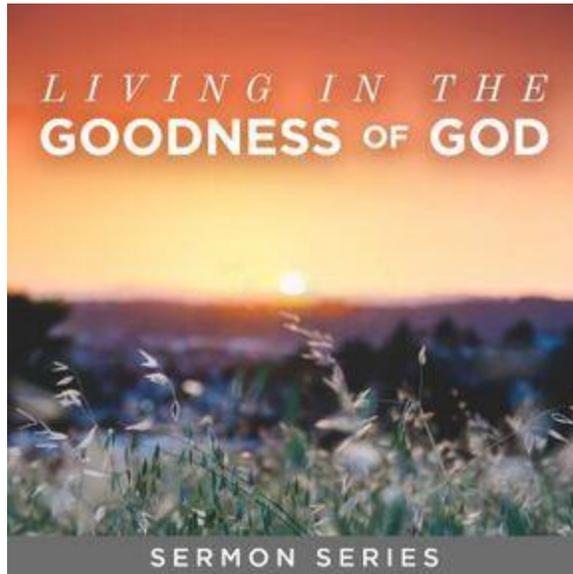


LIVING IN THE GOODNESS OF GOD

IS GOD REALLY GOOD ALL THE TIME – Part 1
An Introduction to Psalm 23

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
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Words of Encouragement Days 225-230



LIVING IN THE GOODNESS OF GOD

God's Favor - What is it and how to you get it?
Many men and women through the ages have been said to have God's favor. You, too, can have God's favor. This sermon series focuses on what it means to live in the goodness of God by trusting Him. Find the answer to worry, regret, indecision, emotional pain, and fear through the 12 expressions of God's goodness taught through the 23rd Psalm.

This Week's Memory Verse:

**"For the Lord is good and His love endures forever;
His faithfulness continues through all generations."
Psalm 100:5 (NIV)**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 225
FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - LOVE

"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

LOVE LIKE GOD LOVES

JOHN 3:16, perhaps the most famous verse of the Bible, is a powerful declaration of the gospel message. This verse refines the definition of love so it is known to be more than an emotion. Love is an act, it is a service, and to love someone is to serve or to give to them, whether that means giving yourself, your time, your emotions, or your energy. For God so loved the world, that He GAVE! He gave us His only Son. It is a sacrificial and generous act of love. May we learn to love like God loves, unconditionally and selflessly, and may we love each other, giving ourselves to each other, regardless of whether or not that love is returned.

The Jews of Jesus' day believed strongly that God only loved Israel and they believed God was exclusively for the Jews. Yet here in John 3:16, we read of love that transcends race, nationality, language, tribe - for God so loved the WORLD! This is a universal offer of salvation to all and a declaration that God loves the world, the world of many nations, tribes, and tongues. God is all inclusive, not just for the Jews, not just for Israel, but for everyone. The love of God is limitless, it clutches all mankind.

We do not, however, receive this benefit or the blessings of His love until we believe in Jesus, God's gift to mankind. The Father gave us a gift. This gift is the way of salvation, our deliverance, and our way to eternity with Him. This gift is priceless. You cannot buy it, you cannot earn it, and you

can receive it only if you believe. To simply believe is not what is being asked for, it is not an agreement or an awareness. This believe is trusting and clinging onto Jesus, walking with Him every day. Just as you would value a gift, value Jesus. Value your time with Him, prioritize this, and make it a lifestyle.

REFLECT: What does God's unconditional love mean to you? What does it mean to love like Jesus? Who can you love like Jesus? What can you do to show them love today?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You for loving me unconditionally, just as I am. Help me to become a person who loves others the way You love. We see in today's passage that love is selfless, love is inclusive, and love is a gift. It is absolutely pure and true. The Bible tells us in 1 John 4 that love is from God and whoever loves has been of God and knows God because God is love. Help me to be a person who loves people like You love them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 226
FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - LOVE

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you." Isaiah 54:10

LOVE THAT POURS

GOD'S love is unfailing. To understand the difference between God's unfailing love and our own, consider this analogy comparing love to a jug of water. When someone shows love to us, we usually respond by pouring much love right back onto them, just like when we pour water out from a jug to fill up a glass. In the same way, when someone fails to show us love, we hold back and do not pour out much love and even stop pouring out love all together. Our love wavers, is not constant, and is very limited because we can regulate how much we pour out onto others and can also stop pouring when we run out of it.

