

In Jesus Steps

Disciples for Life

Unit 1: Who Is God?

Learning to know and love God for who He is, His character, attributes, and being.

Lesson 3

God Is Love

Day One

Love Comes from God

We hope you have experienced more of God's goodness and mercy since beginning this study of Who Is God. Our God is good, and He is mercy. God is also love.

In *Lesson 2: God Is Mercy*, we learned that mercy is being good to people and helping them when they are in need, even though they may not deserve it. Goodness and mercy are connected. Since God is good, He has mercy on the people He has made. He cares about the needs of others.

Goodness and mercy are related to love. They flow from God's self-giving heart of love. Because God is love, He is good and merciful to us. He is motivated to help from pure affection.

1. Read 1 John 4:7. Where does love come from?

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7

God is the source of love. He is the starting point in talking about love. Without God, love would not exist. Of course, neither would planet Earth. God created the world and the universe in love.

God's love does not depend on us. God does not love us because we are funny, smart, wise, beautiful, or handsome. There is nothing about God's creatures that *cause* Him to love them. Love comes from God's heart or being. He is love, and He loves perfectly.

There can be distinct kinds of love and various definitions. For example, we could distinguish between the love of a parent and a friend. For the purpose of this study, we are going to look at two definitions of love. One is general and the other is from the Greek word *agape* (ἀγάπη), also translated "love" in English.

Definitions: *Love* is the quality of warm regard for, and interest in another. *Love* is also strong affection and unselfish concern for another. It usually includes a deep personal attachment. In contrast, *agape love* is unconditional in nature, based on the compassion and extended *love* of the giver, not the actions of the recipient. It is divine in nature, yet those who have a relationship with God the Father through Jesus the son can exhibit qualities of *agape love*.

Love was here before angels or humans were created. Love has always existed because God is eternal (without end or beginning). Therefore, love has existed forever in God.

Like God's attribute of goodness, love can be difficult to understand. For example, how can a loving God allow evil and suffering in the world? If you are still struggling with these kinds of questions, go back and read *Unit 1, Lesson One: God Is Good*. Some of the same arguments for God's goodness can be applied to God's love nature.

Read John 17:24 and answer questions 2–5:

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." John 17:24

2. Jesus is talking to God. What is the name Jesus uses to talk with God?

3. What kind of relationship *should* the name father describe in one's life?

4. What kind of a relationship did you have with your earthly father? Comment on your past and present relationship.

5. How long has God the Father loved God the Son?

Not everyone had a father growing up, and not everyone who had a father had a good one. I can speak a little about this from experience. I do not remember my father ever holding me or playing with me. The one thing I do remember is being hit by a broom—not exactly positive or gentle discipline. Simply, I did not have a good relationship with my father.

My parents divorced when I was eight years old, and my father moved to another state. I remember when he drove away, I was not sad, and I never missed him. I only saw him two more times after the divorce even though he lived for another 35 years.

During my first eight years and afterwards, he did not provide, protect, listen, communicate, or discipline well. He was not my friend, and I seriously questioned his love for me and our family. Strangely, I did not resent or have any bad feelings for my father. I just did not think about him. However, as a Christian, I do forgive him for not being a kind and loving parent.

Some of my friends had fathers worse than mine. One was an alcoholic with a bad temper. Their family always had to be careful not to upset him. Since there did not *seem* to be any good role models around me, I did not miss having a father. It has only been in the last 10 years or so that I have realized something was missing in my early family life.

God the Father is not like my father. In fact, He has none of the imperfections or shortcomings of *any* earthly fathers. God is perfect. He *always* provides, protects, listens, and communicates exceptionally well. We are His friends, and He loves us for who we are. He even disciplines us in love, and for our own good.

We experience God by faith (Hebrews 11:1–40). He is a real Person but different from the people He created. He is divine and spirit. Therefore, God does not have physical characteristics or limitations like we do. To help us understand and relate to God, the Bible uses figurative language describing God in human terms. Figurative means expressing one thing in terms of another.

Humans are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). We are like God in terms of having a spirit, attributes, minds, feelings, will, and emotions. Although God is spirit (John 4:24), He is neither male nor female. However, He chooses to reveal Himself in both masculine and feminine characteristics.

