

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.

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.