



Title: The God Who Shepherds You
Theme: Grasping God's Everlasting Love

“The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.’” (Jeremiah 31:3)

Chapter thirty-one of the book of Jeremiah held words of comfort for Israel as she was in captivity, assuring them that God in due time would restore them and their children to their own land. He would and again make them a great and happy nation, especially by sending the Messiah, whose kingdom and grace would be enjoyed by all who would receive Jesus Christ. There would be a day that they would repent of their sins, and God would graciously accept them in their repentance. God would enrich their spiritual blessings and those blessings would be offered to the seed of Israel forever. (The Expositors Bible Commentary; Matthew Henry Commentary)

The Children of Israel were offered the blessings that were promised to Abraham. Abraham's seed goes beyond the Jewish nation and people for they are offered to the Gentiles as well. (Romans 4:16-17)

I would propose to you that there was a time when sin held you captive and God out of His love for you drew you to repentance. He appeared to your spiritual heart and the Holy Ghost drew you to Christ. He graciously accepted your plea for forgiveness and has set you in His everlasting love and care, if and only if you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord.

Just how is God a Shepherd to His people?

Eight masks that mankind likes to wear in desperation to experience love

The first step to experiencing God's love is to understand and admit the fact that there are love masks that modern mankind likes to put on. There are eight masks that mankind likes to wear in desperation to experience love.

The first is “Performance.” People convince themselves that if they excel at something this will gain them love. They like people saying, “Look what he did... Look at what she accomplished.” Those who are able to perform get strokes of appreciation, a little bit of value, a little bit of what the world calls love. However, it does not last and the drive to perform overtakes what should be done for Christ and Christ alone.

The second is “People.” Often people will look to people in their lives for affirmation and value. Do not get me wrong, people should give affirmation to others who are diligent and faithful, and work hard to do their best for the Lord and others. It is one thing when God moves upon someone’s heart to give affirmation but it is another when people compromise God’s righteousness in their lives to gain praise from man.

The third is “Pity.” There are people who will put themselves down so people will go out of their way to come to them and give them special attention. There are many times when we should have pity on the hurting and down hearted, but at no time should sin be entertained.

The fourth is “Position.” Some feel like, “If I can only get that manager position, then I can reach for the CEO spot on the corporate ladder, then I will have value.” It is only a mask when success is not gained out of sacrificial love for who you serve.

The fifth is “Physical Affection.” Too often people equate human contact with love.” If there is no sacrificial giving and living before those we want physical affection from, then we are wearing a mask of false love.

The sixth is “Pleasure.” I can’t wait until the next thrill or high or grand experience. It is a mask covering up that need for true love that can only come from the Lord.

The seventh is “Possessions.” If I can only have that lake front property, live in that neighborhood, drive that car, worship in the same type of church that I saw on TBN. If the Lord gives you all that then it is great, however, if you feel you need that to have a healthy walk with the Lord then your wearing a mask of possessions and missing true love.

Lastly, is “Problems.” This is usually a juvenile form of love mask, the crying out of a young adult wanting expressions of love on His own terms and not God’s. This problem also arises in adults and sadly even in the church setting.

In the Old Testament they were referred to as the “rabble.” (Numbers 11:4; Ezekiel 23:42) Those wanting their own way or carefree people not interested in God ways. These rabbles are people who are quite aware of the God of heaven and earth but they live by their own agenda.

What the Bible says about God, who is love

Once someone is aware of the love masks and is willing to throw those masks aside they may experience true love, God's love by searching what the Bible says about God, who is love.

The Bible boldly proclaims that there is only one love in the universe that has lasting value and satisfies that longing to be loved. That true love that enables Christians to express genuine love to the Body of Christ, to family members, to friends and co-workers.

The answer to finding the God who is love is found in the Bible which was written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16)

The Bible tells us this about love, "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 him. (1 John 4:16) In the very same epistle we find that Scriptures warn us with, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:8)

God is love! Let the Holy Spirit of God place this truth deep within your mind and heart. Go beyond revelation and pray for illumination. My prayer for you is the same as the Apostle Paul's prayer. We read that prayer in Ephesians chapter three, "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Just as a wife of a husband who loves her as Christ loves the church can know and experience the benefits of sacrificial love, the Bride of Christ, those who are born again can experience God's pure unadulterated love. However, it must come from illumination of the Holy Spirit and the children of God must be willing to share His love with others.

God is love! 1 John 4:16 is the greatest single teaching about God in the whole Bible. This single statement unlocks many doors and answers many questions.

William Barclay in his exposition of Biblical love covered four major areas of life as we know it. These thoughts came to my mind as I considered his teaching to God's love.

