

BFF430 Rebuilding Our Knowledge of God Who Loves

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith Families" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: I'm well. I'm about to go vote in a few minutes.

Scott: Me too. Well, in a few minutes, hours, sometime today, I'll do it.

Steve: I'm going to make sure I take some work with me because I think the lines are going to be long. It's beautiful weather out here. Sometimes when it's rainy, it dampens -- no pun intended -- people's enthusiasm for getting outside, but it's going to be 75 here today in November, so it's amazing.

Scott: Your puns are always intended.

Steve: That's true. I can't stop them.

Scott: We know.

Steve: We've already talked about rebuilding our understanding of God in terms of He's kind. He knows us, and this next one was very particularly enlightening to me when I was going through my dark year, which turned into my light year.

Going through that time, I was finally addressing my stuff. For the first time, I was thinking about things like how I thought of God, and I was asking questions of God, and articulating my own condition, which is a good place to begin. I think that you can't get to point B until you first figure out where point A . For me point A was, I didn't really believe that God loved or liked me.

I knew He loved me because I was part of the world, but I didn't feel like He liked me. I just felt like I was back in the corner of the big room, where there's a bunch of people present and I was just happy to be there, but I didn't really think that I would ever sit up in the front row and see Him smiling at me.

That's a strange thing to admit, but once I figured out that this was an issue, then I was able to begin to address it with God's help. Of course, my journey in 2012 began when I asked God to help me to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. In response to that prayer He began revealing how much He loved me.

Finally, I said to God, "This is nice, but I've been asking You to help me to love You more," and as soon as I did, this verse came into my mind, "We love because He first loved us." 1 John 4:19.

So I hope that people listening today will receive two things. Number one, ask. Ask God to show you your point A. Where are you in your relationship with Him? How much do you believe that God loves you?

Because how much you believe He loves you contributes to how much you love Him, which is the first and great commandment. And ask God to reveal his character to you. Do you really see God as kind, or do you see Him as harsh? Those kind of questions.

This is why we're talking about rebuilding our understanding of God according to Scripture because this is the only standard we can trust. We can't trust our own gut. We can't trust our own understanding. We've got to lean on His word.

Let's pray, and then we'll jump in.

Father, we are desirous that You will help us to see where we are in our relationship with You. I know that you'll do it in a kind way. You'll do it in a gentle way because that's who You are. You're meek and lowly of heart, but You'll also do it because You know us. You know us. This is what we just talked about last time.

You know us deeply. You know us well. You know us intimately. You know us better than we know ourselves. So I pray for Your spirit to help us today to take an inventory and figure out where we are in our relationship with You and how we view You. Is it biblical, or is it colored and shaped by our own experiences, our own childhood, our own wounds, and everything else?

We want to break through from all those things and embrace the scripture. Give us ears to hear Your word today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: Way back in 2012, not only did I realize that God was helping me to take in His love, but I was also intrigued by the church in Ephesus:

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lamp stands, says this: 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.'" (Revelation 2:1-4)

When I read that, I thought, "Wow. That's pretty much me." I have done a lot of stuff for God and His kingdom. I have served. I've worked. I've labored. I've ministered. I've preached. I've led youth groups, all these things, and I wasn't growing weary. I was enduring, but then I wondered: "Have I left my first love. Is loving God the most important thing to me?"

My next thought was, "I wonder if Paul ran into the same situation when he was laboring and ministering to the church in Ephesus." I reread the whole six chapters of Ephesians, and I found wonderful expressions of God's love and grace. It's like I could feel Paul's heart working hard to help these Ephesians to get how much they were loved so they, in return, would love Him.

One passage was Ephesians 2:4-9. "God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace, you have been saved, and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

I could feel Paul's great desire to get the gospel to these people. These were, I would say, intelligent people because they'd done their due diligence. "You apostles, you say you're apostles, but..." and they examined them. They found them to be wrong. They endured. They were persevered.

This was a pretty special congregation that had done a lot of good things for Christ, but he said, "Yes, but you're missing the prime objective. You need to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength."

As I continued to read through Ephesians, I found this wonderful prayer in Ephesians 3. "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you." I can almost hear him say, "Ephesians, I want you to get this. I want you to be strengthened with power through His spirit in your inner being."

Last week we discussed how transformation happens from within. Notice the rest of his prayer: "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge."

I think the Ephesian church had their theology all lined up. I think they knew how to spot error, but He wanted them to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that they may be filled with all the fullness of God.

I hope that even if you can't listen to the rest of the podcast, that at least you can pray and ask God to help you to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. If you want to, use these words in Ephesians 3, which I did. I asked God to answer that prayer for me, and I used those words in my own prayer.

