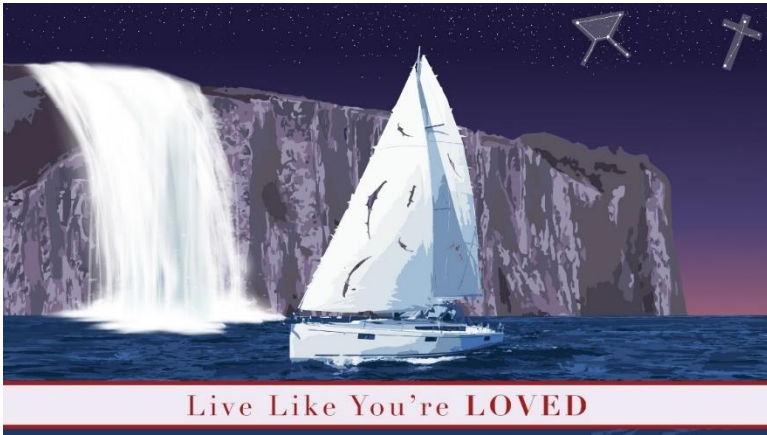


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Live Like You're  
Loved



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# Doubting God's Love

When I started sharing with people that I had the idea for a video series entitled, “Live Like You’re Loved,” the response was nearly the same every time:

- First, a very wide-eyed look and a thoughtful pause.
- Then the person would say, “I would be interested in that!”
- Or “I want to know what it’s like to live like you’re loved!”

I knew I was onto something.

The need for love is universal. And the need to know that we’re loved, to feel that we’re loved, to experience love, is deep. And especially, to know that we are loved by our creator God.

In this series, I want to explore four truths – four things that we may have heard, may believe in our heads, but somehow

doubt in our hearts. Yet they are true anyway, and I want to convince you that they are true.

Then I want to deep-think what your life would look like if you actually believed these truths, experienced these truths, and acted upon them.

The four scriptural truths I want to explore are:

- You are loved
- You are forgiven
- You are sent
- You are eternal.

This book is organized around these four scriptural truths. I want to explain why these are true, based on sound Biblical understanding, then I want to delve into how your life would be different if these truths became embedded in your soul.

I don't know exactly why, but I have been blessed to live a great deal of my life with this paradigm embedded in me. Therefore, along the way, I will share some of my own experiences in living these four truths. I want you to experience the same transformation in your life that I have felt in mine.



As a teacher, it's common to come up with some theme, some clever line of thought and teach it, but then you might realize that you yourself don't live your life this way. For example, when I developed the "Legacy Tree" video series, I wanted to live "Legacy Tree" principles myself for awhile before I assembled the information. It actually took me nearly 20 years to feel ready to write that series!

But it was different for "Live Like You're Loved." After months of experience and reflection, I realized that I had lived most of my life trusting in these beliefs and actually made lots of small and big decisions based on these four truths. I just didn't have the structure before to realize that I was actually doing it.

As you get into this series, you may find that you are absolutely living at least one of these truths and have embedded it already into your life. But you may find that for at least one of these truths, you haven't done it yet – you may have the head knowledge, but not the heart knowledge that causes a real change in your life. That's a phrase you'll see throughout this book: "Heart knowledge."

Here's an example. A friend was giving his testimony. For much of his life, he felt something was missing in his faith. He went to church. He knew that Jesus was the Savior of the world. He had all the head knowledge he needed. But still, something in him felt unfulfilled. When he discovered heart knowledge, his life changed.

This is the transformation I hope you will find as a result of this book.

## The Twin Scepters

One of my favorite teaching paradigms is that we have to address the elephant in the room. That's what I call it when I have set up a proposition that seems too neat and simple to some of my viewers or readers. I'm aware that there are objections that I need to address. Those are the elephants in the room.

And we have a gigantic elephant in the room this time.

