

Do You Love Him?

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[0 : 00] The psalm that we read together, Psalm 116. I'm going to look at the whole of this psalm together. We'll just read at the beginning. I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. As you go through this psalm, you find the recurring theme of calling on the Lord and praying to the Lord, crying out to the Lord, recurring again and again.

It's a reminder to us of the great blessing and privilege that there is in having the Lord to be called upon, being able to come in prayer to God.

But we can all acknowledge, I'm sure, there are times when maybe prayer is a struggle for us all. A time when we find it hard to come to God in prayer.

Maybe we feel angry towards God. We feel undeserving of God. We feel just a distance from God at times.

[1 : 04] For a number of different reasons, we can find prayer a struggle at different times. The words won't come. We're easily distracted. We start thinking about other things.

We fall out of the habit and the routine of coming regularly to God in prayer. And it leads us to ask the question then, what can we do? We know we're struggling.

We know maybe finding it hard. What can we do about it? How can we get back into that intimate bond with God? How can we get back into that close relationship with him?

In coming to him regularly and lovingly and with great joy, coming to him in prayer. Well, we have God's word.

And that is where we come to. If we are struggling and finding prayer hard, we come to God. We don't stay away feeling he won't want to hear us.

[2 : 02] We don't stay away feeling we're not deserving of him. We are to come to him. And we are to come through his word. Because his word, it brings us back to him in such an intimate way.

And especially in so often as you look at the Psalms, you find the Psalms help us once again to come and even just pray through the Psalms. Reading the Psalms, we're reading them in a prayerful sense.

And this Psalm that we've been reading together here, Psalm 116, it reminds us of that great relationship that the Psalmist had here with God.

Everything wasn't straightforward. Everything wasn't perfect. Things were hard for the Psalmist. And yet the opening words of this Psalm reminds us of that great relationship and that great intimacy that every Christian has with the Lord.

I love the Lord. I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. There's this wonderful reminder from the outset that God listens to his people as they pray.

[3 : 13] And so as we come to God's word, if we're struggling ourselves to pray, as we read through this Psalm or other Psalms or other parts of Scripture, we find that God's word begins to melt our hearts, reminds us maybe not so much of our love for him first, but of his love for us.

Of what a wonderful God we have. And so if you find yourself in that situation, if you are in that situation, then come to a Psalm like this and read through it, meditate on it, and not just be challenged by it, but be moved by it, by the love of God towards his people.

The first few words there, I love the Lord. That's what we're going to focus on this evening, our love for the Lord. And that question, do you love him?

Because the Psalmist is able to say here, he does. And he goes on to expand on that by giving reasons why he does. And that's why we want to look together at this evening.

Do you love the Lord? And if you do love him, how much? How much do you love him? The gospel and the word of God, it often asks us these questions.

[4 : 36] You find Jesus so often challenging crowds of people with deep and meaningful questions. Not just those who are his followers, those who are close to him, but those who are his enemies.

He challenges them often with searching questions. For example, in Matthew 22, verse 41. There, Jesus is with a crowd of Pharisees, those who are antagonistic towards him.

And he asks them a searching question. He says to them, what do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? They're hearing so much about the Christ, the Messiah, but they don't realize he's there before them.

And so what does he say to them? What do you think about the Christ? It's not searching. We think of that question for ourselves tonight. What do you think about the Christ?

How would you answer that yourself? Well, there's so many searching questions. And this psalm highlights for us other searching questions too.

[5 : 48] And there's three questions arising from this psalm that I want us to think about this evening. The first question is, do you love him? The second question is, why would you love him?

And the third question is, how can you love him? So the first question we think about is, do you love him? And when we think about coming to God in prayer and our struggle sometimes to come to God in prayer, this is where we have to begin.

Do you love him? When we feel a distance sometimes from God or an unworthiness of coming to God, ask yourself this, do you love him?

And when you think of that question, do you love him? Is there a particular part of scripture it takes you to? Or a particular individual it makes you maybe think about?

Well, it brings us to the New Testament and to Peter. And when Jesus had risen from the grave and he appeared before Peter and he restored Peter, but he restored him with this challenging question.

[7 : 06] Do you love me? Put yourself in Peter's shoes after all that he had been through, after all that he had seen, after denying the Lord Jesus.

