

Adventuring with God

By Jeanne Hedrick

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Love in Action

“Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams.”

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKI

This is the month when everyone’s mind turns to love and romance. I’ve never been convinced that Valentine’s Day would be as popular as it is without the exchange of chocolate, though. Isn’t it amazing how we can move through the winter months finding one excuse after another for our indulgence?

Consider the evidence ... we celebrate by giving candy with gusto to anyone who happens by our door in late October, and continue our sweets feast into November. (What’s Thanksgiving without fabulous desserts? And besides, there’s that Halloween candy to eat up...) Throughout December we spend the whole month partaking of treats at various gatherings.

Most of us step back and take a breather in January, but we’re quick to leave our New Year’s resolutions behind us when Valentine’s Day rolls around in February. Easter provides another excuse for us—arriving in either March or April—and in May we honor mothers by giving them expensive chocolates and flowers. No wonder we need to play hard all summer to work off the extra pounds!

But I digress. Chocolate is *not* the subject of this devotional, although many feel like Sandra J. Dykes: “Forget love—I’d rather fall in chocolate!” I want to talk about real love, not the kind we celebrate on February 14. In the world, all too often love is bought and sold, given and then taken back, talked about a lot, but less frequently lived out. Every once in a while, though, we see it ... love in action ... and it’s so harsh and dreadful

that we find it painful to contemplate and even harder to respond to.

I remember a story I read once, in a secular newspaper, which captured this kind of love that is at once beautiful and dreadful. A man’s young son had been hit by a car, but that wasn’t what was noteworthy about the incident. Hours after the ambulance had taken the boy away, the police had completed their investigation, and everyone else had gone home, the father of the boy was still on the scene, acting in a very peculiar way.

In the dark and cold night, drivers could see him purposefully waving them away from the stretch of road where his son had been killed. He seemed to be guarding it with a passion no one could figure out. Finally a passing police officer stopped to find out what was going on. When he asked the father what he was doing, he sobbed out his explanation. “I can’t help it, mister. I just can’t stand to see them tracking through his blood.”

That’s an expression of the kind of love I’m talking about—a fierce, loyal love that risks one’s own well being in order to secure a measure of dignity for the one he loves. It’s a heartbreaking example, but it’s helpful to us in understanding, to some extent, how God the Father sees the sacrifice of His Son. How does He feel when we carelessly and thoughtlessly track through, in a figurative sense, the blood Jesus freely poured out as an offering for sin? How arresting is the scene at Calvary to us? Does it make us slow down and ponder

the incredible cost associated with our salvation? Or do we speed on by, eager to get to the next thing, oblivious to how our callous attitude grieves the Father and dishonors His Son?

It's hard for us to grasp the enormity of the redemptive act carried out on the Cross, but the Father wants us to reverence it. To act as if it doesn't matter—"ho hum, that's a given. Tell me something I don't know"—is the same as tracking through His blood, and Scripture tells us how the Father will respond to that kind of attitude.

"Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:28-29)

For many years I only saw Calvary through the lens of my own self-interest—that God's love reached out to me and saved me from my sins through it. This is a profound truth that I *should* celebrate and find great comfort in. How blessed we are that *"God so loved the world [including me] that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

But the love expressed on the Cross wasn't just about you and me. In His willingness to become our sin offering, Jesus showed His love towards the Father as well. We see His love in action, His harsh and dreadful love, in Gethsemane as He wrestled with what lay before Him. He told His disciples, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."* Then, *"Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'"* (Matthew 26:38-39).

What was the Father's will? Isaiah 53 says it was the Father's will to bruise Him ... *"For the transgressions of my people He was stricken. He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied"* (vv. 8, 11) ... but we shouldn't assume that the Father was unmoved by what He asked His Son to do. Like the father at the scene of his son's death, He is grieved to see us heedlessly rush by and dishonor His beloved Son.

Many have tried to figure out why Jesus would cry out on the cross, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"* Reading scriptures like Habakkuk 1:13, they conclude that it was God the Father's holiness that prompted Him to turn away; He couldn't look upon all that sin being borne by Christ.

That may be true, but I sometimes wonder if there might be another reason for the inexplicable sense of separation that Jesus felt. Maybe love is the real reason He pulled away. After all, God looks on the sin of mankind every day and doesn't withdraw. Perhaps He couldn't bear to watch His sinless, spotless Lamb suffer such pain, humiliation, scorn, and injustice ... even if it was the only way to save us.

What we may have failed to grasp in the Gospel account is how painful it was for both the Father and the Son to accomplish our redemption. Oswald Chambers observed, "The Cross is the point where God and sinful man merge with a crash and the way of life is opened—but the crash is on the heart of God." (*My Utmost for His Highest*, April 6).

We are approaching the most important season of the calendar year for Christians. I can't speak for you, but I know that I need to ponder again with wonder and heartfelt gratitude what real love, love in action, looks like. Songwriter Stuart Townend captured the profound mystery and love we find at Calvary in his song "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" (1995). Here are some of the beautiful lyrics.

How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure.

How great the pain of searing loss, the Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the Chosen One bring many sons to glory.

It was my sin that held Him there until it was accomplished.
His dying breath has brought me life; I know that it is finished.

Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer.
But this I know with all my heart: His wounds have paid my ransom.