



Winter 2010

God's Extravagant Love

Jesus' life on earth was a revelation of a God who consistently goes *overboard* in His lavishing of mercy and love. In His parables alone, we see God in various images of such grace, such as a lender shockingly dismissing an enormous, unpayable debt; a shepherd going out into the night just to search for one strayed lamb; a merciful judge hearing the appeal of an undeserving tax collector. According to these stories, the all-encompassing breadth of His forgiveness doesn't even depend on our repentance, natural ability to love others, or honorable deeds. It depends only on the infinite love lodged in the heart of God for us.

One of the most familiar of Jesus' stories is about the father who had two sons in Luke 15:11-32. Toward the climax, we see two striking pictures: the starving, shame-driven prodigal trudging down the road thinking about the mess he's made, the embarrassment and heartache he's caused his dad to endure. He keeps rehearsing the remorseful apology he's composed in hopes that his father will consider hiring him as a servant.

There may be no greater statement about God in the Bible than what the father does when he sees his son from a distance. Filled with compassion, he excitedly *runs* out to meet him in a completely undignified manner, grabbing the dirty and tattered young man and embracing him with uninhibited joy. Before the son can even begin to recite his carefully-crafted speech of

shame, his father—without a trace of anger or resentment—is overcome with emotion that only unconditional love could provoke, and lavishes unbridled affection and acceptance on him.

The love of God is unlike any other love. It's not based on *anything* we do. If it was, and that "anything" were to give way, then wouldn't His love disintegrate as well? And that's the furthest possible thing that could happen. *Nothing* is stronger or deeper than His love. As 1 John 4:16 says, God *is* love. When I first read this paraphrased prayer by Ruth Calkins of Paul's testimony of this fact in Romans 8:35-39, it took my breath away to consider its reality.

I may fall flat on my face; I may fail until I feel old and beaten and done in. Yet Your goodness and love is changeless. All the music may go out of my life; my private world may shatter to dust. Even so, You hold me in the palm of Your steady hand. No turn in the affairs of my fractured life can baffle You. Satan with all his braggadocio cannot distract You. Nothing can separate me from Your measureless love-pain can't, disappointment can't, anguish can't. Yesterday, today, tomorrow can't. The loss of my dearest love can't. Death can't, life can't. Riots, wars, insanity, non-identity, hunger, neurosis, disease—none of these things, nor all of them heaped together can budge the fact that I am dearly loved, completely forgiven

and forever free through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son.

This is the gospel truth: you are loved, perfectly, unconditionally, and fully! And don't miss this fact: God not only loves the world; He loves *you*. Profoundly. You are loved unconditionally. Jesus tells you to make yourself at home in His love, and that the only reason you will ever be able to love Him will be because He loved you first. When your feet are firmly planted in the ground of this truth and are bathed in His extravagant love, experiencing its breadth and length and height and depth, your life *will* change. All your devotion to Him will flow out of this source!

The apostle John wrote this powerful declaration toward the end of his life: "*We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us*" (1 John 4:16). Possibly the most consequential question we'll ever have to answer is this: can we declare this truth with absolute conviction? These words turn an abstract proposition into a personal relationship; they are the heart and soul of the Christian faith, and the fundamental decision of your life. Being a Christian isn't the result of a moral choice or belief in lofty ideals, but rather, an ongoing encounter with a person—Jesus—who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Will you believe God and believe in the love He says He has for you?

(This is an excerpt from an article that will appear in the Easter edition of In Touch magazine.)

Looking for the Life-Light

Our home is quieter than it's ever been. I say that, not knowing whether it's true, but because it seems so. Our children are grown and gone. Our dog's deaf, blind and sleeps most of the time. Plus, my wife and I don't make a lot of noise. We begin most days silently praying together. Then we exchange kisses before heading into a busy day in a noisy world. Most evenings we arrive home from work feeling satisfied and weary.

Truthfully, I like this season of my life. And in a particular way, I'm especially looking forward to mulling over Christ's birth again this Advent. Years past, the opportunity was oftentimes swept away in a flood of hustling and bustling activities. Familiar traditions and superficial diversions dulled my senses, rendering me incapable of listening for and hearing God's voice speaking deep within. And even when I managed to avoid the holiday trappings I still missed the point.

But I'm more hopeful about the potential outcome of the kind of Advent that I'm feeling drawn into this year. That it'll be a season of sincere and intentional interior preparation. That, in turn, it'll open me more widely and connect me more deeply to the brilliant "Life-Light" that entered the world that first Christmas. That as I reflect on his first coming; how he lived, died and rose to live again, my slumbering spirit will be reawakened and my heart taken more fully captive by the astonishing reality that God loves me beyond my wildest dreams. And that being seized by the power of God's unbridled affection I'll also be compelled to wonder about the future, Second Advent—the coming of God's kingdom on earth and to hear the calling voice of God for me to do my part in the building of that kingdom.

After all, the "Life-Light" that descended as an infant into our world of conflict and landed in the feeding trough of a barnyard animal is much more than first meets the eye. It's not merely a soft, twinkling light, but a raging, consuming fire. This "Life-Light" is brighter, clearer, more

penetrating and powerful than any light that has ever shown. This "Life-Light" shines with such intensity and force that wherever it appears it scatters the proud, humbles the mighty, feeds the hungry, and sends the rich away empty-handed (Luke 1:51-53).

Yes, it's Advent; the season that's full of expectancy. Once again we're awaiting the arrival of God. And I'm beginning to feel like a child playing a game of "hide and seek" and I'm listening for God to begin counting down, "10, 9, 8...3, 2, 1...until he once again finally announces, "Here I come, ready or not!"

The question that remains is, "When God calls; will I be listening? And if I hear his call, will I be ready to answer the call?"

(This is an excerpt from a monthly blog I'm writing for CONVERSATIONS: A Forum for Authentic Transformation.

*It may be located at:
www.conversationsjournal.com/category/blog/*

The School of Spiritual Formation and Care of the Soul

Journey Resources and Potter's Inn is offering this five day event at St. Francis Springs Prayer Center March 27-31, 2011 in Stoneville, NC. We urge you to take advantage of this unique opportunity. The School is for pastors, missionaries, and leaders in churches and Christian organizations.

The rhythm of each day will be spaciouly designed, providing time for lively discussion, thoughtful teaching, quiet reflection, rest and study. Participants will meet in small groups and one-on-one with a spiritual director in the afternoons.

Please visit our web site at www.journeyresources.com for further information.

Fil's Perspective

This is a season of remarkable opportunity for Journey Resources. God has opened doors in various

strategic places and people's lives are being impacted across the United States and beyond.

Preaching & teaching ~ in addition to the numerous invitations Journey Resources receives, I'm assisting St. Mark's Church in Burlington, NC with their ongoing spiritual formation needs.

Writing ~ InterVarsity Press released my book *Breaking the Rules: Trading Performance for Intimacy with God* last spring.

Encouraging compassionate action rooted in prayer ~ local and global opportunities have increased for serving the world's poor, sick, and suffering and those following Jesus' call to aid them.

Spiritual direction ~ I have monthly one-on-one encounters with numerous individuals for the purpose of helping them continually grow in their relationship with God.

We remain intent on Journey Resources being as self-sustaining as possible. Fees for speaking engagements, retreats and book sales enable us to meet more than one third of our financial obligations. The remaining balance comes from caring people like you.

If you are not presently partnering with us and are able to help, we would be most grateful. All gifts to Journey Resources are tax deductible. No level of support could be too small to matter.

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Please accept my heartfelt thanks for partnering with us in whatever way you have in the past are now or may be led in the future.