

Podcast 255 God is the Loving Initiator

Welcome to the Building Faith families podcast with Steve Demme where we are continuing our series on God's attributes.

Let's pray: Father, thank You for every opportunity that we have to consider You and draw near to You and learn more about You and Your ways and all the different attributes and characteristics of Your nature that You have revealed in Your Word. I pray that You will help us to go deeper in our knowledge of You. In Jesus' name, amen.

In Ephesians 1, Paul was praying for the Ephesian church. I have an affinity for this church for it seems that we have similar issues. In Ephesians 1:16-17, Paul says that he ceased "not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him."

I thought that's a really interesting prayer that Paul prays, that God would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. That would be one of the primary reasons why we should study God's attributes and His character so that we might know Him more and we would have our knowledge of Him increased.

As we know Him more, we are going to love Him more because He is amazing. He's wonderful. He's perfect. He is everything that is good and righteous and holy, and the more we know Him, the more we are going to love him.

As a dad I frequently think of "what kind of dad was God the Father to His Son Jesus?" I want to be a godly dad. I could read books about being a good dad which are helpful however I think it is better to get my attention focused on the perfect heavenly Dad, which is God the Father. Meditating on His attributes and His character helps me become more like Him.

Bill Bright, who was the founder of campus Crusade was a special godly man. He wrote a book on the attributes of God. I heard him speak about the practice he had of thinking about God each night before he fell asleep. What a great way to fill our mind with good wholesome thoughts and what is a more wholesome thought than God himself?

Today, I'd like to talk about God being the loving initiator. God loves us so much, that He sent his Son into the world. God was the one Who had the idea. He loved us so much that He wanted to restore His relationship with His wayward children. He wants to draw us back to Himself. He knew that He had to remove the sin that is separating us from having a close communion with Him. He took the first step in this process of reconciliation by sending His Son. God so loved each of us, that He took the initiative to send His Son.

Several years ago I discovered this truth in Psalm 23, which I had long ago memorized as "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." In the New Living Translation, this passage reads "Surely your goodness and unfailing love shall pursue me all the days of my life." That's a very different thought than some someone trailing behind me like a little brother. Pursuing is much stronger than following. This is a description of God taking the initiative to have His love overtake us. It is His goodness and unfailing love that are going to pursue us all the days of our life. This is how much love he has for us.

In Romans 5:8 it says, "while we were sinners, Christ died for us." He didn't wait till we cleaned up our act. He didn't wait till we were crying out for help like the children of Israel did when they were in the land of Egypt. He took the initiative and He died for us, while we were messy sinners. This is something that blesses me to think that God loves me enough to take the initiative to pursue me, and die for me, and send His son to take my place and remove my sin.

He's taken all the initiative and he's pursuing us and I'll get a little ahead of myself here, but that's one of the reasons I want to pursue each of my children. It's why I want to go after people who perhaps don't know God, follow through on relationships with people and love all my enemies and love my neighbor and love people that don't know Christ, because if I'm going to be like God, I am going to pursue people, I am going to take the initiative, I'm not going to sit back and wait until their lifestyle lines up with mine or their political thoughts lineup with my thoughts or see which church they go. I want to pursue people, I want to take the initiative.

Here are a couple more verses which corroborate this concept. "In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10) "We have come to know and believe the love that God has for us, God is love. whoever abides in love, abides in God and God abides in him." (1 John 4:16)

Notice those three words, "God is love." Those few words are packed. They don't say that God is loving or God chooses to love us or God has good days and bad days, but God is love all the time, eternally. God doesn't change and God is love. Every part of his being is love everything He does flows from love, every action that he takes is rooted in the fact that He is love. Paul in first Corinthians 16 says, "Let all that you do, be done in love". That's an exhortation for me as a follower of Jesus, as a believer in Jesus, as a lover of God, to let everything I do be done in love. But that takes work on my part, that takes transformation by the Spirit. This is an effort for us, but not for God who does not need to be transformed – everything He does is done in love.

