The Family Friend
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The Love of God

For a writer the last article in a twelve-year column is a daunting challenge. For the last three months I pondered the subject and decided that the love of God is, personally, my only choice.

Whoever you are, whatever your background, regardless of your present obstacles, God loves you and you cannot change that! His love is unconditional, His mercies everlasting and His blessings are boundless. I offer the next few paragraphs as personal testimony to His love.

I did not grow up as a Christian (although I had a wonderful "Beaver Cleaver" early childhood). However, at age 13, my parents separated, at age 14, they divorced. After two alcoholic stepmothers in the next two years, my real mother and father remarried. A year and a half later they divorced again—four divorces between my ages of fourteen and eighteen. To be fair, my parents were very good, helpful, involved parents, they just didn't like each other very much.

Before my 15th birthday, the police (in my Dallas suburb) came to Agnew Junior High and arrested two others and me for a burglary we committed. Every month or two, I was suspended from school for various infractions. I quit high school at one point, but returned a few days later.

Near my 14th birthday, I lost a grandfather who was part of my heart. Near my 16th birthday, my brother (my best friend in life) was murdered in a drive-by shooting at a birthday party in the upscale neighborhood of White Rock Lake in Dallas.

I crashed and burned. Two years of alcohol, bad friendship choices, general frustration with life, and bad relationships with teachers led to failing grades (I had been a straight A student for eight years… before my parents' divorce and my brother's death. Don't tell me kids weather divorce just fine).

I had constant and nagging questions, "Where is my brother Bill? Will I get a chance to kill his murderer? Is there a heaven, a hell, a God? If so, how could he let these things happen?" Life was not good.

Then came a letter from a former neighbor. He had seen Bill's obituary and was overjoyed **that Bill had been baptized a few days before his death!** What? Bill, my drinking buddy and best friend? Baptized? What is this all about?

I was many miles away camping in the wilderness when Bill was baptized, and days later, murdered. What had he learned that he never had the opportunity to tell me?

The only answer: The love of God. Again, No matter who you are or where you have been in your spiritual walk (or lack of it), God loves you more than your wildest dreams, and you cannot make Him stop!

God drew me home with His love. Like the great poem of Francis Thompson, *The Hound of Heaven,* God's love chased me through life down the alleys and through the wilderness until I finally understood.

The love of God "has been poured out within our hearts …" Romans 5:5. Nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Romans 8:39. Paul links the love of God with the grace of our Lord and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 13:14.

Yes, you have work to do, keeping *your own heart* full of love toward God. **"Therein is one of life's most important concepts. Why? Because the "love of Christ controls us," if and when we remember the depth of His sacrifice on the cross"** (II Corinthians 5:14).

Your major job, as a Christian and as a parent, is to, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,"** (Mark 12:30). Then, as your children see your love in action and learn of God's love toward us, they begin to form the same love for Him.

Why is that so important? Because Jesus said in John 14:15, **"If you love me you will keep my commandments."** The more you love Jesus, the better you walk **"in His steps,"** (I Peter 2:21). Likewise, the more your children love Jesus the more they, too, will seek to walk **"in His steps."**

God loved me and kept reaching out when I turned my back. God sent the sweetest of angels to become my wife. In 1965, He sent my Sandy to touch my heart and convince me love is real.

He still loves me more than I understand, or will ever be able to comprehend. You must believe this genuine reality yourself. Immerse your children in that fact. Bathe your family's consciousness in the genuineness of the love of the Father and the Son. Run back to His love when ***you*** have been the prodigal.

Today, God still blesses me, as He did Paul and all who seek Him, putting us into service even though our former lives were in shambles without Him. Crazy kid turned preacher… whew, He must love me a lot to allow me to serve Him after being such a wild child!

God loves you, too, just as much as the day you were born! That is my point. The love of God (His love toward us and ours toward Him) controls us! We run home to a waiting Father overjoyed to see us, (cf. Luke 15:10-27). We return to a Father who forgives and forgets. We come back to a Savior who taught forgiveness seventy times seven (actually infinite).

The day I decided to accept God's love toward me, my life began to change drastically! And yours can too. That is the main message of the cross. Sing, and mean it, *"Your empty wasted years, He will restore, and your iniquity remember*

no more." As you bring Him your broken life (for the first time or the one hundred and first time), His grace forgives your heart and His love wipes away your tears**.—Ray Wallace**

Via ***Rocky Mountain Chistian***

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Grief

Grief is like peeling an onion. It comes off one layer at a time and you cry a lot. —Marion Balster, **Compassionate Friends**

The first part of grief is shock. It is real and yet not real. When grief hits, the mind goes into shock. One lady said, "I know we are planning a funeral for my son, but I expect that door to open at any moment and my son walk in." We don't need to rush at dealing with grief because everyone sets their own schedule. Don't let anyone schedule your grief for you. You will get there in your own time. One person said, ***"Don't Take My Grief Away From Me."***

The first layer that we peel is, "Will I Survive?" Will I ever be well again? How long will I hurt? Some other question may be asked, but they are all the same, Will I survive? At first one may know intellectually that he will survive, but not be sure emotionally. As one clings to hope, he learns he will survive.

How long will it hurt? No one can say how long your grief will last or how long it should last. You will walk through your grief in your own way and at your own schedule. Rather than grief recovery, maybe we need to think in terms of grief adjustment. In general terms, it is advised that one should allow at least two years to go through the grieving process. If you take more than two years, it does not mean you are weak. You will move at your own pace. (**To be continued**)

-From, ***Will I Survive This Pain?*** by Doug Manning, via Church Street Church of Christ bulletin