

john 15:4
Abide in ME



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

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The week of January 26, 2020

A NEW SONG

Psalm 40:1-5

This week's edition of the Abide will be slightly different given the special nature of Sunday's message. In your Growth Group gathering you will have the opportunity to reflect upon Pastor Mike's message. You are also encouraged as a group to carve out substantial time in prayer. As you pray, ask God to make His purpose clear for Mike and his family and for our church.

To Experience God's Love

by Colin Smith¹

Many Christians live at a great distance from a felt experience of the love of God. So much Christianity in the West is shallow and satisfied. It affirms a creed, but it so often lacks spiritual life. Across the country there are millions of people who have a faith, who've been brought up in the church to believe Jesus died and rose, but they have no living experience of God's love.

We need this prayer from 2 Thessalonians 3:5: "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's patience." This is a prayer for Christians. Paul is writing to the church. It's a prayer that God will do something in us who believe but do not always feel that God loves us. I don't want to be there! And neither do you. People who are not Christians endure great pain and carry great sorrows. They do it by gritting their teeth. They do it in Britain with a stiff upper lip. Paul is saying to these believers in this verse, "I want something better for you. I want your soul to be filled with the love of God."

Testimonies of Experiencing God's Love

Let me give you some real-life examples of the love of God flooding a person's soul, so that you will be encouraged to pray for more of this love yourself.

John Wesley

Wesley was a pastor. He had preached on two continents—in England and in Georgia. Something happened to him on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738, while he was listening to a man read the preface to Luther's work on Romans. Here is Wesley's description of what happened:

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. Amazingly, Wesley had been preaching in church for years, but now he tasted the love of God. He had a new sense of its sweetness. His life and ministry were transformed.

Jonathan Edwards

In 1737, Edwards rode out into the woods for a time of prayer and wrote of his extraordinary experience: "I had a view, that was for me extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God . . . and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love." He went out into the woods, tied up his horse, and saw the love of Christ in a way that he had not seen it before. He had a "view" of it. He got a glimpse of it. Its sweetness came home to his soul.

Blaise Pascal

One of the most intense descriptions of this kind of experience comes from Blaise Pascal. Pascal is especially interesting because he was a mathematician and a scientist. It would be easy for some of us to dismiss this loving call by saying that there are certain more emotional types of people who have these experiences.

Pascal had an extraordinary experience of the love of God that lasted for about two hours. He scribbled some notes of what happened to him, and then he sewed them into the inside of his coat, where they were found after his death:

This day of grace 1654
From about half past ten at night, to about half after midnight
Fire!
God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob
Not of the philosophers and scholars.
Security, feeling, joy, peace
God of Jesus Christ . . .
Greatness of the human soul . . .
Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy . . .
Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ
May I never be separated from him.

What happened to Pascal? His heart was “directed into the love of God and the patience of Christ.” These testimonies show an amazing work of God in the hearts of men, causing them to experience God’s love and Christ’s patience in a new way.

Power to Know God’s Love

Recently, a seminary professor asked 120 of her students this question: “Do you believe that God loves you?” Out of 120 Christian students preparing for ministry, how many do you think said, “yes”? Two! The rest gave answers like this: “I know I’m supposed to say, ‘Yes’ . . . “I know the Bible says he loves me . . . but I don’t feel it,” or “I’m not sure I can really say I believe it.” How can this be? Jonathan Edwards used a simple analogy to get to the heart of this problem: “There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness.” You can know honey is sweet, because someone tells you, but you don’t really know its sweetness until you’ve tasted it. You can know God loves you because your Sunday school teacher told you, but you don’t really know God’s love until you’ve tasted his love.

Here are concrete steps to experience more of God’s love.

Become dissatisfied with your present spiritual experience. Cultivate a holy discontent. The person who prays this prayer is looking for something more than he or she already has: “Lord, direct my heart into your love.”

We live in a “been there, done that” culture, and the great danger is in developing a “been there, done that” form of Christianity: “I know God loves me, that Jesus died for me and that my sins are forgiven. So, what’s next?” Then one day someone says, “Do you really believe that God loves you?” And your shallowness is exposed. A. W. Tozer says in *The Pursuit of God*,

“We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found him, we need no more seek him. . . . In the midst of this great chill there are some who will not be content with shallow logic. They want to taste, to touch with their hearts the wonder that is God. I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God.”

Some of you think God is cold and aloof and harsh and demanding, and these thoughts are deeply rooted in your mind. You need this prayer: “Father, direct my heart into your love!” Ask God, and go on asking, until like the snow that melted in the warmth this week, your heart begins to thaw in the warmth of the love of God.

Gaze into the love of God in Jesus Christ. Psalm 27:4 says, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”

People who don’t like each other will glance at one another. People who like each other will look at one another. People who are desperately in love will gaze at each other.

Isaac Watts used another word to say the same thing in his famous hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” Survey, gaze, ponder and meditate on the love of God. May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s patience. Something in this article may awaken in you—deep calls to deep. Maybe you’re thinking, *I want more of what he’s talking about.* Settle it today, in your heart and in your mind, that you will pursue a sweeter taste, a deeper experience, a clearer glimpse of the love of God and the patience of Christ. Go after it. And don’t ever stop.

¹Colin Smith is senior pastor of the Orchard Evangelical Free Church in Arlington, Ill. ©Lightstock

STEP ONE . . .

OBSERVATION

What does the text say?

PSALM 40:1-5

I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.

2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him.

4 Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.

5 Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.

None can compare with you; were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.

STEP TWO

Prayer

*Our holy Father, we praise and adore You.
Your splendor is without equal,
Your love is better than life,
and Your grace knows no limits.*

*No one knows our needs better than You
or gives new mercies like You.*

*Father, thank You for Your pit-rescuing love.
We all have a number of pits from which You have been faithful to rescue us,
and others for which we now trust You for rescue.*

*Fill us today with a new song,
A song of deep grace,
endless mercy, and abiding love.
Amen.*

STEP THREE . . .

REFLECTION

How is the text to be lived out personally?

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the Word but doers ~ James 1:22

You're encouraged to journal your answers to the following questions in order to apply what you've learned this week.

1. How is God making Himself known to you?
2. What is going on beneath the surface of your life that Jesus is trying to change?
3. How is God calling you to serve your family, community, and world?

Read the Bible: Reading Plan for 2020

Sunday, January 26 thru Saturday, February 2, 2020
Genesis 27, Matthew 26, Esther 3, Acts 26; Gen. 28, Matt. 27,
Est. 4, Acts 27; Gen. 29, Matt. 28, Est. 5, Acts 28; Gen. 30,
Mark 1, Est. 6, Romans 1; Gen. 31, Mark 2, Est. 7, Rom. 2;
Gen. 32, Mark 3, Est. 8, Rom. 3; Gen. 33, Mark 4, Est. 9, Rom. 4