



breakthroughs

**finding freedom and true
fulfillment in jesus**

Lesson 12: Loving God

The purpose of Breakthroughs is to help us walk out of darkness and experience healing and freedom in our lives. We've learned a lot about God, His Word, ourselves and how the enemy works in our lives over the past 12 weeks. Hopefully you are beginning to experience healing and freedom in your life. Our journey together is nearing the end, but our journey with God never ends. God will continue to help us and direct us further into healing and freedom. The steps that we've taken in Breakthroughs and the things that God has taught us along the way are for keeps. We don't just toss them aside once we've completed a 13 week study. God has equipped us through His Word, His presence, His weapons, forgiveness and grace to continue the journey. We have been richly blessed by our Heavenly Father to overcome darkness and walk in the light. ***We have been given everything we need to be free from the bondage of the enemy. God has poured out His love and grace on the Cross and we are forgiven.***

How does it make you feel when you consider all that God has done for you and given you?

Hopefully you are experiencing a greater depth of God's love for you. If you are struggling with feeling loved by God then tell Him. Continue to ask God to help you accept that He loves you. I have cried out to God many times for Him to help me receive His love for me. I still have times when I struggle with accepting God's love for me and ask Him to help me receive His love. Remember that we need to be honest with ourselves and with God, approaching Him with an honest heart on a daily basis.

This week's lesson is titled "Loving God." Loving God is the result of experiencing healing and freedom in our lives. We will learn in this week's lesson that loving God is a strong indicator of an individual's freedom. In other words, our freedom and our love for God are connected in such a way that they grow together. As we experience more freedom, our love for God grows more deeply. Our love for God is a result of what He does in our lives.

Please read the following verses:

This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10 NIV).

We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19 NIV).

God is the initiator of love (1 John 4:10). We are able to love God because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Loving God is a result of us accepting His love for us. Recall that God created us with a deep need to know Him, experience His love for us, and to love Him. As we continue to make God our only stronghold, we will experience more of His love, deeper healing, and greater freedom in our lives. Our love for God will increase as a result of what He is doing within our hearts.

WHY IS LOVING GOD CRITICAL FOR OUR FREEDOM?

Our freedom is a gift that God gave us at the Cross. Grace poured out abundantly, completely destroying the power of sin and darkness. Our debts are paid in full by the blood of Jesus. Forgiven. Set free. So, how do we live our lives after receiving such grace?

We love God. After receiving God's grace, we love God back. We give God what He gave us. We give Him our lives. We give Him our hearts. We give Him our all. Religious leaders asked Jesus what was the most important thing they could do (the greatest commandment), and Jesus told them to love God.

"Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37 NIV).

We can learn a lot from what the religious leaders asked Jesus. They had darkness and bondage in their lives and they were trying to get free by doing all the right things. They knew the “to do” list and tried to do it all perfectly. Jesus told them that loving God needed to be first on their list, and the rest of things would fall in place. The religious leaders chose to deny grace and focused on their “to do” list. They believed that doing all the right things would bring them closer to God. Of course, their hearts longed for God’s love and acceptance. Like us, they were created with a deep need to experience God’s love and to love and worship Him. However, they did not accept God’s grace, so they lived in bondage. They may have looked good on the outside because of the things they did, but those things did not bring them closer to God. It actually separated them from God. This is why loving God is critical to our freedom. As we follow God we must be aware of a dangerous trap, *legalism*.

Legalism

Legalism teaches that if we do everything that God tells us to do, we will be acceptable to God. If we don’t do everything that God tells us to do, God will not accept us. Legalism is the polar opposite of grace. Legalism teaches that we must earn God’s forgiveness and acceptance by what we do and not by what Jesus did for us on the Cross.

How do you think legalism could be used as a trap in your life?

When we are tempted to leave God out of our lives we need to remind ourselves of what **the enemy** is trying to do to us. He wants us to leave God out, and try to live our lives apart from God. He will try to get us to follow God through our actions and not our heart (legalism). He will try to yoke us back into bondage. God tells us in Galatians 5:1 (NIV):

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Based on what you've learned over the past 12 weeks, what can we do to "stand firm" and not allow ourselves to be yoked back into bondage?

Following God

God's Word gives us clear directions on how to follow Him. The directions are simple; however, following the directions is difficult. One reason following God is difficult is because we try to follow His directions without asking for His help. *We attempt to do what God is asking us to do, but we fail to ask God to help us to do those things.* This is a huge way that legalism becomes a trap for us. We forget that our lives are changed because of the Cross, and we begin doing things in our own strength. We start feeling discouraged because we are tired and feel empty and then are tempted to follow a 'little god.'

If you find yourself trying to make changes in your life without asking God for help, what will you do?

(Hopefully you answered that you will ask God to help you.)

We have been given everything we need to live free from darkness, 'little gods,' and strongholds. Yet we stand at a crossroad every day of our lives. Will we follow God and ask Him to help us, which is the narrow path? Or will we deny the Cross? Yes, not following God and asking Him for help is denying our desperate need for God's grace (the Cross). *When we don't follow God and ask for His help, we are telling ourselves that we don't really need God.* We are following the markers that are directing us to rely on our own strength. We are positioning ourselves for arrows from the enemy, making ourselves vulnerable to 'little gods' and we can easily step into a pit.

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The question we will face each day for the rest of our lives is this: Will we deny our desperate need for the Cross... or will we cling to the Cross? You may be thinking that those two choices seem a bit radical. Is there not a more subtle choice? Does the choice have to be so black and white? It seems to me that God did not provide a more subtle choice. Walk in the dark, or walk in the light? Live in bondage or be free? Walk in Grace or legalism? Serve One God or many gods? Have God as your Stronghold or build many useless strongholds? Seek the narrow gate or wide gate? Believe the Truth or chose to believe lies? Choose the Cross, or deny the Cross?