There are about seven references in the Bible to God in motherly terms. For example:

“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!” Isaiah 49:15

“As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.” Isaiah 66:13

“Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open; like a lion I will devour them—a wild animal will tear them apart.” Hosea 13:8

Scripture reveals that God has chosen to refer to Himself more often as a father than a mother. There are about 170 references in the Bible to God as Father. Since God has chosen to make Himself known as our Father through His word, we should respectfully and obediently comply with (fulfill) His wishes.

This does not mean God loves or values men more than women. Remember, it was only after God created Eve (and gave both dominion over the earth) that He said, “it was very good” (Genesis 1: 26–28, 31).

Women as well as men are given inheritance rights as sons in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26–29). In some English Bible translations, the Greek word for son is translated children in English. In ancient times, only sons could inherit property and lead their father's estate. In Christ, women equally share and lead in their *Father's* business. It is only when men and women are working together in harmony that we model a biblical ideal.

Remember, God is spirit, and His abilities are vastly different from men and women. For example, God is all-present (omnipresent). Yes, God is everywhere, all the time, and at the same time. Therefore, He is always with us.

Not only is God always with us. He will never leave us. We are never alone. Even if we do *not* feel His presence in a particular situation, we can be assured He is present. We can also be certain He is working things out for our *spiritual* good.

Everything God does is motivated (caused) by love. Love is God's nature. God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit have loved each other forever. They love outside of our time and space. God created time and space for our world.

Jesus existed before He took on flesh (body) and was born to the Virgin Mary. Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit are one in the holy mystery we call the Trinity. As you read and study the Bible, you will see this truth plainly revealed (made known).

6. Read John 17:5. Was Jesus with the Father before the world began? Yes No (Underline One)

And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. John 17:5

God did not *need* to create humans. He was not lacking in any way. He was not lonely, nor did He require anything to make Him glad. The triune God (consisting of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit) was perfectly happy and content in His own love. If God did not love Himself, He would not be true to His own loving nature. If God were not aware of His love and content in it, He would not be God.

We do not know all the reasons why God created the world and placed humans here, but we do know He acted out of love. God wanted to share His love and receive love in return. We also know we were created to glorify and honor God (Psalm 96:8, 115:1).

7. Read Psalm 136:3–6. Why do we give thanks to God, the Lord of lords?

Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever. ⁴to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever. ⁵who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever. ⁶who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures forever.
Psalm 136:3–6

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer from # 7 with the disciples on your team.

In 1957, “In God We Trust” became the official motto (slogan) of the United States. It has been printed on all paper currency (money) since that time. The saying has been engraved on coins since 1864.

Not all U.S. citizens trust or have faith in Almighty God. In fact, some citizens want the motto removed. These are usually people who do not believe there is a God (atheists). God and His love surround their very existence, yet they refuse to believe or accept His existence.

Perhaps you believe there is a God, but do not think God really loves you. If you had one or more uncaring parents, you may even question your own worthiness to be loved. Maybe you are angry and question why God *did not* give you a loving father or mother. Or you may have had loving parents but they taught or modeled behavior that made you doubt God's love.

8. Do you trust or believe that God truly loves you? Yes No Maybe (Underline One)

9. Explain why or why not you believe that God truly loves you.

Action Step

10. Memorize Jeremiah 31:3:

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." Jeremiah 31:3

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer and memory verse from #10.

11. Please pray: Heavenly Father, thank You for this lesson on love. Please use this lesson to show Your love to me. Help me to know and love You in return. Give me the faith to believe in You and Your perfect and everlasting love for me. Amen.

Pray for your family and members of your discipleship team: O God, please impress upon my family and co-disciples' hearts Your vast love for them. Increase their knowledge of You and Your love for them each day. Amen.

—End Day One—

Day Two

God Has Feelings and Emotions

Love has an emotional side to it. When we love someone, strong feelings are involved. We want to spend time with that person, and we enjoy seeing his or her face. Emotions or feelings can well up for anyone with whom we have a close relationship, such as a spouse, child, parent, or friend.

The emotional part of our affection moves us to spend time with that person, listen to them, speak kindly, and do nice things for them. We are also seeking a positive response from those we love. We want them to love us back.

It is hurtful to love someone and not be loved in return. Since they are special to us, we want to be special in their eyes also. Rejection or getting a negative response from anyone is painful.

