GOD LOVES YOU is the second of the five talks on God's grace; that is, God's continuing offer of a life-giving relationship by which to grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ. This talk builds on the talk entitled GOD DESIGNED YOU. In GOD DESIGNED YOU, participants heard that God offers us a relationship through which we can become the whole persons God created us to be. The participants will hear the FAITH talk before this one, which will lead them into the realization that the relationship is possible by faith. The evening meditation, which comes before this talk, raises the question of responding when Christ comes knocking at our heart's door. In GOD LOVES YOU, participants hear God's invitation to receive God's accepting love and to say yes to God's offer of a relationship. The speaker, while developing the main points of the talk, should personalize the content with a story about his or her own experience of opening to God's unconditional love, accepting the offer by faith, and starting a life based on a relationship with God. The call to say yes is carried over into the PRODIGAL talk and made real in the Reconciliation Service during the evening of Day One.

While this talk touches on the reality of sin and separation from God and mentions the fact that conversion is a continuous process, neither is the focus of this talk. The focus of this particular talk is God's unconditional love and God's call to say yes to that relationship, which is the beginning of a new life in Christ. Later talks will address more fully the subjects of sin and sanctifying grace.

The outline elaborates on the points, not to provide a script, but in order to stimulate the speaker in developing the talk in his or her own words. Personal examples are to be used as the speaker feels comfortable and as they fit the text. This talk should be no longer that 15–20 minutes. Visual aids help convey the main points of the talk. The reflection guide will pose the following questions:

1. Have I really thought about how much God loves me? Do I feel that I have accepted God’s love?
2. What difference does accepting God’s love make in my life?
3. Will I be open to God’s love for me during these three days? What might prevent my being open?
ALD—"With a clean sheet of paper, pen in hand...", followed by the before-talk chorus, at which time the speaker will enter the conference room (participants should be standing for the chorus). The speaker will ask the participants to join in "The Prayer to the Holy Spirit" found on the last page of the Chrysalis Worship book. The speaker will then ask the participants to be seated.

Introduction
Share a brief story, illustration, or experience that helps get people’s attention and leads into the theme of saving love. For example,

- Share a story about someone who kept refusing an offer of friendship, only to realize later what he or she had missed, as an image of how we sometimes do not realize the amazing grace of God’s offer.
- Relate an illustration of someone who tirelessly pursued his or her love and finally succeeded, as an image of God’s pursuing love.

“My name is ___________________, and the title of this talk is GOD LOVES YOU.”

I. Signs of God’s love are all around us.

A. God’s creation
   1. Creation is an expression of God’s overflowing love. The Creator is present to us in the wonder and beauty of creation.
   2. We are made as free beings to share in God’s glory and purpose (Ps. 8).
   3. Yet almost from the beginning, people used free will to ignore God rather than to have a relationship with God (Gen. 3-4).

B. God’s covenant with humanity
   1. The Bible is a love story—the story of God’s love for humanity despite our sin.
   2. Throughout the Old Testament we hear God repeatedly inviting us to a covenant relationship—a mutual relationship of love.
   3. Through Jesus, God offers this transforming relationship to us (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:18-20). Jesus models a life transformed through relationship with God.

C. God’s offer of a relationship: grace
   1. God does not offer us things but a relationship of genuine self-giving (1 John 4:7-12).
   2. We call God’s offer of friendship grace (something given freely yet not deserved or worked for).
   3. God pursues us throughout our lives (prevenient grace, grace that goes before us).
   4. God’s grace stems from God’s unconditional love. That is what we call justifying grace. We cannot make ourselves right with God on our own, only by God’s grace through faith—faith in God’s unqualified love toward us in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:8).
5. This means God loves us just as we are, not for how good or holy we can be. Even when we feel unacceptable, God accepts us. Even when we fail God, God forgives us and is ready to give us another chance. Even when we see no future for ourselves, God prepares a way, opening the future in ways we cannot imagine.
6. Accepting God's unconditional love for us—believing that nothing can separate us from God's love, nothing we do can make God stop loving us—is the basis of a Christian life.

