

## God's Promise to Love Us



### SABBATH—JANUARY 4

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Psalm 33:5; Deuteronomy 7:6–9; Hosea 9:15; 1 John 4:7–20.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Jesus answered, ‘All who love me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them. My Father and I will come to them and live with them’ ” (John 14:23, ERV).



“‘The Father loves you. He loves you because you love Me and believe that I came from the Father’ ” (John 16:27, NLV).

**NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS** use different words from the Greek language to talk about “love.” Two of these words are “**agape**” and “**phileo**.” Many people believe that the Greek word “**agape**” talks about a love that comes only from God. People also believe that “**phileo**” means to love in a way that isn’t as powerful as “**agape**.” They also think that “**agape**” is something that God can give but never get from humans.

All of these ideas are false. When we study the Bible carefully, we see that “**agape**” can mean both God’s love and human love. Bible writers also use the word “**agapao**.” “**Agapao**” means “to love.” “**Agapao**” can sometimes be used to talk about loving the wrong things (2 Timothy 4:10, John 12:43). Many times New Testament writers use words other than “**agape**” or “**agapao**” to mean God’s love. Jesus said, “ ‘The Father loves you. He loves you because you love Me and believe that I came from the Father’ ” (John 16:27, NLV). In this verse, the word for “love” in the Greek language is “**phileo**.” As we see, John uses this word to talk about both God’s love and human love.

The Bible also teaches that God’s love is not one-way. God wants to be in a love relationship with us. God cares about how we think and feel about Him. God loves us and wants us to love Him back.

**GOD'S EVERLASTING LOVE (Psalm 33:5)**

The Bible tells us that God loves everyone. The most famous verse in the Bible announces this truth: “ ‘For [yes] God loved the world [the people who live and die on this planet] so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal [everlasting] life’ ” (John 3:16, ICB).

**Read Psalm 33:5 and Psalm 145:9. What do these verses teach us about God’s love and mercy?**

Some people may think that no one can love them. Or they may think that God loves everyone else, but not them. But the Bible announces that God loves everyone. Because God loves everyone, He also wants everyone to be saved.

**Read 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4; and Ezekiel 33:11. What do these verses teach us about how much God wants to save everyone?**

The verse after John 3:16 adds: “ ‘God did not send his Son into the world [to this earth] to judge the world [people]. He sent him to save the world’ ” (John 3:17, WE). God wants every person to accept His love and be saved. But the Lord won’t force His love on anyone. People are free to accept or reject His love.

What happens when someone rejects God’s love? Does God stop loving this person? Of course not. God continues to love the ones who reject His love. In Jeremiah 31:3, God announces to His people: “ ‘I love you people with a love that continues forever’ ” (ERV). Elsewhere, the Bible teaches this same idea (to read an example, look at Psalm 136). God’s love never runs out. His love is everlasting. We have trouble understanding this idea because we often have a hard time loving other people, don’t we?

What if we knew God’s love for ourselves? How would this love change how we behave each day? How would this love change how we love other people?

**God loves everyone. God loves bad people, too. What should God’s love for these awful people teach us about how we should love them?**



**“God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal [everlasting] life” (John 3:16, ICB).**

**GOD'S PROMISE TO LOVE US (Deuteronomy 7:6–9)**

**God showed us the strongest example of His love when Jesus died for us on the cross.**

The Bible often uses word pictures about families to show God's special love relationship with us. These word pictures include the love between a husband and wife or the love of a mother for her child. These word pictures are used to show the special relationship between God and His chosen people. God promises to love His people. He also expects His people to accept His love and to love Him (and each other) back.

**Read Deuteronomy 7:6–9. What do these verses teach us about the relationship between God's love and His promises?**

Deuteronomy 7:9 talks about a special love relationship that God has with His chosen people. The relationship depends on their loyalty. If they obey God, God will bless them. God won't stop loving them if they sin. But the people can break their relationship with God if they reject His love and His law.