There were two other prayers that I prayed during that time. I don't know why. I still haven't figured this out about myself, but I was getting these amazing insights into God's love, and yet in the morning, I struggled. I felt like I had to start over every morning renewing my mind, being transformed by the truth. I don't know why.

Then I ran across two wonderful scriptures in the Psalms. Psalm 90:14 says, "Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love that we may rejoice and be glad all our days," which I turned it around and put it in the singular, "Satisfy me in the morning with Your steadfast love that I may rejoice and be glad all our days." I would just roll over and pray that.

Another prayer I prayed was Psalm 143:8, which is similar. "Let me hear in the morning of Your steadfast love, for in You, I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to You, I lift up my soul." That year I was the asking machine. I was hurting and so I did a lot of asking. I did a lot of praying just to survive, but I also did a lot of asking because I wanted God to work deep in my heart, and I didn't know what else to do.

One morning, I woke up, and even before I could start praying, it just seemed like God was a million miles away, and I didn't have time to go search the scriptures and sing hymns and pray. I just sighed, and said with an attitude, "Do You still love me as much today as You did yesterday?" When I did, God gave me a heavenly picture.

I don't know what word to use to describe it, an illumination, a vision. I saw Jesus standing in the clouds. I was in an airplane at 30,000 feet or whatever, and I was looking out the window, and I saw Jesus standing in the clouds, blue sky all around, bright, his arms were spread wide, and he was laughing, and he said, "Of course, I do. I don't have any baggage."

I went, "Wow." I've never had anything like that happen before, and I thought, "Is this biblical?" Because I know the scriptures well enough. 1 John 4:1 says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God."

So I thought, "I need to test the spirits because this is new territory for me." So four things. The first one was, it was light, and the first thought in my mind was God is light, and 1 John 1:5 declares, "This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all," and I checked the box. OK. God is light.

Then he was smiling. "Of course, I do. I don't have any baggage. Of course, I love you. But then, it says in 1 John 4:16, "We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us." God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. The three words, God is love. I call this an illumination sometimes because that concept was illuminated to me that God, in His very essence, is love. Now this is what we're focusing on. We're focusing on who God is. What's His nature and character? He's kind. He knows us, and He's also filled with light, and He's filled with love. I don't know what makes up God. I don't know if He has little atoms or something, but every one of those atoms has a cross on it because God is love. He doesn't have good days and bad days. He's not loving. He loves us all the time because that's Who He is.

The third idea that came to me was, "And God never changes." He's light. He's love. Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Malachi 3:6, "I, the Lord, do not change." He's God. He's love. He's light.

So I had three boxes checked off, and then I thought, "I wonder why His arms were spread wide." So I prayed and said, "What about His arms?" The Holy Spirit took me to Luke 15, the story of the prodigal. "He arose," -- he, the prodigal -- "And came to his father, but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to his father, 'I have sinned against heaven, and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, put it on him, put a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet.'" This father had his arms spread wide because he ran and embraced him.

If you've ever had somebody run and embrace you, I tell you, I've got grandkids that when papa gets out of the car, they run and embrace me. They love me, and I run and embrace them, and I give them huge hugs because I love them.

This is a picture of God that I didn't have. I didn't believe when I got out of the car at heaven's gates that the Father would come running and embrace me.

I do now. I didn't then, but God has helped to transform my thinking, and during this season, when I was asking God to help me to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, the specific passage that helped me the most was, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you," and that sealed the deal.

If He loves me as much as He loved His son, then that's a lot. That's perfect. I can't think of better love. We talked about this a few weeks ago when we were reading John

17 where Jesus is talking to His Dad, and His prayer is amazing because you can tell that He and the Father, they love each other to pieces.

So when Jesus says, "The same way that My Dad loves Me, that's how much I love you," I got it. Even though I understood it, I began studying passages on the love of God because transformation to me means marinating in the truth.

We sing a song, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." I have given my testimony along this line to many people. Oftentimes, I'll ask them, "You know, the Bible tells us that Jesus loves us, but not using **John 3:16**. Can anybody tell me another passage?" The people normally get quiet.

I realized we say that we know that God loves us, but we haven't done the work. We haven't done our homework. We haven't searched the scriptures to see if these things are true. Now I've done this, and I'm going to see if I can add it to the PDF that I attached to this, the transcript for this talk, but I have almost eight pages of how has Jesus loved us.

I have other studies on how has the Spirit loved us, how has the Father loved us, but now I'm going to now read a whole page of scripture, and as you listen, lean back and soak it in.

Lamentations 3:21–24. "This I call to mind, and, therefore, I have hope. The steadfast love of Jehovah never ceases." Got that? "The steadfast love of Jehovah never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning."

