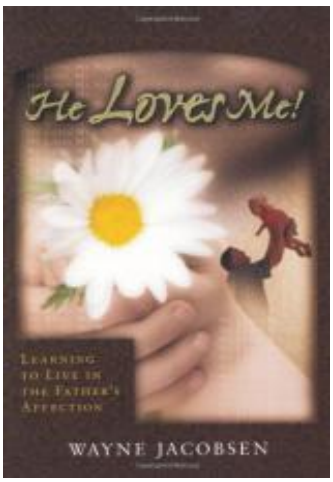
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He Loves Me!: Learning to Live in the Father's Affection

by Wayne Jacobsen



About the Book

So many Christians believe God's love is fickle: when they sin, He turns away in disgust and anger. They vacillate between "He loves me" and "He loves me not" because of their behavior. That reasoning, writes Wayne Jacobsen, is as flawed as pulling petals from a daisy. Rather God's love is sturdy, enduring, and undisturbed by people's failings because God loves humankind not for what they do --- but who they are. They are God's beloved creation.

Startlingly honest and empathetically written, **He Loves Me!** reveals the facts of God's relentless grace. Readers will learn how to live consciously, confidently in this love all the time. Questions for personal reflection and group discussion help make these truths practical and life-changing. Insecure Christians ready for a revolutionary relationship with God will find out just how accessible that is.

Discussion Guide

Chapter 1

For Your Personal Journey

How often do you find yourself doubting God?s love for you? When do you question his love the most? How certain are you that God loves you as deeply as he does anyone else in the world? When difficulties arise, do you find yourself doubting God?s love for you or trying to be more righteous so he?ll like you more? Ask God in the days ahead to reveal the depths of his love for you.

For Group Discussion

1. Share an experience you went through in which you really doubted if God cared about you.

2. How do you feel about it now? If you?re still unsure, what might you ask God to do to change your perception of that event?

3. If you look back now and know that God loved you even if you didn?t recognize it at the time, what did you learn in the process?

4. How can we encourage one another to be certain, instead of doubtful, about God?s love?

Chapter 2

For Your Personal Journey

Spend a few moments thinking about your relationship with God. Do you see it growing in closeness and sensitivity, or does it feel abstract? Is he more real than your closest friend, or a distant presence that rarely seems to engage in the real issues of your life? If

your relationship with him isn?t what you want it to be, ask him to help you grow to know him better and to recognize his presence throughout each day.

For Group Discussion

1. Share your favorite Bible story of God?s revealing himself to someone.

2. What do you see in the relationship Jesus had with his disciples that you want to see in your own relationship with him?

3. Share an experience from your own life when you knew God?s presence was with you in some tangible way.

4. Spend a few moments talking about what you can do to grow to know God better.

Chapter 3

For Your Personal Journey

Did you come to God only because you were afraid of the alternative, or were you entreated by his love? Do you view him as a stern judge or a loving Father? If the former, ask God to reveal himself to you as he really is. Over the next few weeks, look for ways God will help you let go of your fears. Let his love capture your heart as your sole motivation for walking after him.

For Group Discussion

1. Why do religious people use the threat of hell to get people to come to God?

2. When you think of God appearing in your life, what do you see? How would he act, and what does he feel about you? Would you see Jesus treating you the same way if he showed up? How do we reconcile the two?

3. Think about the relationship that Jesus has offered us with his Father. What might we say to communicate to people who don?t know him just what kind of God he is?

4. Ask God to free you from fearing his judgment and teach you instead how to trust his love.

Chapter 4

For Your Personal Journey

Ask God to show you where you live less loved. What does it make you do: run your own way like the younger brother or work even harder like the older one? God wants you to know that there is nothing you can do to make him love you any more today, and

nothing you can do that will make him love you any less. He just loves you. Ask him to teach you how true that is so you can live in freedom.

For Group Discussion

1. Take a moment to share whether or not you identify more with the older son or the younger son and why.

2. What did you learn about God?s love in this parable?

3. What kinds of things have you done when you?ve felt ?less loved? by God?

4. Think of some ways that God has demonstrated his love for you, even when you did nothing to earn it.

Chapter 5

For Your Personal Journey

What reservations do you have about entrusting yourself completely to God? Realize that the only way to grow in trust is to grow in the knowledge of his love. Ask him every day to reveal the depth of his love to you and in doing so to teach you how to trust him more.