But there is good news! God's love is not like our love. Instead, God's love is ever-flowing and always constant, never stops, and never depends on how we act towards God. This is what it means to have unfailing love. Isaiah 54:10 speaks about how the unfailing love of God is more reliable and stronger than the mountains, which have stood in their place since the beginning of time. While we are nowhere close to having unfailing love, this is what we aim to give to others when we are filled with the Holy Spirit and living out the fruit of the Spirit. Only then can we really begin to love others with a love that is unwavering and independent of the circumstances around us.

REFLECT: Write a definition of the word unwavering. Beside it, write a definition of unwavering love. Consider what God's unwavering love looks like to you. Now consider how you love others. How easy is it for you to love others? What can you do to love others more?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I praise and thank You for Your steadfast love towards me. Thank You, Lord, for Your never-failing faithfulness, comfort, and grace which is new every morning and refreshed every day. Thank You that you are a God who cares me and graciously carries and tends to me as I trust in You.

Though I am poor and needy, thank You, Father, that You hear and answer my cries. You send help in time of trouble, provision in time of need, strength when I am weary, and comfort when I am in distress. Thank You, that You carry me in Your everlasting arms of mercy and grace. I praise Your holy name that Your grace is sufficient for all my needs, and made perfect in my weakness. God, Your steadfast love towards me is very precious and I love You, yet my love is very weak. Help me to love You more and more with every passing day. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 227

FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - LOVE

"My commandment is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." John 15:12-13

LOVE EACH OTHER AS HAVE LOVED YOU

PEOPLE repeatedly struggle with the idea of love presented in today's passage. How can you command someone to love? Isn't love supposed to be a feeling? Unfortunately, in this respect we have become slaves to what social media portrays. We think we only need to love those who we call 'friends'. Instead, what Jesus essentially speaks about here is far different. Unlike the instructions of this world, Jesus tells us to love our enemies, too.

It's certainly easy to love people who love you back. But what about those that have hurt or wronged you? Are you supposed to love them, too? Surely not! So, why then does God want us to love those who are hard to love? One thing we can be sure of is this: He will never command us to do what is impossible. As Jesus said, "with man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26) Our ability to love others on our own is limited. It's circumstantial, conditional, and subjective. But with God's help, we are able to love the way Jesus does, loving EVERYONE at ALL TIMES.

According to 1 John 4:8, "God is love." Therefore, as we draw closer to God, His love flows from us to others and contains qualities of God's love. As followers of Christ, we are able to show love because we've experienced it. (1 John 4:19) If the Almighty and Sovereign God came down to earth to lay down His life for someone as wretched and sinful as we were before we even knew Him, surely we can follow this example. That willingness to love those who don't deserve it is what it means to truly follow Jesus, and this is the kind of

love God commands us to give - to love everyone, even the unlovable.

The next time you find yourself struggling to love someone, remember the command God has given us: "love each other as I have loved you." Are you able to love others the way Jesus loves us?

REFLECT: Think of a time where you received an extravagant gift. What was your reaction? If you're like most people, you wanted to thank whoever gave it to you. God is the same - He loves to hear us thank Him for what He has done. Take some time to thank Him for His unwavering love. Then look for a way to share that love with someone today.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, more and more I come to understand what Jesus meant when He said that He is one with the Father and prayed that His disciples may be one. I see that love is a precious union of heart and a sweet communion of spirit, and just as the Father and Son display the same powerful love, so we, too, by the power of the Holy Spirit are to have that same beautiful love developing in us.