There is a term used for love that is not returned (reciprocated): unrequited love. It usually applies to romantic love but can refer to any kind of love that is not returned. You may have experienced this kind trauma. It involves real pain. Hence, phrases like "broken heart" and "wounded spirit" can be a good description of your suffering.

Yes, unrequited love can be responsible for physical pain. You might feel it in your chest, head, or stomach. You may even throw-up (vomit) or have difficulty sleeping. Perhaps you cannot eat—or eat too much. A general depression sinks into your soul.

You may begin to wonder, *What is wrong with me?* or *Why doesn't this person love me back?* There may be an element of shame or embarrassment involved. You may even blame God for not making you more attractive or lovable. Or you may want to blame God for not making the person love you.

12. Please share a time when your love for someone was not returned.

The other side of unrequited romantic love is the viewpoint of the other person—the person doing the rejecting. You may have had someone love you who you did not love in return. As a result, you may have experienced guilt and anxiety for having hurt someone. Most people do not feel good about causing someone pain and heartache. Still, the one rejected usually experiences the most trauma.

Remembering past times of unrequited love—whether caused by you or by the other person—may still burn and sting. I pray that God, in His unfailing love, to restore and heal you.

However, I also want you to think and feel with your emotions for a few minutes. God created you and sent His Son to die for you. Every good thing you have is from His loving hand. How might He feel when you turn your back on Him, when you do not return His amazing love? How might God feel when you pray or pay attention to Him only when you need or want something?

God has feelings and emotions. However, His feelings flow from His eternal nature and are not subject to change (Malachi 3:6). This is true of God's overall state of mind. We cannot change His overall mental health and stability. He is never moody, emotional, sullen, or temperamental.

13. Read Psalm 78:40. The Israelites rebelled against God in the wilderness and _____ Him in the wasteland!

How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the wasteland!
Psalm 78:40

Definition: *Grieve* means to feel or show pain, sorrow, and grief.

Definition: *Rebel* means to oppose or fight against a person or group in authority.

14. Have you ever thought how your actions concern God? Yes No (Underline One)

Our actions concern God, but they cannot affect Him. God is the unmoved Mover of all things and self-sufficient; He cannot be moved or changed by external forces. He is perfect and lacks nothing. This truth is known as God's impassibility and is one of His attributes. It means that God has different feelings, but not changing passions. Passion arises from a desire for what is lacking; God lacks nothing and is in control of everything.¹ Think about it. How could God be in control and be content if billions of people in the world *could* inflict pain or suffering on Him?

God is said to feel grief so that we may understand the importance of our actions. God wants us to behave in certain ways and uses terms and language to help us grasp what our sinful behaviors are like. Sin is serious business and can cause pain and suffering for ourselves and others. It is such serious business that Jesus had to suffer and die for our sins. When Jesus became man, He took on human flesh willingly. He chose to experience life as a man. He chose to suffer and therein, understand human pain, joy, and passion.

God loves you with an intensity that is impossible to imagine. His love for you is immensely tender, compassionate, sympathetic, kindhearted, and firm. God's love for you is perfect. He loves you in ways that are best for your eternal good. *He is love* (1 John 4:8).

In love, God created humans and placed us in a beautiful world. He provided food, shelter, and clothing. God is faithful to answer prayers and protect us. He also gives us free will to choose how to live our lives.

The ultimate and definitive (final solution) act of God's gifts and love rests in His Son, Jesus Christ. We will look more closely at Jesus' character shortly, but for now recognize Jesus is God making His love a brilliant reality. God is revealing and showing how great a love He has for you.

¹ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis, Bethany House, 2003), 112–113.

15. How do *you* love God back?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer from # 15 with your team.

There are many ways to love God. One way of loving God is particularly important. We need to *obey* Him. Both the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 28:1, 11:1; Jeremiah 7:23) and the New Testament (John 14:15, 14:23, 15:14; 1 Peter 1:2) make this clear.

Another way to love God is to love our neighbor. A neighbor is anyone in need. We love God by helping the hungry, stranger, poor, sick, imprisoned, hurt, injured, weak, orphan, widow, blind, lame, needy, grieving, and foreigner (Matthew 25:35–45; Luke 10:25–37; Acts 20:35; James 1:27; Job 29:11–12, 16–17; Isaiah 58:7–8). A challenging way to love God is by loving and helping our enemy (Matthew 5:43–48).