The First refers to "Creation:" it is hard for us to understand why God would take time to even create this world, knowing that mankind walks in disobedience, gives a poor response to His Word and continually causes Him grief. Man's very nature, without the leading and control of the Holy Spirit causes nothing but trouble. A full Biblical understanding in creation is essential to understanding His very nature. Being a creating God He creates and being a loving God He desires to create man to live in a world where He could express His love to others. True love must have someone to sacrificially love and there must be someone to receive that love.

This picture is seen in marriage, when the husband truly, sacrificially shows love to his wife. She naturally responds to his love by being a loving "help mate" (Genesis 2:18) to what God calls her husband to do. When the Bride of Christ understands the love of Christ for her, she naturally becomes a complementary helper for the Lord because the Holy Spirit of Christ is doing a work in God's obedient children. When children in the Christian family setting respond appropriately to the love their parents are giving they are receiving love from God being expressed by the parents and His love will then carry on to generation to generation. (Exodus 20:4-5)

Two, refers to "Free Will:" unless love is a free response it is not a love that brings true satisfaction here on this side nor does it lead to everlasting life. If God had only been law with no Holy Spirit to bring true life to the written Word men would move like robots or they would serve because they are programmed. When people become legalistic toward the Word of God they serve for all the wrong motives.

They become like people who observe the law to get from God or like children who obey because they do not want to get into trouble. The only response that is pleasing to God is a reaction that comes from an act of love for God and Jesus Christ. Love is of necessity and there must be a free response of the heart, therefore, God by a deliberate act of self-limitation has to endow men with free will.

Three, refers to "Providence:" God's love is reflected in His constant care of everything at all times. There is no single Hebrew or Greek word that expresses the idea of God's providence. Providence is normally defined in Christian theology as the unceasing activity of the Creator whereby in overflowing bounty and good will (The New Bible Dictionary; Psalm 145:9; Matthew 5:45-48) He upholds His creation in ordered existence. (Acts 17:28; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3) He guides and governs all events, circumstances and even the free acts of men. (Psalm 107; Job 1:12;2:6; Genesis 45:5-8) He directs everything to its appointed goal, for His own glory and the glorification of Jesus before the lives of everyone. (Ephesians 1:9-12) Providence is presented in the whole of Scripture as a function of divine sovereignty. God has His hands over all, doing just what He wills. (Psalm 103:19; 135:6; Daniel 4:35; Ephesians 1:11)

Four, refers to "Redemption:" the Bible says, "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) This redemption means more than just saving souls from spending eternity in hell, but also for redeeming the heart of man so he can have communion with God, to do the work of God with Christ walking in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. This redemption, purchased through the blood of Christ frees from the bondage of sin.

Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." "Redemption" (apolytrosis) means deliverance from the bondage of sin on payment of a price, and that price was the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 9:15 says, "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."

Redemption then is not just looking to Calvary, but forward to the freedom of the redeemed. The Holy Spirit through the writings of the Apostle Paul reminds Christians of their responsibility with regard to the cost paid by Christ, "You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:20)

Christians are free to serve Christ and exercise their Holy Spirit gifts sacrificially in the Body of Christ. They are able to love others as God would, thus expressing a life of true Biblical love.

The beloved John gave us this Biblical examination as it relates to God's love shining through us, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:8) God chooses to express His love through Christians just as He chooses to use His obedient children to teach the Word of God, to sing about His greatness and wonderful works, and to make disciples of Christ.

James C. Hefley wrote an article titled, "White Man" to "God's Man."

When Wycliffe's translator Doug Meland and his wife moved into a village of Brazil's Fulnio Indians, he was referred to simply as "the white man." The term was by no means complimentary, since other white men had exploited them, burned their homes and robbed them of their lands.

After Doug and his wife learned the Fulnio language and began to help the people with medicine and in other ways, they began calling Doug, "the respectable white man."

When the Melands began adapting to some of the customs of the people, the Fulino gave Doug greater acceptance and spoke of him as "the white Indian."

One day, as Doug was washing the dirty, bloodcaked foot of a very badly injured Fulnio boy, Doug overheard a bystander say to another: "Whoever heard of a white man washing an Indian's foot before?" Washing feet to the Fulnio Indians was a very caring and humble gesture. Then the Fulino Indians started saying, "Certainly, this man is from God!" Not long after that, whenever Doug would go into an Indian home, it would be announced, "Here comes the man God sent us."

Doug showed the necessity of showing love and support to a community while teaching the Word of God. God's Word says "Whoever loves God must also love his brother." (1 John 4:21) "Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God is in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Him." (1 John 4: 16b-17)

What sacrifices are you making to show God's love to others? Do you grasp God's love for you and have you embraced His love by accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord?

The Lord Our Shepherd

There is no way that we can cover all the areas of life in which God has shown His love to so many. God is love. There is another aspect of God's love that the Holy Spirit wants you to grasp today. God is Jehovah-Rohi, "The Lord Our Shepherd."

