

## LEANING INTO GOD'S LOVE: WEEK 2

“If the gospel is not the ABC’s of the Christian life but the A to Z, we can expect that the gospel is for all of life, not just the moment of conversion. The gospel’s saving work is deep work. It is deep tissue massage, spiritual reparative therapy, and radical reconstructive surgery.” Jared Wilson in *Gospel Deeps*

“Reconciliation is peacemaking. It involves God’s taking the initiative to make friends out of his enemies.” Robert Peterson

“Forgiveness isn’t an end in itself. The point of forgiveness is to remove the barrier that stands between us and God so that He can give us His Spirit and bring us into His everlasting family.” Darrell Bock

### God’s Love in Revealing Himself to Us

#### 1. God revealed himself because he wants us to know him and to be known by him.

That God would reveal himself to us in creation (Rom. 1:20; Ps. 19), in Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:3-4), and in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3) is a gift of love. We don’t have to wonder what God is like because God has revealed himself to us. And he’s not just given us facts so that we could know details about him, but he reveals himself so that we can know him and be known by him. This is love. It’s loving of God to make himself known to undeserving sinners, and it’s the giving and receiving of love that is the goal behind it. God wants us to know him. We would not know him—at least not well or in truth—apart from his kindness to make himself known. God’s revelation of himself to us is both a gift and a sign of his love. Knowing God in this way is the apex privilege of being human and the highest purpose we have (John 17:3). God reveals himself to us so he can be known as a friend (Ps. 25:14; John 15:12-17; James 2:23; Ex. 33:11; Is. 41:8; Rev. 3:20).

“The Bible insists throughout that the living God of whom it speaks not only can be known, but wills to be known. And far from leaving it up to us to get to know him through some game of religious hide and seek, this God takes the initiative in revealing himself to us. God can be known because God has spoken.”<sup>1</sup>

#### 2. God has revealed himself to us in the Bible

The Bible is God’s revelation of himself to us in human words.<sup>2</sup> God’s message to us isn’t simply a disclosure of truth, but God’s revelation of himself (1 Sam. 3:21; Deut. 18:18–22; Heb. 1:1). Through the story of Scripture, God tells us his will for us and he reveals what he’s like in his words and his deeds. Both God’s attributes disclosed and actions displayed help us see him. Like a good father, he trains us with the wisdom and knowledge we need to flourish in life. It is the voice of God, communicating with us. When we want to hear the Father speak to us, when we need his guidance, a soothing word, comfort, help, or his presence, the Bible is how God talks to us and makes himself known to us.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Wright, *Knowing God Through the Old Testament: Three Volumes in One*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019). Kindle edition.

<sup>2</sup> For more on this, see “[Divine Revelation: God Making Himself Known to Us](#)” by John Frame or “[Scripture as Divine Revelation](#)” by Matthew Barrett at [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org).

“What happens is that the almighty Creator, the Lord of hosts, the great God before whom the nations are as a drop in the bucket, comes to you and begins to talk to you through the worlds and truths of Holy Scripture. Perhaps you have been acquainted with the Bible and Christian truth for many years, and it has meant little to you; but one day you wake up to the fact that God is actually speaking to you—you!—through the biblical message... You come to realize as you listen that God is actually opening his heart to you, making friends with you.”<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*

### **3. God has Revealed himself through the Son**

The Father’s love is seen in the incarnation where the Son is sent to reveal the Father to us. Jesus, God incarnate, is the revelation of God that uniquely reveals what God is like. Jesus said that “whoever sees me sees him who sent me” (Jn. 12:45). Jesus is the revelation of God to us as one of us (Jn. 1:14; 6:40). He is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). In fact, we cannot know the Father unless we know the Son (Jn. 14:6–11).

It’s not that Jesus sort of looks like the Father in some ways but is also very different, like how people might say my son looks like me when he’s a mixture of looking like me in part but unlike me in other ways. No, Jesus is the “[Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3).

This points to the Father’s love because it proves he wants to be known in a way that is clear, intimate, and according to truth. Because God is not like us in so many ways, and cannot be seen or touched, there are moments he seems distant or our knowledge of him might feel vague. It might even make God seem hard to relate too. But God doesn’t want things to stay that way, so he sends Jesus to show us the Father. Philip said it would be enough if Jesus would show them the Father, and Jesus assures them that the Father is seen and known through his Son, Jesus (John 14:9).

