

UNIT

3

VERSE TO MEMORIZE

“He said to him, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command.’”

MATTHEW 22:37-38



# GOD PURSUES A LOVE RELATIONSHIP

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## Carrie's Cancer

When one of my children could not get his own way, he would occasionally say, "You don't love me." Was that true? No, my love had not changed. At that moment, however, my love was expressing itself differently than he wanted it to.

When our only daughter, Carrie, was 16, the doctors told us she had cancer. Doctors had noticed a small spot on an X-ray but had not followed up on it for two years. Now the cancer was advanced. We had to take her through extensive chemotherapy and radiation. We suffered along with Carrie as we watched her experience the severe sickness that accompanies the treatments. Some people face such an experience by blaming God and questioning why He doesn't love them anymore. Carrie's cancer treatments could have been a devastating experience for us. Did God still love us? Yes. Had His love changed? No, He still cared for us with an infinite love.

When you face circumstances like this, you can ask God to explain what is happening. We did that. We asked Him what we should do. I raised all of those questions, but I never said, "Lord, I guess You don't love me."

Long before this experience with Carrie, I determined that no matter what my circumstances, I would never look at my situation except against the backdrop of the cross. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God forever convinced me that He loved me. For this reason, during Carrie's illness I could go before the heavenly Father and see behind my daughter the cross of Jesus Christ. I said, "Father, don't ever let me look at my life and question Your love for me. Your love for me was settled on the cross. That has never changed and will never change." Our love relationship with the heavenly Father sustained us through an extremely difficult time.

No matter what your circumstances are, God's love never changes. The cross, the death of Jesus Christ, and His resurrection are God's final, total, and complete expression of His love for you. Never allow your heart to question God's love. Settle it on the front end of your desire to know Him and experience Him. He loves you. He created you for a love relationship. He has been pursuing you in that love relationship. Every encounter He has with you is an expression of His love for you. God would cease to be God if He expressed Himself in any way other than *perfect love!*<sup>1</sup>

# DAY 1

*A love relationship with God is more important than any other single factor in your life.*

## CREATED FOR A LOVE RELATIONSHIP

In the first two units I introduced you to some basic truths for knowing and doing the will of God. The seven realities you have examined summarize the kind of relationship through which God works to accomplish His purposes. As I said earlier, this course was not written to teach you a program, a method, or a formula for knowing and doing God's will. It was written to point you to a *relationship* with God. God will then work through that relationship to accomplish through you whatever He pleases.

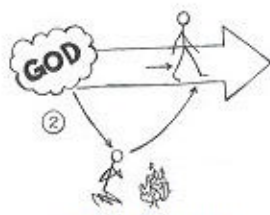
- 1 **God created you for a love relationship.**
  - a. Has there been a time in your life when you questioned God's love for you? If there has, describe it here.
  - b. In that experience, were there ways God was expressing His love for you?
  - c. What Scriptures do you turn to when looking for assurance of God's love for you?
- 2 **This unit will focus on the second reality. Write the second reality in the margin, but replace the word *you* with *me*.**

### WITH ALL YOUR HEART

In this unit I want to help you see that God Himself pursues a love relationship with you. He takes the initiative to bring you into this relationship. He created you for fellowship with Himself. That is the purpose of your life. This love relationship can and should be real and personal to you.

- 3 **If you were standing before God, could you describe your relationship with Him by saying, "I love You with all my heart and all my soul and all my mind and all my strength"?  Yes  No**  
If not, how would you describe your current relationship with God?

#### REALITY 2



#### RELATIONSHIP

One of our church members was always having difficulty in his personal life, with his family, at work, and in the church. In a church meeting he became extremely angry and stormed out of the room. It was obvious his life was filled with anger. Soon after, I met with him and asked, "Can you describe your relationship with God by sincerely saying, 'I love You with all my heart?'"

The strangest look came over his face. He said, "Nobody has ever asked me that. No, I could not describe my relationship with God that way. I could say I obey Him, I serve Him, I worship Him, and I fear Him. But I cannot say I love Him." This man had a father who never told him he loved him. The son feared his father, but he didn't love him. The man had wrongly assumed God was the same kind of Father. I helped this man realize God loved him and wanted to have loving fellowship with him. That truth set the man free to experience the love of His heavenly Father.

