect. So I found the freedom then to live inside what God's saying to me.

So, first of all, follow what God's showing you. I think the tendency a lot of us have when God shows us something, we want all of our friends and family and everyone else to believe it. So we spend more of our time arguing, trying to convince others, push them into the same thing we are seeing instead of simply following it ourselves, letting God love us into a place of change instead of trying to push other people to it as well. Secondly, beware of religious people. You know the type, and if you've grown up in religious environments, they may be all the people. They may be still living by old expectations and they want you to do so as well. They use guilt and fear as tools to try to manipulate you to the conformity they want.

When you really discover that the only thing that counts is a growing **trust in who God is** expressed in our love for people, that manipulation of religious folks loses its power. No longer do you feel compelled to follow that. You don't have to push them out of your life and go away. Just be wary. Learn to care for others. Watch out for other people around you. You learn how to love them in a different way as that trust in Him grows. Now I love easily and trust carefully. But it is God that I trust!

Volume 3, Day 20: Trust in God – Wary of People

A lot of people confuse love and trust. If I love someone, I'll trust them. You can love people you don't trust or even respect. Love is just having affection for them given that they are children of God, even if not 'born again.' God breathed life into them too. I can love you regardless of whatever character traits you exhibit or don't. Love is a feeling. Trust is an expression.

Trust is something that is earned over time through observation and evaluation. Trust is not all encompassing. If I know that your loyalty to me is such that you would lay down your life for me, then I can trust you with my life. However, just because you might die to save my life, does not indicate that you can be trusted to handle my money or people I value in a way that I can entrust my wealth or children to your care.

Christians are often more gullible than others. We can be easily deceived because they go to our church. Many people want to con you in order to get you to trust them. Then when you do, they violate that trust and steal your valuables.

You can love prolifically, but you should trust cautiously. Trust is the responsibility of the one who entrusts his valuables to another. If you have not done due diligence regarding their character, you may become extremely angry when you find that they have poorly handled what you have given to their care. Even those whom you love might disappoint you sorely in some matters of trust. I have a friend who is known to wreck cars a lot. I will not let him drive any of mine! Maybe you shouldn't let him drive yours either.

Volume 3, Day 21: Create Space and Time for Them

I have observed how my heart has opened to love the least, the last and the lost when I needed to be loved by other people. I thought that's what we all needed to survive. We naturally look out for the neat people, the people we like, the people that are fun to be with.

When God begins to fill up the space in your heart of love and you're not so busy doing all the things you used to do, you're not running to the busyness to hide anymore. So now you've got space, time and energy in your life available when those who need to be loved, who are at broken places emotionally are going through difficult times. Instead of running from them, you can step in.

Create space in your life to be with those who are broken, hurting, or ignored. Make it a point to spend time with them or including, inviting, loving, and enjoying them. Finally be patient with all of them. I love that phrase from Thessalonians. There's not a single relationship in which a little patience won't go a long way.

No, you don't have to make everybody do what you want. And no, you can't love everybody in your life. But as you're growing trust in father's affection for you, it frees you to love other people around you. You'll know what you need to do. You'll know when to get involved and when you should not. Yes, you can love everyone around you. No, you can't meet every need. You will exhaust yourself if you try. But as this growing trust in Father's affection satisfies you, you'll find you have less need of people. When you don't need for them to do what you want, you're able to love them exactly as God wants.

Volume 3, Day 22: Listen to the Right Things

Let's learn to **listen to the right things**. Often religion taught us to listen to the wrong things. We focused on whether we had the right doctrine. And though that's not unimportant, you can have the right doctrine and still not know how to live this life or how to listen to God. We learned about getting other people's approval and attending the right church or going to the right meetings or being under the right leadership or having the right look or pretending to be someone. We were acting better. Somehow we thought that all those things were going to be helpful to this journey. I found that they really aren't.

Let me tell you about eight things that I think are very helpful for people to tune out the signals that are the noise, the static and the distraction, and tune in more of that signal, which includes more of God's heart in the way we live. Let's look at the first one.

Be focused less on appearances. That's both material **appearances**, whether I've got the right clothes and the right look. It's also **pretending** to be better than I am not focusing on what's real in my life. I hear people all the time say, well, if I do that, what are other people going to think? If you're worried about what other people are going to think, you're not going to do well on this journey because you're going to try to meet everybody else's expectation around you. So, learn to focus on what God wants me to be part of right now. What might be on God's heart? Follow that, even if other people, maybe even people very close to you or other people you love don't understand. **Just be the best follower** you can be. And be following God's plans and purposes, just like Jesus did.

