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# **A God Who Cares**

**# 729-B**

**Series: God's Living Legends (Part 1)**

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Our journey through the land of the judges has taught us a lot about the character of man. As we viewed Israel through the microscope of motivation, we have certainly been surprised, at least on occasions, that at the end of the microscope is a mirror. We, in essence, have been looking at ourselves. “So fickle were the Hebrews,” we say, “so ungrateful, so inconsistent.” But usually we stop short of any further indictments as the Holy Spirit floods our hearts with a slow motion re-play of our own relationship with God. We are graphically reminded that human nature hasn’t changed. When we are not walking in the Spirit, we are nothing but imitators of the Israelis at best. God may get our attention and we may respond in obedience; but so often as time passes, we forget what God has done. Weeks or months down the road we turn and occasionally glance to the gods of this world and find ourselves with an idol or two in our lives. Then God has to allow pressure to be brought to bear to begin to arrest our attention again. So often, the cycle must be repeated over and over and over.

Only then do we seem to see God’s standards of obedience as they really are. I am coming to realize of late, however, that too much exposure to the standards of God without adequate exposure to the character of God can leave us mistakenly with a spirit of discouragement. If we are not careful, we will place ourselves on a whole new performance-based treadmill, this time based on attitudes instead of on works. We must not lower the standards of God one-ten-trillionth of an inch. But we must never so focus on our failures that we overlook His success, for God’s story is a success story. Because He lives in us, ours is a success story, too.

When we began this study, we were going to look at the Living Legends from a two-dimensional point of view. The first was to reveal the character of man. The second was to reveal the character of God. It is to that second and more exciting revelation that we look in this lesson.

First of all, let’s look at God’s problem. God’s problem is

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obvious. He has an unfaithful following. Like a broken record, their story slides into the groove of rebellion and over and over it plays, “But the children of Israel did evil, did evil, did evil, did evil, did evil.” Again and again they forgot God. Again and again they actually began to worship Satan. They built idols and bowed down and made offerings to inanimate statues of wood and metal. Their apostasy blossomed into idolatry. The problem is, what do you do with a people that rebellious?

To bring our story up to date, we have to remember that we were walking through a chapter of Hebrew history that we chose to title, “Briars, Thorns and Toppled Towers”. The star of our story was a man named Gideon. He was a nobody, but God turned him into somebody special in order to use him to destroy his enemies. God did it *His* way with *His* kind of odds, *His* kind of man, *His* kind of plan, *His* kind of tools and *His* kind of results. Having seen God destroy the enemy, Gideon had to then deal with the tests of success. In the last lesson, we looked as he encountered the test of jealousy, the test of hospitality, and the test of idolatry. It was at that last point that Gideon faltered and made an ephod, a tribute in essence, to their victory, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his household.

Now his household, incidentally, consisted of a multitude of wives and a multitude of children, including seventy sons. Can you imagine what his insurance rates were? Probably 30 of them were teenagers at the same time. We read an interesting footnote in Judges 8:31 that had a profound effect ultimately on the welfare of his whole family. It says simply that he also had a concubine in Shechem who presented him with a son named Abimelech. That verse will be one to keep in mind. Then we read in 8:32:

And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abie-zrites.

And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god.

And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:

Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel. (Judges 8:32-35)

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So the Hebrews exercised their right to rebellion and came up with a non-existent memory once again. They forgot God and they forgot Gideon. The roller coaster headed downhill once more. So there you have God's problem. What do you do with a whole nation of inconsiderate and ungrateful idol worshippers? We will, I think, come up with two answers. They might be of some help as you think about what you do with children in rebellion as well.

1- What is your action?

2- What is your attitude?

First of all, what is your action? You discipline them by letting them fall into the pits they have dug for themselves. By letting them fall prey to the very enemies they counted harmless. You let them suffer on the back burner of self-inflicted tribulation until they cry for help.

