



Understanding God's Love | Shawn Johnson | 08.04.2024

Weekly Study

SHARE

As group members get settled, take a few minutes to check in with everyone and see how life is going. Share an exciting story from this week, your highs and lows, an answered prayer, or something you're struggling with. If someone is really struggling, rally the group around them and take a few moments to pray over them.

Share a high and a low from last week.

What has been the highlight of your summer?

GROW

This week we're starting a brand-new series called *Bad Theology*. A common misconception about the word "theology" is that it only refers to academic or intellectual studies about God. In reality, everyone's theology is shaped by their beliefs, experiences, practices, and understanding of God. It encompasses how people interpret scriptures, their personal faith journey, their church community's teachings, and their daily life choices. Theology is not just an academic discipline but a comprehensive framework that influences and reflects one's relationship with God and the world.

When it comes to good or bad theology, we must ask ourselves, "Is this thought, belief, decision, or practice leading me closer to or farther away from the heart of my loving Father?"

During this series, we're going to classify "Bad Theology" as anything that keeps you away from your loving Father. To kick off week one, Pastor Shawn is back in the house with his message, *Understanding God's Love*.

We examined the powerful parable of the Prodigal Son from Luke 15, which reshapes our understanding of God's love. It's common to think we need to earn God's love or that we are too lost for His grace, but this story shows that neither is true.

Read the A.W. Tozer Quote: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

What were your biggest takeaways from this message?

Among all the factors that shape your theology—such as your faith journey, interpretation of scripture, community, and daily life choices—which one has the greatest influence on your relationship with God?

How has your understanding of God's love for you changed over time? What experiences or teachings have shaped your view?

What comes to mind when you think about what God thinks of you? What feelings, experiences, knowledge, etc., are fueling those beliefs?

M O V E

Read Romans 8:38-39 NIV, 1 John 3:1 NIV, Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV

Charles Cooley, an American sociologist, observed that our self-perception is often influenced by how we believe others see us: "I am not what I think I am. I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am." We all want to be worthy of God's love, which leads us to strive for perfection. When we fall short, feelings of shame, guilt, and inadequacy can overwhelm us. This often distorts our understanding of ourselves and what God truly thinks of us, leading us to base our beliefs on what we imagine God thinks, rather than on the truth of His love.

Fortunately, the story of the Prodigal Son beautifully illustrates how God, represented by the Father, eagerly awaits our return and celebrates us, regardless of our past mistakes. It reminds us that God's love is not just a duty but a genuine affection; He genuinely likes us, desires us, and is proud of us. This message encourages us to flip our bad theology on its head and embrace the unconditional love and acceptance that God offers, allowing us to live in freedom and confidence as His children.

We may never fully understand God's love for us in this life, but we can trust that He values us far more than we can possibly imagine; a truth rooted in His unfailing character and consistency, not our own effort.

Are there areas of your life where you struggle to believe in your righteousness through Christ alone? Explain.

How can we balance the tension between striving for holiness and resting in God's unconditional love and acceptance?

What do you need to hear from God right now in this season of life? Explain.

What are some practical ways we can remind ourselves of God's unconditional love when we're tempted to believe we need to earn it?

Any final thoughts?

P R A Y

This week, ask God to help you see yourself through His eyes and live in a way that reflects His love for you.