

GOD LOVES YOU

Overview

Speaker: Spiritual Leader or Assistant Spiritual Leader

Talk #4

Length: 20 Minutes

The Aim of the Talk

GOD LOVES YOU is the second of five talks on God's grace given by the Spiritual Leaders. This talk builds on the talk entitled GOD CREATED YOU. In that talk, participants heard that God created us in the image of God and calls us "beloved" and "very good." The participants will hear the FAITH talk before this one, which will lead them into the realization that relationship with God is possible by faith. In this talk, participants hear God's invitation to receive God's accepting love and to say yes to God's offer of a relationship. While this talk touches on the reality of sin and separation from God and mentions that conversion/Chrysalis is a continuous process, neither is the focus of this talk. The focus of this particular talk is God's unconditional love and God's call to us to say yes to that relationship, which is a beginning of a new life in Christ. In this way, your assignment is not to give a lecture or sermon but to bear witness. That means sharing what you've seen, heard, and experienced of God's love and offer of a relationship and the difference that has made in your life. Think of and look for ways that God's love plays a role in your daily life, how it informs and influences everything you say and do. Think about times you struggled with realizing that love and of how you remained separated from it; reflect on how remembering that God created and loves you helps in those times. Get in touch with the ways that you see and experience God's love for you and how those ways make a difference in your life and your ability to accept this love relationship from and with God. What you discover will be the richest content for your talk.

Before Writing Your Talk

The following pages offer resources to help you connect your story and experiences with the theme of the talk.

- Begin with reading through "Exploring the Theme." As you read, highlight points that stick out to you, points you really want to emphasize in your talk.
- Then move to the "Engaging Your Spirit" section. This section is to guide your reflection as you prepare for the talk. You do not need to include

them in your talk, but you may include what reflection came up for you, if you would like. The participants will engage with some of these exercises during their table discussions following your talk.

- Spend time in prayer over the “Exploring the Theme” and “Engaging Your Spirit” sections. Pay attention to personal stories that come to mind, making notes on the specific thoughts and words.
- Open yourself to God’s love, pay attention, and see what happens. Do not feel like you have to make every point in the “Exploring the Theme” section; rather, use it as a guide for your writing.

Exploring the Theme/Talk Outline

“Will you join me in the ‘Prayer to the Holy Spirit’ found on page 7 of the *Worship Booklet*?”

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations; through Christ our Lord. Amen. You may be seated.”

Introduction

- Choose a brief, simple way to introduce the talk to give participants an idea about God’s amazing love.
 - Share a “Chrysalis Moment,” a time of transformation when you had a difficult time embracing God’s love.
 - Share the image that comes to mind as you think about God’s love.

“My name is _____, and the title of this talk is GOD LOVES YOU.”

1. Signs of God’s love are all around us.

- a. In God’s creation
 - i. Creation is an expression of God’s overflowing love. Remember from the GOD CREATED YOU talk that you, too, are part of God’s creation, made to share in God’s glory and purpose (see Psalm 8).
- b. In God’s covenant with humanity through scripture
 - i. The Bible is a love story—the story of God’s love for humanity, despite our sin.
 - ii. Throughout the Old Testament, we hear God repeatedly inviting us into a covenant relationship—a mutual relationship of love.
 - iii. Through Jesus, God continues the story in offering a transformational relationship to us. Jesus models a life transformed through relationship with God.

2. Yet there are many reasons we ignore God’s love.

- a. Ignorance. Many people do not know about God’s love or have been taught misleading images of God (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13; 1 John 4:18; Hebrews 4:14–16; 1 Corinthians 15:34, 10:1).

- b. Desire to be in control. Trusting God with our needs, happiness, and life purpose is scary; we would rather trust ourselves (see 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 4:5, 7:1; 1 Timothy 6:17).
- c. Doubts about the reality of God. We wonder if God is a figment of human imagination and if God is trustworthy.
- d. Pressure from others. We tend to go with the flow and let others decide what we think. Saying “yes” to God may mean saying “no” to certain activities.

3. Sometimes there are negative consequences when we ignore God’s love.

- a. We have a deep-seated emptiness that we try to fill with other things. We can begin to strive for other ideals that cannot replace the ideal of a relationship with God.
- b. We suffer from pain and guilt when we live against God’s image in us. Sometimes this pain can result in us lashing out at those closest to us, not believing that we are good enough or loved enough, by God or by those in our lives.
- c. We struggle with poor self-image, low self-esteem, bad feelings about who we are. When we don’t believe that God calls us beloved, we seek that affirmation in other places, and we don’t believe it when it is spoken from our friends and family.
- d. Consider sharing a “Chrysalis Moment” here, perhaps a personal story of your transformation where you experienced a negative result of ignoring God’s love and how you grew from that moment.