Secondly, what is your attitude? Ah, there is the key. You never stop loving. The more they suffer from their own sins, the more you suffer with them. You say, "God doesn't enjoy seeing us suffer, even when we deserve it, does He?" That is what I am saying. When we hurt, He hurts, because rebels though we are, *we belong to a God who cares.*

That is our purpose in this lesson: to find out just how much He really *does* care. The story that unfolds in Judges 9 and 10 is an interesting one, but it is not at all unlike the others God has recently unfolded for us. Abimelech, the son of Gideon and his concubine, goes to his mother's relatives, the men of Shechem, and asks them to consider a proposition. He asks them to consider whether they would rather be ruled over by Gideon's seventy sons, or would they rather have a mass murder of all of Gideon's boys and elect him to be their king. Home-town boy made bad. They went with Abimelech, bumped off the brothers and succeeded in destroying Gideon's entire family of male heirs. All that is, except for one. One brother, the youngest of them all named Jotham, escaped and hid.

After his brothers had been murdered and his step-brother made king, Jotham climbs to the top of Mount Gerizim and screams out a message to the men of Shechem. It was the first parable recorded in scripture. We call it the "Parable of the Trees". But the upshot of his story came in the form of an ominous warning in chapter 9:20. The warning was this: "If you have done

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the wrong thing by killing my brothers, Abimelech will destroy you and you will destroy Abimelech". The remainder of chapter 9 is the story of how Abimelech is goaded into battle against his own countrymen and literally destroys them. At one point in verse 40 it says that he destroyed 1,000 men and women by burning them alive inside a fortress in which they were hiding. Then he goes on to Thebez and is about to do the same thing, but a woman on the roof drops a millstone on the king's cranium. As he was dying, he demanded that one of his own men stab him to death, so the history books would not record that he had been foiled by a female. So Jotham's curse came true. Abimelech destroyed the Shechemites and they destroyed him.

Israel's next judge was a man named Tola. He ruled for twenty-three years and died. Nothing either good or bad was etched on his scriptural tombstone. He was succeeded by Jair, a judge from Gilead who judged for 22 years in Israel. All we know about him is that he had 30 sons and they rode on 30 donkeys together. They owned 30 cities. It sounds like a traveling side show. But one verse later, Jair died and was buried. So much for Jair the judge. So we will take up again reading in chapter 10 and verse 6,

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him.

And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon.

And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead.

Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.

And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim. (Judges 10:6-10)

So the story comes full cycle once again. They did evil, did evil, did evil. God relinquished His protective power and allowed them to be sold again into the hands of the enemies

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whose gods they served. As always, slow as they were at the art of repentance, it took them 18 years before they scratched their thick skulls and realized what they had done. Verse 10 tells us that the proverbial light bulb of conviction flashed on and they cried to the Lord with a double-dipped confession, “Lord, we have not only forsaken you, but we have served Balaam. Lord, we have been bad boys.”

And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines?

The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand.

Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.

Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

(Judges 10:11-14)

God answers the phone in heaven, listens to their chorus of confession and answers, “I’m sorry, you must have the wrong number. You have been worshipping Baal for years. Call information, they will give you his hotline. Surely he can rescue you.” God sort of sarcastically tests the Hebrews to see if they were serious and to remind them how helpless were the gods in whom they had put their trust.

And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.

And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.

(Judges 10:15,16)

The children of Israel said what God had been waiting to hear, “We have sinned. We come back to You. No strings attached. Do whatever You want. Punish us however You chose. We just want to walk with You again.” To prove their sincerity, they tore down their idolatrous altars and they fell down and worshipped God. It is here that we read one of the most insightful glimpses into the character of God: “*His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.*” You say, “How could that be? Why should the God of creation, the God of eternity be grieved and broken hearted because his wayward children were in misery? They deserved it,

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didn't they? They had defiled His name, rejected His word and ignored His warnings for 18 long years. These 18 years were just added to a long list of rebellious parentheses in a life of continual disobedience. What would cause the God of the ages to be so moved? To be so grieved?" I will tell you why He was so grieved. He loved them. His children were about to come home and race back into the arms of their heavenly Father. Their heavenly Father was moved to grief over their misery.