Today, I pray that the body of Christ may become united as one, and abound in the unity of the spirit more and more in love, not compromising truth but showing a genuine concern for one another. I pray that individually and collectively, we may live godly lives in Christ Jesus and seek to encourage and edify one another, seeking to be of the same mind and having the same godly love for each other. I pray that we may be united in spirit and in purpose, and that we do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but rather with humility of mind regard the needs of others as more important than our own. Help me to live out this type of love in my life. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 228

FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - LOVE

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away." 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

LOVE IS MORE THAN JUST A FEELING

THE Bible speaks a great deal about love. One passage found in 1 John 4:7-8 says, *"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."* In other words, those who know God love others.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, our passage for today, breaks it down into a list for us: *Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.* (1 Corinthians 13:4) Notice two things about love here. First, love is defined by how we show it to others - love is patient, i.e. it exhibits patience towards others, even when it's difficult to do so. Love is kind - love is known when we show kindness to someone. Second, love is more than just a feeling, love is a choice. Indeed, rather than just going with our emotions, sometimes love can actually mean fighting or resisting them. For example, love is patient. Being patient isn't something which we would ever choose to do naturally. You would never wake up in the morning thinking that you want someone to irritate you so you can practice being patient. It's the same with kindness, the same when it comes to not being easily angered, and the same when it comes to keeping no record of wrongs.

So rather than just being something which you feel, love is a choice and a decision we make in the moment when we decide to behave or say something different from what we might do by natural instinct. Love means being selfless and that involves an element of sacrifice.

REFLECT: Which characteristic of love in today's passage is easiest for you to do? Which is the hardest? Growth happens when we make good choices to change our behavior. So what area do you need to grow in and what is one step you can take today to begin to make a change? Share your desire to change with God and ask Him for help to take the steps needed for success.

TODAY'S PRAYER:

Abba Father, Thank You for the love You have given and shown me. Thank You for surrounding me with Your love daily, for the opportunities You give me to grow in love, and for the instructions written in Your word which teach me. Thank You, Holy Spirit, for helping me to change and grow. I desire to love others the way 1 Corinthians 13 speaks of love. Help me to take a step today to begin to make a good change in one of the characteristics of love so that I can better reflect Your love to others. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 229

FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - LOVE

After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love Me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “You know I love You.”

“Then feed My lambs,” Jesus told him.

Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love Me?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “You know I love You.”

“Then take care of My sheep,” Jesus said.

A third time He asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love Me?”

Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, You know everything. You know that I love You.”

Jesus said, “Then feed My sheep” “I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don’t want to go.” Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, “Follow Me.”
John 21:15-19

UNRETURNED LOVE

HAVE you ever experienced unreturned love? You know, the type of love that puts the needs of others before your own? The type of love where you forgive without cause or give far more than you could get back? Whether it’s within a friendship, a relationship or even within family, it can often prove to be the greatest feeling, but I’m sure even the best of us have had times where we’ve wondered, is this fair?

When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times, Peter responded each time with, “Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.” It seems Peter even got offended when he was asked the third time. I mean, I suppose I’d respond the same way!

Although Peter had already denied Jesus three times, Jesus was not calling Peter out on his denial. As Jesus was whipped, beaten, crowned with thorns that pierced through His skin and pinned to the cross, He did not think of those who had wronged Him, or whether they even deserved His sacrifice. Instead, He endured it all because of the love He had for us. He sacrificed everything so that through His love, we might have life. His love is lavishly unselfish. It is unrelenting. It is a perfect love that chases us and keeps no record of wrongs. How beautiful is it that although Peter denied Him, the only thing Jesus cared to ask about was Peter’s LOVE? He didn’t focus on Peter’s failing. He didn’t ask for explanations like we might have expected. Instead, He asked “Do you love Me?”