This reference of God is found in the first verse of Psalm 23. This name of God has brought a great amount of comfort to the Body of Christ. This beautiful expression of God reminds the humble that God is much more than just a cleanser of the heart of mankind, but also He is "shepherd."

This revelation of God has dried tears and dissipated fears. This name of God forms the mold into which the faith of many Christians has found a firm foundation. Like the foundation of a perfectly constructed building is this name of our loving God. This name of God was given to the psalmist David who wrote after experiencing the faithfulness of God through life's trials and temptations. Letting the Holy Spirit to place this name of God into your mind and heart will cause you to proclaim with the psalmist who wrote, "Surely [God's] goodness shall follow me all the days of my life." (Psalm 23:6)

Nathan Stone tells us that "Rohi" {RO'EH} primarily means to feed or lead to pasture, as a shepherd does his flock. Jehovah is a shepherd of His people. Everything in David's life and in his writings, which was brought about the Holy Spirit indicates the love relationship God so desires with His people.

After God sent the prophet Ezekiel to rebuke the poor shepherds of Israel for not properly feeding the people of God, the Lord made this promise, "I Myself will search for My sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so I will look after My sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness... I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak..." (Ezekiel 34:11-12; 16)

We live in that dispensation right now. God by His Holy Spirit is calling people to Christ. They have put themselves in place that allows the flesh, the world and the devil to destroy them. He has bound the injuries of many and strengthened a great number who have surrendered their will to His.

For those who seek after and follow the instructions of God in regard to worshiping Him the Bible says, "I will dwell among [My Children]..." (Exodus 29:45) The word "dwell" refers to God being present with His people in manifold ways, protecting, guiding, feeding and fellowshiping. God offers the intimacy of His presence. He may be known as a shepherd is known among his sheep.

Not only is God our Shepherd, but Jesus teaches that He is our Shepherd. He said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." (John 10:11) He is the fulfillment of Ezekiel 34:11-16

He qualified Himself to become the Great Shepherd by becoming the sacrificial Lamb of God who died for the sins of the World. The Book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. (Hebrews 2:11) The Bible says that Jesus came not to help angles, but to help us. (Hebrews 2:16) Jesus shared in our humanity so by His death He might destroy Satan who holds the power of death. (Hebrews 2:14)

As our Shepherd, Jesus is able to minister to us in every part of our lives and intervene on our behalf. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:15-16)

He knows what you are feeling right now, what you are going through and is able to be the shepherd who can heal the brokenhearted, strengthen the weary and intervene at the throne of God. Take all things to Him in prayer with a surrendered heart.

Because He learned obedience and was made perfect through what He suffered (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8) through our suffering He is able to help us learn obedience and be made into His image. (Romans 8:28-29) As the good shepherd He meets every genuine need. (Philippians 4:19)

He leads us to the healthy pastures of God's Word because it is only by feeding on His Word Christians can grow in Christ and survive in their relationship with God. (Matthew 4:4)

It is because of our Chief Shepherd's prayer that we can enjoy God's continuous presence by the Holy Spirit of truth who promises to guide us in all truth and abide within us. (John 16:13; 14:16)

Brethren, when we are sorely tired He will lead, protect, and provide. When we are weary and wounded He will anoint our heads, heal our wounds and refresh our human spirit with seasons of refreshing. He will put us and keep us in his everlasting love.

Do you know how much God loves you? Are you connected to His love and is His love making a connection to others around you? Is He really the Shepherd of your heart? John says if you know God, you will express His love to others.

You cannot get God's love unless you are connected to the God who Shepherds you. You must be willing to express His love to others if you are going to enjoy His love.

Walter B. Knight wrote about a coal miner who worked in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. He was standing in the rear car not paying attention to what was coming up ahead. He got entangled in some high voltage wires and was left hanging. His feet could not touch the ground nor could his arms reach out to any place to grab. That is why he was still around to tell the story. Someone saw him dangling in mid air hung up in the electrical wires, so they turned off the electricity and then got him down. Had his feet been able to touch the ground or his hands found something to grab onto, the electricity could have found a way out and He would most likely be dead.

God's love is like that in this sense. We must first connect to God's love through having Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord. The danger is when we try to make connections with others in our strength, we will destroy ourselves. However, if we allow Christ to help us by the enabling of the Holy Spirit we become healthy channels through which God's love can be expressed through us.

In order for us to enjoy His love we must be a willing vessel for His love to get out of us, to be lived out through us by loving others for the sake of Christ and Christ alone.

Are you allowing the Chief Shepherd to lead and guide you? Do you know His love and are you allowing His love to be shown through you by loving others.

Let us pray!