I'm afraid sometimes you and I may look so long and hard at the quality of life God wants us to live that we may forget the kind of God we have. When we let Him down, He doesn't cast us aside. He weeps like a father does whose son has gone astray. He waits like a father does until his son has reached the end of his search for another god. He watches like a father does for the slightest sign that his child wants to enjoy the father's love again. He is not happy when we suffer needlessly. He allows it to bring us to our senses but He grieves over our misery. He grieves because of His great love for us. Do you fully grasp the love of God? Paul prayed for us in Ephesians 3:16. Listen to it paraphrased:

I pray... that out of his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you the mighty inner strength of His Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love; and may you be able to feel and understand, as all God's children should, how long, how wide, how deep and how high his love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves, though it is so great that you will never see the end of it or fully know or understand it. And so at last you will be filled up with God himself.

(Ephesians 3:16b-19 TLB)

Paul says that we will never fully grasp the magnitude of the love of God until we drink of it without limits in heaven. But his prayer for us in Ephesians 3 was that progressively, day by day, our roots would reach down deep into the soil of that love and we would progressively come to experience that love, understanding more and more how tall it is, how long it is, how deep it is and how wide it is until we are literally engulfed by it. He prayed for us to be consumed by the magnitude and the majesty of it until we become bodies filled and flooded with the love of God. Wouldn't you like that to be said of you? There was a man, there was a woman whose life was controlled by the love of God. Ah,



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but there is a secret to it. You cannot be controlled by His love until you have received His love and you cannot receive it in progressively increasing quantities until you come to understand the nature of God.

Let's at least make a beginning today by looking at the heart of a God who cares. In this lesson, we will take a look at the character of God, who is love. We will begin in I John 4:

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

We love him, because he first loved us. (I John 4:7-19)

I believe tucked within the context of those 13 verses is a king-sized x-ray of the heart of God. I am overwhelmed at what I see. I see at least six things that can change my life because they can enlarge my concept of the love of God. They make it taller and wider and richer and deeper than I ever imagined it could

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be. Let's look at six truths about the love of God from 1 John 4.

Principle 1- All real love comes from God and only a Christian can have the capacity to love.

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

(1 John 4:7)

Truth number one is a gift that accompanies conversion. The truth is that God's kind of love by definition is the giving of one's self to another with no restrictions as to worth or response. This is supernatural and only He can give it. Therefore, only a Christian husband has the capacity to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. Don't ask an unbeliever to do that. He does not have the capacity to do that. Only a Christian woman has the capacity to love a faithless and unfaithful husband, but she can. She can in Christ. Real love is a gift from God. All Christians *can* experience it, but *only* Christians can experience it. That is what verse 7 says.

Principle 2- God is, by nature of being God, love.

He that loveth not knoweth not God and the Holy Spirit adds this statement that just explodes with power]; for God is love.

We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love;...

(1 John 4:8,16)

That is, God does not merely demonstrate love, He is love. Love and God are synonymous. Just as you cannot have love without God, you cannot have God without love. When you have seen God in action, you have experienced love. That means that whatever God does, springs forth from love. It may not be love as you would define it, but love it is. God *is* love. It is the essence of His character. Whenever you say, "Oh, God doesn't love me." What you are saying is that God is not who He says He is. God by his very nature *is* love and it is impossible for Him not to love you and still be God.

Principle 3- He sent us the most powerful example in the history of man. (verse 9)

God knew we wouldn't understand love, so *He sent us the most powerful example in the history of man.* We call it Calvary. Here is how He showed us His love: by sending His only begotten Son into the world to be the propitiation, the full and complete

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payment for all of our sins. Love came down at Calvary. Man need never again question, "Does God love me?" 1 John 3:16 shouts it,

Hereby perceive we the love of God...

Paul fills in the blanks with this penetrating statement in Romans 5,

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:7,8)

Principle 4- The only way the world has to know the love of God is the way we pass it on to one another. (verse 11) That is why going the second mile astounds the world. That is why turning the other cheek astounds the world. That is why loving our enemies astounds the world. That is why the love we ought to have and show for one another will astound the world. It is a commodity they don't have and it is only found in Jesus and it is only seen in Christians.