Action Steps (16–17): Prayerfully consider three ways to express your love to our triune God. Practice each one over the next three days and write about it.

16. List each way you are practicing loving God and write about the experience:

17. It would be a worthy life goal to explore and practice loving God. Will you make this a life goal (aim, purpose)? Yes No Maybe (Underline One)

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers from #16–17 with your team.

Read Hosea 11:1–4 and answer questions 18–22:

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ²But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. ³It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. ⁴I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.”

Hosea 11:1–4 (Ephraim is another name for Israel, the northern kingdom.)

18. How does God refer to the people of Israel (v. 1)?

19. How did God feel about the people of Israel (v. 1)?

20. How did Israel go away from God (v. 2)?

21. Who taught and healed Israel (v. 3)?

22. How did God lead the people of Israel (v. 4)?

God chose the people of Israel to be His people and receive His commandments. He freed them from slavery to the Egyptians and led them with love and kindness. Nevertheless, they turned from God to idols (Baals) made by their own hands.

In Christ Jesus, God chooses people to be His and follow His Word and Spirit. He freed us from slavery to Satan and leads us with love and kindness. Nevertheless, we turn from God to idols made from our own hands.

Today few people worship inanimate (lifeless) objects made by human hands. But the apostle Paul teaches that other sins are considered idolatry. Idolatry is the worship of a physical object, but it can also be devotion or attachment to anything other than God.

23. Read Colossians 3:5. What are some of the things that belong to our earthly nature and are idolatrous?

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Colossians 3:5

Read Matthew 23:37 and answer questions 24–25:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” Matthew 23:37 (Prophet is a person who speaks for God.)

Note: Jerusalem was a city where God's temple was located. It was the center of Jewish worship. In this context, Jerusalem is used figuratively to include the Jewish people (formerly called the Israelites) and their religious leaders.

24. How are Jesus' words to the people similar (alike) to God the Father's words to the people in Hosea 11:1–4?

God the Son, like the Father, expressed His love for the people and His sadness over their sin. God wants a loving relationship with us, but many are unwilling to accept it. We would rather go our own way. Our way, without God, is the wrong way and the way to destruction. Earlier in this lesson we learned that God is divine and spirit. We experience God by faith. However, at one point in history, God came to earth in human form. Jesus, the Son, was born of a virgin and walked the earth as a man. He was fully God and fully man.

Therefore, when Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and the people, we can experience the heart of God. We can see God's love poured out through human actions and words. God's feelings and emotions become real to us.

We do not have any power to physically or emotionally wound God. In other words, He is not vulnerable to us. But God *chooses* to experience grief (John 10:18). Jesus had real pain and suffering. He chose to be affected (influenced, touched) by our behavior. He was considered a man of sorrows. Read the prophecy of Isaiah 53:3 below that was foretold about Jesus 700 years before He was born.

Action Step

25. Read and meditate (think deeply) on Isaiah 53:3. How do these words about Jesus express His love for *you*?

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Isaiah 53:3

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer from #25 with your team.

—End Day Two—

Day Three
God Sends His Love

When we love and care about another person, we give of ourselves. We may give gifts, time or talents. It is self-giving love. We give of what we have, whether it is quality words, quality time, or quality resources.

Read John 3:16 and answer questions 26–28:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (“World” means all people in this verse.)

26. Does God love you? Yes No (Underline One)

27. How did God prove His love for you?

28. How do you receive eternal or everlasting life?

You may be thinking, "God sent His Son, Jesus, for everyone. God loves everyone. How does this make me especially loved?"

The answer goes back to God's divine character. His capacity to love is infinite (without limit). Therefore, He can and does love you immensely. In the same way, God loves all the people He has made. Just because Jesus was given for everyone who believes, does not mean His love for you is less meaningful or real.

We are small-minded. Our love is tainted by the Fall (Adam and Eve's sin) and the world we live in. Do not think of God's love in human terms. Think of God's love in divine terms. **Pray:** *O God, Open my mind and heart to Your ideal and amazing love. Amen.*

Jesus' death on the cross is the epitome (ideal) of self-giving love. Jesus willingly came to earth and willingly died on a cross for your sins. The fact that He died for others only makes His sacrifice more powerful. He took the sins of all people into His body on the cross (1 John 2:2–3).