And then Jesus, John 21, verse 15, it says, When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

And what was Peter's response? He said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. You know that I love you. Now, to us, as we read these verses in John, we see the word love.

But when you read it in the Greek, there's two different words used. When Jesus asks the question, do you love me? He uses a word called agape.

And that's a deep, a deep, deep love. A love that goes beyond any love that we can imagine.

[8 : 10] It's a love that's rooted in God, rooted in Christ. A love that's unconditioned. A love that is no matter what. That's what Jesus is asking him.

Simon, do you love me? This agape love. But what you notice with Peter is when he says, you know that I love you, he doesn't use the same word.

He uses the word phileo, which means like a love between friends. A friendship love. A close bond of love, but not with the same depth of this agape love that Jesus is asking him.

And Jesus asks him this question three times. The second time he asks it in the same way. Simon, do you love me?

With this agape love. And Peter's response, the second time is the same. You know I love you. Phileo love. A friendship. A close love. And the third time Jesus asks him, Simon, do you love me?

[9 : 19] The third time he uses phileo. This friendship love Jesus is asking about now. And Peter replies that third time in the same way.

Lord, you know that I love you. Phileo love. It's almost like he doesn't quite have the depth of love that he knows he should. Because of all that he's gone through.

Because of all that he experiences. He almost can't come to say, Lord, I love you. With this agape love, I've let you down. I've failed you in so many ways.

But Jesus comes to him, seeking to restore him to that way. And praying that you would come to love him with this agape. This deep love.

Now, why do we go there? Well, because in this psalm, the word used in that verse, verse one, I love the Lord, is agape.

[10 : 19] This deep, rich, unconditional love. And it's this love that the Lord wants his people to have. To come more than phileo love.

This friendship love. But to come to this depth of love. To love God, no matter what. To see our sins as they are. But to know that he loves us.

And to say, I love, agape love, the Lord with all my heart. Because he has heard my voice and my prayer. And so that's the challenge for us in these opening words.

I love the Lord because he has heard my voice. Now, there's no doubt Peter would have gone on to love the Lord in that way.

To love the Lord and serve him with all his heart. And that's what Jesus was doing in restoring him. Moving him on from just that close bond of relationship, of friendship, to this agape love.

[11 : 23] And that's the love that as Christians we are to have towards him. Because that's the love he has towards us. And in the opening four verses, the reasons for the psalmist delight is clear for us.

He loves the Lord because he has heard his voice. Am I pleased for mercy? He inclined his ear to me. Therefore, I will call on him as long as I live. This relationship is there.

This depth of relationship is there. And that's where we are to come to. That's the Lord that we are to come to. And we are struggling to pray.

To remind ourselves of what God has done for us. The psalmist here is saying, I love the Lord because he has heard me.

And I will call on him no matter what. No matter what comes my way. I will call on the Lord. I will pray to him no matter what.

[12 : 28] Because I love the Lord. That is this depth of relationship. So whatever our circumstances, this is the relationship we have with our Lord, with our Father.

That we can love him with his love because he has loved us with it. So whether we are going through hardships or highs, whatever it is, we can enjoy this relationship with God.

And you just look through the Psalms. You see it so often in the Psalms, the varying experience of the psalmist. And so often as you're reading through the Psalms, whether it's challenging times or joyous times, the real heart of the matter, the question is the relationship with God.

And so whether the psalmist is angry with God and questioning God, or whether he's rejoicing in God, there is always this certainty, this surety that God is there.

And that's why we remind ourselves again and again, that God is with us. David in the Psalms, for example, he so often shows how varying our emotions can be and our experiences can be.

[13 : 42] And yet the constant nature of God. Psalm 142, it speaks of David being surrounded by enemies. And yet in verse 4, he says, look to the right and see, there is none who takes notice of me.

No refuge remains to me. No one cares for my soul. There's no one there for him. But then verse 5 says, I cry to you, O Lord.

I say, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. The Lord is with him. Despite being surrounded by enemies, the Lord is with him.

In Psalm 18, which we sang together, that psalm is in the experience of David having been delivered from his enemies. And he says there, I love you, O Lord, my strength.

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

[14 : 46] The Lord is there with him. You see two differing experiences. Enemy surrounding and everyone's deserted him, yet the Lord is with him. In one instance, delivered from the enemy and rejoicing in God.

In the other, I love you, Lord, O Lord, my strength. So whatever our circumstances, do we not have reason to rejoice in God?

