



How to Tell God You Love Him

If somebody asked you to describe the Christian life, what does God want from us more than anything else in a few words, what would you say? If you said *ethical behavior*, if you said *religious ritual* you'd be wrong. The essence of the Christian life can be summed up in two words "**love affair**". God wants to have a love affair with you.

The Bible says that you were created as an object of God's love. God made you to love you. That means that you are created for the purpose of having a relationship and, as a result, the most important thing you can *know* in life is that God loves you. And the most important thing that you can *do* in life is to love Him back. Jesus said it like this in **Matthew 22:37** "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.*" Nothing is more important. If you do this you will fulfill your primary purpose in life. If you miss this part of your life, your life is a failure.

There's a term in the Bible for expressing love to God. That term is called "worship". We think of worship as a ritual or routine or something you do in a church. Yes, but No. Worship simply means expressing love to God. Any time you're expressing love to God, you're worshipping whether you're by yourself, in a small group, in a large crowd or wherever. When you express love to God in any way you are worshipping.

And here is something I don't want you to miss. Expressing our love to God is not only something we do individually, it is something we do together. In fact, as I reflect back over my Christian life, some of the most powerful and meaningful moments took place in corporate worship. Someone once described the goal of corporate worship as "making it easy to find God and making it difficult to forget him." I like that.

I saw on the Internet a book called *Ten Thousand Ways To Say "I Love You"*. Today we're going to cover all 10,000. Actually I've narrowed it down to five. **Five ways to tell God you love Him.**

I. THE FIRST WAY IS ONE WE'RE REAL GOOD AT HERE AT FBC AND THAT IS BY SINGING TO HIM.

You've probably noticed that music and love go together because music comes from the heart. It's something that comes out of your soul, your emotions. There are many *love songs* in the world. There are radio stations that are dedicated entirely just to the love song format. But did you know that more songs have been written about Jesus Christ than any other topic in the world?

Unlike others, Christianity is a singing religion, a singing faith. Why? Because it's not about religion. It's about a love affair. It's about a relationship with God, that God loves you so much that He sent His Son to die for you and He wants you to love Him back.

Psalm 147:7 *⁷Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp.* (NIV) Nothing will make you more aware of God's love and God's presence in your life than singing and praise. I know some of you are saying, "But you don't understand. I can't sing." The Bible says, "Make a joyful noise." I know all of you can do that. You go to football games or somebody's getting married - you make a joyful noise. So just let it out. You don't have to hit the right note. You just have to make a joyful noise.

To tell you the truth, I just don't understand a Christian who doesn't sing. The COMMAND to sing is given all throughout the Psalms. And when you read the Psalms, it's not just a directive to sing individually, but to also do it together.

Psalm 66:8 (NLT) *Let the whole world bless our God and sing aloud his praises.*

Psalm 95:1 *'Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. (NIV)*

Notice that the Psalmist says "let us" sing and "let us" make a joyous shout. Singing is an important part of you learning to express your love to God.

I know there are some people who come to church intentionally late. They say, "I'll miss all the preliminaries. I'm coming for the main event. I'm coming for the preaching." That's a big mistake. You need principles for your head AND music for your heart. You need to worship God. Music inspires, it refreshes, it rejuvenates, it revitalizes. Music and worship in praise to God has a healing element to it. I've noticed this: when I least feel like singing that's when I need to do it the most. When I don't feel like participating in worship, when I don't feel like getting involved, when I just want to stand still and be a spectator that means my heart is cold and it needs to be warmed up. I need to get involved and let my mood be lifted in worship.

Wherever God is you can worship. That means you can worship in the shower. You can worship in your backyard mowing the lawn. You can worship washing dishes. You can worship driving to work and or on the golf course. You can express your love to God everywhere. And that means you can sing everywhere. It in some of those places you really should sing by yourself!

But singing is a corporate event. Have you ever thought about this? Christians all over the globe come together for times of corporate worship. And, in many parts of the world where there is persecution, Christians put themselves at risk to come to a corporate gathering and sing. So, why do they do it? Because there is power in "together".

II. THERE'S A SECOND WAY YOU CAN EXPRESS LOVE TO GOD. BY TALKING TO HIM.

It took me a while - I admit I'm a slow learner - but I finally figured out that this marriage thing is about communication. I'm a little dense but I finally realized that the key ingredient to marriage was talk. I discovered that on the days that I had deep, soul-communication with Nina - not "Hi, How are you? I love you. See you later." I'm talking about deep, soul-communication -- this is when our relationship grows. And on those days when we have little or none of that communication our relationship decays. Because a relationship is never standing still. It's either growing or decaying.

The same is true with God. On the days when you have deep, significant talk with God your relationship grows. On the days when you have little or no talk with God your relationship decays. It's that simple.

When you really love somebody you don't just want to spend time with them. You want to talk with them.

When people first fall in love, what do they do? Well, for one, they're always on the phone? It's like you had a phone in your ear. You talked and talked and talked. You were getting to know that person. That's how you get to know them, through communication.

If your husband or wife never ever talks to you, you have every reason to start wondering, "Do they love me?" That's why, husbands, you need to talk to your wife! She needs this like multiple vitamins. A daily dose.

