

Personal reflection

When you are feeling lost, confused, fearful and anxious, ask yourself where your inner 'face' or gaze is focused. Become aware of what it is, look at it. Then consciously turn your gaze towards your fellow human being or on your loving Creator. Do this with a loving regard towards yourself - 'Oh look, I have strayed from my connection with the Lord.' There is no need for judgment; this is all part of our spiritual journey. Repeat the words - **I am with you always**, or any other biblical verse that comes to mind.

Meditation - Walking to Emmaus

Imagine you are walking along a dusty road from Jerusalem to Emmaus; a stranger who is also walking on the road approaches - you don't recognise him ... What stops you from recognising the presence of the Lord with you? ...

Speak to him now and tell him what lies on your heart ...

The Lord speaks to you ... listen to what he has to say at this moment in your life ... You find you have reached Emmaus ... the words just come out ... asking him to stay awhile. You go into the house ... sit down at the table ... he takes the loaf of bread, blesses and breaks it ... and in that instant you know him ... it is your loving Lord.

In the simple act of breaking bread ... in the simple every day things we find his presence ... the reality of his love

Acknowledgments: photo 1: Maria Keays, photo 2: art by A. Grant

Five Essentials- Aspects of Loving - a focus for the Church
1st Essential: Part 2: Being loved not abandoned, lost, but accompanied
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Being loved - not abandoned, lost, but accompanied



'And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' Matthew 28:20

'The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.'
Deuteronomy 23:37

Life is often difficult, people often let us down or demand more from us than we can deliver. Sometimes we feel that all we hold dear and is familiar to us is ending. What we based our life on and seemed secure is no longer safe. This could be in the sphere of work, or family life and relationships and perhaps most of all this relates to our belief structures. It feels like 'the end of the world'.

But is it the end? Possibly it is also a new beginning as well, which can only come about if we let go of the things we have valued in the past. Maybe we valued them more than the love that we receive unceasingly from God.

The Lord loves us and is present with us no matter the circumstances.

Repeat the phrase 'I am with you always' silently to your self. Let it sink into your heart and mind.

If we look back on our lives we can often see that the most difficult periods in our life brought change and a softening of our hard edges. We became more compassionate, less ready to write other people off because of their mistakes. The testing times crack the hard shell of indifference and judgement towards others and ourselves.

A new shoot of life-giving understanding and love begins to grow.



Often in life, a loving God seems distant and uncaring, but this is only our limited perception, because we have turned away from him and become isolated in our self-regard. He is indeed there with us, supporting, leading, loving each one of us.

Perhaps what life has provided seems harsh and cold – how can this be from a loving God? I think sometimes God has to shake our foundations in order to give us an opportunity to leave behind our smug complacency and self-sufficiency.

Elijah's experience of God was not in the earthquake, wind or fire but in the 'still small voice' which literally means 'a thin voice of silence'. We cannot hear the whisper of divine love in our limited belief structures and our focus on a superficial life. Often we only experience the outward catastrophes and upheavals of our daily life, not realising that these can lead us to turn and hear and experience God's compassionate love.

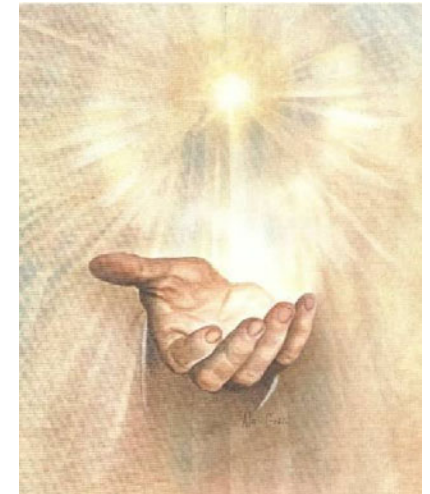
The following are ideas of different ways you can explore and experience being loved always.

Bible focus: (you may want to do this on a separate piece of paper.)

God's compassionate love is demonstrated many times in the stories of the Word, here are a few examples; finding the lost sheep; Daniel in the lion's den; Jesus and the disciples in a boat in a storm; Children of Israel in the wilderness; Elijah being fed (- by ravens and by the widow's cruise of oil and jar of flour)

As you read these passages from the Word write next to each one the quality of the Divine love which is demonstrated - e.g. for the lost sheep I felt it was the constant regard and care of Divine love that comes to us no matter how far we wander away and how lost we are in life.

Are there any other stories that come to mind that speak to you of God's constant love? You might like to add them to the list.



Teaching focus

The Lord never turns his face from us – “The **face** of the Lord is mercy, peace and everything good. The Lord never looks at anyone except with mercy and never turns his face from anyone. It is we, when we are wrapped up in ourselves, who turn our face away. As a blessing the Lord is said to lift his face on us, meaning that the Lord gives us the capacity to love others.”

(paraphrased from *Secrets of Heaven* 223 & 358)

Mercy is love that is grieving. -

“God's love for the human race is all encompassing. The Divine is not distant, indifferent, detached. God is human, a Divine Human, and even as his love rejoices in our own joy, his mercy grieves with us in our times of grief and pain. We are never alone.”

(*Way of Wisdom, Meditations on Love and Service, Emanuel Swedenborg.*)

If you wish to explore further in the writings of Swedenborg, here are a few suggestions:

still small voice - *Arcana Caelestia* 8823, 6971

face - *Arcana Caelestia* 5585, 5608:5

lost sheep - *Apocalypse Explained* 405:33

mercy - *Arcana Caelestia* 223, 358, 5480

Experiential

As you go about your every day routines, consciously recall the presence of the Lord with you by using a very short phrase like ‘the Lord is always with me’ or ‘the Lord is my shepherd’.