Everything in this man's life was out of order because God's basic purpose for his life was missing. God created us for a love relationship with Him. If you cannot describe your relationship with God by saying that you love Him with all your being, you need to ask the Holy Spirit to bring you into that kind of a relationship.

- 4** If you need to and are willing, pause now and ask the Holy Spirit to bring you into a wholehearted love relationship with God. Spend time in prayer expressing your love to God. In the space below, list ways God has expressed His love for you over the years. Thank Him again, for each one.

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If I tried to summarize the entire Old Testament, it would be expressed in this verse: "Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:4-5).

Throughout the Old Testament, God expressed His love for people. The essence of the New Testament is the same. Quoting from Deuteronomy, Jesus said the greatest commandment in the law is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). Everything in your Christian life, everything about knowing Him and experiencing Him, everything about knowing His will depends on the quality of your love relationship with God. If that is not settled, nothing in your life will be right.

- 5** Read the following Scriptures, which describe a love relationship with God. As you read, circle the word *love* (or any form of it, such as *loves*) each time it appears.

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, love the LORD your God, obey him, and remain faithful to him. For he is your life" (Deut. 30:19-20).

"God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"The one who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by my Father. I also will love him and will reveal myself to him." (John 14:21).

"Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us . . . nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35,37,39).

"This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." (1 John 3:16).




Can you describe your relationship with God by sincerely saying, "I love You with all my heart"?



Everything in your Christian life, everything about knowing Him and experiencing Him, everything about knowing His will depends on the quality of your love relationship with God.





A love relationship with God is more important than any other single factor in your life.

**SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

My Christian life depends on the quality of my love relationship with God.

God created me for a love relationship with Him.

Everything God says and does is an expression of love.

A love relationship with God is more important than any other single factor in my life.

“God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:9-10,19).

**6 Using the preceding Scriptures, answer the following questions.**

- a. Who is your life? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. In what ways has God demonstrated His love for you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. How can you show your love for Him? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. What does God promise to do in response to your loving Him? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. Who loved first—you or God? \_\_\_\_\_

Answers: (a) The Lord is your life. (b) He has drawn you to Himself. He sent His only Son to provide eternal life for you. Jesus laid down His life for us. (c) Choose life, listen to His voice, hold fast to Him, believe in His only Son, obey His commands and teachings, be willing to lay down your life for your brothers. (d) You and your children will live under His blessings. By believing in Jesus, you have eternal life. The Father will love you. God will come to make His home with you. He will make you more than conquerors over all your difficulties. You will never be separated from His love. (e) God loved you first. “God is love” (1 John 4:16). His very nature is love.

What is the one thing God wants from you? He wants you to love Him with all your being. Your experiencing God depends on your having this relationship of love. A love relationship with God is more important than any other single factor in your life.

**7 Write your Scripture memory verses for this unit on the following lines and review your verses from other units. Remember, you may select a different verse to memorize or a different translation.**

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**8 Day 3’s assignment may require advance planning. Turn to page 60 and read activity 2 so you can prepare.**

**Review today’s lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.**

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

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Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

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What does God want you to do in response to today’s study?

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# A LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

## DAY 2

Picture in your mind a tall ladder leaning against a wall. Now think about your life as a process of climbing that ladder. Wouldn't it be a tragedy to ascend to the top and find you had placed the ladder against the wrong wall? One life to live, and you missed it! Earlier in the course we talked about your life being God-centered. That means your life must be properly related to God. This is the love relationship for which you were created—a God-centered love relationship. Your walk with God (Father, Son, and Spirit) is the single most important aspect of your life. If it is not as it should be, nothing else will function properly.