What do you talk to God about if you want to express love to God? Anything that you'd talk to your best friend about. Everything. Your hopes, your fears, your dreams, your anxieties, the things you're embarrassed about, the things you're proud of, the things you're ashamed of, your goals, your ambitions, your hurts, your cares, every part of your life - you come to God and you talk to God about it. The Bible says in **Psalm 116:1-2** *'I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. ²Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. (NIV)*

If you don't feel close to God and some of you don't... some of you have been believers for quite a long time and you honestly, have lost your spark. There's a remedy for that. Start talking to God again. You don't talk to Him the way you used to talk to Him. You don't talk to Him at the gut level as you used to. You need to just talk to Him more often. Prayer is not some duty that you have to do. It's a privilege that you get to do. You get to talk to the creator of the universe. He has invited you and He wants to talk with you.

This expression of worship also has a community aspect to it. All through the Bible and through history we find pockets of Christians gathering for the purpose of prayer. Sometimes their prayers are prayers of praise. Sometimes they are prayers of intercession. Sometimes they are prayers of searching. Sometimes they are prayers looking for comfort.

Let me offer a word of practical advice to our groups. Make prayer a priority of your group time. Don't just tack it on the end. And, I want to encourage every single person in your group to learn to pray and pray out loud. Some of you have never prayed in a group setting before. That's OK. But your small group provides a great environment where you can begin to learn to pray. You don't have to use a special voice or certain words. Just talk to God on behalf of your friends. Even if it is just a sentence prayer, take a risk this week to pray in your group.

III. THERE'S A THIRD WAY YOU CAN EXPRESS YOUR LOVE. THAT'S BY LISTENING TO HIM.

Listening is one of the greatest gifts you can give to somebody. The gift of listening. We all want to be understood. We all want to be listened to. When you listen to someone, you're saying, "You matter to me." When I listen to my children, when I listen to my wife, anybody, I'm saying, "I value what you have to say. I value your opinion. You're important to me." When I don't listen to somebody I'm basically saying, "You don't matter to me. You're not important to me. What you have to say I don't value." One of the ways you express love to anybody is by listening to them.

The same is true with God. Every time you listen to God you're saying, "God, You matter to me. I value what You have to say." Listening is the most misunderstood and left off part of prayer. Most of us think that prayer is just talking to God. That's only fifty-percent of prayer. The other fifty-percent of prayer is shutting up and being quiet and letting God speak to us. Usually we're in too much of a hurry to do this. What we do is, "*Hi, God, it's me. I've got ten things I need from You. Thank You. Over and out. Good bye.*" We don't stop. We don't

wait. We don't listen. We don't say, "God, do You have a few things to say to me?" We don't listen.

One of the most important steps you can take in listening to God is to set aside time for God. All of us have pressure packed, deadline-filled schedules. Our days and our souls are filled with noise. God has a remedy. As one of the ten commandments, God said that we are to set aside one day per week for rest and worship. This rhythm of life is so important that God put it in his top ten list.

Leviticus 23:3 (CEV) says: *You have six days when you can do your work, but the seventh day of each week is holy because it belongs to me.*

Perhaps the reason some of us can't hear God is that our lives are so fast and so full and so noisy, that there is no room for God.

God is speaking to you all the time. At least He's trying to speak to you all the time. You say, "Why don't I ever hear Him?" Because you're not listening. You don't ever take the time. You don't ever get quiet. You never pause in the middle of the day and say, "Do You have anything to say to me right now?" You're so busy, your life is so full of noise, you always have a channel on - radio, TV, cell phone, something - God couldn't get through because the lines are all busy. You need to not just take time to talk to God. You need to take time to listen to God. You stop and pause because God is speaking.

How does God speak to us? Many ways.

One is the Bible, His word. If you're not spending any time in this book obviously He's not going to speak to you through this book because you're not reading it.

Two, He speaks to us through the experiences we go through in life.

Three, God speaks to us through trials. But you're not listening. You're not reading these principles in this book and you're not being aware that God may be trying to tell you something through that irritation.

God speaks to us through other people, through the advice of Christians and godly people who will say, "What about this?" God will often speak to you through another person. In my life, God has often provided direction, insight and confirmation through

other people. Here is another reason why you need to be in community with other believers.

Proverbs 11:14 (Msg) says *Without good direction, people lose their way; the more wise counsel you follow, the better your chances.*

Sometimes God will speak to you the loudest and the clearest through the wise counsel of friends. Do you have a trusted circle of friends to whom you can go to seek God's counsel? I hope your small group is becoming such a place for you.

IV. THE FOURTH WAY YOU CAN EXPRESS YOUR LOVE TO GOD IS BY PUBLICLY IDENTIFYING WITH HIM.

By not being ashamed of Him at work, at home, in your neighborhood. By not saying, "I'm not going to let anybody know I'm a Christian. I'm not telling my neighbors. I'm not telling the people at work. I'm keeping it a secret." Then you don't really love God. Because if you love somebody you're not ashamed of them. You publicly identify with them.