II. Reasons we ignore God's love (Illustrate with personal examples when possible.)
A. Ignorance
   1. Many people do not know about God's offer of a life-giving relationship (1 Thess. 4:13; 1 John 4:18; Heb. 4:14-16).
   2. Many people have been taught misleading images of God (1Cor. 15:34; 10:1).
B. Desire to be in control
   1. Trusting God with our needs, happiness, and life purpose is scary. We'd rather trust ourselves (2 Sam 22:3; Pss. 4:5; 7:1; 1 Tim 6:17).
   2. We have the freedom to see what we want and go for it without listening to the wisdom of God (Ps. 49:6).
C. Doubts about the reality of God
   1. We wonder if God is a figment of human imagination.
   2. We wonder if God is trustworthy (Gen. 3:1-3).
D. Pressure from others
   1. We tend to go with the flow and let peers decide what we think.
   2. TV, movie, or music stars depict people of faith as out of touch, uncool. Saying yes to God may mean saying no to certain activities.

III. Results of ignoring God's love
A. Deep-seated emptiness that we try to fill with things
   1. In each of us is a God-shaped void, an empty space meant for our Creator.
   2. We mistakenly think we can fill in that empty space with more things, more popularity, more “feel-good” experiences, etc.
B. Pain and guilt when we live against God's image in us
   1. There is a basic sense of right and wrong in all of us, like grain in wood. When we live against the grain of God within us, we eventually experience guilt, inner pain, lack of peace.
   2. Like Adam and Eve, we seek ways to hide from God and even from ourselves (Gen. 3:8).
C. Poor self-image, low self-esteem, bad feelings about who we are
1. Apart from God, we are like cut flowers. Cut off from God, we lose the inner joy and love for living that God gives us.
2. We feel sorry for ourselves and give up on ourselves.
3. We get angry at the world for our troubles; we blame others.

IV. Accepting the love relationship God offers (Illustrate with personal examples when possible)

A. Begin by choosing to be open to God.
   1. Believe that God is. Open yourself to the possibility. Live these three days as though God is real.
   2. Believe God communicates. The Bible's whole message is that God speaks. Find out if that is true. Experiment by listening throughout these three days to what God is saying to you.
   3. Listen to other Christians, their experiences of God and struggles with faith. Notice the ways God gets people's attention.
   4. Believe that God is still there, waiting to hear from you. We can't ignore God forever; God searches us out. God yearns for relationship with us. God wants to restore the connection (John 15:1-11). God wants to assure us that we are God's sons and daughters (Rom. 8:14-17).

B. Trust that God has a great purpose for your life.
   1. Think about God's blessings in your life. God has started something good in you. Now God wants to complete it with your cooperation.
   2. Receive the message being personally delivered to you these three days: God wants a relationship with you.
   3. Imagine what would be different if you were to accept God's love. What would you hope to receive? What one thing would you be able to let go of?

C. Say yes to the love relationship God offers.
   1. Saying yes to God is an act of faith. It is deciding to offer our lives to God—to put our lives and future in God's hands.
   2. Conversion begins the moment we say yes to God.
      a. Conversion is allowing God's love and purpose to turn our lives around, to redirect us.
      b. Conversion is the beginning of a lifelong process.

D. Share your personal story of accepting the relationship God offers.

VI. In closing

A. In the story of Adam and Eve's denying God, Adam and Eve hide from God. They are naked, afraid, and ashamed. They know they have separated themselves from their Maker's love.
B. Yet God searches for them with love and calls their names: “Adam, Eve, where are you? I want a relationship with you.” God seeks us and calls our names as well, saying, “(Call participants’ real names), where are you?”

C. God invites us to say yes to the offer of a relationship. What will be your response?

At the close of the talk, the table groups may begin discussion using the two-page reflection guide that follows. Permission is granted to make one copy per participant.
Trust God’s loving intention for your life.

1. Have I really thought about how much God loves me? Do I feel that I have accepted God’s love?

2. What difference does accepting God’s love make in my life?

3. Will I be open to God’s love for me during these three days? What might prevent my being open?
TALK #4: GOD LOVES YOU

Scripture References

Psalm 8
Genesis 3:4
Romans 12:1-2
2 Corinthians 5:18-20
1 John 4:7-12
Romans 5:8
1 Thessalonians 4:13
1 John 4:18
Hebrews 4:14-16
1 Corinthians 15:34; 10:1
2 Samuel 22:3
Psalms 4:5; 7:1
1 Timothy 6:17
Psalm 49:6
Genesis 3:1-3
Genesis 3:8
John 15:1-11
Romans 8:14-17