Volume 3, Day 23: Guilt, Busyness and Ability

Secondly, **listen for the signal of guilt and fear.**

Religion teaches that those are valuable tools to get you to act right. What we learn by observing the life of Jesus is that His love is what changes us. So begin leaning away from fear and guilt. Actually, just let them die. If you're going to feel guilty if you don't do something, don't do it. Let that guilt die. This will enable you to live in the security of His genuine and deep affection. You really are a love child. And out of that love you can do whatever He asks and whenever He wants to be part of your life. You don't have to rush around, terrorized by fear and guilt, trying and make something happen.

Third, **reduce busyness and complication.**

The life of Jesus is pretty simple. It's simple in that we just need to **follow** him. Do what feels best on our heart each day. And if we don't know what to do, then we don't have to do anything. It's not always about doing something. It's about living true to who you are in the light of who He is. So move away from busyness and complication. Have more margin (availability) in your life for yourself, for Him, and for others that he might want you to engage.

Fourth, **lose confidence in your own abilities.**

I think religion is notorious here. Say, you can do this. Here's the five principles. You've got to work this discipline. You can make this happen. Paul said he lost all confidence in his flesh on this journey. It wasn't human effort that could ever accomplish the work of God. So you want to lean away from that which puts pressure on you to perform and lean into that reflection of God, "What are you doing in me today? And how do I cooperate with that instead of trying to make it happen on our own."

Volume 3, Day 24: Humility, Chaos and Conformity

Five. In your relationships with others, I'd encourage you to be less arrogant and confrontational and be more **gracious and humble**. Express more patience to people around you. Try not to force your opinion on others. Don't demand other people to see it the way you see it. Learn to live inside the freedom of you having your journey and letting them have theirs. There will be that honest moment you need to face that is difficult with somebody, but it won't come when you want it. It's going to come when it's in their best interest, not yours.

Six. **Don't try to avoid the chaos.** So much of our journey has been, well, if we just get things right, God will bless us. So I try to do whatever's easiest, most convenient, whatever's going to be most comfortable for me. We try to avoid the chaos of the world we live in. This is a broken and therefore chaotic world. There's plenty of chaos to go around. Don't live trying to avoid it. Embrace Him in the chaos. Life is what it is. Watch it unfold. God has things to show you. If He has things He wants you to pray about, He'll make that clear to you. You can go with that as well.

Seven. **Drift away from conformity** to what other people want you to do or to be. It may even be people who are spiritual leaders who want you to say certain things and do certain things for them. Avoid conformity of other people's expectations and learn to live in the 'fruit' of the Spirit. His emotions of love, joy, and peace will produce expressions of longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Learn to live in that Spirit's way, not your performance or conformity to others' expectations.

Volume 3, Day 25: Buoyancy and Pleasure in God

Let something very real come from inside you, the Fruit of the Spirit. It is your love for God that leads you to love others in a way that will make you and them more relaxed and gentle. And number eight, finally, you will experience **less frustration and futility**. Such are always evidence of the old creation work. We work hard, we do things. It just doesn't seem to be as fruitful as we thought it would be. Or we end up frustrated because it didn't turn out the way we hoped. Hopefully these eight ideas will help you craft a better relationship and greater trust for God. You can only relax when your trust is only in God's perfect purposes for you and the larger context of the whole of humanity.

Living in this journey with Christ leads to more buoyancy. I love that word. I heard it this summer from someone that said their life in Jesus made them feel more buoyant, lighter, not so exhausted, not so trying to figure out everything and then making it happen. It is living in the freedom and buoyancy of the Holy Spirit that draws us into the life that God has for us. Let those who have made progress in this pleasurable journey with God help you a little bit when you're trying to find that way that God wants you to live.

Our life is a constant adjustment. Things around us constantly change. There is the state of flux which leaves us with more challenges. So, how do we find peace in the middle of the chaos today? You can rest assured that tomorrow will be different from today. Tune in to the Holy Spirit's channel right now and only live in this moment as you listen to Him. You can find that signal! It comes in strong and clear and it lets us know how to live and how to follow him.

ENGAGING God -- Alan - Jacobsen

Volume 3, Day 26: Pruning My Vines

It's winter time, which means it's time to get after the Great Vines and prune them up for a new season. And that reminds me of some of the passages that have meant the most to me in this journey. I hope you find some of those as well for yours. The book of **Galatians**, moving away from a legalistic, performance based life to one inside, believing what you hear and being transformed by love. **Romans chapters 5 through 8** is a passage that talks about how we are so loved. We know that in our heart. And when we know that we know that nothing in this world can separate us from the father's affection. Then there is **1 John chapter 4**. Another favorite is **Hebrews 8, 9, 10, and 11**. Another good one that stirs us into having confidence to come before God, having our heart sprinkled clean.