Jesus takes our vague or slightly distorted notions of God and gives us the real picture of the Father in his fullness of grace and truth. When we think about the beauty, humility, and glory of the incarnation we should also find comfort in the Father’s desire to be clearly and intimately known by us. If the Father seems distant or unapproachable, look to the incarnation of Jesus to see just how near the Father has come and how inviting the Father is. To know the Father, look at the Son.

“You don’t need to be in the dark about God. He has gone beyond parchment and paper. He has gone beyond tapes and cassettes. He has gone beyond videos and even beyond live drama. He has actually come and pitched his tent in our backyard and beckoned us to watch him and get to know him in the person of his Son Jesus. When you watch Jesus in action, you watch God in action. When you hear Jesus teach, you hear God teach. When you come to know what Jesus is like, you know what God is like.”<sup>4</sup>

### **4. God Reveals His Love to Us**

Not only does God reveal himself to us, but God also tells us how he thinks and feels about us. God knows our weaknesses, insecurities, and frailty. And part of why I think the Bible repeats God’s love to us so often is because God knows we need reassured in it. We will doubt it and question it. We tell ourselves—or the enemy tells us—that his love might be true for others, but it can’t be for me.

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<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*.

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, “[The Word Became Flesh](#),” at [desiringgod.org](#).

God makes crystal clear that he loves us with a steadfast, unswerving love to remove the doubts and questions about him that linger. He is not short on words of love. He is not shy about showing us affection by the ways he says things to us, such as calling us the apple of his eye (Ps. 17:8; Deut. 32:10; Zech. 2:8) or telling us about how much he delight in us (Ps. 16:3). And sometimes, such as in Psalm 136, he plays this song on repeat until it's massaged deep into our stubborn, insecure hearts. "His steadfast love endures forever" (Ps. 136).

God assures us that there is nothing that can separate us from his eternal, unending, and unfading love for us (Rom. 8:31–39). And then the stories Jesus uses to describe the Father communicate to us a Father showering us with gifts (Luke 11:13), a God so full of love that he pursues us relentlessly (Luke 15:1–10), and a God who runs to meet us and rejoices to have fellowship with us (Luke 15:11–32).

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you." (Jer. 31:3)

"You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you." (Is. 43:4)

"For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs." (Zeph. 3:17; NLT)

"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 3:1)

"It's not enough for him to make you his child. He wants you to feel like his child and live like his child." Tim Chester, *Enjoying God*

## **Group Discussion**

Read 1 John 4:7–16

1. Why is the Father's sending of the Son to save us the greatest demonstration or the epitome of God's love?
2. When do you most need to remember and meditate on this amazing and compelling proof of God's love for you and commitment to you seen in the Father sending the Son to save us?
3. What do you think it means to abide in God's love (4:16)? Why is abiding in God's love essential for knowing God and growing in him?
4. Although experiencing God's love *should* make us more loving, we fail to reflect or show God's love too often. What are reasons there can be a disconnect or obstruction between receiving God's love and reflecting it to others?
5. Why do you think John mentions both knowing and believing in God's love (4:16)? Have you experienced times where you personally experience (know) God's love and then other times where you don't "feel" it but still believe it? Why are both important?

# The Father's Love in Sending His Son

## 1. The Father sends out of the overflow of *his* love.

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup> but *God shows his love for us* in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:6-8)

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, *because of the great love with which he loved us*, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.” (Eph. 2:1-5)

“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)

“...we must not so focus attention upon the love of Christ that we overlook the action of God the Father. It is not as if the Son of God gave himself to this undertaking while the Father turned away his face until the ordeal was ended and then received Christ into the bosom of his love again. No, the events of Gethsemane, the events of the arraignment before the High Priest and before Pilate, and the events of Golgotha, were events in which God the Father was intensely involved. Calvary is also the supreme exhibition of the Father's love.” John Murray

## 2. The Father sends out of his gracious, undeserved, and unprompted love.

“But God shows his love for us in that *while we were still sinners*, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> 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 4:9-10; see also Rom. 5:8, 10; Eph. 2:1-11)

“We never sent to Him; He sent to us. Suppose that, after we had all sinned, we had fallen on our knees and cried, ‘Father forgive us!’ Suppose that day after day we had been, with many piteous tears and cries, supplicating and entreating forgiveness of God. It would be great love then that He should devise a way of pardoning us. But no; it was the very reverse. God sent an ambassador of peace to us; we sent no embassy to him. Man turned his back on God, and went farther and farther from Him, and never thought of turning his face toward his best Friend. It is not man that turns beggar to God for salvation; it is, if I may dare to say it, as though the Eternal God Himself begged of His creatures to be saved. Jesus Christ has not come into the world to be sought for, but to seek that which is lost. It all begins with Him.” Charles Spurgeon

