



***You shall LOVE the LORD your GOD with all your HEART and with all your SOUL and with all your MIND and with all your STRENGTH. (Mark 12:30)***

## The Joyous Blessing of Father's Grace and Love

**DO YOU REMEMBER LAST YEAR** at this time when we were talking about “flattening the curve” in a couple of weeks or at the most a month? In some ways it seems that this year has lasted forever; in other ways, it seems like it has flown by. *It has been a difficult year for us all.*

I have missed seeing everyone face-to-face in the classes and in the normal flow of life. But this past year has also been a very fruitful year in terms of learning and growing. As I have thought about the truths that the Lord has brought into focus over this past year, four words stand out: *Love, Joy, Grace, Blessing.*

**LOVE.** We know that love is *central* to all human life. In the passage above, Jesus tells us that *loving the Lord God with all that we are* is the greatest commandment. In Galatians 5:6, Paul tells us that the main thing that matters is “*faith working through love*” and in 1 Corinthians 13 he extols *the qualities of love* as the greatest virtue.

Last fall I “rediscovered” a video called “You Are

## Weekly ZOOM Meeting

We are thinking of starting up a general meeting on Zoom, maybe on Thursday nights, to talk about what is going on in the world and how we can faithfully “walk in the truth.” If you would like to be part of that, please let me know: [stacy@tsfmemphis.org](mailto:stacy@tsfmemphis.org).

What You Love” by James K. A. Smith. In it, he talks about the reality that *we all worship* - even atheists and secularists - and what or who we worship is revealed in what or who we *love most*.

Our *primary love* for the Lord is the basis of our worship. To love the Lord is to make Him central to all our life, to delight in Him, to consider Him worthy of our praise and adoration.

**JOY.** We can do this, of course, because *Father God has first loved us*. Because we have experienced the joy of His love, we are empowered to love. Jim Wilder (a *neurotheologian* who is applying brain science to spiritual

## A Few Updates

In the last Newsletter, I shared that we have been working to finish up the MilktoMeat workbooks available on Amazon. I was hoping to be through by the end of 2020, but a few things got me slowed down and I now hope to have the series finished up this Spring. You can find the available workbooks on Amazon by simply searching for “milktoeat.”

Last Fall, I taught a course on Christian Worldview to a small group of home-schoolers. The content of this study takes core aspects of our MilktoMeat curriculum and presents them along with and through some key topics of worldview studies. I began teaching this study



over Zoom for a Sunday School class at First Evan in January and received a gracious and tremendous response to it. We are currently working to make this available as a course on our website entitled, re:Vision - Shaping a Christ Focused Worldview. There is still a lot of work to do, but you can get a “sneak peak” at [www.tsfmemphis.org/courses/revision/](http://www.tsfmemphis.org/courses/revision/).

## Love, Joy, Grace, Blessing...

growth) teaches that our brains *run on joy*. We are constantly looking for those who are *delighted* to see us and be with us. People are transformed when they find a community, a family, an “in group” of mutual joy and love.

Father God has invited us into HIS family, His “in group” that is defined by joy and love. “These things I have spoken to you, that **my joy** may be in you, and that your joy may be full,” Jesus tells His first disciples (John 15:11). “May the God of hope **fill you with all joy** and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13). “Joy is the path to a fearless love for God” (Wilder and Hendricks, *The Other Half of Church*).

**GRACE.** All of this comes to us as an expression of Father God’s grace. Grace is *His unearned and undeserved love given to us in Christ that gives us access to His unlimited power in the Holy Spirit*. We will spend eternity pondering the awesome significance of Father’s grace. In the last couple of years, experiencing the reality of Father God’s love given in His grace has transformed the way I think and the way I pray.

I have become convinced that one of the most important and hardest things that we need to learn is that Father God blesses us based on *who He is* and *not for what we DO*. If His grace truly is *unearned and undeserved*, then all that He provides is *a gift* to us. We need to tie all of this together with *blessing*.

**BLESSING.** When Father God blesses, He is enabling us to become *who He designed and desires* for us to be. This comes to us *from His grace through His love*. We know that we are being transformed to be like Christ—*joyous* and truly *free*. When we *realize* that Father God is providing all that we need for this out of His goodness and grace, it transforms everything.

Over the past several years, I have been trying to *realize* (make it real in my practice) and *trust* in these truths. I often have spans of *joylessness*, feelings of *self-doubt* and *discouragement* as I think we all do.

But then I pray with these truths in mind: “Father, I need your help...” After talking with Father about all that is going on in my thoughts and emotions, I end with something like, “Father, I know that you bless me because

of Your goodness and grace and because I am your child. Your blessing is not based on what I do or could ever deserve, but comes from Your love and grace. Help me to delight in You...” *I have been astounded at the many ways that the Lord has answered this prayer.*

Now to be clear: this is not some type of “formula” that we can pray to manipulate God. It is a prayer that comes out of learning and knowing that this is *true*; this is the way Father God IS: He loves us and delights in us and so we can love and delight in HIM!

I pray that *we can all* “know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (Ephesians 3:19) and “rejoice with joy inexpressible” (1 Peter 1:8) and live in Father God’s blessing that He provides by His grace. [ST]

---

## Updates...

As I said earlier, I have missed seeing everyone and being with everyone in our in person classes. I have had the opportunity to teach several classes over Zoom and am grateful for this technology, but it cannot replace the face-to-face communion. I am hopeful that we might be able to return to our “live” classes in the Fall. In the meantime, the best way to keep in touch with us continues to be through the website: [www.tsfmemphis.org](http://www.tsfmemphis.org).

*The Lord continues to amaze me in the way He provides for us in so many incredible ways.* We continue to trust Him and rely on His provision *through* all of your prayers, encouragement, and financial support.

Would you please join us in giving thanks and praying for the following:

- **GIVE THANKS** that our Heavenly Father knows our needs, hears our prayers, and blesses us all out of His abundant goodness and grace
- For **wisdom to be pleasing to the Lord** in all things
- For the **financial resources** we need this year to keep the ministry moving forward
- For **new opportunities for ministry**—new students, new areas of outreach

*I hope you are all safe and sound in the Love, Joy, Grace and Blessing of Father God In Christ through His Holy Spirit. I hope to see you all soon.* [ST]