In Deuteronomy 7:9, the word written as "love" (ERV) or "mercy" (KJV) comes from the word "**hesed**" in the Hebrew language. "**Hesed**" shows us the promise of God's love and so much more. Bible writers often use "**hesed**" to tell us that God's mercy and love are very powerful and wonderful. "**Hesed**" also means the loyal love that someone shows another person in a relationship. When a person has "**hesed**" love in his heart, he can start a love relationship with someone and expect that this person will love him back.

God's "**hesed**" shows that His mercy continues forever. We can depend on God's promise of mercy and love. At the same time, we must obey God and do our part in the love relationship with Him (read 2 Samuel 22:26; 1 Kings 8:23; Psalm 25:10; Psalm 32:10; 2 Chronicles 6:14).

God's love for us is the beginning of all love relationships we have with others. We can never match God's love. God gave us life. God in Jesus gave Himself to us. Jesus said, " 'The strongest love anyone can have is this. He will die to save his friends' " (John 15:13, WE). For sure, God showed us the strongest example of His love when Jesus died for us on the cross (Philippians 2:8).

**What are ways you can keep God's love always in your thoughts? Why is it important to do so?**

## A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD DEPENDS ON OUR CHOICE (Hosea 9:15)

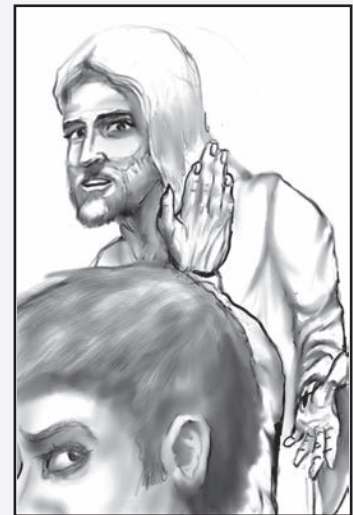
God invites every person to have a personal love relationship with Him (read Matthew 22:1–14). If we want to have a relationship with God, we must love and obey Him (read Matthew 22:37–39). Everything depends on our choice to accept or reject God’s love. God wants to bless us in our relationship with Him. So, we must accept His love to get the blessings He promises us.

**Read Hosea 9:15; Jeremiah 16:5; Romans 11:22; and Jude 1:21. What do these verses teach us about God’s promised blessings? Can we reject His blessings or lose them? Explain.**

If we want to enjoy the blessings that God promises, we must choose to love and obey Him. But we must not think that God stops loving anyone. As we saw already, God’s love is everlasting. This Bible truth helps us to understand Hosea 9:15 better. In this verse, God says about His people, “ ‘I will not love them anymore’ ” (ERV). But we must remember that later in the same book God announces about His people, “ ‘I will love them freely [without limits]. I am not angry with them anymore’ ” (Hosea 14:4, ICB). So, Hosea 9:15 can’t mean that God completely stops loving His people. The verse must be talking about some blessing of God’s love that the people lost because they didn’t obey Him. How we answer God’s love is important for our relationship with Him to continue.

“ ‘He who knows my commands and obeys them is the one who loves me. And my Father will love him who loves me. I will love him and will show myself to him’ ” (John 14:21, ICB). In the same way, Jesus announces to His followers, “ ‘The Father loves you. He loves you because you love Me and believe that I came from the Father’ ” (John 16:27, NLV).

These verses teach us that getting the blessings from a saving relationship with God depends on our accepting His love. (We also must share that love with other people, too.) Again, God’s love for us does not end if we reject Him. We can’t stop the sun from shining or from giving us its light. In the same way, we can’t do anything to stop God’s everlasting love. But we can reject a relationship with God. When we do, we cut ourselves off from the blessings this relationship offers, including the promise of everlasting life.



**When we reject a relationship with God, we cut ourselves off from the blessings this relationship offers, including the promise of everlasting life.**

## MERCY LOST OR REJECTED (1 John 4:7–20)

God's love is everlasting. We can't earn God's love. But we can reject it. God gives us a choice: we may accept or reject His love. God gives us this freedom to choose because He loves us with His perfect, everlasting love **before we do anything** (Jeremiah 31:3). Our love for God is our answer to everything He gives us before we ask for it.