Read 1 Peter 2:24 and answer 29–31:

“He (Jesus) himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24 (parentheses added)

29. Who bore or carried our sins in His body on the cross?

30. How have you been healed of your sins?

31. Jesus died so that we would _____ to _____ and live for _____.

Jesus was beaten, whipped (scourged), and nailed to a cross for our sins. He had done nothing wrong—even a Roman governor questioned whether Jesus was guilty (Matthew 27:22–24; Mark 15:9–15; Luke 23:4, 14–15). Jesus created, loved, and helped people. We are the ones who turned against God and have done terrible things. We are the ones with the diseased souls. We are the ones in need of forgiveness and healing.

Read John 10:9–15 and answer questions 32–36:

“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. ¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.” John 10:9–15 (Jesus is speaking and using figurative language.)

32. Jesus says, “I am the gate.” What is the meaning of His words: “whoever enters through me will be saved” (v.9)?

33. Who does the thief represent (v. 10)?

34. Who does the hired hand represent (vs. 12–13; compare Jeremiah 10:21, 23:1–2)?

35. Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his _____ for the sheep (vv.11, 15).”

36. Who do the sheep represent (vv. 12–15; compare Psalm 100:3; Zechariah 10:2)?

Jesus came to earth to give His physical life so we may have true life. True life is found in a loving relationship with God. It is in this relationship that we find meaning and peace. This does not mean that life will always be easy. We live in a fallen world, and life is tough!

God always guides and leads us in love, although it may not always feel that way. Many people think that having their own way and getting what they want from someone is a sign of love. However, that is the opposite of love. It reminds me of a 1998 movie, *Simon Birch*. Simon's parents did not love or care for him. Perhaps it was because he was born unusually small and stayed that way. The cause (dwarfism) does not matter. The point is that because they did not

love him, they did not care what he did or how their actions and words would affect his life. Loving parents watch, discipline, and punish for the good of their children.

Even with uncaring parents, Simon felt God had a plan for him. He never let go of this hope. He believed he was made for a worthy purpose. When he was 12 years old, the school bus he was riding accidentally crashed into an icy lake. Because of his small size, Simon was able to save the other children, even though it meant his own sacrificial death.

God has a unique plan for each of us. It may involve heroic feats, or it may not. But there is one thing every plan includes. Every plan is designed to help us become more like Jesus. We are to be holy, righteous, and self-giving. Jesus willingly died a lonely and extremely painful death for us. Therefore, we are to die to our flesh—our sinful, selfish human desires.

Love cannot be separated from God's other attributes. God is love, but He is also holy and righteous at the same time. Some people think God should give them everything they desire and never discipline them. So, if their actions harm someone else, they would still not be held accountable. This is an inaccurate (wrong) view of God. It is also a shortsighted view of the world and of judgment to come.

God is the judge of right and wrong. He is a just judge. God always acts in accordance with His righteous character. When He decides a punishment is deserved, it is.

God hates all sin. He hates anything that opposes (goes against) His moral or righteous character. This truth brings us to the doctrine (principle) of God's wrath.

Definition: God's *wrath* is His permanent attitude and response to human sins and injustice. The word *wrath* can also be described in other terms such as anger, fury, displeasure, and irritation.

Although we define God's *wrath* in human terms of intense anger, it is *not* uncontrolled or fitful. God always has power over His feelings. Therefore, His *wrath* is deliberate and intended.

Divine wrath, no matter how fearsome, is a perfect attribute of God. It is just as important as His other characteristics. Without God's wrath, He would cease being holy, just, and righteous. We would not be able to depend on God and His promises. He could lie, cheat, and wink at evil. People could not expect justice in this life or in the next. Our existence would be precarious (shaky, insecure, uncertain).

Read Deuteronomy 9:7–8 and answer questions 37–38:

Remember this and never forget how you aroused the anger of the LORD your God in the wilderness. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the LORD. ⁸At Horeb you aroused the LORD's wrath so that he was angry enough to destroy you. Deuteronomy 9:7–8 (Horeb is the location where Moses received the Ten Commandments, and sometimes it is identified with Mt. Sinai.)