For Group Discussion

1. Have you ever felt like that stray puppy, afraid to trust because of past disappointments?

2. Recall some of the events from Abraham?s story (Gen. 12?23) that God used to teach him trust.

3. Share your own stories of how God has taught you to trust him in the past.

4. What are some of the ways we can grow to better know God?s love?

Chapter 6

For Your Personal Journey

Have events in your past left you disappointed with God?s love for you or overwhelmed you with your own failures? If so, find some time alone with God to go over those moments with him. Ask him to show you how thinking you had to earn his favor might have distorted your perspective of what was really going on. As a regular part of your prayers, ask God to show you where you are trying to earn his favor and ask him to help you see how much he takes delight in you as a loving Father.

For Group Discussion

1. Have you ever felt like the woman with the sick child? How did you resolve those moments in your life?

2. Where do you feel that you walk the tightrope of the favor line in your relationship with God? Where do you feel guilt for not doing enough?

3. Read Saul?s conversion story in Acts 9:1?9. Why did Jesus do this for him? What do you think Saul did to qualify for this moment?

4. Pray together that God will teach you how to know him as he really is.

Chapter 7

For Your Personal Journey

Take an honest look at the spiritual things to which you give your life. Are they rising out of your security in God?s great love for you or an attempt to earn his affection? Do you live trying to pay God back for his salvation, or some other act of his on your behalf? Ask God to begin to rearrange your thinking and to help you understand that his love goes far beyond any gift you can bring him.

For Group Discussion

1. What kinds of gifts and offerings do people use today to try to earn God?s affection?

2. Have you ever gone through a season the way Janice did, working harder but feeling emptier spiritually? What can you learn from that experience?

3. Was there a time in your life when you sensed that Father was delighted with you? Was that because you had done something big for him, or because you knew that he loved you just the way you were?

4. Pray together that God will teach you how to find your acceptance in his love alone and not in anything you can do for him or give to him.

Chapter 8

For Your Personal Journey

Spend some time with God considering your own relationship with him. Do your requests of God look more like those of the businessman or the beggar? Do you begin every day aware of your performance or the lack thereof, or is your awareness focused on God?s mercy and his affection for you? We?ve all been taught that life in God is something we earn with diligent effort and this isn?t easy to unlearn. Ask him to help you understand his mercy and how you can stop trying to jump over a bar you will never reach.

For Group Discussion

1. Are you more like the businessman or the beggar in this chapter? Explain why.

2. Describe the bars you?ve tried to jump over to merit God?s favor.

3. Why do you think we have been given so many bars to jump over as proof that we are serious about God?s life?

4. What would life be like if you could trust God?s mercy for you every day?

5. Pray for one another that you?ll learn the difference between mercy and performance.

Chapter 9

For Your Personal Journey

Think back to the time you first made a commitment to Christ. Did it come because you were overwhelmed with his love, or because you were afraid of his punishment? When you think now of God watching you every moment of every day, do you find that comforting or scary? Do you see fearing him as a necessary motive to help you avoid sin and do the things you think God wants you to do, and if so, has that thinking helped you avoid all the sins in your life? Think through these questions as you ask God to show you how your fear of him might be keeping you from feeling safe in his presence.

For Group Discussion

1. Of the list of fears presented in this chapter, which ones do you normally think are helpful to you? Which ones are harmful? Which ones do you battle the most in your daily life?

2. Has your fear of the Lord helped you avoid harmful actions in your life?

3. Has it been enough to make you stop sinning completely?

4. Tell about a time when the fear of the Lord was very real to you. How did that fear affect your relationship with him?

5. Respond together to what you?ve shared in prayer, asking God to free you from the slavery of fear.

Chapter 10

For Your Personal Journey

Are most of your actions motivated by your security in God?s love for you, or your fear that if you don?t do enough God might not be pleased with you? Ask him to show you the ways your fears motivate you in day-to-day decisions. Read through 1 John 4:7?21 every morning for a few days and meditate on John?s words there. Ask him to help you discover how much he loves you and, in doing so, to drive out the fears in your life.

For Group Discussion

1. Today if Jesus asked you the same question he asked Peter, how would you respond?

2. What things do you do for God that seem motivated by your fear of him or his judgments against you?

3. What things do you do that seem to flow out of knowing that God loves you?

4. Compare those experiences motivated by fear and those by love. How do you feel in each circumstance?

5. Read 1 John 4:7?21 and identify the specific things John identifies about God?s love.

6. Pray together that God will increasingly reveal the depth of his love for each of you.

Chapter 11

For Your Personal Journey

Ask God to reveal to you where wedges of mistrust have been inserted between you and him. Where do you find yourself doubting his love for you or his intentions with you? Where has trusting in your own abilities and wisdom taken you farther from him rather

than closer to him? Ask God to show you how to embrace a relationship with him in his way and not your own.

