

Part 24: The Love of God

Begin with a short prayer for openness. Remember that in coming together to meditate we are not preparing neat little talks to deliver when it is our turn to share, but we are coming together to face ourselves and God. In silent reflection, we take our place before God seriously and allow ourselves to be touched through the material. The sharing then becomes a humble giving of our experience. Whether it seems 'good' or as though 'nothing happened' is not the point, as both are equally important in speaking of where we are in our hearts; it is noticing where we are that is important. **Reflect** for 15 minutes on any changes you have noticed in your sense of self-worth and of God's love for you since joining this group. Note your observations in your journal but **do not share now**.

The love of God

The most serious ailment in present day Christianity is the painfully low self-esteem and self-love experienced by most Christians, stemming from a deep inability to accept and receive God's total and unconditional love. This love is easy to grasp on an intellectual level, because the Gospel is based on God's unearned love for each one of us. But little of this seems to penetrate our felt experience. Many of us have such an inflamed sense of guilt and sin in our hearts that moving to a place where we can accept and experience this divine love is very difficult.

We saw in Part 15 how wrong attitudes distorted our image of ourselves and damaged our ability to love ourselves. In the same way, the attitudes of our hearts block God's words of love. They speak with loud conviction from our past experiences of having had to earn love, of being hurt when let down by love and of being manipulated in the name of love.

These attitudes close us down by limiting and distorting our perceptions. Where do these difficulties arise?

1. Original sin

The doctrine of original sin has become a constant and crushing burden to many and a weapon in the hands of those wanting to justify their criticism and condemnation of others. It can make us oblivious to all that is good, unable to see beyond the brokenness, because all of life has become a problem to be solved. God, who seems not to save us from the problems, is easily perceived as the severe judge who condemns us for the slightest failing. Any sense of our being worth loving, or of God wanting to love us or have anything to do with us, does not get through to us.

2. Material value

Our society is based on the materialist view of life, that our value depends on what we do and on how well we do it. So every time we fail, or don't live up to a material expectation, our attitude of inadequacy is confirmed and strengthened. The small voice that says we are acceptable and special just because God made us is easily crushed by the many critical voices which measure and compare and pass judgement. Often the most strident voice is our own.



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3. The sins of the parents . . .

For many, a sense of guilt and inadequacy have been taken on from their parents and others. Perhaps these formative people passed on the issues they were unable to face, leaving the children to struggle through the same problems and their effects. The reasons for our blocked channels are many and one can become paralysed trying to trace the source to pass the blame. It is useful to get as clear a picture as possible of what is happening and then to use this information to open ourselves to the freedom and love to which God is inviting us in Christ.

Reflect on the party given for the prodigal son, beginning with the call to the servants to kill the fattened calf and to get a feast ready and ending when the last light goes out at the end. Let your imagination take you through every detail – live it, with its emotions and undercurrents.

Imagine you are the son (or daughter) who has come back.

- Listen to your heart as you bathe and put on fresh clothes and join the party that is getting underway.
- Who comes to the party and what is their reaction to your return?
- What does your father say in explanation to them as he welcomes them?
- What do you say as they come and talk to you?
- How do you feel being home again and enjoying this beautiful food, with the music and dancing?
- Who has not come to your party and what would they say to you?
- Do you believe and accept all that has happened as you fall into bed at the end of it all?

Create your own story around this frame and carefully listen to your heart as you move through this experience.

- What is God saying about his love for you through this parable?
- How does this touch your love and acceptance of yourself?

Take 20 minutes for this reflection and then 5 minutes to write it up. Write your journal entry as if speaking to your Father directly from what you have felt. Share with the group what you feel is appropriate.

This week, live with the different ways the father's love for his son surprised you or was new to you. See this love as being there for you, since you have a special place and relationship with the Father.



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