37. Moses is speaking to the Israelites. What does he want them to remember (v. 7)?

38. At Horeb you aroused the LORD's _____ so that he was _____ enough to _____ you (v. 8).

Moses is reminding the Israelites of their rebellion against the LORD. He is especially recalling the time they made a golden calf and worshiped it as a god. At the time, Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments.

God was justified in destroying these people who had turned their back on Him. Nevertheless, Moses prayed and fasted for 40 days and 40 nights for God *not* to destroy all the people. The LORD listened and showed them mercy. However, He told Moses that He would punish them for their sins (Exodus 32:34–35).

The LORD also decided that those who had sinned against Him would be blotted out of the book of life. In this sense the word blot means to wipe out or erase. The book of life or the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:27) is a list of the names of people who will receive eternal life. These are the children of God who go to heaven when they die (John 1:12–13).

39. Read Revelation 20:15. What happens when a person's name is not written in the book of life?

Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:15 (The lake of fire is the same as hell.)

40. Read Romans 5:8. Who accepted God's wrath for sin and revealed God's incredible love for us?

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

41. Read 1 John 5:3–4 and Revelation 3:5. How can you be sure that your name will never be blotted out of the book of life?

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 1 John 5:3–4 (compare 1 John 2:3–4)

The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. Revelation 3:5

Our victory lies in Christ. Jesus accepted God's righteous wrath against sin on the cross. The technical term for this is propitiation. It also means that Jesus' sacrifice makes God favorable (approving, good) toward us. Yes, all God's anger against unrighteousness was directed at Jesus. But we must not think of Jesus as the victim of God's plan. Jesus is God and the blessed Trinity planned Jesus' death on the cross before the foundations of the world (Revelation 13:8).

—End Day Three—

Day Four

God Shows His Love at the Cross

Before the creation of the world God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit knew humans would sin. In His perfect unity, the triune God planned before time to show the extent of His love. God the Son agreed to take on a human form and die for our sins. He offered His body as a sacrifice on a wooden cross.

The cross demonstrates God's love, holiness, righteousness, wrath, mercy, grace, and forgiveness. In the sacrifice of God the Son, God also demonstrates His goodness, patience, peace, wisdom, knowledge, power, jealousy, and His incomprehensibility (our inability to fully understand God with our human minds). Other attributes shown in the death of Jesus Christ are God's truthfulness, beauty, and glory. All these attributes of God are perfectly revealed in Jesus' death and His resurrection. (Of course, these attributes, or characteristics, of God are revealed throughout the Bible.)

Read Romans 1:18–32 and answer questions 42–45 (vv. 18–20 are shown below):

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. Romans 1:18–20

42. What do people receive who hold back (suppress) the truth and do evil (v. 18)?

43. What are things we can know about God, even without the Bible (vs. 19–20)?

44. Do people, anywhere on the earth or living at any time in history, have an excuse for not believing in Creator God (v. 20)? Yes No Maybe (Underline One)

45. Explain your answer about people having or not having an excuse for believing in God.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers from #42–45 with your team.

God expects us to act upon the knowledge or light we have. The Israelites had more knowledge about God than any other people during their time. They knew what God desired through the first five books of the Bible (Genesis–Deuteronomy) He had inspired Moses to write. Nevertheless, the people of Israel continued to sin without remorse (sorrow, repentance).

Read Jeremiah 32:30–33 and answer questions 46–48:

“The people of Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; indeed, the people of Israel have done nothing but arouse my anger with what their hands have made, declares the LORD. ³¹From the day it was built until now, this city has so aroused my anger and wrath that I must remove it from my sight. ³²The people of Israel and Judah have provoked me by all the evil they have done—they, their kings and officials, their priests and prophets, the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem. ³³They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline.” Jeremiah 32:30–33 (After Solomon, Israel divided, with Judah becoming the southern kingdom.)

46. Why was God angry with the people of Israel and Judah (vs. 30, 32, 33)?

47. In the above passage, underline God's response to the people for the evil they had done. What is one word you would use to describe God's attitude toward the people?

48. Are people less sinful today than they were in Israel and Judah? Yes No (Underline One)

People are still doing evil in God's sight, and He still hates sin. God's wrath is His permanent attitude and response to human sin and injustice. Remember, God also has a permanent attitude and response of love to His creation.