4. God’s offer of a relationship is called *grace*.

- a. God pursues us throughout our lives. We call this *prevenient grace*, grace before we even know who God is.
- b. Grace is something freely given—not anything we work for, not anything we are deserving of, but a gift given by God.
- c. God loves us just as we are, not for how good or holy we can be. Even when we feel unacceptable or unworthy, God accepts us. Even when we fail, God forgives us and is ready to give us another chance. Even when we see no future for ourselves, God prepares a way.
- d. Accepting God’s unconditional love for us—believing that nothing can separate us from God’s love, that nothing we do can make God stop loving us—is the basis of a Christian life. The term we use to describe

this is *justifying grace*. It is grace that we are aware of and accept for ourselves, the grace that makes us right with God.

5. Believing that YOU are God’s beloved is not a one-time decision; it’s an ongoing journey.

- a. Believing is not a one-time thing. Most of us experience reawakening to God’s love many times.
 - i. This may be because we’ve forgotten something we learned previously.
 - ii. Sometimes it’s because we remember the teaching but do not have a passion to go with it.
 - iii. Sometimes it’s because we have a new experience or learn something new that changes our understanding.
 - iv. Saying “yes” to God can be something that happens every day. It can be a major moment in life, or a small simple “yes” every day (see Luke 9:23).
 - v. Think of a time that a new experience or learning something new awakened (or reawakened) you to God’s love.
- b. At times, we may struggle with “head vs. heart”—having the knowledge and going through the motions but not truly believing and living out that truth. Consider sharing a time when you struggled with remembering you were God’s beloved.
- c. God longs for us to know this love. God is with us and yearns for relationship with us. God loves us more than we can possibly imagine. Unconditionally. Undeservedly. Everlastingly. Nothing you do—or do not do—can lessen or increase it. We are never alone, no matter how badly we mess up or how dark a place we find ourselves in. God wants the best for us. God wants us to love God too.
- d. Share a “Chrysalis Moment,” a moment of transformation, when you had to re-experience God’s love in your life. Consider sharing from the road map exercise in “Engaging Your Spirit.”

6. When we believe in God’s love for us, we begin to accept the relationship God offers.

- a. Love is a relationship. It starts with God’s reaching out to us. “We love because God loved us first” (1 John 4:19, CEV). God longs for a two-way relationship. God wants more than to say, “I love you,” and leave it at that. God longs for the day we accept God’s love and say in return, “I

love you.” God does not give up on us; God pursues us because God wants the best for us.

- b. Once we awaken to our own belovedness, we are able to see others as God’s beloved. Jesus treated everyone as if they mattered—lepers (see Matthew 8:1–3), Zacchaeus (see Luke 19:1–10), sinners of all kinds (the Gospels are full of these stories)—because he was aware of how beloved by God all people are.
- c. Saying “yes” to God is an act of faith. It is deciding to offer our lives to God, to put our lives and future in God’s hands. It is to accept for ourselves this love that God offers and to live into the freedom God has in store for us. It is a journey, but it is a great one!

7. Fly with Christ!

Engaging Your Spirit

Your Spiritual Life Map

Take some time to create a road map of your life, your journey. When have you felt closest to God’s love and when have you had a difficult time embracing it? What does this look like drawn out? Is it a timeline? Is it a mountain scene with peaks and valleys? Is it a twisty road with some straight paths and some hard turns? Consider sharing a few points of this journey in your talk, not just the easy, close-to-God ones, but also those that were more challenging. Pay attention to how God has been present throughout your journey, even at the hard turns or low points.

Reflection

What images come to mind when you think about God’s love? What have you found helpful in teaching about God’s love? Consider incorporating one of these images into the talk.

Writing Your Talk

- Use the “Exploring the Theme” section as your main guide as you write.
- Allow what you have learned and the experiences you have remembered to point to ideas and stories that will help you outline your talk and begin writing.
- You will want to speak from the heart, ***to be honest and real***. As you share personal stories, make sure to do so in a way that does not pretend to have

all the answers or everything figured out. Share authentically about the joys and the challenges of living out the topic of your talk.

- As you write, continue to remain open to God’s love and presence in your life. Let writing your talk become a spiritual practice, a creative exercise that engages both mind and spirit to help you express your own thoughts, understanding, and experience. By doing so, you will be helping others experience God’s love.

Be Sure to Include

- God’s love is unconditional and is expressed through creation.
- A “Chrysalis Moment,” a personal story about opening up to God’s unconditional love, accepting the offer by faith. Sharing about the joys and challenges of that part of the journey. See the *Chrysalis Team Manual* for a discussion of what “Chrysalis Moments” are (p. 37).
- Saying “yes” to God’s love is a continual journey; sometimes we are able to say “yes” more easily than others.

For details and tips about how to write, rehearse, and present your talk, see the “Preparing Your Talk” section in the *Chrysalis Team Manual* (pp. 35-38).

Table Discussion Guide

Activity: Take some time to create a road map of your life, your journey. When have you felt closest to God's love and when have you had a difficult time embracing it? What does this look like drawn out? Is it a timeline? Is it a mountain scene with peaks and valleys? Is it a twisty road with some straight paths and some hard turns?

1. Consider sharing a few points of this journey around the table—not only the easy, close-to-God ones but also those that were more challenging.
2. Have I really thought about how much God loves me? Do I feel that I have accepted God's love?
3. What reasons do I give for ignoring God's love?
4. Who helps remind me that I am God's beloved?