



God Knows Your Name

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Cheers was one of the most beloved television sitcoms of the 1980s, following the lives of people who worked in or frequented a bar, which, given its atmosphere of love and acceptance was somewhat like a home away from home. Combined with its “everyone-is-welcome-here” resemblance to the ambiance of a traditional English pub, and given the favorite English salute or toast traditionally given as an alcoholic drink is hoisted, the name of the bar was *Cheers*.

Cheers was far more than a place to purchase and imbibe alcohol—it was a place of fraternity, friendship, socialization, caring and support. The regular patrons of *Cheers* shared their lives—their ups and downs.

Cheers was family—a place of community. Here’s the chorus of “Where Everybody Knows Your Name”—the theme song of *Cheers*:

*Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name
and they’re always glad you came.
You wanna be where you can see,
our troubles are all the same
You wanna be where everybody knows
your name*

You may have heard that classic definition of home given in Robert Frost’s poem “The Hired Man”—*home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.*

God perfectly knows, embraces

and loves us because *that’s who he is*. He doesn’t have to take us in, rather, he accepts, embraces and welcomes us because *that’s who he is*.

All of our efforts to make a name for ourselves are totally unnecessary. **God knows your name**—he loves you and me because he is our heavenly Father and we are his children. We are his children—**God knows your name!**

We are his flock, but when he sees us, he doesn’t just recognize a large flock of sheep, he knows each sheep by name. When you and I look at a big flock of sheep, we see ...a big flock of sheep. They all look the same. But that’s not the case with the Lord our Shepherd. Every one of his sheep has a name (John 10:3).

Everyone desperately, whether they realize it or not, desires the love of God... and many people contort themselves into knots, they enslave themselves to all kinds of religious rules attempting to gain and maintain God’s love.

Many people alive on planet earth doubt that God loves them, because they cannot imagine God loving them if he really knew them. But God loves us in spite of knowing all there is to know about us.

Loving Another More Than Oneself

There’s a common misconception about the love that married people have for each other. Common sense would suggest that relationships in marriage work best when each partner

accurately sees the strengths and weaknesses of their partner. Research has proven otherwise.

In many cases, relationships in marriage work best when individuals view their spouse in a more positive way than they may even view themselves. This principle might be part of what Paul was getting at in Philippians 2:3 “...*value others above yourselves.*” In many happy marriages, both parties seem to be almost delusional about each other—some might say they have a serious case of “blind love.”

Marriages are often most happy when the two partners concentrate on all that is good and pure and lovely about their spouses rather than what is flawed and imperfect. This kind of love is given not because the recipient of the love deserves it. This kind of love is given not because the lover is blind and incapable of perceiving reality. This kind of love is given and expressed because love sees through rose-colored glasses.

When you think about it, that is exactly what the gospel is all about. The good news is that God chooses to love us in spite of who we are and what we have done. The good news is that God loves us because that’s who God is—**God IS love**. *Love describes God. God defines what love is.*

God does not love us based on how much we do for him... that is the common definition of God that big-business religion would have us believe. God loves you and me

because he willingly chooses to look past our flaws. We are loved by our heavenly Father because we are his children.

The secret ingredient at the heart and core of all institutionalized religion is the fact that all humans want God to love them. Given the fact that all humans desire God's love, Christ-less religion then teaches that God's love is given in a direct and proportionate response to the actions and behaviors of humans who earn God's love.

Can you see why the gospel of Jesus Christ is an enemy of big-business religion? The gospel of Jesus Christ says that you can't earn or deserve God's love—he already loves you. He loves you because *that's what he is and that's what he does*.

The skeptic will say—"Well, so God loves me even if I am a notorious sinner and a despicably evil person? So why should I even try to be a good person when God will love me no matter how rotten I am?"

The skeptical question ignores one reality—when we accept and embrace the love of God, Jesus Christ lives in us and his love, grace and mercy begin to transform our lives. When we accept and embrace the love of God, he begins to produce his love in us—it's called the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit, according to Paul in Galatians 5:22-23, is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

God Loves You—It's Not Too Good to be True!

God loves us but he will not force us to accept and embrace his love. That's the predicament in which many people find themselves. God loves them but they don't know it, and if they've been told he does, they don't believe it because it seems too good to be true.

As far as God is concerned, he loves us right now just as much as he ever has or ever will. That's the

genius—the beauty—the eternal glory of God's love. God's love cannot be affected by our good or our bad behavior—he loves us just as much anyway. We cannot make God stop loving us, and we cannot make him start loving us. We cannot, by our virtuous deeds or our sinful behavior, influence his love for us.

Garrison Keillor, an author and humorist, who became famous for the tales he told on his Minnesota Public Radio Show called "A Prairie Home Companion" once told a self-deprecating story about himself when he was a teenager.

I was walking down the street one day in my Midwestern town and I saw an unbelievably beautiful woman coming toward me. I just had to find a way to get her to notice me. Just then I saw a brand-new Cadillac parked next to the sidewalk.

So I strolled over to the Cadillac, acting like I owned it, pulled out a dime and put it in the parking meter. Then I leaned against the side of the Cadillac, and smiled as the woman continued to walk toward me.

She smiled back! I couldn't believe it! She continued to walk straight towards me... and then, she spoke to me when she got close enough. Giving me another smile, she said, "Thank you" and then she got into her Cadillac and drove away.

If you will forgive the interpretation, God owns the Cadillac. We can't impress him. We can't act like we're going to put a dime in his parking meter or take him for a ride. He loves us because he loves us... not because we actually own or pretend to own a Cadillac.

He knows your name—he knows you don't own the heavenly equivalent of a Cadillac because no amount of work on your part can purchase a heavenly Cadillac. He loves you anyway, and there's no reason for you to try to impress him as if you are something or someone he knows you are not. □



We are his flock, but when he sees us, he doesn't just recognize a large flock of sheep. He knows each sheep by name... Every one of his sheep has a name (John 10:3).