**Read the picture story in 1 John 4:7–20. Look carefully at verses 7 and 19. What does the picture story tell us about God's love?**



**The forgiven servant had his fellow servant thrown into prison.**

God's love always comes first. If God didn't first love us, we couldn't love Him back. God made us to love and to be loved. God is the beginning of all love. But we have the choice to accept God's love and then show that love in our lives. We see this Bible truth in Jesus' picture story about the servant who won't forgive (read Matthew 18:23–35).

In the picture story, we see that the servant can't repay the money he owed the master. In Matthew 18, the servant owed his master 10,000 talents. One talent was the same as about 6,000 denarii or Roman coins. One denarius was the pay that a man got for one day of work (compare with Matthew 20:2). A worker would need to work 6,000 days to earn one talent. Let's say that a worker worked for 300 days a year. Then he would earn 300 denarii in one year. So, he would need to work about 20 years to repay one talent, because one talent was worth 6,000 denarii ( $6,000/300 = 20$ ). To earn 10,000 talents, then, the worker would need to work for 200,000 years! In short, the picture story shows that the servant **never** can repay the money he owed the master. But the master felt love and mercy for his servant. So, the master forgave him.

But the forgiven servant refused to forgive the small amount of money (100 denarii) that one of his fellow servants owed him. The forgiven servant had his fellow servant thrown into prison. Then the master got angry and removed His gift of mercy and forgiveness. God's mercy and love don't run out or end. But we can finally reject and lose the blessings of God's love and mercy.

**What has God forgiven you for? How much did this forgiveness cost Jesus? What should this price tell you about forgiving other people?**

## GIVING TO OTHER PEOPLE BECAUSE GOD GIVES TO US (John 15:12)

As we saw yesterday, the servant couldn't pay his master the money he owed. In the same way, we can't pay God for everything He did and does for us. "God shows his love for us in this way: Christ died to save us while we were bad people [sinners]" (Romans 5:8, WE). God's love is so amazing! As 1 John 3:1 says, "The Father has loved us so much! He loved us so much that we are called [named] children of God" (ICB).

What we can and should do is show God's love to other people as much as we can. God shows us so much love and forgiveness. So, how much more should we love and forgive other people? Remember, the servant lost his master's mercy and forgiveness because he didn't show mercy and forgiveness to his fellow servant. If we love God, we will show His love to other people.

**Read John 15:12; 1 John 3:16; and 1 John 4:7–12. What do these verses teach us about the relationship between God's love, our love for God, and our love for people?**

Jesus told His followers, " 'You are my friends if you do what I command you' " (John 15:14, ICB). What did Jesus command them to do? Jesus commanded them (and us) to love other people as He loved them. In this verse and in other verses, the Lord commands us to love God and to love each other.

In short, we should understand that God forgave us for something we can't pay Him back for. So, we should love and praise God and live with love and mercy in our hearts for other people. As Luke 7:47 teaches, the one who gets a lot of forgiveness also loves a lot. But " 'people who are forgiven only a little will love only a little' " (ERV). Who among us doesn't know how much God forgives us?

If we love God, we must love other people, too. We should want to share the message about God's love with people in words and in actions. We should help people in their daily lives here and now. We also should seek to lead people to the One who offers them everlasting life in a new heaven and on a new earth.

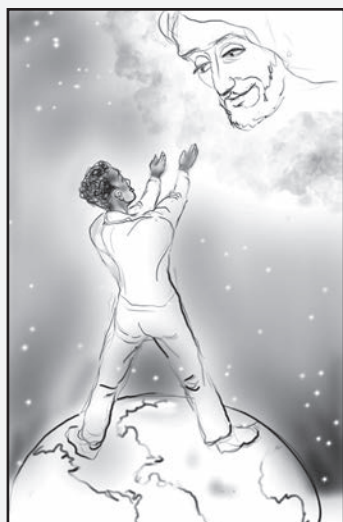
**What are some things that you can do today and in the coming days to show God's love to people? What can you do to invite them to enjoy the promise of everlasting life?**



**As Luke 7:47 teaches,  
the one who gets a lot  
of forgiveness  
also loves a lot.**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Privilege of Prayer,” pages 93–104, in *Steps to Christ*.

