

Week 1: Beloved - *Jesus loves me, this I know*

My Story

Six years ago I went through one of the most difficult seasons of my life; one that shook me to the core and caused me to question God and his love for me. In the delivery room, I learned that my son had a birth defect that would alter his life, and ours. And while I was still coming to grips with that, my marriage was tested when my husband revealed to me that he was struggling with pornography and had been for many years. Then we watched as our cousin had to bury both of her young children killed in separate car accidents within a couple of years of each other. I felt the blow of the triple whammy.

In the months and years that followed, I grew further away from God, somewhat angry at Him for the way life was turning out. I didn't realize until I heard a teaching on the love of God that I had become offended at God for allowing these things to happen, and that offense was distancing me from experiencing his love. I realized that I was defining God's love for me based upon the circumstances in my life. I had to come to a place where I realized my circumstances do not tell me how much God loves me. In fact it was God's love that was holding me together all along.

How do I know Jesus loves me, even when circumstances in life try to make me feel otherwise? For me, the answer required both looking at the facts and choosing faith.

1. The facts show that God chose me, even over himself.

For God so loved the world, He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16.

God gave His son as a sacrifice, by choice. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He had the opportunity to back out and spare His son. Jesus prayed,

Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done. Luke 22:42.

God chose to follow through with the most difficult sacrifice in all of history because He loved us that much.

2. Next comes faith. I chose not to blame God for my circumstances.

The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, I came so that they could have life, life in its fullest measure. John 10:10.

God allowed these things to happen for reasons I may never know....and I can choose trust or choose bitterness. I choose to believe regardless of the circumstances around me. This is the very nature of walking by faith and not by sight. I choose to trust. I trust that He loves me, that He sees a bigger picture than I do, and that ultimately He will work all these things for the good of those who love Him.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

It was the verse below and the questions that follow, that really pierced my heart and helped me release my offense and open my heart back up to Christ by realizing just how much He loves me.

Cried the lover to the beloved, "O how beautiful you are, my daughter. There is no flaw in you. You've stolen my heart, my sister, my bride. Yes, with one glance of your eye, you've stolen my heart. Place me like a seal on your arm, for don't you know that love is as strong as death, its jealousy is unyielding to the grave. Do you not know that my heart is burning and blazing like a fire for you? Yes, like a mighty flame. Many rivers cannot quench this love, neither can floods drown it." Song of Solomon 4:7&9, 8:6-7

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Do you believe that God loves you like that?
- What would happen if you did believe that?
- Is there any offense in your heart that you need to release in order to truly experience God's love and live in freedom?
- Name one person you know who lives in the knowledge of the Love of God. What can you learn from his/her life?

Final Thoughts

This week take some time to meditate on God's love and ask the Holy Spirit to show you ways He's loved you and is loving you now. If you've never experienced Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life or if you've grown distant, don't go another minute without taking the first step into His loving arms. THAT is where everything begins! You can pray this simple prayer now:

"Father, I recognize that I have sinned and not lived your way. I have not loved you or received your love. Today, Father, take my life. I give you control. I receive all the power and love and healing You died for me to receive on the cross. I give you my heart. I give you my life. Today is the beginning of my new life in You! Amen!"

Be sure to share with your small group leader this step you've taken. Your faith will grow by sharing it.

If you have accepted Jesus as Lord, take this week to thank Him for all the ways He's loved you and blessed you and take some quiet moments to meditate on His Love for you in ways you haven't thought of before.