

Before Jesus came, God had tried in so many ways to demonstrate His love for humankind.

*He had shown His power and wisdom in the creation of the world.

*He had shown His wrath in the flood in Noah's time.

*His steadfast faithfulness was made clear in the covenant which He made with the children of Israel.

* He displayed His expectations for all people when He gave the 10 Commd.

For years and years-by demand, threat, and promise- God had made Himself known to His chosen people. In Jesus, however, God was brought into focus for us as never before. In His Son, God shows himself as one who has a personal love for every human being. An awareness of God's love can completely change your life.

I was spending a summer month in Boston, Massachusetts, with a dear friend whom I adored like a big brother. He was teaching ROTC in Boston's Tuft's University, and I would take a bus or sub into Cambridge to wander over to the Harvard Square and learn about the big Cities of the Northeast. We would meet for lunch and I would get a preview from his eyes and then wander and search some more till evening. That was the coldest city I have ever been in, Boston. I can't tell you how many times I stopped to ask for help with directions, expecting the gracious ways of Southern people. To my surprise, I found people too busy to talk, too distracted, and even just gruffly disgusted to be bothered! I began to count the times I was bumped, brushed into, or just plain ignored. Several times I was just plain cussed out for being a bother! The count mounted to 28 times one afternoon. The next morning I was determined to beat my record as I mounted the morning bus. The bus seemed more crowded than ever before, and with each new push and shove my exasperation grew. Until I asked myself if my adventure from the sunny south was worth bucking this rude crowd every day. My eyes wandered over the advertisements overhead of the standing crowd, and my attention was grabbed by a tiny sentence someone had scrawled on the bottom of one of the ads:

GOD IS LOVE, AND HE LOVES YOU.

Suddenly it was as if I was seeing with new eyes. Looking at the words again-then at the people around me, I no longer saw an irritable, pushing, shoving crowd, but children of God, just as they were. I remember at that moment, how my own feelings of irritation and frustration were replaced by a different sense of compassion and genuine feeling for their personal struggles, their pains, the daily news, the pressures, and the problems.

Certainly I had problems of my own, but the simple inscription above their heads, "GOD IS LOVE," stayed with me all day and when I left the bus. God had spoken to my own ragged heart in whispers through it all.

Who can describe the love of God? Poets, musicians, artists have used every figure of speech to portray that love, but they have never exhausted the possibilities, and can only give a partial and imperfect description. The incarnation, the life, and the death of our Lord Jesus Christ have shown us the love of God seeking the absolute best for us, God's eternal plans, the salvation of every person on the face of the earth.

When challenged by a curious and very dignified religiously astute crowd, Jesus summed up all their religious strivings by saying , *"All God asks and wants of you can be said in one word, that is to love him, to really open up your heart to him and let him be your friend."* Those are not His exact words then, but I bet Jesus would have said it in those terms in our day. After all, part of what really inflamed those people who managed the religious life of their day, and ultimately put them on the death track for Jesus was that he made the walk with God so "user friendly!" But they loved the décor and the adornment of a formalized religion, and they wanted it to be hard for folks to get in, so to speak!

The word of LOVE announced by Jesus is still a complete denial of all that! And we must hear this warning to our generation as well. IF we are intent on making it hard for people to get close to God, because we like it our way, we are running against all that Jesus brought! "Let the little children come!" God is Love, and He loves you! Come and get it!

Then how do we love God? John was careful to instruct his listeners. We must listen too. Here are 4 ways I believe will help you love God.....

(You may use your notes here:)

- 1. First, We COMMUNE with God**, in John's terms it means God is in me and I am in Him.

Our daughter, Maryanne, called from college last week. She had been feeling overwhelmed for some time, what with the last push of a senior year, social chair of a busy sorority and all her drivenness to do all things with excellence, better than the last time.....she just wears herself out! And she and her friends had just received the news of a friend who had graduated last year, who had gone to Colorado to work. And driving home from work had been killed on an icy road! She was devastated. Rena took the call. Soon I heard Rena say she could come the next day and cook supper for her suitemates, and get some personal time with Maryanne. She did that and that seemed to help so much. I read the emails of thanks.

Mom, Thanks for being there for me, for all of us! Thanks for your good words, we needed them so much! I had looked forward to our visit all day long!

Sounds so simple, doesn't it. But that is what it means to COMMUNE with God, to go to the Lord with our lives, our needs, our thoughts, concerns, our pain. He IS there for us. He DOES have a word for us, He WILL give direction and satisfy our deepest need. He lives in us, really! And we then grow into living in Him. SAVIOR, a name meaning saving guide, a power beyond all our hopes and needs. We need a Savior. But more, we need to build up some time with him, daily, so we don't just have to run in desperation when we run out of steam or out of answers.

7 minutes with God was a first spiritual discipline I learned as I came to faith, and I soon learned that like a fire, this home hearth needs someone to keep throwing a log on to keep that fire warming, cooking, and sometimes drawing the whole place to its nurturing care. **3 minutes** of the Word of God, **2 minutes** in silent reflection and applying it to my life today, and **2 minutes** in Thankful and Hearty Prayer. So simple! But life changing!

So ONE IMPORTANT way to love God is to COMMUNE with Him.....
“(v. 16) *“Whoever lives in love, will live in God, and God in Him!”*”

Make an appointment and spend time just like you and I would with a friend! God is waiting for those treasured moments with you, as a friend would. Will you keep that appointment? That’s LOVING GOD.