I have known businesspeople who lost their business, their money, and their property. With everything stripped away, they had to decide if having Jesus was enough for them to still have joy. If you lost all of your money and possessions, but you had a vibrant walk with God, could you truly be happy? We are a doing people. We feel worthless or useless if we are not busy doing something. Scripture leads us to understand that God is saying, "I want you to love Me above everything else. When you are in a relationship of love with Me, you have everything you need." To be loved by God is the highest relationship, the greatest achievement, and the noblest position in life.

That does not mean you will never accomplish anything as an expression of your love for God. He will call you to obey Him and do whatever He asks of you. However, you do not need to do something to feel fulfilled. You are completely fulfilled in a relationship with God. When you are filled with Him, what else do you need?

*To be loved by  
God is the highest  
relationship, the highest  
achievement, and the  
highest position in life.*

**1** Read the following hymn by Rhea Miller and circle everything that may compete with Jesus for a person's love and attention.

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold,  
I'd rather be His than have riches untold;  
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands,  
I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand.  
I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause,  
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;  
I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame,  
I'd rather be true to His holy name.  
He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom,  
He's sweeter than honey from out the comb;  
He's all that my hungering spirit needs,  
I'd rather have Jesus and let Him lead.

*Refrain*

Than to be the king of a vast domain  
Or be held in sin's dread sway;  
I'd rather have Jesus than anything  
This world affords today.<sup>2</sup>

- 2** Reflect on the meanings of the words. If you could have only one or the other in each of the following pairs, which would you honestly choose? Check your response.

I would rather have:  Jesus.  silver, gold, riches, houses and lands.

I would rather have:  Jesus.  people's applause and worldwide fame.

I would rather:  have Jesus.  be the king of a vast domain.

- 3** If you chose *Jesus* for each answer, is this the way you have been living your life?  
 Yes  No

Do you really want to love the Lord your God with all your heart? He will allow no competitors, not money and possessions, not fame and popularity, and not power or authority. God says:

- "No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matt. 6:24).
- "When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he would give you—a land with large and beautiful cities that you did not build, houses full of every good thing that you did not fill them with, cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you eat and are satisfied, be careful not to forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. Fear the LORD your God, worship him, and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you, for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God" (Deut. 6:10-15).
- Once your love for God is in place as your greatest priority, God will provide everything else you need (Matt. 6:31-33).

**Matthew 6:31-33**

"So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."

**CREATED FOR ETERNITY**

God did not create you for time; He created you for eternity. Time—your lifetime on earth—provides the opportunity for you to become acquainted with Him. It provides occasions for Him to develop your character into His likeness. Then eternity will hold its fullest dimensions for you.

If you live only for time—the here and now—you will miss the ultimate purpose of creation. If you live for time, you will allow your past to determine your life today. Your life as a child of God ought to be driven by the future—what you will be one day. God uses your present experiences to mold you for future usefulness here on earth and in eternity.

- 4** What are some things in your past that have a strong limiting influence on your life today? These may include a troubled family background; failures; shame over a personal or family sin; past abuse; pride, or unhealthy desire for success, fame, recognition, or wealth.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- 5** Do you think you are currently being shaped more by your past or by your future? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I was speaking at a conference when a woman approached me and recounted the heartbreaking story of how her father had abandoned her and her family. She described her feelings of worthlessness, abandonment, and rejection. For years she was consumed with finding her father and convincing him she was not worthless and he should take her back. "Then one day I found my Father," she said. "He was at the back of the *Experiencing God* book." She had been studying *Experiencing God* and had come to the list of the names of God. She realized her heavenly Father had always loved her and had been seeking a love relationship with her. Her heavenly Father set her free from the bondage to which her earthly father had consigned her.

**Paul** had to overcome his difficult personal history. Here was his approach to dealing with his past and present:

<sup>4</sup>If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

<sup>7</sup>But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup>More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup>My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, <sup>11</sup>assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.

<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. <sup>13</sup>Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:4-14).

**6** Answer the following questions, based on Paul's statement in *Philippians 3:4-14*.

a. What are some things in Paul's past that could have influenced his present?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. How did Paul view these things (v. 8)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c. Why did Paul view his past this way (vv. 8-11)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

d. What did Paul do to prepare for a future prize (vv. 13-14)?