Isaac Watts, he was a famous minister and a hymn writer. And he had to leave the ministry in his late 30s due to ill health. And he spent pretty much the rest of his days confined to house.

He couldn't serve the Lord in the same way as he had done. And yet he was inspired to write various hymns over the years. Five years after he left the ministry, he wrote the hymn, I Love the Lord.

And it's a paraphrase of Psalm 116. And as him says this, I love the Lord, he heard my cry and pitied every groan.

[15 : 59] Long as I live and troubles rise, I've hasten to his throne. I love the Lord who heard my cry and chased my grief away. O let my heart no more despair while I have breath to pray.

Despite the situation and the circumstances of where he was and how his lot had changed so quickly, he was still able to hasten to the throne, to pray while he had breath and to rejoice and say, I love the Lord.

He heard my cry and pitied every groan. So the question is, do you love the Lord? Do you love that he hears your prayer?

And do you hasten to his throne? That is where we are to come, to come to him. Even if we are struggling to pray, to know that we love him because he first loved us.

The psalmist goes on here and he says to us, why would you love him? And in verse 5 down to verse 11, he outlines for us various ways where we can delight in God and why we should love him.

[17 : 16] And the first way is this. Do we know who God is? Do we know God as he is? Gracious is the Lord and righteous.

Our God is merciful. Look at the way he starts. It's all about the Lord. Gracious is the Lord. Righteous and merciful.

As a reminder to us here, as we come to God, we remind ourselves who we are praying to. The Lord is the one who is gracious.

The Lord is the one who is righteous. Our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple. He is there for all. So we begin by looking to God.

Reminding ourselves of who he is. And again, it's a great reminder to ourselves as we pray to always begin with our focus on God.

[18 : 19] Just like the Lord's prayer. An outline for how we are to pray. As the disciples were asking us in their own struggles to pray. Lord, teach us to pray.

For the Lord Jesus said, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. It begins with the Lord. Our Father who art in heaven.

Our Father who art in heaven. And so he goes on. The focus is first and foremost on the Lord. Because in prayer we can so easily make it just a list of requests.

And we go through our requests and feel that we have prayed to God. That we are in this close relationship with him just because we've brought all our requests before him.

And that is part of our prayer. But the first part of prayer is always adoration. Always looking and reminding ourselves who God is.

[19 : 18] If we just begin with a request, we can so easily forget the one who is able to answer our prayers. And so the psalmist here is reminding himself almost who the Lord is.

Gracious, righteous, merciful. The one who preserves. The one who has rescued. He has delivered all of these things. He's kept them from stumbling.

He goes on with this list. It is the Lord who has done all of these things. Who can compare to this God? There is no one. We pray to the only one who is able to do any of these things.

Gracious, righteous, merciful, preserving, bountifully just. And all of these things. He is the only one who is able to do it. And so he's humbled before God.

And so should we. So should we be as we come to him in prayer. Be humbled before him for who he is. Who can compare to this God?

[20 : 28] Just like Job in the Old Testament. In chapter 38, verse 4. The Lord is saying to him. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

You know, can anyone thus say that we have made anything of the created world that we see around us? Where were we when he made it? We were nothing. We were no one.

This is the God who has made the heaven and the earth. He has made all of these things. And we are reminded here in verse 8 too.

He has delivered my soul from death. My eyes from tears. My feet from stumbling. Where would we be without this God?

Lost. Completely lost. Completely lost. And yet here is the Lord. The one we are looking to. And who longs to be in relationship with us.

[21 : 25] There is no one else who compares. In the love of God towards us as we see in Christ Jesus. How he has rescued us from death.

How he has come to save us from our sin. With that agape love. That unconditional, undeserved love. That he has brought to us.

In 1 John 4 verse 9. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us. That God sent his only son into the world. So we might live through him.

Away from death to life found in him. So there is this nature of who God is. And who we are in comparison.

We are nothing. And yet God longs for us to be in that relationship. To come to him. Why should we love him?

[22 : 30] Well, because of who he is. And what he has done for us. Do you love him? The third thing we see in this psalm.

The final thing is. How can we love him? The psalmist brings things to a close in this psalm. With a question for himself.

What shall I render? In verse 12. What shall I render to the Lord? For all his benefits to me? What can I possibly give to God?