William Barclay, the great Scotsman and theologian, writing about this verse, demands that we remember our privileges, to be called the children of God! That’s our NAME as God sees us. In the early generation after Jesus, Crystom preached a sermon about raising children. In it he said we should give our children a biblical name, a truly ggreat scriptural name, and continually tell the story of the character of origin. This he said, would give them a standard to live up to, some sense of purpose in the Lord’s world as they grow up.

Every Christian gas the privilege of being called a child of God! Just like belonging to a great team, or a winning school, or a great army battalion that raised the flag, or accomplished a decisive victory, or a part of a family of reknown, like the royal family of England, as these give us a reason o hold our heads ip high, to aspire, to notlet our team down, to hear the name of God’s family as our own will keep our steps ordered on the right path, and set our hearts climbing!

And the Biblical word to us here is not that we are just called the children of god, we ARE the children of God! As Barclay would say, by natue we are creatures of God, but it is by God’s grace, His loving –kindness so undeserved, that we become a child of God.

2 Words are associated with The parent child relationship, Fatherhood and paternity. Paternity indicates a relationship of responsibility to care for and provide for a ccjhild. Fatherhood indicates an intimate, loving relationship. We are all related to God in paternity, but in His chosen Fatherhood, we are children of God when God approaches us as He has in His Son Jesus, and we respond.

WILL YOU KEEP THE APPOINTMENT?

2. Second, We COMPLETE love by fulfilling what God has said. This means there are requirements to love as there are to the vows we make in marriage or a family or friendships. When we keep our pledged word, we fulfill the intention of those words, those vows.

When we do as God has said, we complete the word, the promise of love. God brooded over creation and spoke life into existence. The creation responded as God spoke, and His word was completed. Isaiah has said that God's word will not return to Him void, meaning, once spoken His intentions are out there like a transmission in cyberspace until they find their mark, are received, and the word is carried out by his Servants and His world.

We accomplish the intention of God as He speaks the word of life. The fulfillment of His plan is made complete as we do as he has said. We are pretty important in God's way, we the church. We are under His directive to share the gospel with the whole world, and that world will not return, or be completed until it is accomplished by His church! We've got Mail!

3. Third, And I love this assurance of what will happen deep within each of us as God's children.....This is something we all desperately need, even expect as Christians, and rightly so.....

We have CONFIDENCE in the end, as John says, at the judgment, verse 17, because we are like Him in this world. It means that because we love Him, and because we love what He loves, and because we love our brothers and sisters, which is a whole lot to swallow (so that we have to grow into it every day) that because we are like Him, we come to anticipate all the glories of **HEAVEN** as our destination, just as Jesus did, as He faced the cross so courageously, so resolutely and faithfully!

Don't we all dread death! Yet it is coming for us all. As one friend called it, "**the Potato Salad Promise!**" *One day all of us will give up our last breath, be taken from our homes, dressed in our best, lowered into a hole in the ground, have a bit of dirt thrown on our faces, and all our family will go to the church and eat potato salad!!* Yes, it is coming to all of us!

But the Bible means to give us such a powerful change in our hearts, filled up with God, and living in His way, that we will have what Jesus had and promised to every one of us! Life everlasting!

This is the CONFIDENCE..... as John says again in 1 John 5:14,
“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the CONFIDENCE we experience in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if He hears us-whatever we ask-we know that we have whatever we asked of Him”..... Such Confidence!

Are you one who answers the question of heaven by saying humbly, “Well I hope so!” Well, we can change that. We can say, “Yes, I am going there! I may not have my bags packed, and I confess I want to stay here as long as I possibly can, “*but,*” in the words of the apostle, “*I know whom I have believed/ and am persuaded/ that He is able/ to keep that which I’ve committed/ unto Him against that day!*”Such Confidence!

I have resisted much talk of heaven through most of my days and ministry, but the older I get, and the experience of the death of my dear father, I am slowly joining the ranks of the confident ones, even those who are looking forward to the day when He calls me home to see His face, to receive my inheritance, to rest from my labors. And I don’t deserve one iota of it. Jesus gave it to me and to you as His completion of the word of God spoken and accomplished!...Such Confidence!

That brings glory to our Savior, that we anticipate with His CONFIDENCE, the fulfillment of His promise to us. So get your expectations up, dear friends! You’ve got a lot to look forward to! There is more to come!

4. And FOURTH, and last, We accept God’s COMMAND,..... TO LOVE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

In 1 John 3:16, which Alyssa read for us, the Bible identifies this love.....
“This is how we know what love is: “Jesus laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need.....” What more can we say but that we have a long way to go on this one. We who live in a society that

measures our sense of worth, our true value in our ability to accumulate those material possessions! This one is tough, although we all do a little. Let me say aloud that this is the way we love God, and no matter how much we are caught up in our American culture, our value system, that won't be a good enough excuse when we get to the judgment day.

It is simply enough to say, that this is one of the primary ways that we can really love our God, one of the ways God defines for us, one of the things we just have to work at constantly. And I hope you see your church as a place responsible to point out the opportunities to love in this way, a place where you can do what you say you most believe in, loving God His way, without counting the cost. It may help to repeat this word we know for sure, that you just cannot out give God. If you haven't discovered that powerful secret, then I challenge you to launch that this year. The dividends are out of this world!

So SIMPLE! Is it all too simple for any of us? Is it too simple for you? It was too simple for them religious folk of Jesus' day, and that is why those others were given the offer of God's love. Because they hungered to know God and to belong to The Lord! So the Gospel was preached among the Gentiles! That's us, folks! Are we keeping up with the great grace of God? **Are we loving God?**

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