The objection you may have is, "Wait! God is loving, yes, but He is also a disciplinarian. God is forgiving and full of grace, yes, but He also is the judge of all humans. We may be eternal

creatures, but we're not automatically guaranteed eternal life with God.”



<sup>1</sup> You will have raised a good point. God is the Lord of humans, wielding the twin scepters of judgment and grace: judgment that comes because we are sinful, broken and separated from God; grace that comes because God is loving and wants relationship with us and

wants to give us good things, including second chances.

God is also the perfect, loving-but-firm father, demanding accountability and showing mercy. He judges us yet also offers grace.

Before we can really get into the meat of this book, I need to address the elephant in the room.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt of “The Last Judgment”, Michelangelo\_Buonarroti\_04 by Michelangelo. Considered public domain in the US as it is a public domain artwork worldwide.

This balance between parental-style love and discipline, and this balance between sovereign judgment and grace, are seen throughout the Bible.

## Balancing Love and Discipline: Peter

A great example of the balance of love and discipline is how Jesus treats Peter when restoring him after Peter's betrayal in Jerusalem. Jesus loves Peter and needs him to head the new Christian church, but first Jesus applies a gentle, but clear and firm, discipline for what Peter has done.

Let's go straight to the scriptural text in John 21: 15-17 for the procedure and look at it afresh from the view of loving discipline.

**When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"**

**"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."**

**Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”**

**Again, Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”**

**He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”**

**The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?**

**Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”**

This is seemingly a simple, redundant exchange, but it is layered with meaning and discipline, all in the context of loving relationship.

First, there is the matter of three questions. This is straightforward; Peter denied Jesus three times when asked about him after Jesus’ arrest, so Peter must answer Jesus’ question three times as well. As William Barclay puts it, “Jesus, in his

gracious forgiveness, gave Peter the chance to wipe out the memory of the threefold denial by a threefold declaration of love.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Second is Jesus’ strange phrase of “Do you love me more



than these?” Most likely, Jesus is referring to the other disciples and to Peter’s boast (Matthew 26:33) that

“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” To which Jesus replies (Matthew 26: 34), “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

It’s a large slice of humble pie that Peter must eat by the seashore with Jesus. He must acknowledge his three denials of Jesus, and he must acknowledge that he was no better than his fellow disciples when the going got rough.

It’s informative that Peter does not attempt to boast again. He does not say, “Yes, I love you more than these.” He knows that

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<sup>2</sup> Barclay, William. *The Gospel of John, Volume 2, Revised Edition*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> Raphael, “Christ’s Charge to Peter.” Public domain. Considered public domain in the US as a faithful reproduction of two-dimensional public domain work of art.

he failed in his attempt to stand out from the others. Now Peter can only, simply, humbly answer, “You know that I love you.”

So, the resurrected Christ has disciplined Peter. But in restoring Peter with love, He also gives Peter the great task of becoming the shepherd of His earthly flock. It’s a huge moment, as Peter now shoulders this responsibility with a newfound humility and determination gained from a balance of discipline and love.

I hope it’s clear that discipline is not the same as condemnation. God disciplines His children, but He does not condemn them. Romans 8:1 makes this clear: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Discipline has to do with training and growth; condemnation has to do with punishment and guilt. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [www.gotquestions.org/Lord-God-discipline.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Lord-God-discipline.html)

## Balancing Judgment and Grace: Jonah

God is seen applying His twin scepters of judgment and grace in the Book of Jonah, both in how He applies them to the city of Nineveh and to the prophet Jonah himself.

The simpler part is to look at God's treatment of Nineveh. The city was the capital of the powerful Assyrian empire; supposedly it was so large, it took three days to cross. But it was full of wickedness. The prophet Nahum calls Nineveh "the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims." (Nahum 3:1)

The Lord tells Jonah, "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." (Jonah 1: 2) Jonah reaches Nineveh in a roundabout way (more on that later), and proclaims, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." (Jonah 3: 4) The Lord has pronounced judgment on Nineveh and has even given a timeline before His wrath falls on the city.





Surprisingly, Nineveh's king actually takes Jonah seriously. The king decrees that he and the people will repent, dressing not only themselves but even their

animals in sackcloth to signify their remorse. His decree is both majestic and humble in its acknowledgement of God's power:

**Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish. (Jonah 3: 8-9)**

God has rendered judgment but relaxes it with grace when He sees the true repentance of the city of Nineveh. The Lord does not wreak destruction on Nineveh after all.

Now let's turn back to our wayward prophet, Jonah, and see how God treats him with both judgment and grace.

When Jonah is assigned to go to Nineveh, he boards a ship that is headed in the opposite direction toward the western Mediterranean. He is escaping both Nineveh and the Lord.

As the famous story goes, God sends His judgment via a great storm that threatens to break the ship apart. When the crew casts lots to uncover if any passenger is responsible for the storm, Jonah is identified as the guilty party.



Realizing that God had sent the storm because of his disobedience, Jonah begged to be thrown overboard. His wish was

reluctantly granted and, as soon as he was cast into the sea, the storm abated.

Swallowed by a great fish, Jonah cried out to God for deliverance. Heeding the prophet's anguished prayer, "the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah upon the dry land."

(Jonah 2: 10)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Reader's Digest Association, Inc. "Who's Who in the Bible". Pleasantville, New York: The Reader's Digest Association, 1994.

To recap, God rendered judgment on Jonah for his disobedience, but later gracefully rescued Jonah from his despair.

Jonah then obeys God's reiteration to proclaim doom on Nineveh. But when Nineveh repents, Jonah becomes angry because he felt like this is what would happen before he left home and led him to flee on a ship. He tells the Lord, "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." (Jonah 4: 2) The prophet knows his scripture well, reciting God's own words from Exodus, and he knows the grace of God even in the midst of His judgment and wrath.

Even though Jonah goes to sit in the hot sun and pleads with God to end his life, the Lord instead provides a plant to shade him, showing grace to Jonah. But the next day, God sent a worm to destroy the plant. He also sends a scorching wind and a blazing sun that makes Jonah again wish to die.

God uses this mixture of judgment and grace to teach Jonah mercy, showing the prophet that Jonah's pity on the plant mirrors God's pity on Nineveh.

## Focusing on Love and Grace

Having described God's perfect blend of Love and Discipline, Judgment and Grace, I will focus in this book on Love and Grace. The reason is that I want to address a pandemic of a different kind: The disease of not fully loving oneself nor allowing oneself to fully feel the love of God. God loves us, yet we do not fully recognize that love, or we may even reject it. It's hard for us to believe that God could love us!

For example, a woman shared her story with me after watching the video version of "Live Like You're Loved." She had faithfully attended church all her life. She was a leader in her church. She had worked tirelessly to serve the church and other people. Yet, strangely, she felt unloved and unforgiven by God. She believed herself to be unworthy of receiving that God loved her as His child and forgave her despite her wrongdoings. She had probably hoped that her service to God would rescue her. Watching "Live Like You're Loved," she came away believing

in God's love and forgiveness, not solely for the theoretical "everyone," but for her personally.

In my experience, there can be many reasons why someone does not recognize or believe that God loves them personally:

- A world view that God is absent or does not care about the world.
- Religious belief that God will only love them if they follow certain rules.
- An upbringing where love was withheld if they didn't behave "correctly."
- A belief that God's love is not personal but general love for humanity.
- A general fear of God.
- A feeling of separation from God due to sin.
- A lack of devotion to time with God.
- Lack of self-esteem.
- Depression or other mental / emotional health issues.
- And more.