Jesus pursues each of us not for obedience, not for repentance, not for promises, not for our behavior, but for a heart of love, because once we have that, all the rest will follow. We will then “feed His lambs”, “tend to His sheep”, and give to others the love that gives life. Through the fruit of the Spirit, we have this love alive within us. Although we can never reciprocate the greatest sacrifice ever made, we can always give the greatest gift we have ever received, which was given to us unreservedly. So whenever you begin to wonder if you are giving more love than you receive, pause. Rejoice. Unreturned love is proof that God’s love is alive within you, and it is simply the greatest gift you will ever give.

REFLECT: What would your response be if Jesus asked you the question, "Do you love me?" What can you do to show Him how much you love Him? Who can you share His love with today?

TODAY’S PRAYER:

Lord, You give your love so freely to me. Fill my heart with the love that You freely give, and help me to make Your love my first and last thoughts each day. May I love others and freely give love to them. Show me what it means to love others in a tangible way. Make my spirit a spirit of joy, happiness, and love for both my friends and my enemies, and help me to love others as abundantly as You have loved me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 230

FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - LOVE

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” 1 John 4:7-8

“Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.” Ephesians 1:4 (NLT)

INTERSTELLAR LOVE

INTERSTELLAR by Christopher Nolan (2014) is not a movie that is quoted very often when speaking of God. In this most unlikely of movies, there is a hidden gem in one scene that we, as Christians, can really use to understand love. During a monologue emotionally delivered by Anne Hathaway, she says the following:

"Love is the one thing we're capable of conceiving that transcends dimensions of time and space." She goes on to explain how we're able to love someone regardless of how far away they are. We're capable of loving someone who died years ago. Regardless of time and space, love still exists and still attracts.

This brings us to 1 John 4:8, specifically the last part; God IS love. It is fascinating to know that before time, space, and everything we know was created in Genesis, God existed; love existed. Before Hollywood turned this concept into a movie, God showed us what real love is.

Ephesians 1:4 tells us God loved us before the universe was created, let alone before we were formed in the womb. Love was able to reach us through time as Christ thought of you and me while being nailed to the cross and experiencing pain and suffering to justify us. The distance between heaven and earth was irrelevant to God when He chose to send His love down in the form of His Son to die for the ones He loves. No matter how far the sheep wandered, the Shepherd's love for it remained intact, and we see this parable personifying how love transcends distance as the shepherd sets out to find His beloved lost sheep. (Matthew 18:12-14) No matter how much distance you think there is between us and God right now (both physically and metaphorically), His love

is still able to bridge that gap, for love existed before space was created. Love is not dependent on time or space; it exists in a higher dimension. God loved you for where you were, where you are, and where you're going to be.

Love is planted within each and every one of us. If we don't love, we don't know God. (1 John 4:7) As we contemplate how we can grow closer to God and get to know Him better, know that God has placed the very thing required to do so within us: love.

REFLECT: God IS love and God loves YOU. These two statements are familiar to us. What do they mean to you? Take some time to reflect on what it means that God has ALWAYS existed. Then reflect on the fact that He has ALWAYS loved you. When did you first realize He loved you? What does His love mean to you today?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You that You made Yourself known to humanity through Your Word. You recognized that as humans, we are rebellious and prideful, yet You loved us so much that You sent Your only begotten Son to lay down His sinless life as the perfect sacrifice for our sin, for my sin, so that by His death and resurrection, all who believe on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life.

Thank You, that in Your love You chose to communicate with us through Your Written Word, the Bible, and by Your apostles and prophets, You revealed to mankind Your plan of salvation so that whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ would not be condemned. You are a personal God and loved me so much that Your Son, Jesus, willingly went to the cross to redeem me from the penalty of sin, and reconcile me back to You eternally.

Thank You, that Your Word is like a perfumed love-letter that has been forwarded from heaven in love to all. Thank You for the truth it contains and thank You for Your perfect and unconditional love and grace towards me. Help me to assimilate these truths deep within the confines of my soul and glorify Your name for the unconditional love that You have seen fit to pour out on me by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve