

GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Returning to Our Roots

STUDY SIX

Loving God: Our Ultimate Response

Psalms 18:46–49; 32:1–5; 37:1–9; 46:1–3

Walking with God is a day-by-day commitment that says, “Today I’m going to know God better. Today I’m going to love God more.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

KNOWING who God is and how we relate to Him is foundational. Without that knowledge, we grope in the dark through a maze of meaningless pursuits. Knowledge, however, is only one side of the coin in our relationship with God.

Moses gave us the flip side in a creed that has been recited by Jews for thousands of years. The creed is called the Shema, which means “listen.” It begins,

Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

Jesus called this command, “the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37). No other response to God precedes or surpasses loving Him. It is absolutely essential in our relationship with Him. As our love for God increases, so does our desire to know Him better, which leads to greater love. The cycle of pursuing knowledge and responding with love continues as our relationship with God grows richer and deeper over a lifetime.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study traces love’s response to God recorded in the book of Psalms. We’ll look at God’s marvelous deeds in three psalms and then learn from David’s response of love in three more psalms. Few have loved God with all their heart, soul, and strength as much as David did, and he invites us to walk in his footsteps through his psalms.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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1

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

David's simple prayer in Psalm 18:1 captures the purity of his devotion. We'll look at more of his psalm later, but here is a good starting place for this study and whenever you open God's Word.

*I love you, LORD,
you are my strength. (Psalm 18:1)*

Repeat David's prayer a few times and then pause in silence to let these words settle into your heart and soul.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Ever since God freed His people from Egypt and led them to the promised land, the Israelites had experienced God's provision, protection, mercy, and faithful love. David and other poets set their praise to music in the book of Psalms. The psalms were written to be sung, so as you read them, try to imagine yourself in a worshipful setting with a congregation praising and petitioning the Lord together.



Observation: God of Grace, Man of Gratitude

The psalms rang out a message to God's people like bells pealing in a cathedral tower: *Remember what God has done and trust Him.* Human ingenuity, weapons of war, clever scheming, or political power hadn't saved God's people in the past and wouldn't save them in the future. God alone was their refuge and strength.



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God of Grace and Mercy

In the chart below, read the verses listed and write down the compassionate actions from God that the people desperately needed.

Selections from Psalms	God's Compassionate Actions
<i>Psalm 31:1–4</i>	
<i>Psalm 31:9–15</i>	
<i>Psalm 37:1–9</i>	
<i>Psalm 46</i>	

Trust God. Love God. He won't hang you out to dry. He knows you have integrity. Release your defenses and trust Him. That's the message of the psalms. No substitutes for God. No other refuge but the living God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Man of Gratitude and Love

When we embrace God’s compassion, grateful love for Him flows in return—a response David modeled in the psalms listed in the following chart. We’ve included the likely backdrop for each psalm. Read the verses and write down how David’s circumstances led to his response.

Psalm	Backdrop	David’s Response to His Circumstance
<i>Psalm 18:1–6, 46–49</i>	God rescued David from his enemies and Saul.	
<i>Psalm 32:1–7</i>	God forgave David’s sins of adultery and murder.	
<i>Psalm 40:1–4</i>	God lifted David out of his despair.	

The heart that loves God bursts forth in songs of praise. It is wonderful when your heart is so in love with your Lord that the only way to express it is to sing.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: Why Loving God Is the Greatest Commandment

David expressed love for God by telling God he loved Him, crying out to the Lord (*Psalm 18:6*), confessing his sin (*32:1*), hiding himself in the Lord's protection (*32:7*), waiting on Him (*40:1*), and trusting Him (*40:4*). What a close relationship David had with his Lord!

Jesus ranked the command to love God higher than all other commands—higher than commands against idolatry, murder, stealing, adultery, lying, or coveting. Loving God is greater than all the ceremonial commands for ritual purification and the whole sacrificial system.

Why do you think the command to love God comes before all other Christian duties—before attending church, giving, or even loving others?

God wants us to say, “I love you, Father. I trust You. I cling to You.” The better you get to know your God, the more comfortable you will be with that kind of response.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Love and Obey

The people of Israel had a history of heart problems. They would go through the religious motions without love for God, genuine obedience, or actual life change. How did Jesus get to the heart of the Pharisees' problem in *Matthew 15:7–9*?



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How did Jesus connect love with obedience in *John 14:15, 23–24*?

What principle about knowing God, loving God, and obeying God can you write to conclude your study?

When you go through affliction and feel God's presence, what happens in the process? You and your Lord become close, so close it really can't be explained in human terms. You link yourself to the Almighty, and you walk together. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Those Who Truly Love God

God knows that a heart filled with love toward Him provides the perfect growing conditions for obedience to bloom. Those who love God experience God like David did. They know God's power because God has delivered them. They know God's peace because God has forgiven them. They know God's presence because God was near them in their affliction. They respond with abiding, deep love for God that no power on earth or heaven can take away.



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What experiences have you had with the goodness, grace, and protection of God? How have these experiences inspired your love for Him?

Struggling with fear, guilt, or weakness of faith can weigh you down. Which of David's ways of living for God would you like to emulate to lift you up right now?

How can you grow your love for God? By meditating on the Psalms as you did in this study, taking God at His word, recalling God's grace in your life, and simply saying the words, "I love you, LORD. You are my strength" (Psalm 18:1). Love is the first and greatest command because from it springs a lifelong walk with God that is secure, intimate, and a fountain of everlasting joy.

Oh, the joys of those who trust the LORD! (Psalm 40:4).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the closeness You offer me. You are the Maker, holy and separate from Your creation. And yet, You come near through Your Son and the indwelling Holy Spirit. My body is Your temple, and I love to dwell in Your presence every moment of every day. In Jesus' name, amen.