We can act as if we must earn God's love. We can act as if we could make God stop loving us. But this is not the story of the Bible. Let me share two examples:

- As furious as God could get with the Israelites, He never stopped loving them and never abandoned them. The people completely insulted and humiliated God by their manufacture of the golden calf in Exodus 32. God is angry and doles out punishment with both immediate and long-lasting consequences. But soon after, harking back to the Exodus 34 scripture Jonah referenced above, God proclaims His compassion and grace, His love and faithfulness, and renews His covenant to drive out other peoples from the Promised Land to make it safe for the Israelites.
- In the New Testament, in Romans 8, Paul describes how we should understand how God works through His Holy Spirit to bring His children closer to their Father, and that we do not have to live in fear. Despite our faithlessness, the Spirit brings about our adoption into sonship as children of God.

Still, we are prone to doubt God's love. This is the crisis I want to address in this book. If we truly believe – deep in our hearts, without a doubt – that we are loved by God, what difference would it make in our lives? How would we behave differently? Would it change the way we view ourselves? Would it change the way we interact with the world?

My view is it would revolutionize our lives to embed God's love in our soul and then act on it. In fact, it's my contention that this is exactly what God intends. He wants us to understand that we are loved, and if we reorient our lives based on a love relationship with God, we can then truly live differently and joyfully, loving our neighbor as ourselves and changing the world to reflect that His kingdom has indeed come near.

The same goes for the Biblical truths that we are forgiven by our loving Father, we are sent with purpose into the world, and we are eternal creatures, invited to eternal relationship with God. Embedding these truths in our souls can and should transform us to live vibrant lives in service to our Lord and Savior!

## Two Keywords: Freedom and Daily

If I had to sum up what I hope for you to get out of this book, “Live Like You’re Loved,” it would be (1) Freedom, and (2) Daily benefits.

Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” We can live our lives in shackles, and that is not God’s doing! When we understand the truth that God loves us, forgives us, sends us, and desires an eternal relationship with us, then we can break free from shackles, discard our baggage, and live a life of freedom.

As I’ve said before, we may have the “head knowledge” that God loves us, but we may lack the “heart knowledge.” Until we trust God’s love wholeheartedly, we can’t live in the freedom that God offers.

Meanwhile, there is an immediacy that comes with God’s promises. This day, you are loved. This day, you are forgiven. This day, God sends you into the world with purpose. This day, you can walk with God and get a foretaste of the eternal life God offers.



I'm not saying that "In one day, you shall be healed!" If you have been influenced by a certain pattern of thinking for most of your life, it's hard to shake that pattern. But you can start today. You can have light and freedom in your life today, and on a daily basis going forward.

My overall goal for "Live Like You're Loved" is to help you feel God's transforming power that gives freedom on a daily basis.

## The Layout

Let me explain the layout of the chapters that follow. There are four primary topics:

- Live Like You're Loved
- Live Like You're Forgiven
- Live Like You're Sent
- Live Like You're Eternal

I will break each topic into two chapters. The first will focus on the scriptural truth of the concept, showing how we are each indeed loved, forgiven, sent and eternal. The second chapter will teach four steps for living the concept.

To remember the four steps, I'll use the acronym SAIL – S-A-I-L. These stand for:

- Step in
- Accept
- Improve
- Live it

The “Step in” phase is about moving head knowledge into heart knowledge. It’s about understanding the Biblical truth of being loved, forgiven, sent and eternal, then embedding that in our hearts and souls.

The “Accept” phase goes a step further with the Biblical truth. Beyond the basic premise of being loved, forgiven, sent and eternal, there is a foundation or structure that you must accept, a Biblical framework for you to build upon as you reorient your life.

That leads to the “Improve” step, which is a key element. We go from the theological into the practical. This phase typically will require different thoughts and habits in order to improve your life and move you down the path toward the goal.

Then “Live it” is the step where the conversion to “Living Like You’re Loved” (or Forgiven or Sent or Eternal) achieves its full bloom. This is the life we want to achieve, but we have to go through the other steps to get there. At this point, you are fully functioning in the new paradigm, equipped both with heart knowledge and with practical patterns to implement on a daily basis.

Once the four sections are described, I’ll present a concluding chapter to tie these four sections together and to illustrate how to overcome your own habits and objections to implement these principles in your life.

Now, let’s learn how to live like you’re loved!