For Group Discussion

1. Explain and discuss the following: one can obey without trusting but one cannot trust without obeying.

2. Think of some moments in your life when your efforts to do good only backfired and made the situation worse.

3. What kinds of things does the enemy whisper in your ear to drive a wedge between you and God so that your trust in him is eroded?

4. What do you think God can do to help you trust him more?

Chapter 12

For Your Personal Journey

Can you recognize the effects of shame in your own life? What effort will you expend to make yourself look better to others, to yourself, or even to God? In your relationship with God, do you think more of what you have to do for him or what he has already done for you? Ask him to show you how appeasement distorts your relationship with him, and ask him to free you from it so that you can participate in what he wants to do in you.

For Group Discussion

1. Reflect together on the truth that the true God is the one who wants to sacrifice for us instead of demanding our sacrifices for him.

2. Where do you still try to appease God in the sacrifices you make or in blaming others to alleviate your guilt?

3. How does this change the way you view Christianity?

4. Spend some moments thanking God for providing all you need to come into a trusting relationship with him.

Chapter 13

For Your Personal Journey

Where do you try to save yourself using your own ingenuity to survive, rather than trusting Jesus to lead you as he desires? Isn?t his unlimited patience amazing in that even after our worst deeds, he stands ready to cover us with his wings and let us abide safely in him? Ask him to show you what that means specifically for you and to teach you how to live every day and through every circumstance trusting that he loves you.

For Group Discussion

1. What did you get out of the story of the hen and her chicks?

2. Have you ever used religion as a covering for shame? How?

3. What is easier for you to do, run under his wing or try to figure out a way to fix things yourself? Why do you think that is?

4. Give examples of God?s unlimited patience and celebrate together in prayer his awesome faithfulness to the weakest of his people.

Chapter 14

For Your Personal Journey

What comes first to your mind as you contemplate the death of Jesus? Think beyond the physical realities and see what transpired between Father and Son as they provided a safe place for you from the destruction of sin itself. There is nothing more to do here than to simply express to God your gratefulness for providing such an incredible gift.

For Group Discussion

1. Together share how the story of the cross has touched your life. What events stick out in your mind?

2. What do you see going on between the Father and the Son through those moments?

3. What does it mean to you that Jesus became sin itself? Share your ideas.

4. Read one of the Crucifixion accounts and give thanks together for the indescribable lengths to which God went so that we might have life in his name.

Chapter 15

For Your Personal Journey

Do you see God?s wrath directed at sin or directed at you? It is one thing to say he loves the sinner and hates the sin, but sometimes we feel that he is out to get us as well. Wherever you see that in your thinking, ask God to help you change your mind and see things the way he does. He wants you to know that everything he has done in your life is intended to bring you into the fullness of his love. Where you don?t understand that, ask him to show you.

For Group Discussion

1. Can you think of a time when your love for someone caused you to act on his or her behalf at great personal risk?

2. How does seeing God?s wrath as the antidote for sin, rather than its punishment, affect your view of God and the cross?

3. Talk about the difference between the cup he drank and the cup he offers us to drink. How does that touch you?

4. Ask God to give each of you a personal revelation of the cross and confidence in all God accomplished there for you.

Chapter 16

For Your Personal Journey

Where is it easy for you to trust God, and where is it difficult? How can Jesus? example encourage you to trust God when he seems the most distant from you? Since it is his faith you want to live by, ask Jesus to teach you how he wants to grow your trust and how you can fix your hope on him in a way that runs deeper than your circumstances or feelings.

For Group Discussion

1. How would your life be different if you absolutely, completely trusted God for everything in your life?

2. Where does the darkness seem to surround you and make it difficult to understand what God is doing in you?

3. How can Jesus? actions on the cross provide the basis for you to learn how to trust Jesus through anything life can hurl at you?

4. Pray for one another that God will teach you in the everyday realities of your life what it is to trust that he is with you, working out

his will in you.

Chapter 17

For Your Personal Journey

Spend a few moments thinking what you are still counting in your relationship with God. Is it failures? Minutes in prayer? Number of converts? If you find yourself doing those things, ask God to help you receive what he has already given you. Stop doing anything that seeks to earn his love and learn to do what you do simply because you already have his love. This is quite a change of mind that only God?s Spirit can produce.

For Group Discussion

1. What kinds of things do you count to determine your status with God?

2. When you feel as if you?re not doing enough for God, what do you usually focus on?

3. Have you tried to do some great thing for God? How did it turn out? Did he use it to touch some lives anyway? (Isn?t he amazing?)

4. What would you do tomorrow if you absolutely knew God loved you and just wanted to share your life?

5. What barrier(s) do you see in your life that makes it difficult for you to accept God?s love for you? Pray together that God will show you how to get past the barrier.

