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SERMON TITLE: **God's Love: Pay it Forward**
SCRIPTURE: **Mark 12:29-34**
DATE: **March 13, 2022**
Online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also 1 Samuel 17:32-50.

David is one of the most admired people in the Bible as a man who had great faith. He felt he could do anything, win any victory, find greater-than-average strength, receive answers to prayer—he could do anything with God!

When the Bible says the most important thing is to love God with all your heart, your understanding, and your strength, it is good to look at the ones who loved and engaged with God well. David was that person.

Here are some things David said about his relationship with God: (from 2 Sam 22:30-51)

By you I can crush a troop,
I can leap over a wall.
God's way is perfect;
His promise proves true;
He is a shield when we take refuge in him.
God has girded me with strength
He has opened wide my path.
God's help has made me great;
has made me stride freely;
my feet do not slip;
God girded me with strength for the battle;
Assailants sink under me--
He beat them fine like dust,
He crushed them.
God delivered me from strife with the peoples.

David saw God as the greatest asset he could have. Wouldn't it be great to have his attitude?

Is that your attitude about God's work in your life? Is that your assurance about God's presence in your problems?

David's attitude is one of love and respect. He knew God's love was actually his salvation, in his everyday work and life.

God says of David: he is a man after God's own heart. (1 Sam 13:14)

What if we had that attitude about God when we woke up every day? What if we carried David's confidence in God? What if we relied on God's help when we pray? What if we ascertained God's power in our troubles? How it would improve our daily life! I would LOVE to sense God's love all the time.

Today's story is about a man—a Sunday School teacher—who was getting it. Remember the rich young ruler who went away sad because Jesus asked for his utter commitment? Here we have another "seeker." He was already an expert in the Old Testament. But he wanted more. He sensed something special about Jesus. Jesus' message of love resonated with him: READ Mark 12:29-34

The man responded. He knew there was something beyond just taking sacrifices to the temple. What he was seeking was relationship with God.

You might think that it is risky to depend on God's love. How do we know God will come through? What if God calls us to do something hard, like fight a Goliath? How do we know God will respond to our prayer when we can't see him?

There's a story about a little girl who was afraid to sleep in her own room. Her parents put her to bed but she kept getting up, going to her parent's room, begging to sleep with them. They sent her back to bed, but over and over she returned to them. Finally, her parents said, "Look, you are not alone. No one is going to hurt you. God is there watching over you." She replied, "But I need God with skin on!"

Do you feel that you need God-with-skin-on?

Let's explore how to shore up our faith to know that God loves us. The Bible says,
"Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see" (Hebrews 11:1).

We tend to be like the anxious little girl who can't see God. Let's admit it. That is often us! Let's explore David's strategies for loving and being loved by God.

David's Strategies for Loving God

Begin with prayer – "Listen to my voice in the morning, LORD. Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly." "Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love. For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress" (Ps 5:3, 59:16).

Set your goals – "Trust in the LORD and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you" (Ps 37:3-5).

Look for opportunity – “Show me where to walk, for I give myself to you. . . . Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your gracious Spirit lead me forward on a firm footing” (Ps 143:8b,10).

Personal story by Jennifer McWilliams.¹

Give God credit for success – “God, it was not their own strong arm that gave them victory. It was your right hand and strong arm and the blinding light from your face that helped them, for you loved them” (Ps 44:3).

End with prayer – “It is good to proclaim your . . . faithfulness in the evening” (Ps 92:2).

During the night – “I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night. Because you are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your strong right hand holds me securely” (Ps 63:6-8).

Go to Worship on Sunday – “Happy are those who hear the joyful call to worship, for they will walk in the light of your presence, LORD. . . . You are their glorious strength. It pleases you to make us strong” (Ps 89:15-17).

David was a shepherd, the youngest of his family. He could have said, “There are too many siblings and they are getting all the attention. I can’t get no respect.”

He woke up thinking of God. He had a desire to do his job well. He asked God and God gave him victory over whatever animal threatened his sheep. It took courage but he developed confidence that God would help him.

David might have thought, “I’ll never get out of this dead-end job.” But one day someone notices. And through Samuel the prophet he became king because “he was a man after God’s own heart.”

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

Let’s think of the people in Ukraine. Many of them are courageously praying and putting their lives on the line to fight the enemy. It is so moving to see them fight for their country that it has affected us all over the world. Their courage has so affected the world that people everywhere are helping. The Ukrainians are so small they are like David against Goliath, and yet they are holding on in faith.²

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.

In the Wednesday night Lent study we are talking about a city that suffered under the bubonic plague in 1633. The town had 250 people and 84 died. The entire town went to their church and prayed. They asked God to stop the death, and they made a vow to tell the story of Jesus’ Passion every ten years for the rest of time. No one else died.

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR SOUL.

The vow did not die. The next generation and every generation following took on the vow and the village of Oberammergau, Germany still puts on the Passion Play. Now, 388 years have passed. This year a half million people will see the play, and Oberammergau citizens say they can see that it gives people peace.

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. THEIR NEIGHBOR IS THE WORLD.

But that did not happen through their own strength. God empowers them, just as God empowered David to defeat Goliath.

It was David’s desire to defend his nation and defeat Goliath because he mocked the living God. It was Oberammergau’s desire as a city not to die from the plague, but to live in the knowledge of what Jesus has done for us. Individuals affect cities and cities can affect the world.

And so David carried on, to honor the God whom he could not see. And so the people of Oberammergau carry on a vow make by their ancestors to tell Jesus’ story to honor the God whom we see by faith. They continue to do this because when people see the play it causes them to have peace with God. The Ukrainian people fight to defend their country with faith, even though they are the underdog.

God set this firm foundation through his loving us and our loving him in response.

God’s love blesses us and as we share it, we bless others. It is the circle of God’s love. Be blessed. And then commit to pay it forward to others. It’s a circle of love.

AMEN

¹ View online at www.fpcd.org/livestream. Click on in-person or online worship and look for March 13, 2022.

² See the pictures of helpers and video of Ukrainian soccer player, Roman Yaremchuk in the recording of the sermon at www.fpcd.org. Parents in Poland left baby strollers in railroad stations for Ukrainian moms. Signs offer places to say.

One person had a sign that said “We can take 8,” People from Germany and France provide. There’s even news of Ukrainians giving food and tea to a captured Russian soldier and letting him call his mother to let her know he’s okay. Ukrainians gather in subway stations to sing hymns and praise songs to encourage others.