Principle 5- The love of God is the antithesis of fear. (verse 18) In other words, when you have perfect love you have nothing to be afraid of. A life characterized by fear has not come to know the love of God. Perfect love casts out all fear. When you become aware of how sovereign God is and then become aware of how much a sovereign God loves you, what is there to be afraid of? Paul shouted this note of triumph in Romans 8,

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Paul said, "I can't be afraid of anything if there isn't anything that can separate me from the love that God has for me." God's love and fear have no place in the same life. They are like oil and water. Fear has torment. He that lives in fear has not been perfected in love.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18)

Principle 6- Since love originates with God, only those who receive His Son have it, and we cannot manufacture love even as Christians, we can only return it. (verse 19)

We love him, because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

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We return it to God when we worship. We return it to God when we love other people in His name. But we are not transmitters; we are receivers with giant reflectors. The more we receive, the more we have to give, but you cannot imitate God's love. You cannot manufacture a love like it. You only receive it and return it. Therefore, your capacity to love your parents, your husband, your wife, your children, your neighbor, your enemy, and your capacity to *really* love anybody with God's kind of love will be directly proportionate to your concept of God.

What is your concept of God? If you see Him as a stern schoolmaster with His arms folded in heaven, waiting for a chance to mete out discipline, you have missed it. You will never be able to really love anybody until you have learned of the love of God and met the God of love. If you see Him as a distant, uncaring, unconcerned deity who cares more about principles than people, you have missed it again. You will never be able to love anybody until you have learned of the love of God and met the God of love. Distant? Uncaring? He has numbered the very hairs of your head. He pauses with concern over every sparrow that falls. He knit us together in our mother's womb as the Psalmist said. He scheduled every day of our lives before we were born. The Psalmist adds, "When I awake in the morning, He is still thinking of me." He hears every prayer that we pray. He collects every tear that we cry. He grieves over every hurt that we have. My friend, no one ever cared for you like Jesus. He is perfect love and love perfected.

If you see God as an unforgiving judge who bears grudges or harbors ill-will for past offenses, you have missed it again. You will never be able to love anybody until you have learned of the love of God and until you have come to know the God of love. Unforgiving? If He were unforgiving, would He have seen you in your sinfulness and utter rebellion and died to make you whole? If He were unforgiving, would He have taken your sins and cast them as far from Him as the east is from the west to be remembered against you no more? If He were unforgiving, would He hand you an unlimited promise that if you confess your sins that He is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you of all unrighteousness? Unforgiving? The world never knew what forgiveness was until they tasted the love of God.

No, our God is love, perfect love. Every time He breathes, He breathes love. Every time He gives, He gives love. Every time

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He disciplines, He disciplines in love. Every time He forgives, He forgives in love. When He thunders, He shouts His love. When it rains, He sprinkles His love. The lightning announces His love. Every flower, every bird, every newborn child says, "God is love." Sure, we live in a world infected with the venom of sin and the poison of it has broken out in hatred and death and disease and pain. We live in the midst of it all. But even as we suffer the pain of the very world we adulterated by sin, God continues to show us His love. He promises us that a day is coming when all that resist His love will vanish and those who are His will live in His love forever. But, until then, Paul wrote, His prayer for us is that we might come to progressively experience the magnitude of that love.

Now I know all of you have read and many of you have memorized I Corinthians 13. This chapter tells us how love looks in a life. If God is love, then it tells us about the character of God Himself. So let's go through it very quickly and substitute the word God for the word love. We will learn what God is like.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have *God*, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have *God*, I am nothing.

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have *God*, it profits me nothing.

*God* is patient, *God* is kind, and is not jealous; *God* does not brag and is not arrogant,

*God* does not act unbecomingly; does not seek *His* own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,

*God* does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

*God* bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

*God* never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;

but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

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When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.

But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love [for it is the essence of God Himself].

(I Corinthians 13:1-13 NAS)

Paul ends by saying that only three things last, faith hope and love. But of all these, the greatest of these is love. Why? Because as God generates faith through His Word and He generates hope through His life, He is love. He gives us faith. He gives us hope. But He is love. So love will outlast, outperform, out-transform anything and everything else. It has more power than empty doctrine or vain legalism. It has more power than tradition, more power even than instruction. That is why you and I must come to experience and pass on the love of God. There is no defense for God's love. There is no argument against God's love. No weapon can destroy God's love. It will cause an unfaithful husband to fall to his knees, a bitter parent to weep for joy, a hardened criminal to be overcome with grief and conviction. The love of God is the essence of the God of love.