“Tell God about all your needs, your joys, your sorrows, your troubles, and your fears. God will not grow tired of listening to you. God knows the number of hairs on your head. So, He knows everything you need. ‘The Lord is full of [filled with] loving-kindness [mercy] and pity.’ James 5:11 [NLV]. Our sorrows touch God’s heart of love. When we tell our sorrows to God, His heart is touched, too. Tell everything to God that troubles your mind. Nothing is too big for God to solve. God keeps life going on all the planets. He is the King over all heaven and earth. Nothing that makes us happy or at peace is too small for Him to care about. He knows everything that happens to us. He can fix any problem. Our Father in heaven is interested in everything that happens to us. He is interested in the things that upset us and the things that give us joy. He is interested in every prayer of faith that we say. ‘He heals those who have broken hearts. He takes care of their wounds.’ Psalm 147:3 [NirV]. The relationship between God and every one of us is personal and deep. God loves you and watches over you as if you were the only person on the earth who needed His love and care. He loves you as if He gave His Beloved Son to die only for you and no one else.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 100, adapted.



**God loves you and watches over you as if you were the only person on the earth who needed His love and care.**

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think about this thought from the quote above: “God loves you and watches over you as if you were the only person on the earth who needed His love and care. He loves you as if He gave His Beloved Son to die only for you and no one else.” How does this thought give you hope? How should you live your life, knowing how much God cares for you?
- ② How does this week’s lesson help you to understand Psalm 103:17, 18 better? What does this lesson show you about God’s everlasting love? In what ways is His love everlasting? At the same time, how do the blessings of a relationship with God depend on our choice to accept His love?
- ③ How does your understanding of God’s everlasting love strengthen your relationship with God and people?

## DIRT, NOT CORN

**M**elvin wasn't sure what to believe: Did God make man from dirt or from corn? The Bible taught that "the Lord God took dust from the ground and formed [made] man from it. The Lord breathed the breath of life into the man's nose. And the man became a living person" (Genesis 2:7, ICB). Melvin was from a group of people named the Cabécar. There are about 17,000 Cabécar in Costa Rica. The Cabécar taught Melvin that Sibú made humans from corn. Sibú is the word for "God" in the Cabécar language.

Growing up, Melvin always thought that the Sibú of the Cabécar people was the same as the Sibú of the Bible. Then Melvin studied the Bible with a Seventh-day Adventist. Melvin understood that the Bible taught very different ideas about God than he learned from his people. Melvin decided to accept what the Bible taught about Sibú. Melvin was baptized with his parents and two other family members.

A year later, Melvin's mother died at the age of 40.

Melvin was 22 at the time. He believed the Bible teaching about what happens when you die: a person sleeps until Jesus comes back. But the Cabécar people believed that Melvin's mother was alive. Worse, she would be lost in the dark forever if her family didn't help lead her into the next life in a special funeral ceremony that continued for four days. Melvin's family also needed to kill two pigs and three chickens and feed them to the guests who came to the funeral. If Melvin's family refused to kill the animals, everyone would think they were selfish. Melvin's grandparents and other family members wanted Melvin and his family to follow the Cabécar teachings. But Melvin and his family decided to follow the Bible. An Adventist pastor helped them to find a place to bury his mother outside of Cabécar land.

At this time, Melvin chose to become a pastor. After his mother died, Melvin decided to spend the rest of his life telling the Cabécar about the real Sibú in the Bible. Melvin wanted to help his people know Bible truth about the Sibú who made humans from dirt, not corn. Melvin also wanted his people to know that they didn't need to kill animals to get everlasting life.

Today, Melvin Madriz is a 24-year-old student at an Adventist university in Costa Rica. There, Melvin studies to be a pastor. Melvin will be the Adventist Church's first Cabécar pastor. Only about 30 Cabécar people are Adventist.

Melvin says, "I believe only in Sibú from the Bible."

Pray for the Cabécar people to learn about the God of the Bible and for all people worldwide who don't know about Jesus. Thank you for your offerings that help Bible workers share the Good News with these people groups.

INSIDE  
*Story*  
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



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**Melvin Madriz**