Can you imagine: How do you think my wife would have felt it, years ago when we were dating, I said, "Let's get married and we'll be committed to each other but let's just keep it our little secret. Let's don't tell anybody about it. I'll be committed to you and you be committed to me but when we're in public let's pretend like we don't know each other. And let's just act like total strangers. Won't that be great?" She'd say, "What kind of love is that, buster?" It isn't any kind of love at all because when you really love somebody you're not ashamed of them. You say, "This is my husband/wife." You take on a name. You're a family and you identify with each other.

Again, here is a place where "community" helps me worship God. When I see others who take their stand for Christ, it give me courage to do the same. Christianity is a public faith.

Listen to these words from Jesus.

Matthew 5:14-15 ¹⁴*"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. (NIV)*

The fact is, it is easier for me to let the flashlight of my faith shine when I know you have your flashlight turned on. Courage and "together" go hand in hand. Every team, every platoon, and every gang knows this to be true. So, don't be afraid. Publicly identify yourself with Christ.

You can't say you love Jesus Christ and be ashamed of Him at the same time. Jesus said it like this, in **Mark 8:38** *"If anyone is ashamed of Me and My teachings then I will be ashamed of him when I come in the glory of My Father."* We need to publicly identify ourselves with Christ. That's how we show our love for Him.

There's another way you can identify yourself as a believer. That is through the act of baptism. What is baptism all about? "What is this thing about getting dunked under water? I took a shower this morning. Why do I need to get all wet for God?"

Baptism is an IDENTIFICATION with the death burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It says through the act - "What Jesus did when he died and rose again, he did for me. I have identified myself with Him in faith and He has identified Himself with me."

I have an honest question for some of you. You say you love Jesus. Then why have you not followed Him in the most basic act of baptism? Are you ashamed of Him? Are you more concerned about getting your hair wet in front of somebody than making a statement to say, "I am not ashamed of Jesus Christ"? How can you say you love Him if you won't do the very first thing He commanded and publicly signify through the waters of baptism that you are a follower of Christ?

V. FINALLY THE FIFTH WAY YOU CAN TELL GOD YOU LOVE HIM IS BY GIVING TO HIM.

The first generation of Christians were givers. And, they did it together. It is amazing what can be done and accomplished when we each give our little bit.

Many of you gave a little bit of your time and effort in the food drive, and look at what God did with it. Now some of you could not give because of health or time reasons and that's fine. But some of you perhaps could have but chose not to. You missed out on a blessing. Because giving is an act of love.

Yes, giving, at its core, is the essence of love. You spell "love" G-I-V-E because that's what love's all about. When you love someone you want to give to them. *You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving.* It is impossible to do that. You say you love God, then it's going to show up in your

generous lifestyle. I can claim to be a Christian, a follower of Christ. I can claim to love God. But the Bible says there is one way to really test the sincerity of your love. **2 Corinthians 8:7** *"Just as you excel in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in complete earnestness, see that you also excel in the grace of giving. I am not commanding you but I want to test the sincerity of your love."* God tests the sincerity of your love by looking at your giving.

Why does He do that? God doesn't need your time. He doesn't need your money. What does He need? He wants your heart. He wants what your giving represents. And He wants you to *become like Him*. *"God so loved the world that He gave..."* You can either become like God and become a *generous giver*, or you can become like Satan and become a *stingy hoarder*.

Giving is another act of worship. It's as much an act of worship as singing, praying, listening, everything else. It's saying, "God, I love You so much I want to give back to You. You saved my life and I want to give back to You." Everything we have come from God. We can't out give God because He gave it all to us in the first place.

I have discovered that there are really basically two kinds of people in life - cheerful givers and fearful givers.

Cheerful givers say, "I'm going to give. It all belongs to God anyway. He gave it all to me. I wouldn't have anything without God so I'm going to give it all to Him and He can take care of all my needs." Cheerful givers - that's the kind that God loves.

Then there's the fearful givers: "I can't afford to do this. I can't afford to give. I've got to hoard. I've got to watch what's for me. I've got to protect my selfish interests."

Cheerful or fearful - you make the decision. God tests the sincerity of my love by how generous I am in life.

When we come to the time in our service when we give our tithes and offerings, it's not like, "Ok! It's time to tip God." If that's your attitude, forget it. He doesn't need your money and doesn't want it anyway.

Here's the bottom line: There are many, many ways to express your love to God. We just looked at five. God uses our hands and feet and eyes and ears and all parts of us because He loves us and we love Him. First you need to establish that relationship with God.

Prayer:

Would you pray this prayer in your heart if you've never opened your life to Jesus Christ? Say, *"God, I realize the need for You in my life. Jesus Christ, today I've realized what You did for me on the cross and I realize that I'll never be able to repay what You've done for me and I realize that everything I have is a gift from You. Please forgive me for not trusting You in every area every moment of my life. Today, I want to trust my life to You. I want to join a church family. I want to start to grow spiritually. I want to use my talent to help other people. I want to fulfill the purpose and mission that You put me on this earth to do. Use me to make a difference in the world. In Your name I pray. Amen."*