The choices may appear to be harsh, but look closer. God knows us. He knows our wounds, the arrows that have pierced us deeply, the pits we've been in, and the weight of our chains. Because He loves us so much, He wants us near Him. He knows the battles to come, the trials to come, and how truly desperate we are for Him. He created us to walk with Him and to be near Him. The enemy took this from us when he entered the garden, but God restores it to us through the Cross.

Please take a few minutes and think about God's pursuit of you. He came for you. He died for you. He wants to be with you. What are your thoughts and feelings when you think of how passionately God loves you?

When following after 'little gods' looks easier and you are being pulled towards old strongholds, how can thinking about God's love help you choose Him?

LOVING GOD by FOLLOWING GOD

“This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome.” 1 John 5:3 (NIVUK)

According to 1 John 5:3, how do we show God that we love Him?

It is easy to read 1 John 5:3 and focus our attention on trying to become obedient to God’s commands. The danger is not in trying to become an obedient follower. The danger lies in what is motivating us to follow.

As we study God’s Word and learn directions to follow, we can respond in a couple of different ways. One way is to see these directions as rules which we must follow, or we will end up chasing after ‘little gods’ and find ourselves sitting in a pit. The motivation behind following directions this way is fear. We follow the directions because we are afraid of something bad happening. Well, this is not entirely a bad way of viewing directions. God makes it clear that we have consequences to our disobedience. However, following directions because we are motivated by fear is not God’s desire. We can also be motivated to follow directions because we are afraid that God will reject or abandon us if we disobey. Again, this is not how God wants us to travel the journey with Him. He has a much better way.

The better way is for us to follow directions because we love and trust the One giving the directions. We follow God because we are motivated by love – not fear.

Why do you think our motivation for following God is important?

Let's read what God has to say about the 'little gods' in our lives and how He describes His love for us.

“Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' iniquity, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.”

Exodus 20:4-6 (CSB)

It may sound strange that God would tell us that He is a 'jealous God.' When we think of the word jealous we think of it in a negative way. We think of a jealous boyfriend or girlfriend, who is overly suspicious, possessive and controlling. All of this is motivated by fear and selfishness. This is not good. God is jealous for us because He is our Creator and He formed our hearts. God knows that our hearts were created with a desperate need to experience His love for us, and for us to love Him back. He knows that we were created to walk life's difficult and often painful journey with a heart that belongs fully to Him. Giving God anything less than our entire heart will cause us to feel discomfort. The discomfort can range from feeling stressed, depressed, or angry, to feeling like we want to end the journey. The discomfort is what causes us to run after 'little gods' and makes us an easy target for the enemy.

How does it make you feel to think of God being jealous for your heart?

When you think of God's plan for you to love Him more than any person or thing, how does that make you feel?

How much of a challenge do you think it is to love God with all of your heart?

Hopefully you see that there is a connection between following God and loving God. Our journey out of darkness and into healing and freedom is a based on a deep love relationship between the Creator (God) and His creation (us). God's passion for our healing and freedom is fueled by His deep love for us.

HOW DO WE LOVE GOD WITH ALL OF OUR HEART?

1. We tell God that we can't love Him the way He wants us to love Him, and we need His help to love Him.

Take a moment and do that now. Ask God to help you love Him with your whole heart.

2. We ask God to give us a heart that is sensitive to His knocking. We also ask God to help us trust Him that He will open doors to our hearts. All we need to do is respond to His knock by asking Him to make Himself at home in our heart.

Take a moment and do that now.

3. This is a simple, but powerful way of growing in your knowledge (heart and head) of God’s love for you. Commit to daily asking God through prayer to help you receive His love for you. Ask God to help you “get it.”

Take a moment and write your prayer in the space provided.

4. Ask God to help you accept His truth about His love for you. As we grow in our knowledge of how much God loves us we will respond with a greater love for Him. We are told in His Word:

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” 1 John 4:10 (NIV)

“We love because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19 (NIV)

God is the initiator in our love relationship with Him. We must begin with the knowledge and acceptance of God’s love for us first. It is God’s love within our hearts that allows us to love Him. Remember we can do nothing apart from Christ (John 15:5) – not even love God.

Take a moment now and commit to reading and thinking about verses that tell us about God’s love for us. Look at the back of this workbook for verses about God’s love for you (Appendix II).

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Based on what you learned in this week's lesson, what is the connection between loving God and experiencing freedom?

Based on what we've learned about 'little gods,' how can loving God keep us from chasing after 'little gods?'

Based on what we know about strongholds, how can loving God keep us from building strongholds in our lives?

Cling to the Cross. When you are afraid, doubting God, tempted to return to the darkness, then call on the name of Jesus. Fix your mind on Truth, and cry out to God to deliver you. Remind yourself of the grace that was poured out for you to be free. Bring your desperate heart to God and ask Him to consume you with His love for you. Then follow Him because you love Him. Follow Him because you know you can't live without Him. *Cling to the Cross.*

God's Love for ME

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)

For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

The LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. (Jeremiah 31:3)

But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Give thanks to the God of gods, for His steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 136:2)

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)

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39)

And from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (John 1:16)

The Lord 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; He will exult over you with loud singing. (Zephaniah 3:17)

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 7:6)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. (1 John 3:1)

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace. (2 Thessalonians 2:16)