But probably my favorite one is **John 13, 14, 15 & 16**. It's what we call the upper room discourse. It's Jesus with his disciples for the last time, explaining to them what this relationship is all about. He talks about love changing the whole world, talks about Father has a place in Him for us to dwell. I like the interpretation of that as **God wants to be at home in you and He wants you to be at home in Him**. And that's what it means to become part of the divine community. That's what it means to live deeply in all that God is. And Jesus said, the reason I'm telling you these things is so that My joy might be in you and that your joy might be full. That's bedrock to the work of Jesus in our lives. I think a lot of people think, and I used to think that we're basically disgusting human beings that God can barely tolerate and he wants to clean us all up so he'll be comfortable with us. But I know better now!

Volume 3, Day 27: Discarding Dead Branches

Jesus says the work of God in our lives is so that our joy might be full because His joy dwells in us. And there's that analogy of the vineyard, which brings us to this vine we're pondering today. Jesus says, "We're the branches and He's the vine, and if we remain in Him, we'll bear much fruit." Why does God want us to bear fruit? Well, I think He'd repeat, "...so that My joy might be in you and that your joy might be full." And then He says that to make us fruitful, one of the things He does is He prunes us.

I've pruned a few thousand grapevines in my life. And we're going to take this one on for just a little bit. The object of trying to prune a grape vine is to find the most fruitful branches to have for the next year. So you're cutting off everything that's not going to be part of the fruitfulness of the vine next year and getting it down to the five or six, hopefully good canes that will bear lots of fruit. We pull the rest of them away. So when Jesus talks about making us clean, this is what he's talking about. He says to the disciples, I've already made you clean. I've pruned away all the stuff that keeps us separate from each other so that you can live your life in Me and bear fruit.

It looks pretty severe on the vine. It looks like a lot of things are getting hurt here, but what we're really doing is getting it back to only the good canes that can bear fruit in the year to come. And when you're down to those last five canes, that's what will be fruitful. If you don't prune the vine, you get lots of leaves next year, but you won't get any grapes. So as the vinedresser, God cuts away the things that will sap our strength and diminish our fruit. It hurts, but it is necessary!

Volume 3, Day 28: Discipline IS NOT Punishment

I hear so many people when we talk about God's affection saying, "Yeah, I believe in God's affection. I believe He loves us. But what about that passage in Hebrews? It talks about Him disciplining those that He loves?" I know why you ask. But I grew up thinking discipline and punishment were the same thing. So if anything bad was happening in my life, well that must have been God's punishment because I didn't do good enough.

It's strange that we think of discipline as punishment because discipline isn't about punishment. Discipline is about shaping. It's about training. It's about ordering our lives in a way that we can be pleasing to God and live deeply in his life. So when God trains us, He's just pruning us up so we can be fruitful and it's that simple. And when He gets it down to the four or five canes that will be fruitful, then the other thing He does is wrap those up on a wire. When I get done with this later today, all these canes will be lying along this wire and this vine will be ready to bear fruit next year in the way it produces the greatest amount of fruit.

Well, discipline isn't God punishing you! It's God training you! Why? So that His joy might be in you, that your joy might be full. 1 Peter chapter 4 says it this way, and I'm quoting from the Message version, "Jesus gets the last word on everything." And I love the idea that Jesus is going to be the last person to go through my life, just like my dad was for his vineyard. Whoever picked grapes, pruned vines, and tied vines. My dad was the last one to walk through his vineyard just to make sure everything was arranged as he wanted it to be. Peter continues, "Jesus has been through everything you're going through and more."

Volume 3, Day 29: Whole and Fulfilled

If knowing that Jesus has experienced more hardship than us knows how to help us through ours doesn't encourage you, I don't know what else could. So He says, "Learn to think of your sufferings, whatever pain comes into your life as a weaning from the old sinful habit of always having to have your own way." That's how sin works. I want what I want. I want to get what I need. And when God is trying to put His joy in us that our joy might be full, that means we're not doing life the way we think best. **We know worst** what our own happiness and joy might be. **God knows best.** Then he says, "You'll be free to wake up every morning to do what God wants instead of being tyrannized." That's a good word to describe the flesh. It is being tyrannized by what we want.

The whole process of God training us is pruning us in this season. He is training us to be on the wire. When I move this cane onto the wire, I just can't move it quickly. It'll break. I've got to take it very slowly and let the vine bend because if I break this cane off I will lose all that fruit for this next year. On this one cane there will be 10 or 12 bunches. If I break it off, the fruit will be gone.