For all his benefits. For all his love towards me. We feel maybe we can offer nothing. What can we possibly give to God?

Who has loved us in such a way. Well, the psalmist as he began says. I love the Lord. Because he heard my voice. And my pleas for mercy.

[23 : 35] So what can we give to the Lord? For all his benefits. We can come to him. We can worship him. And that's the first thing that the psalmist answers his own question with.

I will lift up the cup of salvation. And call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

You have this sense of the psalmist reminding himself. Going on. I will call on the name of the Lord all my days. No matter what.

I will keep coming back to the Lord. I will lift up the cup of the salvation. I will call on the name of the Lord. I will keep coming back.

I will worship him with all my heart. There's a sense of public worship. And there's also this sense of private worship.

[24 : 36] And that's how we are to live ourselves as well. What shall we give to the Lord for all his benefits? I will give public worship to him.

I will make clear to all that I love the Lord because he has heard my voice. And I will make it clear to all that I will love the Lord no matter what. No matter my situation.

So people would say, well, it's easy for you to worship God when things are going well. But what a witness it is to still say, I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my prayers.

But even when things are going wrong with us, even when things are hard for us, we will still say, I will still call on the name of the Lord.

I will still lift up the cup of salvation. I will still pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. I will love the Lord no matter what.

[25 : 37] Because that's the love he showed to me. That's the love that Christ showed to me. He loved no matter what. Even in the garden of Gethsemane, as he was praying with the Father, not my will, but yours be done.

Even as he went to the cross and suffered there in our place, they said to him, he could call down anyone to come and help him at that point. But no, thy will be done.

No matter what. That is the love of Christ to us. That agape love. And so that is the love that we are to show to him.

To give our worship. To give our all for him. And so is that the love that we have for him.

Is that the love that we are seeing in ourselves towards him? Do we love him in that way? This is a living sacrifice.

[26 : 46] This is what Romans 12 verse 1 and 2 speaks of. Being living sacrifices to God. Loving God no matter what.

And that is the way that we witness to those around us. That is the way we show that we love the Lord. No matter what.

Dwight Moody once said, show me a church where there is love. And I will show you a church that is a power in the community.

The love that he was speaking there was a love for the Lord. A love for the brethren. And a love for the lost. Show me a church where there is love.

And I will show you a church that is a power in the community. And we think of where we started. When we think of the idea of maybe we're struggling to pray.

[27 : 45] Well, the more you go through this psalm, the more you realize how much reason we have to love God. And where that love leads us. How can we show our love for God?

It's about public worship, but it's also about service of thanksgiving. In verse 17, I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord.

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. He is saying this in light of what? Of being a servant.

In verse 16. Oh Lord, I am your servant. I love the Lord because he has heard my voice.

And now he is saying, Oh Lord, I am your servant. I am your servant. I will love you and I will show your love in worship and in service for you.

[28 : 49] This is the great depth of the love that God had for us. Being returned by his people.

By loving the Lord with all our hearts. By being his servant. By worshiping him with all our hearts. Going back to another hymn that Isaac Watts wrote.

Love, so amazing, so divine. Demands my soul, my life, my all. That's exactly what this psalm is saying.

I love the Lord with all my heart. Do you? Do you? Do you love the Lord with all your heart? Do you worship him with all that you are?

Do you serve him as you ought? When we come back to the heart. The love of God for us. Drives us in prayer.

[29 : 55] The call on the name of the Lord. And to love him in the same way. With all our hearts. With all our souls. And with all that we are.

So may the Lord help us to pray. And help us to see the wonder of his grace. And the wonder of his love. And to serve him with all our hearts.

Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we rejoice in your love for us. We thank you for the depth of it. For it being unconditional.

For Lord, that you showed mercy. Even when we were your enemies, you loved us. And you brought us by your grace. And by your mercy to see your love shown to us in Christ Jesus, your son.

And we pray, Lord, that you will help us. To see him always before us. To set him before us always. So we will be able to call upon the name of the Lord.

[30 : 57] That we will be able to pray more earnestly. Recognizing our unworthiness of it. But yet, oh Lord, knowing that it is a love. For your people.

So Lord, help us that we will love you. Love you with all our hearts. For you have heard our prayers. You have heard our cries for mercy. And so Lord, teach us always to pray.

And to look to you. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We can conclude. We can conclude. We can conclude.