How can God's wrath toward sin, and His love for mankind be reconciled (resolved, settled)? Nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37). Therefore, God set up a plan to solve humanity's sin problem and satisfy His righteous wrath.

Incredibly, Jesus accepted God's wrath into His own body on the cross! In effect, God the Son has received the wrath we deserve. God solved this complex issue of His righteous wrath and His all-consuming love.

Read Romans 3:25–26 and answer questions 49–51:

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Romans 3:25–26 (Atonement means to bring together as one those who were enemies. Forbearance is patience, restraint, mercy.)

49. How did God demonstrate His righteousness (v. 25)?

50. Why does God let the sins of His faithful people committed before Jesus' death go unpunished or without penalty (vv. 25–26)?

51 Read Romans 5:9. How are you saved from God's wrath?

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! Romans 5:9

Definition: *Crucify* is a verb describing an ancient punishment where a person was put to death by nailing or binding the wrists or hands and feet to a cross.

Jesus is the one and only way to be saved from our sins and God's wrath. We must believe He is the Christ (the sent One) whose death on the cross provides salvation and then follow Him—the One who rose from the dead. To follow and obey Christ is the same thing as making Him Lord of our lives.

But what about the people who lived before Jesus was crucified? Knowledge of Christ has been progressive. That is, Christ has been revealed gradually or in stages since Adam and Eve sinned. Recall the promise God gave before they were driven out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). God said that Eve's offspring would crush Satan's head. Someone (Christ) would overpower and conquer the one (Satan) who had tempted them to sin.

Adam and Eve believed (had faith) in what God revealed to them. They acted out their faith by starting a family. They had children and told them about God. However, they did not know when or how Christ would be born or die.

They acted on the light or revelation that God had given to them. The basis of their salvation is still faith in God's promise of a Savior. From the beginning to the end of this world, all people will be saved by placing their faith in the blood of Christ. The Old Testament people who believed in the promise of a Savior are still saved by faith in Christ.

Definition: *Revelation* means the unveiling (uncovering) of something hidden. The *revelation* of God is defined as His process for making Himself known. This includes revealing His attributes, character, will, plans, and nature. God can only be known through His *revelation*.

The Bible is a record of God's special revelation about Himself and His plan of redemption. Jesus taught that the Old Testament prophets had testified (declared, gave evidence) about Him (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). The apostle Peter agreed with Jesus and taught the same (Acts 10:43).

Definition: The word *redemption* meant to pay a required price (ransom) for someone's release. For example, the price could be used for slaves, criminals, or prisoners of war to be set free. Jesus described His death on the cross as “a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). The apostle Paul also referred to Jesus’ death on the cross as a ransom (1 Timothy 2:5–6). Jesus is the Redeemer (Rescuer, Savior).

Romans 3:25 tells us that God let the sins committed before Jesus go unpunished. But now that Jesus has come to Earth, died, and resurrected (raised from the dead), all sins can be forgiven. Christ died for everyone, past, present, and future. However, God's wrath will be poured out on those who refuse His free gift of salvation. God is righteous in His love and must punish sin. In God's immense love, He made a way for all to be forgiven. Those who refuse His love must pay the price themselves. The price is hell.

52. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9b–10, 5:9. Who saves us from the coming wrath?

They (believers in other churches) tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. 1 Thessalonians 1:9b–10.

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:9

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 and answer questions 53–55:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 (The Greek word translated “compel” means to oblige or hold fast.)

53. Why does Christ's love compel us to live for Him (v. 14)?

54. How do *you* live for Christ?

55. How do *you* live in loving union with God?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #53–55 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Four—

Day Five

Union with God

Union is the act of uniting or joining two or more people or things together. Marriage, for example, is a union of two people. We normally think of marriage as a joyful and fulfilling union. But sometimes people are married or joined to someone who does not care about them. This makes for a sad union.

In Christ, you are united with God. Union with God is the same as union with Christ and the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11; 1 John 1:3). You, as a believer, have God's Spirit living in you or in your heart. Therefore, believers have the most loving union in the world!

Union with God means you can have a close, personal, and loving relationship with Him. You can experience God through conversation (prayer) and feelings. The Holy Spirit moves in your mind and spirit in ways that reveal God's presence and purpose.