Paul says in Ephesians 5, "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." 1 Corinthians 13: "The greatest of these is love" and he spells out what love looks like. However God is love. He is the original, He's the One we're emulating. He is what we are becoming. As we go on in our Christian life we are being transformed into His Image, and becoming more like God. The more we become like Him, the more we think about Him, the more we respond to His love, then the more we are able to walk in love and let everything we do be done in love.

In Revelation 3 when John in the Spirit is talking to the church in Laodicea, which I always find interesting, because he is speaking to the church, to people that believe in Him, and yet he says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears My voice and opens the door I will come into him, and eat with him and he with Me." But I thought they already knew Him, I thought they already believed in Him. This invitation is given to people that have already responded to His offer of salvation and received Jesus as their Savior.

My takeaway is that God continues to pursue us even after we have initially responded to Him. Even after we have received His gift of eternal life, He continues to knock at the door of our heart and go deeper in our relationship. He gently knocks until we hear His voice, and open the door. I hope that we will each seek to know Jesus more fully present in our lives, and as we invite Him in, He'll come into us and share a meal with us, as friends.

I've been really blessed a lot lately, by Psalm 145, and I'd like to close by reading it. I love how the words in this Psalm are focused on God's nature and his character. It reveals who God is, which helps me as I meditate on His attributes.

Psalm 145

I will extol You, my God and King, and bless Your name forever and ever.

Every day I will bless You and praise Your name forever and ever.

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall commend Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.

On the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works, I will meditate.

They shall speak of the might of Your awesome deeds, and I will declare Your greatness.

They shall pour forth the fame of Your abundant goodness

and shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The LORD is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made.

All Your works shall give thanks to You, O LORD, and all Your saints shall bless You!
They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and tell of Your power,
to make known to the children of man Your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of Your kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. [The LORD is faithful in all His words and kind in all His works.]
The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season.
You open your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing.

The LORD is righteous in all His ways and kind in all his works.
The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.

He fulfills the desire of those who fear Him; He also hears their cry and saves them.
The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.

My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and let all flesh bless His holy name forever and ever.

I think it would be fun and very edifying to be sitting in a room with a group of believers and simply share which one of those verses really touches your heart? Which attribute is especially meaningful to you. There are so many packed in this Psalm. The Lord is gracious, merciful, and slow to anger. He's abounding in steadfast or unflinching love.

The Lord is good to everybody. In everything He does, He's kind. That's the one that gets me, it says it twice in there: He's kind in all his works. He's loving in everything He does. This is our Dad, our God and the more I read these words and meditate on His goodness, the more I love Him. And hopefully He rubs off on me and I will love others as He has loved me.

I'd close with the song that helps me comprehend God's care and affection – Loved with Everlasting Love, which is #66 in Hymns for Family Worship.

Loved with everlasting love, Led by grace that love to know,

Spirit breathing from above, Thou hast taught me it is so.
O this full and perfect peace, O this transport all divine;
In a love which cannot cease, I am His and He is mine.

Heav'n above is softer blue, earth around is sweeter green,
Something lives in ev'ry hue Christless eyes have never seen.
Birds with ladders songs o'er flow, flow'rs with deeper beauties shine
Since I know, as now I know, I am His and He is mine.

Things that once were wild alarms, cannot now disturb my rest;
Closed in everlasting arms, pillowed on the loving breast.
O to lie forever here, doubt and care and self resign
While He whispers in my ear, I am His and He is mine.

His forever, only His; who the Lord and me shall part?
Ah, with what a rest of bliss Christ can fill the loving heart.
Heav'n and earth may fade and flee, firstborn light in gloom decline,
But while God and I shall be, I am His and He is mine.

Let's pray: Father thank You for loving us. Thank you for taking the initiative to express and convey Your love for us. Thank You for sending the Spirit of God to shed Your love abroad in our hearts. Thank You for quickening us, so that we have our eyes open, not only to our sin but to our Savior. And thank You for teaching us more about Jesus and His love for us today. Answer Paul's prayer for us by giving us a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. in Jesus' name, amen.