Forget \_\_\_\_\_

Read forward \_\_\_\_\_

Pursue as my goal \_\_\_\_\_

**Matthew**  
**6:19-21,33**

"Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."



Answers: (a) Paul was faithful to his heritage as a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin. He was faultless in keeping the laws of the Pharisees. He was zealous for God. (b) He considered them rubbish and loss. (c) Paul wanted to know Christ, to be found in Him, and to become like Him to attain a future blessing (resurrection from the dead). (d) He refused to focus on the past. He strained toward the future. He pressed toward the future goal of a heavenly prize.

Paul's desire was to know Christ and to become like Him. You too can order your life under God's direction so you come to know Him, love Him, and become like Christ. Let your present be molded and shaped by what you are becoming in Christ. You were created for eternity!

**SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

To be loved by God is the highest relationship, the highest achievement, and the highest position in life.

God did not create me for time: He created me for eternity.

I will let my present be molded and shaped by what I am to become in Christ.

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

I will make sure I am investing in things that are lasting.

Only God can guide me to invest my life in worthwhile ways.

**INVESTING IN THE FUTURE**

Begin orienting your life to God's will. His purposes go far beyond time and into eternity. Make sure you are investing your life, time, and resources in things that will last, not in things that will pass away. If you don't recognize that God created you for eternity, you will invest in the wrong priorities. You should store up treasures in heaven (see Matt. 6:19-21,33).

This is why a love relationship with God is so important. He loves you. He knows what is best for you. Only He can guide you to invest your life in worthwhile ways. This guidance will come as you walk with Him and listen to Him.

- 7** In what are you currently investing your life, time, and resources? Make two lists below. On the left list things that will pass away. On the right list things that have eternal value.

Passing Away	Eternal

- 8** Pray about any adjustments you need to make in the way you invest your life. Ask God for His perspective on your life. Write any adjustments you sense God wants you to make.

**Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.**

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?	Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.	What does God want you to do in response to today's study?
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

# WALKING WITH GOD

## DAY 3

God created the first man and woman, **Adam and Eve**, for a love relationship with Himself. After Adam and Eve sinned, they heard God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. They hid from Him because of their fear and shame. Try to sense the heart of a loving Father when He asked that tenderhearted question “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9). God knew something had happened to their love relationship.

When your relationship is as it ought to be, you will always be in fellowship with the Father. You will remain in His presence, enjoying your love relationship with the God of the universe. When Adam and Eve were missing, something had gone terribly wrong.

*When your relationship is as it ought to be, you will always be in fellowship with the Father.*

### QUIET TIME WITH GOD

Early each day I have an appointment with God. I often wonder what happens when the God who loves me comes to meet with me and I have missed our appointment. How does He feel when He asks, “Henry, where are you?” and I am not there (see Jer. 7:13). This applies to my daily time with God. I keep that time alone with God, not in order to have a relationship, but because I have a relationship. Because I have a close walk with my Lord, I want to meet with Him and spend time with Him. Time with God enriches and deepens the relationship I already have with Him.

I hear many people say, “I really struggle trying to have time alone with God.” If that is a problem you face, let me suggest something: make the priority in your life to love Him with all your heart. That will solve most of your problem with your quiet time. People who struggle to spend time with God don’t have a scheduling problem; they have a love problem. You have a quiet time because you know Him and therefore love Him, not just because you want to learn more about Him. The apostle Paul said Christ’s love compelled or constrained him (see **2 Cor. 5:14**).

**2 Corinthians 5:14**

*“For the love of Christ compels us, since we have reached this conclusion, that one died for all, and therefore all died.”*

**1** Suppose you were dating someone you loved and intended to marry. What is the primary reason you would spend time with that person? Check only one response.

- Because I would want to find out about his likes and dislikes
- Because I would want to find out about her family background
- Because I would want to find out about his life goals and future plans
- Because I would love her and enjoy being with her

When two persons love each other and plan to marry, they want to find out information about each other. However, that is not the primary reason they date. They spend time together because they love each other and enjoy being together.