## 3. The Father sends the Son out of his pursuing, rescuing love.

Though Adam and Eve flee from God and try to hide, God comes looking for them (Gen. 3:8). David writes about how there's no place he can hide that God is not there, seeking him out. No darkness shuts him out. No sin causes him to fold his hands and give up on us. No running gets him off our heels. He is the “hound of heaven” seeking us out. In Ezekiel 16, God describes his relentless, undeserved love with the picture of an abandoned, helpless, bloodied baby that God has compassion on. The three parables in Luke 15 all illustrate the pursuing love of God.

“God has seen our unloveliness—the deep brokenness and rebellion in our hearts—and instead of withdrawing, he pursues us to the beautiful end.” Matt Chandler

“I’ve spent all my life thinking God’s relentless pursuit of me was to catch me in sin. And while it’s true, he cares deeply about my sin, his relentless pursuit has always been to show me how much I’m loved. He isn’t chasing me around for a whipping. He’s chasing me for a hug.” Lore Ferguson Wilbert

#### **4. The Father’s aim is reconciliation—peace and fellowship—not just forgiveness.**

“Jesus suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, *that he might bring us to God.*” 1 Peter 3:18

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.... For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Rom. 5:1; 10-11)

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:18-21)

“Christ’s saving work results in reconciliation, both objective and subjective...No longer are we enemies, now we are friends. And this objective accomplishment has wonderful subjective results. In Christ God has made peace outside of us with the result that we now have peace within our hearts.... Reconciliation is peacemaking. It involves God’s taking the initiative to make friends out of his enemies.” Robert Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son*

“If the gospel only brought us forgiveness, if the gospel only brought us justification, if the gospel only brought us propitiation, if the gospel only brought us escape from hell, eternal life, health and wealth, and did not bring us into the enjoyment of the person of God, it would not be good news. I don’t care how many songs we sing about those glories, it would not be good news, because every one of those magnificent achievements of Christ are to get us to God.” John Piper<sup>5</sup>

#### **5. The cross is the greatest proof of God’s love.**

“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).

“*In this the love of God was made manifest among us*, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. *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 4:9-10).

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<sup>5</sup> “[Forgiveness is not the Gospel](#)” by John Piper at [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org)

Every word drips with the preciousness of the gift and depth of the love behind it.

*The Father* sends his only Son to reconcile us to himself.

The Father *sends* his only Son to reconcile us to himself.

The Father sends *his only Son* to reconcile us to himself.

The Father sends his only Son *to reconcile us to himself*.

“There is love in our creation; there is love in providence. But most of all there is love in the gift of Christ for our redemption. The apostle here seems to say, ‘Now I have found the great secret of God’s love to us. Here is the clearest evidence of divine love that ever was or ever can be manifested toward the sons of men.’” Charles Spurgeon

“How deep the Father’s love for us,  
How vast beyond all measure  
That He would give His only Son  
To make a wretch His treasure.” Lyrics from “How Deep the Father’s Love” by Stuart Townend

## The Father’s Love in Adoption

Adoption refers to God’s declaration that because we are in Christ we are now his sons and daughters. This declaration creates a new and permanent relationship between us and God. We gain a Father, an elder brother in Jesus, a family in the Church, an unfading inheritance, and all the joys and blessings that come with being God’s child. We are welcomed and wanted by him, given full access to him at all times, and granted the intimacy between beloved children and a perfectly loving Father. Adoption is “the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification.... Adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves.” J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*

“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 3:1)

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12)

“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” (Gal. 3:26)

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” (Gal. 4:4-7)

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (Rom. 8:14-17)

“In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.” (Eph. 1:4-5)

“Adoption makes us full members of God’s family, not second-class children. It provides us all the privileges of sonship, with obligations as well. What are these privileges? First, we have a relationship with God as our Father; we come to him familiarly, calling him Father, with open access to his presence. Second, we have God’s care and provision, materially and spiritually through the Holy Spirit. Third, we have the privilege of God’s fatherly discipline as he works in us for a harvest of righteousness and peace. Fourth, we become heirs of all our Father’s goods. With these privileges come responsibilities; they include bearing God’s name nobly in this world, doing his will, obeying him as our Father and sovereign Lord, defending and advancing the cause of his household and reign. The final privilege we receive in adoption is acceptance as beloved brothers with Jesus Christ.” Richard Phillips, *Chosen in Christ*

