

Loving God

THE COST AND THE BENEFIT

DO WE LOVE GOD for who He is or for what He does for us? Certainly, this is a question I ask myself frequently. It is an important question. Earlier in my walk with the Lord, I questioned His goodness because dear family members had not been healed. I couldn't understand how a loving God could withhold healing from His children. My love was challenged because it was based on what He does or doesn't do. When He didn't give me everything I prayed for, I struggled.

The Jewish people have wrestled with this as well. How could God have allowed the Holocaust to happen? Amazingly, in the midst of horror and sorrow, many (but not all) continued to trust God. As Job said: "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him*" (Job 13:15a).

A Hasidic rabbi lost his wife and 11 children in the Holocaust. Afterwards he was asked: "Why did miracles occur only during biblical times? Why don't they happen in our time?" The rabbi replied: "The fact that there are Holocaust survivors who, after all they endured, can still keep faith, is itself, the greatest miracle of all."

Gradually, I came to realize that God wants unconditional love from His children. He wants us to love Him even when we don't understand everything that happens in our lives. He wants us to love sacrificially. It is a surrendered lifestyle of love. This kind of unconditional love is seen in the book of Job. In the face of terrible situations, Job continued to put his trust in God. In the end, we see God reward Job's faith, trust and love by restoring his fortunes. Abraham showed unconditional love when he was willing to sacrifice Isaac on the altar. When he showed he would hold nothing back from God—even his beloved son—God provided the ram for the sacrifice. Out of the ashes of the Holocaust, the worst imaginable situation, the modern State of Israel was born. Many have sacrificed much in order to wholeheartedly follow God and His call. Some were even martyred for their faith.

When Jesus (Yeshua) says we should love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Matt. 22:37, Luke 10:27 and Mark 12:30), that means everything!

If we love God in order to receive His benefits, we might actually be loving ourselves more than loving God. How can we know if we are loving God unconditionally? If we pray and ask God to

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reveal His heart to us, if we ask how we can bless Him and generally long to be in His presence and know Him more, then we are loving Him in a wholehearted way. If our prayer life is all about our needs and wants

or even telling God how we think He needs to resolve a certain issue, then our prayers are more about us than about Him, which could be selfishly motivated love.

Unconditional love for God can result in our lives being more difficult, at least for a season. When God called Tom and me to Israel, we wanted nothing more than to please Him by answering the call. It meant giving up a life of comfort in the United States. Our lifestyle in Israel was meager. We drove old cars

(the first one a 23-year-old Volkswagen Beetle) and had to carefully budget for food. We didn't go out to eat or buy new clothes. We were thrilled to make these sacrifices because we did it out of love for God. Many live such lives of devotion to God and His call. Their stories are always an inspiration.

Jesus' priority is stated in Mark 12:28–34 when He says we need to love God with every fiber of our being. Are you ready to love God with all your heart? Are you willing to listen to His heart's desires and follow Him even if it means you sacrifice personally? Those who are willing to love God in this way, to obediently heed His calls, who are even willing to give up their beloved son like Abraham, who will love God regardless of the hardships they may face in life, are promised benefits. This is a love of total surrender to the God of the universe, the God of Israel and the Creator. In some instances, men and women of faith have even lost their lives in following God's call. One of the most famous was Jim Elliot. His wife, Elizabeth, wrote their story in *Through Gates of Splendor*. One of the most famous quotes attributed to Elliot

is this: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Elliot gave everything, including his life, in service of God. His benefit came in his eternal reward.

Let’s look and see what the Bible says about His benefits both in this life and beyond.

God Will Show Lovingkindness

Several places in Scripture we find the words: “*showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments*” (Exod. 20:6 and Deut. 5:10 NASB, see also Deut. 7:9–12). It appears in both lists of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Other Scriptures like Nehemiah 1:5 and Daniel 9:4 have the same words without the phrase “to thousands.”

Lovingkindness is the English translation of the Hebrew word *chesed*. It is one of the most wonderful words in the Bible, appearing 248 times. It can also be translated as mercy, kindness, goodness, kindly, favor, merciful, good and godliness.

I am also reminded of the words of Jesus (Yeshua): “*If you love Me, keep My commandments*” (John 14:15) and “*As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love*” (John 15:9–10).

What an awesome, amazing benefit. We can experience the extravagant love of God when we give ourselves to Him and His ways. I want to live with His favor, His love, His kindness and goodness. This is the reward to those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Be Like the Sun in Full Strength

Judges 5:31 records the song of Deborah, and she references this phrase: “*Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength.*”

The Bible uses many word pictures to express thought. In this reference, the one who loves God is promised to be like the sun in full strength. What does that mean? Well, the sun is on





There is no darkness in the sun.

fire from the inside out. It is light from the very core of its being. The heat from the sun sustains life on our planet. Without the sun, all life would die. God created this great light not just to look good in the sky but to make it possible for life to continue on this planet. People who love God are like that. The light of God's presence is evident in their inner being and brings light, heat and life to those around them.

There is no darkness in the sun. In a similar way, God's love can banish darkness in our lives. When I think of darkness, I often equate it with fear. John, the beloved apostle, said, *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love*

his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 John 4:18–21). When the sun is in full strength, there is no darkness at all. It is banished. What an amazing thought.

All Things Will Work Out

Paul said: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Not everything in life will be easy or pleasant, but we have this amazing promise when we love God: He will work things out for our good.

Delight Yourself in Him

One of my favorite Scriptures is Psalm 37:4: “*Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.*” I used to think that meant I would get all the things I wanted, but then the Holy Spirit showed me that it could be read another way. When we delight in God, when we love Him wholeheartedly, He can put His desires in our heart. We no longer think only about our pleasure, but desire the things He desires. Suddenly we want to do the things He wants.

In the *ArtScroll Tanach Series* on the Psalms, it says this: “When God sees that you take delight only in Him, He will surely fulfill your every request, because whatever you desire will be put in His service.”



He will work things out for our good.

When Tom and I felt God’s call to go to Israel, we knew we might have to give up many things. Those things faded into insignificance because He planted His desires in our hearts and they became our dearest desires as well.

We were in our 30s when we moved to Israel, just at the time when we should have been buying our first home. We gave up that natural desire to follow Him. Our first “home” in Israel was volunteer housing in an Israeli *kibbutz* (collective community). It was one room. It was filthy, had bugs—and even scorpions on occasion—very meager, decrepit furniture and no bathroom facilities in the room. My husband turned to me and said: “Are you ready for this?” As a middle-class American, I had never lived this way. Still, I didn’t hesitate. God had put His desire in my heart, and I was ready to face many inconveniences in order to follow Him.

Later, the Lord blessed us with a home. In our 50s, we were able to eventually buy a home in Israel through a series of miracles. It has become part of God’s provision for our future retirement. Jesus (Yeshua) said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or

children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29–30).

Seek First His Kingdom

In Matthew 6 we find a beautiful passage about God’s provision. Jesus (Yeshua) tells us we don’t need to worry about temporal things—what we will eat or drink, our bodies or what we will wear. What we need to concern ourselves with is seeking Him and living His way. “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all*



these things [food, clothes and so forth] shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow..." (Matt. 6:33–34a).

In Closing

As you consider the personal costs and benefits to loving God, I hope you will decide to make loving God wholeheartedly your life ambition. Following the greatest commandments of Jesus (Yeshua) is following the paths of truth. They lead to life abundant in this life and in the life to come.

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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