Similarly, you will learn much about God, His Word, His purposes, and His ways as you spend time with Him. You will come to know Him as you experience Him working in and through your life. But learning about Him is not why you should want to have a quiet time with Him. The more you know Him and experience His unfathomable love, the more you will love Him. The more you love Him, the more you will enjoy spending time fellowshiping with Him.

Today's lesson is shorter than normal to allow time for the following assignment. You may be able to do it today, but you might choose to set aside time later in the week. Plan to complete the assignment prior to your next small group session. This assignment may require some planning or adjustments. Feel free to modify the assignment to your personal needs and circumstances.

**SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

When my relationship is as it ought to be, I will always be in fellowship with the Father.

I will make the priority in my life to love Him with all my heart.

I will have my quiet time because I know Him and love Him, not just because I want to learn more about Him.

**2** Just as Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the day, set aside at least 30 minutes for a time to walk with God. If your location, physical condition, and weather permit, find a place outside to walk. Use this time to get out of your routine. You may even want to plan a special trip for part of a day to be alone with God. The place could be: in your neighborhood, a wooded area in the country, a city park, a beach, a garden, a mountain road, a lakeshore, or somewhere private.

Spend time walking and talking with God. If the location permits, you may even want to talk out loud. Focus your thoughts on your heavenly Father's love for you and your love for Him. Praise Him for His love and mercy. Thank Him for expressions of His love to you. Be specific. Express your love for Him through worship.

**3** After your walk, use the space below, in the margin, or in your journal to write about your feelings. Answer the following:

- How did you feel as you walked and talked with God?

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- What aspect of your love relationship with God did you become aware of?

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- If this was a difficult or an emotionally uneasy time, why do you think it was?

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- What happened that was especially meaningful or joyful?

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**Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.**

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

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Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

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What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

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# GOD PURSUES A LOVE RELATIONSHIP

## DAY 4

God always takes the initiative in our love relationship. The witness of the entire Bible testifies that God pursues us and orchestrates ways for us to experience Him. He came to Adam and Eve in the garden. In love He had fellowship with them and they with Him. He came to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. God took the initiative for people in the Old Testament to experience Him in a personal fellowship of love. In the New Testament, Jesus approached His disciples and chose them to be with Him and to experience His love. He came to Paul on the Damascus road.

In our natural human state we do not seek God on our own initiative.

**1 Read Romans 3:10-12 in the margin and answer these questions.**

- How many people are naturally righteous? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many people understand spiritual truths on their own? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many people naturally seek God? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many people instinctively do good? \_\_\_\_\_

No one! Not even one! Sin has marred us so deeply that we don't seek God on our own initiative. Therefore, if we are to have a relationship with Him and His Son, God must take the initiative. This is exactly what He does.

**2 Read John 6:44-45,65 in the margin and answer these questions.**

- Who can come to Jesus without being drawn by the Father? \_\_\_\_\_
- What does a person do who listens to the Father and learns from Him?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What is the only way a person can come to Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

"The LORD appeared to him from far away.  
I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
therefore I have continued to extend faithful love to you"  
(Jer. 31:3).

I led them with human cords,  
with ropes of love.  
To them I was like one who eases the yoke from their jaws;  
I bent down to give them food (Hos. 11:4).

God reaches out to you with an everlasting love. Based on that love He pursues you. He has drawn you with cords of love when you were not His friend but His enemy. He gave His Son to die for you. If you are going to experience God and know His will, you must be absolutely convinced of God's love for you.

*God takes the initiative.  
He chooses us, loves us,  
and reveals His eternal  
purposes for our lives.*

**Romans 3:10-12**

"There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one."

**John 6:44-45,65**

"No one can come to me [Jesus] unless the Father who sent me draws him . . . Everyone who has listened to and learned from the Father comes to me. This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by the Father."

**Matthew 16:13-17**

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'"

"They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'

"'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'"

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

"Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.'"

### 3 How do you know God loves you? What evidence in your life convinces you that God loves you? \_\_\_\_\_

God came to Saul, later known as **Paul** (see Acts 9:1-19). Saul was opposing God and His people and was fighting against God's Son. Jesus came to Saul and revealed the Father's purposes of love for him. This is also true in our lives. We do not choose Him. He chooses us, loves us, and reveals His eternal purposes for us (see Rom. 8:29-30).

