

Surprise by Grace, week 3: the Big Love of God

1. Let's start this week's time off a bit differently. Rather than immediately enter into discussion, take 5 minutes to reflect. Spend some time thinking about God's love—not in concept, but in reality. Use the following three questions as your guide:

1. When is the last time you truly, deeply felt that God loved you? Do you always feel that way? Never? Is there a specific moment where He felt closer than ever?

2. When is the last time God felt distant to you? Like if he actually loved you, then He really wasn't showing it?

3. What do you think the difference was between those two times?

2. In the video, we talked about Voltaire's famous line, "If God has made us in His image, then we have returned the Favor." Do you think this is true? Are we guilty of exchanging the truth of how God *really* is for something that is easier to understand or somehow more like us? How?

Is there some image of God you have in your head that needs to be blown to bits?

That may sound strange, so let me clarify: Do you have an understanding of God's character or His actions or His attitude that somehow doesn't match up to the God of Love that we've been describing? For instance...

...Do you worry he's waiting for you to fail?

...Is He going to punish you?

...Do you see him like your parents? Is that helpful?

...Do you see him like a president, or a dictator, or a king, or an absentee ruler?

...Do you see him as cold or distant?

...Does he Love the people you Love, and hate the people you hate?

...Does he not pay attention to you sometimes?

...Is there some other image you have not listed here?

Now. Don't be afraid to speak your answer out loud. Ask your group: can you help me undo this idea of God that I have in my head?

3. Read 1 John 3:1-2.

First of all, are you as awestruck by this reality as John seems to be? Does it astonish and bewilder you, or have you gotten used to it over time?

John says that "the world does not know us, because it did not know Him." Apparently, something about you is supposed to be so shaped by this Love that people see God right through you, as someone looks at a son or daughter and can see the distinguishing features of the Father.

How has the Love of God changed you? How are you different as a result of knowing and experiencing God's love? Can others see His love in you?

4. Have someone read out loud the following, one after the other:

1. Psalm 119: 13-18
2. This prayer by the rabbi Joshua Abraham Heschel:

"Dear Lord, grant me the grace of wonder. Surprise me, amaze me, awe me in every crevice of your universe. Delight me to see how Your Christ plays in ten thousand places, lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not His, to the Father through the features of men's faces. Each day enrapture me with your marvelous things without number. I do not ask to see the reason for it all; I ask only to share the wonder of it all."

As we draw toward Easter, we need to remember that we celebrate Jesus' death and Resurrection in order to once again be amazed by what it all means. So spend some time in prayer. Specifically, pray that we all can once again be stunned by the magnificent Love of God!