I love the analogy of the vineyard. I grew up in one. I wrote a book called *In Season*, which is all about how we embrace this process of fruitfulness. Check it out. I think it will help you understand that *God's training in us is not God trying to make us righteous*. It's God trying to make us whole and fulfilled. And when we're there, then we'll know that His idea of righteousness is to be at home in God, to let His love train us so that we can be His kids in the earth. That's what engaging Him is all about.

Volume 3, Day 30: TRY IT! Don't Give Up..

It's time for you now to find your own wings on this journey and not need someone else to tell you what to do. Maybe you have found your way to that beginning connection. If that's the case, then you're ready to fly. And maybe you don't have the connection yet that you want. Don't give up. This takes time. This is just an encouragement for you to find a way into it. If it hasn't happened yet, relax, you've got time.

This always takes time. All the things that Jesus has to untangle in our hearts, whether it's the lies of the world or the lies of religion that have us performing instead of relaxing into His reality. That's why Jesus told us to keep on asking, keep on knocking. Keep finding your way in, not because God makes it difficult. It's not that. It's because there's so much in us that's has to be settled before we can go on the kind of journey He wants for us. This is a journey of love (emotion) not of actions.

And if you've begun this journey, you know as well as I do that you've just begun. As Paul writes and prays for the Ephesians, "I pray that you would know the height and breadth and depth of this love God has for you. It's like an ocean." It's like that. If you look at God as this vast ocean, the Pacific Ocean, God wants you to mine this depth of His love every day, to just keep an eye out for Him. What insight is He giving you today? What does He drop into your life? Maybe through a song, maybe through a passing comment you hear, maybe something that just stirs deep in your own being. This is a lifetime adventure just to explore who He is in the reality of your life, in the challenges of it, in the hurts of it, in the joys of it. How is God making Himself known to you today?

Volume 3, Day 31: Let It Seep Into Your Soul

How does He love me? How does He make His Presence known in my life? What conversations do I have with other people? I love Paul's expression that you would know together with all the saints, the depth of this love. So these conversations and relationships God will give you going forward, they are going to open up His multifaceted greatness to you. We may be ankle deep into this reality. I might be after this part in my journey, and that may even be generous.

There's enough to explore here today, tomorrow and the rest of my life in this world. There's enough to explore here for eternity, to know God as He really is, to experience Him in His fullness. And Jesus said the purpose of all this for God was that He wanted His joy to be in us so that our joy could be full. This was about you coming to a sense of fullness in the reality of who He is and how much He loves you!

It's not circumstantial. It's not just going to work when life goes well and there's plenty of money in the bank, all is good. His joy being in us is what we need most when our child is sick, when we're unemployed, when we're suffering the rejection of good friends that used to care about us or betrayal. This is the joy that penetrates beyond the reality of our own pleasure or misery. There's so much to explore about God. Relax. Let it come to you in His time. Don't try to force it. Don't white knuckle your way into something. Learn to relax into a greater reality, and then you're going to find that this God has wanted to engage you more than you've ever wanted to engage Him. It takes time as it seeps into your life quite naturally. All we need to do is keep looking, keep seeking, and keep asking.

ENGAGING God -- Alan - Jacobsen

Volume 3, Day 32: Heart and Soul

The Apostle Paul encourages us to be imitators of Jesus Christ. Does this really make sense? Is it possible? We understand the concept, but we also know that we would be poor imitators of either one. So, can we comply?

We think of imitation as acting or talking like someone else. The theater is an example. We watch play actors imitate the characters of the play. We watch the story unfold as it were in real time in front of us. But the real story happened long ago. The better the imitations the greater the reviews are. Since the real players about which the play is written are imperfect, this works out just fine.

However, the real character in Paul's account is too perfect to be imitated. And since the objective is not achievable, we lay down the script. To be sure, there are plenty of scriptures to inform us that we cannot do a good job of imitating the perfect words and actions of Christ. So, instead of following the script in our hand, we grovel in the shadows of guilt and shame repeatedly repenting.

But, wait! We have an '**over study**' within us who can play the part flawlessly. The most important aspect of this dilemma is to consider that Jesus' clarified imitation in John 13 when He told His disciples the real objective. This is also the testimony of faith in Jesus. He said, "... Love each other as much as I love you!" The truth is that the best play acting is that which reflects the **heart and soul** of the original character!

So, **be the best understudy** of the living Christ's Holy Spirit within you and you will not only have the heart and soul that Loves Like Jesus Loves but also God's love will always be expresses itself powerfully in you like it did in Jesus!