Jesus said to His **disciples**, "You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you" (John 15:16,19). Didn't Peter choose to follow Jesus? No. Jesus chose Peter. Peter responded to God's invitation. God took the initiative.

**Peter** was responding to God's initiative in his life (see **Matt. 16:13-17**). Jesus asked the disciples who people said He was. Then He asked them who they thought He was. Peter correctly answered, "You are the Messiah." Then Jesus made a profound statement: "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven."

### 4 How did Peter learn that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah? \_\_\_\_\_

In essence Jesus said, "Peter, you could never have known and confessed that I am the Christ unless My Father had been at work in your life. He caused you to know who I am. You are responding to the Father's activity in your life."

Do you realize that from the beginning of time, God determined to love you? Apart from His work in your life, you never would have become a Christian. He had something in mind when He called you. He began to work in your life. You experienced a love relationship with God when He took the initiative. He opened your understanding. He drew you to Himself.

### 5 What did God do to draw you to Himself, specifically? \_\_\_\_\_

When you responded to His invitation, He brought you into a love relationship with Himself. You would never experience that love if God had not first reached out to you. You cannot recognize God's activity unless He takes the initiative to reveal it to you.

### 6 Number the following items from 1 to 4 in the order they occur in the development of a love relationship with God.

- \_\_\_ a. God comes into my life and fellowships with me.
- \_\_\_ b. I respond to God's activity in my life and invite Him to do in my life what He pleases.
- \_\_\_ c. God expresses His love and reveals Himself to me.
- \_\_\_ d. God chooses me because of His love.

Some of these actions can seem to happen at the same time. Yet we can be sure of the order: God takes the initiative; then we respond. I numbered the items a-4, b-3, c-2, d-1. God *always* takes the initiative in loving us.

**3** How do you know God loves you? What evidence in your life convinces you that God loves you? \_\_\_\_\_

God came to Saul, later known as **Paul** (see Acts 9:1-19). Saul was opposing God and His people and was fighting against God's Son. Jesus came to Saul and revealed the Father's purposes of love for him. This is also true in our lives. We do not choose Him. He chooses us, loves us, and reveals His eternal purposes for us (see Rom. 8:29-30).

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**Matthew 16:13-17**

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'

"They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'

"'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

"Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.'"

**4** How did Peter learn that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah? \_\_\_\_\_

In essence Jesus said, "Peter, you could never have known and confessed that I am the Christ unless My Father had been at work in your life. He caused you to know who I am. You are responding to the Father's activity in your life."

Do you realize that from the beginning of time, God determined to love you? Apart from His work in your life, you never would have become a Christian. He had something in mind when He called you. He began to work in your life. You experienced a love relationship with God when He took the initiative. He opened your understanding. He drew you to Himself.

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When you responded to His invitation, He brought you into a love relationship with Himself. You would never experience that love if God had not first reached out to you. You cannot recognize God's activity unless He takes the initiative to reveal it to you.

**6** Number the following items from 1 to 4 in the order they occur in the development of a love relationship with God.

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- \_\_\_ c. God expresses His love and reveals Himself to me.
- \_\_\_ d. God chooses me because of His love.

Some of these actions can seem to happen at the same time. Yet we can be sure of this: God takes the initiative; then we respond. I numbered the items a-4, b-3, c-2, d-1. God *always* takes the initiative in loving us.

**7** The following Scriptures speak of God's initiative in the love relationship. Read each verse. Then briefly summarize how God acts (acted) or what He does (did) to take the initiative.

"The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, and you will love him with all your heart and all your soul so that you will live" (Deut. 30:6).

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"All things have been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal him" (Luke 10:22).

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"You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16).

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"It is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13).

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"This is how we have come to know love: He [Jesus Christ] laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16).