“Justification clears us legally of guilt before our Judge, but adoption includes us emotionally in the heart of our Father.” Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel*

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to see reconciliation and adoption as the goal of our redemption and not only forgiveness, justification, or eternal life?
2. What are some of the blessings and privileges that come with being adopted as God’s child? What are some of the responsibilities?
3. How might you apply the doctrine of adoption—and the reality of God’s love underneath it—to:
  - someone struggling with a lack of assurance
  - battling insecurity, fear of man, or people pleasing
  - living in freedom from guilt and shame
  - feelings of loneliness
  - temptations toward anxiety, fear, worry
  - hope for eternity in our sickness, sorrows, trials, and suffering in this present life
4. As you think about the love of God in the gospel—gracious, costly, sacrificial, unmerited, pursuing or initiating, loving the unlovely, etc.—how can we reflect his love to others?
5. What truths, promise, or verses do you most need to remember and respond to from tonight? How can you meditate on these and walk in them practically this week?

### Recommended Resources

- [“The Love of Our Heavenly Father”](#) by Werner Hamukoto at [Africa.thegospelcoalition.org](http://Africa.thegospelcoalition.org)
- [“The Father’s Love”](#) by John Murray
- [“Love’s Climax”](#) sermon and [“Herein is Love”](#) sermon by Charles Spurgeon
- [“Adoption”](#) by David Garner at [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org)
- [“What Does Adoption Have to Do with the Gospel?”](#) (video) at [gospelproject.com](http://gospelproject.com)
- [“10 Themes to Understand Adoption in Christ”](#) by David Garner at [facultywts.edu](http://facultywts.edu)
- [“Adoption Changes Everything”](#) (sermon) by Christ Beals at [yourchurch.com/sermons](http://yourchurch.com/sermons)
- [“Adoption: A New Father and A New Heart”](#) by Donald Macleod at [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org)

## **Last Paragraph of “Love’s Logic” sermon by Charles Spurgeon**

<https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/loves-logic/#flipbook/>

“And now I must spend a minute in putting the truth of my text to the test. I want you not to listen to me so much as to listen to your own hearts, and to God's word, a minute, if you are believers. What is it we have been talking about? It is God's love to us. Get the thought into your head a minute: ‘God loves me—not merely bears with me, thinks of me, feeds me, but loves me. Oh, it is a very sweet thing to feel that we have the love of a dear wife, or a kind husband; and there is much sweetness in the love of a fond child, or a tender mother; but to think that God loves me, this is infinitely better! Who is it that loves you? God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Almighty, All in all, does he love me? Even he? If all men, and all angels, and all the living creatures that are before the throne loved me, it were nothing to this—the Infinite loves me! And who is it that he loves? Me. The text saith, “us.” “We love him because he first loved us.” But this is the personal point—he loves me, an insignificant nobody, full of sin—who deserved to be in hell; who loves him so little in return—God loves me. Beloved believer, does not this melt you? Does not this fire your soul? I know it does if it is really believed. It must. And how did he love me? He loved me so that he gave up his only begotten Son for me, to be nailed to the tree, and made to bleed and die. And what will come of it? Why, because he loved me and forgave me,—I am on the way to heaven, and within a few months, perhaps days, I shall see his face and sing his praises. He loved me before I was born; before a star begun to shine he loved me, and he has never ceased to do so all these years. When I have sinned he has loved me; when I have forgotten him he has loved me; and when in the days of my sin I cursed him, yet still he loved me; and he will love me when my knees tremble, and my hair is grey with age...he will bear and carry his servant; and he will love me when the world is on a blaze, and love me for ever, and for ever. Oh, chew the cud of this blessed thought; roll it under your tongue as a dainty morsel; sit down this afternoon, if you have leisure, and think of nothing but this—his great love wherewith he loves you; and if you do not feel your heart bubbling with a good matter, if you do not feel your soul yearning towards God, and heaving big with strong emotions of love to God, then I am much mistaken. This is so powerful a truth, and you are so constituted as a Christian as to be wrought upon by this truth, that if it be believed and felt, the consequence must be that you will love him because he first loved you. God bless you, brethren and sisters, for Christ's sake. Amen.”