At a later time, we will look more closely at the characteristics of His love, the depth of it, the limitlessness of it, the tenderness of it and the power of it. But for this lesson, I wanted us to just look at the nature of His character and see that in essence, God Himself *is* love. We read that God was grieved over the misery of Israel because He is love. One reason I wanted us to see that is that I am convinced too many of us don't really understand the height and the depth of His love. I know I don't. You can't help but spend time with people, or particularly counsel people, and not realize that most of us have a very vague and inconsistent and unhealthy view of the love of God. So we find ourselves unable to adequately receive it and return it. I believe there are at least three reasons for that. I would like to share these with you in closing. These are three reasons why we fail to grasp the love of God.

1- We live in a world marred by sin and controlled by Satan. Often life's circumstances are so grim, so affected by the disease of iniquity that we cannot imagine that behind all of this is a God

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of love. We stand by a hospital bed or beside a grave and we view a seemingly unnecessary tragedy and cry, “How could a God of love allow this?” or, “How could a God of love allow a Vietnam?” or a rape or murder. But we’ve missed the point, haven’t we? Our God of love *did* create the perfect world for us to live in. He called it Eden. There was no war, no murder, no death, no disease. He loved us so much that He allowed us the freedom to choose to return His love rather than to be mindless robots who could not, by choice, reflect His image. Man rejected that world and chose instead to scorn His love and go his own way. We became our own gods. We live in a world that we created. It is only a shell of what He created. Sin has soured its song, faded its beauty, destroyed its joy. But still He loved us, so He re-created Eden in the hearts of men and gave us His only Son as the total price for re-entry. He has re-designed a third Eden, more beautiful than the first, more tangible than the Eden of the heart, and called it heaven. He has gone ahead just to prepare a place for each of us. We say, “How could a God of love allow death and disease?” I say, “How could anyone but a God of perfect love die to free us from our own wrong choices and live to save us to an all-new glory?” That is love. That is a God who cares.

2- The second misunderstanding of His love is because we tend to see God the perfect Father through the lens of earthly fathers instead of viewing fatherhood through the lens of our heavenly father. Thus, we mistakenly create an image of the invisible based on our knowledge of the visible. I was fortunate to have a very loving father. But those who grew up with vicious fathers, or absentee fathers or unfaithful fathers or unfair fathers or unholy fathers or weak fathers, tend to attribute God *the* Father with characteristics of their earthly father. For many it takes time to unravel that problem and re-define their image of God. But it can be done and it must be done.

3- The third reason is that we formulate our concept of God’s love based on what we know of love on earth. It is a similar problem to number two. If you view the imperfect to define the perfect, you must view the perfect and then you must conform that which is imperfect to it. The world’s concept of love, even the church’s concept of love, is so far removed from the real thing that if we use IT as a pattern, we will never know the love of God. We must come to know the God of the Scriptures because we have a God who cares. He cares about our every thought. He

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cares about our every need. He cares about our every hurt. He cares about you. He cares about me. Wouldn't you like to know a God who cares?

If you have never received the Son, Jesus Christ, and have never been born into His family by faith, you have never tasted the love of God and you are separated from that love for all of eternity. Meet the God of love. Meet the God who cares. He is the God who cared enough to send His only Son to pay the total price for all of your sin. It was not because He *had* to, but because He cares. With outstretched arms this moment, He offers to give you His life, to give you His love, a love you have never experienced before. Won't you trust Him right now? It isn't up to you to learn to love Him. He has done it all. Just invite Him to be your Savior. Taste of His love. Ask Him to come into your heart right now and you will be born into the family of a God who cares. You might pray something like this:

*God,*

*I have scorned your love so long and gone my own way and done my own thing. All the while you loved me enough to die for me. Dear God, I receive that love and exchange my sins for your forgiveness. I invite Jesus Christ to be my Savior and Lord. Oh, God, now I am whole. Now I am holy. Thank you, Lord, for saving me and loving me so much.*

*Amen.*

If you just received Christ, tell someone about it right away. You need to hear more about the brand new life and the brand new love that is yours.