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"See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

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**8** God always takes the initiative to establish and deepen your love relationship with Him. What is God currently initiating in your life that you need to respond to? \_\_\_\_\_

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**SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

God always takes the initiative in this love relationship.

I do not choose Him. He chooses me, loves me, and reveals His eternal purposes for my life.

I cannot know God's activity unless He takes the initiative to reveal it to me.

**Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.**

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

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# DAY 5

## A REAL, PERSONAL, PRACTICAL RELATIONSHIP

*God's plan for the advancement of His kingdom depends on His relationship with His people.*

The relationship God wants to have with you will be real and personal. By "real" I mean that God is more than a doctrine or a person in history. He wants to interact with you on a personal level today. He is also practical in how He relates to you. Some people ask, Can a person actually have a real, personal, and practical relationship with God? They seem to think God is far off and unconcerned about their day-to-day living. That is not the God we see in the Scriptures.

**1** Read each Scripture passage and describe at least one fact indicating the relationship the person(s) had with God was real, personal, and/or practical. If you are already familiar with the account, you may answer from your present knowledge of the passage.

a. Adam and Eve after they sinned (see Gen. 3:20-21): \_\_\_\_\_

b. Hagar when she fled from Sarai (see Gen. 16:1-13): \_\_\_\_\_

c. Hannah when she poured out her grief to God (1 Sam. 1:9-18): \_\_\_\_\_

d. Twelve Jesus sent out to preach (see Mark 6:7-13): \_\_\_\_\_

e. Peter in prison awaiting trial (see Acts 12:1-17): \_\_\_\_\_

f. John on the island of Patmos (see Rev. 1:9-20): \_\_\_\_\_

From Genesis to Revelation we see God relating to people in real, personal, intimate, and practical ways. God had wonderful fellowship with **Adam and Eve**, walking in the garden with them in the cool of the day. When they sinned, God pursued them to restore the love relationship. He met a practical need by providing clothing to cover their nakedness.

**Hagar** fled for her life after Sarai used and mistreated her. When she reached the end of her resources, had nowhere else to turn, when all hope was gone, and everyone had forsaken her, God came to Hagar. In her relationship with God, she learned that God saw her, knew her needs, and would lovingly provide for her. God is extremely personal.

**Hannah** experienced years of disappointment and hurt. She poured out her sorrow in worship and God met her need in a very practical and powerful way, giving her a son, Samuel, the following year.



**The disciples** also had a real, personal, and practical relationship with Jesus. Jesus chose them to be with Him. What a joy it must have been to walk with Jesus daily as the twelve disciples did! When Jesus gave them a difficult assignment, He did not send them out without any help. He gave them instruction and authority they had never known before, even over evil spirits.

In some places of the world, obedience to the Lord results in imprisonment. This was **Peter's** experience. In answer to prayer, the Lord miraculously delivered him. This was so dramatic Peter first thought it was a dream. The Christians who were praying for Peter thought he was an angel when he appeared at the door. Soon they discovered the Lord's deliverance was real. That deliverance probably saved Peter's life.

In exile on the island of Patmos, **John** was spending the Lord's Day in fellowship with God. During this time of communion in the Spirit, the revelation of Jesus Christ came to John to "show his servants what must soon take place" (Rev. 1:1). This message has encouraged churches from John's day until now.

Do you sense, as you read Scripture, God expressed Himself to people in personal and practical ways? Do you see their relationships with God were practical? Was He also real and personal to Noah? to Abraham? to Moses? to Isaiah? Yes! Has God changed? No! What was true in the Old Testament also occurred during the time of Jesus' life and ministry. It was the same after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Your life can also reflect a real, personal, and practical relationship as you respond to God's work in your life.

**2** Briefly describe an experience in your life when God was real, personal, and practical in His relationship with you.

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Love must be personal and practical. A person cannot love without someone to love. A love relationship with God takes place between two persons. A relationship with God is not merely a belief system, it is personal. This has always been His desire. His efforts are expended to bring this desire to reality. God is a Person pouring His life into yours. Christianity is a personal, practical, progressive relationship with almighty God.

