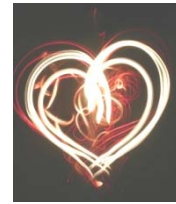


FAITH FOUNDATIONS

Theme 2: A new identity in Christ

Week 1: You are loved



BIBLE STUDY

[all passages: TNIV]

Jeremiah 31:3

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

Isaiah 49:13-16a

¹³ Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains!

For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

¹⁴ But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me."

¹⁵ "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast

and have no compassion on the child she has borne?

Though she may forget, I will not forget you!

¹⁶ See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

1 John 3:1a

¹ See what great love the Father has lavished on us,

that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Ephesians 3:17b-19

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Explore the text

- Notice what each passage teaches you about your belovedness, and mark the text above.

Apply it to our lives

- What effect do you think it might have on your life as the truth about your belovedness really sinks into your heart?
- In what ways have you already experienced God's unconditional love for you?
- What are some practical ways for you to claim the knowledge that you are loved unconditionally? This week try to stay aware of this truth and its effect on your experience.

DIG DEEPER To gain more insight on this subject we encourage you to:

- Listen to Henri Nouwen's message again and ask yourself, How does the teaching speak into my experience and thinking? Find it on YouTube (search Henri Nouwen, Becoming the Beloved). We watched parts 1 & 2. Parts 3, 4 & 5 cover the follow-up message for a total of 40 minutes. Write down a few thoughts in response.
- Read the story of the Lost Son in Matthew 15:11-31 and talk with God about how it speaks into your life.

OUR FIRST LOVE by Henri Nouwen

Listen to what God is saying to us:

You are my child.

You are written in the palms of my hand.

You are hidden in the shadow of my hand.

I have molded you in the secret of the earth.

I have knitted you together in your mother's womb.

You belong to me.

I am yours. You are mine.

I have called you from eternity and you are the one who is held safe and embraced in love from eternity to eternity. You belong to me. And I am holding you safe and I want you to know that whatever happens to you, I am always there. I was always there; I am always there; I always will be there and hold you in my embrace. You are mine. You are my child. You belong to my home. You belong to my intimate life and I will never let you go. I will be faithful to you.

The spiritual life starts at the place where you can hear God's voice. Where somehow you can claim that long before your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your school, your church touched you, loved you, and wounded you—long before that, you were held safe in an eternal embrace. You were seen with eyes of perfect love long before you entered into the dark valley of life.

The spiritual life starts at the moment that you can go beyond all of the wounds and claim that there was a love that was perfect and unlimited, long before that perfect love became reflected in the imperfect and limited, conditional love of people.

The spiritual life starts where you dare to claim the first love. Love one another because I have loved you first.

Excerpted from a lecture given at Scarrit-Bennett Center, 8 Feb 1991