Chapter 18

For Your Personal Journey

Has a false notion of grace diminished your passion for righteousness, or has it made you hungrier for the righteousness that comes from trusting God? If the former, ask God to draw you closer to him so that your love for him will produce a desire to be like him.

Also, look for ways that you put righteousness before relationship, thinking that your performance makes you more acceptable to God. Ask him to teach you what it means to trust him in the pressing details of your life right now.

For Group Discussion

1. Talk about grace as you understood it in the past in contrast to what you read in this chapter.

2. What add-ons to grace have you tried? Did they work?

3. How do you find yourself viewing sin?as a forbidden pleasure or a destroying presence?

4. Share an incident where you experienced righteousness that grew naturally out of simply learning to trust God instead of leaning on yourself.

5. Where do you see yourself putting the demands of righteousness before the joys of relationship? Pray that God will help you reverse this process and learn to delight in him.

Chapter 19

For Your Personal Journey

Where are you being stretched to the end of your rope? Where is God exposing the weaknesses of your own strength and the foolishness of your best wisdom? Give up the idea that your failures have brought you to this moment, for it is an incredible work of God calling you to trust him more than you have in the past. Ask God to teach you how to give up self-sufficiency and learn to trust him. Then do whatever it is that trusting God?s love would lead you to do and learn to ignore the ravings of your anxieties and fears.

For Group Discussion

1. Share some experiences of how the Father has taught you to trust him when you?ve been at the end of your rope.

2. Read Romans 8:31?32 and discuss how the cross guarantees that the Father loves you today in the midst of whatever circumstances you are facing.

3. Even though the advice ?You just need to trust God more? is true, why is it the worst possible advice to give someone in the midst of a crisis?

4. Explore why we seem to be able to support people only when we understand what they are going through. How can we support people on their journey even though God is doing things in their lives that we don?t understand?

5. Ask God together to teach you how to walk out this trust in the everyday circumstances of your lives.

Chapter 20

For Your Personal Journey

Ask God how shame-based behaviors are manifesting themselves in your relationship with him. Look for him to identify where boasting, blaming, gossip, self-pity, and worrying about what others think are causing you to live to shame instead of living to him. Also ask him to reveal to you all the places where covering up for shame hurts your relationships with others. Ask God to draw you close enough to him so that you will no longer need to live in bondage to shame.

For Group Discussion

1. Share some of the ways you see shame working in your life.

2. How do you cover up for it?

3. How would your life and fellowship together be different if you cared what the Father thought of you more than what anyone else thought?

4. We have all heard the tapes of shame playing in our heads. Take a few moments to identify some of the things God wants you to know about the way he thinks of you.

Chapter 21

For Your Personal Journey

Realize that loving others is the overflow of being loved. Wherever you see your life being given away to help others, rejoice at what God has worked in you. Wherever you see your love lacking toward others, ask God to take you to deeper levels of his love. Let him show you where you have expectations of others that prevent you from loving them freely and let him set you free.

For Group Discussion

1. Share together some of the best moments when God expressed his love to you through another believer. What made it special to you?

2. Talk about some of the things that make relationships helpful and what makes them harmful.

3. Where should our focus be if we don?t find ourselves compassionately involved with people around us?

4. If you?re a group that meets regularly together, ask God over the next couple of weeks if there is a specific way your group might express God?s love to someone. Don?t think of a program to start here unless he tells you clearly to do that, but rather think in terms of something practical you can do to bless someone without manipulating him or her.

Chapter 22

For Your Personal Journey

Review the things you are currently praying about. Which prayers are ?Save me? prayers and which are ?Glorify your name? prayers? Which serve your desires and which result from your understanding of God?s purpose in the situations you?re in? Ask him to reveal to you every day what his purpose is in the circumstances you face and pray for that purpose?s continued unfolding as he draws you closer to himself.

For Group Discussion

1. Give examples from Scripture and from your own life of ?Save me? prayers.

2. Now give examples of ?Father, glorify your name? prayers.

3. Can you think of a time in your life when you prayed for the exact opposite of what you wanted because you felt God?s purpose would be fulfilled by it? Share about that.

4. If some in your group are open to share some of the things they?re praying about, ask God to show you together what his purpose is and how it will best be served by your prayers.

5. Pray for God to be glorified in your lives as the journey unfolds in the days ahead.

Chapter 23

For Your Personal Journey

Go and live this life in the peace and joy of Jesus. Awaken to each new day certain of his love for you and ask him for help wherever you need it. Then listen and do your best to follow him each day. You will find this life richer and deeper than you ever thought imaginable.

For Group Discussion

No more questions here. Just share with one another how this chapter helped you see the next step Jesus might have for you on your journey.

Author Bio

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