If for some reason you cannot think of a time when your relationship with God was real, personal, and practical, spend time evaluating your current relationship with Him. Go to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to reveal the true nature of your walk with Him. Ask Him to bring you into the kind of relationship He desires for you. If you realize you have never entered a saving relationship with God, turn to the activity on page 8 for help in settling that most important issue now.

## GOD'S PRESENCE AND WORK IN YOUR LIFE ARE PRACTICAL

Some people say to me, "Henry, what you are suggesting about doing God's will is not practical in our day." I always differ with them. God is an extremely practical God. He was in Scripture. He is the same today. When He provided manna, quail, and water for the children of Israel, He was being extremely practical. When Jesus fed five thousand people, He was being practical. The God I see revealed in Scripture is real, personal, and practical. You can trust God to be exceedingly practical as He relates to you too.



God's constant presence is the most practical part of your life and ministry.

God's constant presence is the most practical aspect of your life and ministry. Unfortunately, we often assign God a limited role in our lives. We only call on Him when we need help. That is the exact opposite of what we find in God's Word. He is the One who is working in our world. He invites you to relate to Him so He accomplishes His work through you. His plan for the advancement of His kingdom depends on His working in real and practical ways through His people.

Knowing and experiencing God through a real and personal relationship was practical in the Scriptures. I believe you will find that this kind of walk with God will be profoundly helpful to you as well. God can make an enormous difference in your relationships in your family, in your church, and with other people.

**SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

The relationship God wants to have with me will be real and personal.

God's plan for the advancement of the kingdom depends on His working in real and practical ways through His relationships with His people.

**3** Can you describe your relationship with God as real, personal, and practical?  Yes  No Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**4** What is one area of your life you would like God to be more: 1) real; 2) personal; 3) practical? Pray you will be responsive to all He does in these areas of your life in the coming days.

**5** Review your Scripture memory verses and be prepared to recite them to a partner in your small group session this week.

**6** If you have not taken time to walk with God and write about the experience in day 3, try to do so before your small group session.

**Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.**

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	What does God want you to do in response to today's study? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
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1. Carrie is doing well today. She graduated from seminary, married, has two beautiful children and served with her husband as a church planter in Germany for sixteen years before relocating to Atlanta.  
 2. Rhea F. Miller, "I'd Rather Have Jesus," © Copyright 1922. Renewal 1950. Assigned to Chancel Music, Inc. International copyright secured. All rights reserved. Used by permission.



# GOD PURSUES A LOVE RELATIONSHIP

## SESSION 3

### VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

1. Christianity is not a religion; it's a relationship.
2. No matter how far you go, no matter how hard you run, God continues to pursue you in a love relationship.
3. We don't have quiet times so we can grow to love God. We have quiet times because we love God.
4. When you find yourself too busy to spend time with God, you don't have a scheduling problem, you have a love problem.
5. God is love. He is the standard and everything else has to measure up to Him.
6. If you don't feel like you love God as you ought, don't panic. God is still pursuing you. Open your heart to all that God is doing, even today.

### YOUR NOTES

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### UNIT REVIEW

Which of the following ought to be the primary influence in shaping your life? Why (p. 57)?

- a. My past       b. My future

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Who takes the initiative in establishing a love relationship between you and God (p. 61)?

- a. I do.  
 b. My pastor does.  
 c. God does.

Fill in the blanks to complete the second reality of experiencing God.

God \_\_\_\_\_ a continuing \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with you that is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Check your answers, using the pages cited in parentheses.

### Scriptures Referenced

Hosea 1:2-3  
 Hosea 3:1  
 Mark 12:30  
 Psalm 16:11

### Sharing Time

- Things in which you are investing your life, time, and resources and the adjustments God wants you to make (activities 7–8, pp. 58–59)
- Reasons you know God loves you (activity 3, p. 62)
- An experience when God was real, personal, or practical in His relationship to you (activity 2, p. 65)
- One of the most meaningful statements or Scriptures from this unit's lessons and your prayer response to God. Choose one from pages 55, 59, 63, and 66.

Streamable session videos are included with the purchase price of this book. Look for your access code on the insert attached in the back of this book.