Zephaniah 3:17. "Jehovah your God is in your midst, a mighty one Who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by His love."

John 3:16. Listen to it afresh. "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."

John has a lot to say about the love of God. His name means "beloved," and he was beloved. When you visualize the Lord's supper and you see John sitting next to Jesus with his head on his chest, it's appropriate.

I have a son named John. He'll lean on me, and he'll put his arm around me. We'll walk into restaurants arm in arm. He loves well because he's been loved well, and John, the beloved disciple, was the beloved disciple, and he was also the one that talked the most, I think, about God's love.

John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you."

Romans 5:8, "God shows His love for us and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Well, that passages crushes the false idea that somehow God loves us more if we do more stuff for Him because He showed His love while we were not performing. We were His enemies. We were sinners. We were a mess, and He still died for us.

Romans 8:38–39, "I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor

depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing can separate us.

1 John 3:16, "By this, we know love that He laid down His life for us."

1 John 3:1, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God, and so we are."

1 John 4:10, "This is love. Not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

So when I'm tempted to not believe that God loves me, I recall God is love. God never changes. Nothing can separate me from His love. Those are my go to's. Those are the when when the devil was tempting Jesus, he responded with scripture. Well, when I'm tempted, I can respond to scripture. There they are. God is love. God never changes. God is love. Nothing can separate me from it. All right, brother. There you go.

Scott: Thank you.

Steve: You're welcome.

Scott: I needed that today, and I need that every day, which is kind of the point, I think, that we do need those things every day. Because I don't know if it's just a consequence of the fall that we forget or our hearts forget every morning, but this is not unique to you or to me. I've heard countless Christians talk about needing to remember God's love first thing in the morning, and it makes a big difference.

Like I said, it might be a result of the fall. It might be Satan is just active in the morning trying to make us forget that I find renouncing Satan and embracing the love of God in the morning is really helpful, and when I don't do that, I end up having a rough day sometimes.

This is absolutely essential, and whatever it takes, I mean, if it's songs, if it's reading the scripture, if it's praying, if it's a combination of all of them, if it's something else that helps you, whatever you can do to receive God's love in your heart, that's the objective.

Steve: Absolutely, and David, I think the reason David was David, is what he affirms in Psalm 56:9, "This I know that God is for me." When we know that God has our back, that He loves us, that He doesn't change and nothing can separate us from His love is transformative. We can take a deep breath. We operate differently when we know that God's on our team. Amen.

Scott: When you believe the hardcore stuff like, people talk about having limiting beliefs and how you have to change your beliefs to be able to change your life and your actions and whatever and be successful and stuff like that, and they'll talk themselves into believing things by repeating -- what do they call those things -- daily affirmations and things like that?

Steve: Yes.

Scott: Which, you know, I kind of take maybe there's some value, maybe there's not. I don't know. Anyway, I know there's power in God's word. I know there's power in asking His spirit to fill me with His...Well, to fill me with His spirit and to fill me with

His love to do what you did and just ask Him to help you love Him, and yet He turns around and just shows you how much He loves you. That all works.

I know that works. Me looking in the mirror saying, "I'm good, I'm great, and doggone it, people like me," it's not going to work for me. You know?

Steve: I agree. Affirmations in and of themselves and aren't rooted in scripture are wishful thinking, but those that are rooted in scripture, that's where the transformation comes from. I put together all that stuff we talked about last week on transformation, is at the bottom of this transcript.

Steve: I added footnotes where I took seven words in Romans 12:1-2, and I looked them up in the Hebrew and the Greek, and put them in there to assist us in being transformed by the renewing of our mind. I don't know where else to be transformed except by His spirit and His word. That's it.

By the way, if anybody's interested, I wrote a whole book on this, "Knowing God's Love," which is a result of all these studies that I did to figure out that God really loves me because I think that's fundamental.

The idea of rebuilding God, is we're rethinking our pillars. God is kind. God knows us. God loves us, and we're going to do a couple more pillars, but once we are building our house on those pillars, then when those pillars are attacked by storms and hurricanes and tornadoes, which they will be, we'll be able to stand differently. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for loving us to pieces. When we have trouble taking it in, but Your spirit knows how to transform us from the inside out, and I pray that You'll renew our mind, renew our thinking, help us to articulate where we are so that we can ask You for help to get from point A to point B.

Thank You for my journey. Thank You for being so faithful. Thank You for helping me to get what David had. This I know that God is for me. In Jesus' name, do it for all of us, I pray. Amen.

Scott: Amen. That's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith Families podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemme@gmail.com. If you have a question for me, you can reach me at scott@unsocializedmedia.com. Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.