For the rest of us, don't we need to be reminded occasionally how much He really loves us? God had to remind me this week how much He loved me.

Is it possible that you are in the same boat? Are you a Christian who is lonely, weary, discouraged, maybe down on yourself, living in fear of the past or fear of the future because you have lost your vision of the love of God? You can have a song in your heart again, "Oh, How He Loves You and Me." You belong to a God who cares.

Even if, like the children of Israel, you have been out of fellowship with God for a long time and you can't imagine that He could ever forgive you for those idols in your life, for again



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and again making promises you didn't keep, and again and again promising to walk with Him without wandering only to fall prey to the enemies of double-mindedness and compromise, I have good news for you, too. The minute you cast down those altars and fall down before your Savior, your God will be grieved over your misery. Remember the story of the Prodigal Son? This moment, you can come home. He is not waiting to scold you or to scorn you or to ignore you. His eyes are filled with tears. They are tears of grief. He has been living for the moment when you would turn your eyes toward Him and race to meet Him. In fact, if you just make a move in His direction, He will come running with open arms to meet you. He has been waiting, waiting to welcome you back home for the fourth time, or for the four-thousandth time, because He has never stopped loving you. He never will. Remember, He can't stop loving you and still be God.

So what can separate us from the love of God? Praise His name, nothing can separate us from the love of a God who cares.

*(See closing poem next page.)*

A God Who Cares

HAS EVER THERE BEEN A LOVE?

Has ever there been a love like that?  
Since 'ere our time began  
A love that reaches to earth's great depths  
To claim the heart of man?

Has ever there been a love so true,  
Though scorned and ignored, and refused?  
Again and again it reaches its arms  
With all new compassion infused.

The vilest of sin, the deepest of scars  
Cannot its power deter;  
For the greater the need, the deeper it flows  
And the deeper it longs to restore.

Has ever there been a love like God's,  
That transcends time and space,  
That hungers to meet the simplest of needs  
With a shower of enabling grace?

No, there never has been a love like His,  
And there never will be again;  
A love that forgives and cleanses and frees  
From the crippling bondage of sin.

No, there never need ever again be such love.  
No such need really cries to be filled.  
For the love of our God is *eternal* love,  
And ne'er can it ever be stilled!

So drink at God's fountain, beloved, and yearn  
To be freed as His love is unfurled;  
For through it and by it He'll change your life,  
And with it, He'll change your world!

## A God Who Cares

### For Focus and Application

1- God's incredible attitude towards the Israelites was two-fold. One involved His actions, the other His attitude. He allowed them to suffer and be disciplined for their rebellion, but He never stopped loving them. In fact, He grieved over their rebellion. What was the key to that? Think carefully. It is the crucial element in this lesson. Where was His focus, on them or on how they were affecting Him?

2- God's first response to His children in Judges 10:14 was for them to find solace or strength in the gods they were worshipping. Why did He do that? What do you think was His purpose? Was He being sarcastic? How can you use this principle in counseling others?

3- Judges 10:15 and 16 is the turning point for Israel, and thus we see the turning point in God's response. What four statements did the Jews make that turned the heart of God? What one statement is made about how God felt?

4- Why do we struggle so to achieve the balance between the discipline of God and the love of God? How does this impact that balance in disciplining our children? What two extremes does Satan try to move us towards?

5- Paraphrase (write in your own words and personalize) I John 4:7-19.

6- Do you believe that real agape love can exist in a non-believer? Is that conviction based on human feelings or Scriptural fact?

7- How does coming to understand the depth of God's love affect those who suffer from anxieties and fears? How can we come to understand that love even if we did not have that kind of love from our earthly parents?

8- Explain in your own words what you think I John 4:19 means. It is a vital principle in Scripture.

9- Set an agenda for yourself for the next six months. Assign at least one day a week to meditate on the love of God, using the Scriptures as your only basis of authority. Agree to memorize at least one verse a week on the love of God, and as you do, personalize it, pray it back to God, and begin to sing praises to God for His incredible, indescribable love.

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10- If you are not a believer or have wandered from your first love, ask God today to make the love of God real to you. He will. He delights to do so.

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