The union you enjoy with God is by divine grace. It is a gift. Just as we do not earn our salvation, we do not earn our relationship with God. Jesus went to the cross not only to accept God's wrath but to give us a personal union with the living God (John 14:20).

Read 1 John 4:9–10 and answer questions 56–57:

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This 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 4:9–10

56. How did God show His love among us (v. 9)?

57. What is love according to v.10?

Union with God is promised to you as a believer. It is not something only experienced by super-spiritual or mystical Christians. However, we must believe and open ourselves to the Holy Spirit's movement in our lives. God will reveal Himself to us in His way and in His timing.

God has always wanted to be close to the people He created. Our Holy Father looks for those who will devote themselves to Him. When he finds them, our heavenly Father extends a heartwarming invitation in Jeremiah 30:21b–22.

58. Read Jeremiah 30:21b-22. What does God promise for those He brings near to Himself?

“I will bring him near and he will come close to me—for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?” declares the LORD. ²²“So you will be my people, and I will be your God.”
Jeremiah 30:21b–22

One of the ways I experience God's love is during my prayer time. From the time I became a believer God has called me into His presence—first thing in the morning. Through God's grace, I yearn (long) for this daily time with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As I read the Bible during this time, the Holy Spirit will bring verses to my attention. I know this is God's way of speaking to me. He will also speak to me in my spirit about things He wants me to do. I write these tasks in a notebook and cross them off when they are completed.

During my morning time with God, I also worship and thank Him. In addition, the Holy Spirit also reminds me (convicts) of sins to confess, prayers to pray, and general fellowship. This quality time with God is *never* boring and is *always* the highlight of my day.

Our union with God is ongoing, not just for morning time. This is only one example of how union with God may be experienced. I pray in order to experience and be aware of God all day. I want to take this morning-time fellowship with me wherever I go and whatever I am doing.

59. Read Galatians 2:20. How does the apostle Paul live?

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
Galatians 2:20

Action Step

Read 1 Corinthians 6:17 and Romans 8:11, 14 and pray for a holy and vibrant (lively, deep, bright) union with God:

But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:17

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.
Romans 8:11

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. Romans 8:14

60. I have prayed for a holy and vibrant union with God? Yes No (Underline One)

Remind God often that you want to have a vigorous and dynamic union with Him. Ask His Holy Spirit to unite with your soul and reveal Himself to you. Praise and thank Him daily for making your relationship possible through Jesus Christ.

61. Read 1 John 4:16. What can we rely on?

*And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.*¹ John 4:16

We have been learning about our individual relationship with God, and this is important. We each have to decide to accept Christ when the Spirit draws us. No one can make this decision for us. We also have individual minds, hearts, and emotions. God made us this way.

God also made us for fellowship or friendship with others. Being in union with God means we are also joined together with other believers. The church is the body of Christ. Church is the community of believers coming together in Him. Christians share in life socially and in meaningful ways to please God.

62. Read Ephesians 5:1–2. How should we treat others?

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
Ephesians 5:1–2

Love is *not* something to be hoarded (stockpiled). We are to follow God's example and walk in love by giving freely of ourselves. God enables us by pouring out His love into our hearts by His Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Our power to do *good* also comes from God (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Even when we mess up, God loves us. Even when we do not cooperate with God, He loves us. Even when we do not feel loveable or worthy, God loves us. Yes, even when we do not *feel* God's love, He loves us.

Action Steps

63. Read and meditate on Psalm 36:5–6. Describe God's love in your own words:

Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. ⁶Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep. You, LORD, preserve both people and animals. Psalm 36:5–6

Trust in God's love. God is love. Trust in God's love for you. No matter what is happening in your life, believe and put your hope in Christ.

64. Read and memorize Psalm 52:8–9.

But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. ⁹For what you have done I will always praise you in the presence of your faithful people. And I will hope in your name, for your name is good. Psalm 52:8–9

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer and memory verses from #63–64 with your team.

Look to God for your source of love. No one else. Satan and his followers will try to get you to take your eyes off God. They will tempt you to seek satisfaction from relatives, friends, and others. Your heart will not be filled by seeking attention or approval from anyone but God. Call on Him now to fill you with His love. Receive it in thanksgiving and praise.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14

—End Day Five and Lesson 3—

Next—Unit 1: Who Is God, Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign

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