

“Stories ~ (3) Lost Things” [8.23.09]

When you think about God, how do you imagine God to be? What picture or image of God does your heart most resonate w/or connect w/?

Let’s take some pictures from scripture & see which one comes closest to connecting in your heart:

Maybe when you think about God = you imagine that...

1. God is love
I John 4: 8b – 10 or p. 943 in pew Bible

Maybe when you think about God = you imagine that...

2. God is comforting
Isaiah 66: 13
“I will comfort you there in Jerusalem as a mother comforts her child.”

Maybe this picture is closer to your heart, that...

3. God is forgiving
Romans 3: 21 – 26 or p. 859 in pew Bible

Maybe you imagine God in a different way, that...

4. God is creative
Psalm 121: 1 – 2
“...where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven & earth.”

Maybe you just trust that...

5. God is good
Lamentations 3: 20 – 26 or p. 624 in pew Bible

Or maybe this simple but powerful image resonates best with you that...

6. God is protective
Isaiah 58: 8
“Your godliness will lead you forward, & the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.”

The Bible is filled w/images that reinforce how Magnificent - - Awesome - - & Mighty our God authentically happens to be!

Growing up I wish I could have had one of these healthy pictures of God to embrace, but that just was not the case. Until I was in my mid-20s the sole picture I possessed was that God is TERRIFYING!

This terrifying image was reinforced every time we went to church; using strong passages like = Hebrews 10: 27 + 30 – 31 or p. 926 in the pew Bible

I accepted Jesus because I was terrified of the consequences ~ still real today. Don’t get me wrong, fear is not a bad motivator; but this type of fear-based relationship will not sustain anyone over the long haul!

The Bible has another picture of God that deeply humbles me; it’s one that my heart safely resonates with today ☺

I. The story of (3) Lost Things

A. (R) Luke 15: 1 – 3 or p. 797 in pew Bible

- Notice who was coming to hear Jesus teach ☺
 - The self-righteous + notorious sinners = that's church @ it finest ☺
- The fact that these type of people with 'doubtful reputations' were not only coming to hear Jesus teach - - but Jesus was also befriending them & doing the forbidden; eating with them = treating them with dignity ☺
- These [simple acts of kindness] infuriated the self righteous-religious types; their discontent - - their grumbling [triggered Jesus] to tell this story ☺

[WATCH] how God moves in these 3 parables = much different picture:

B. (R) Luke 15: 4 – 7 = LOST sheep

- The story pictures a humble shepherd of very modest means; he is alone w/out the luxury of someone else to help guard the flock [lonely job].
 - Each night he would count his sheep before putting them up; that night he comes up 1 short.
 - with no hesitation he leaves the other sheep that are safe & goes after the lone sheep that is LOST.
- In antiquity the shepherd would look until he failed to find the sheep, found its tattered remains, or located the animal.
 - v 7 is somewhat confusing = re(R) v. 7

The point is that the LOST sheep receives special attention over those that are safe & sound!

Powerful imagery of God joyfully carrying someone LOST on His shoulders ☺

C. (R) Luke 15: 8 – 10 = LOST coin

- This story is filled with significant imagery:
 - in that day married women wore a headband that was made up of coins strung together; these coin were typically given to the bride by her father when she was given in marriage.
 - These headbands served several functions in the life of a married woman:
 - It declared her status as a married woman = no longer available
 - Those coins also declared her independence = if something were to happen to her husband = she would be left w/no financial support, these coins were able to give her a fresh start.
 - It was also used to identify sinful women = when a woman had been guilty of unfaithfulness; a coin was sometimes removed from her headband to signal everybody who saw her of her mistake.

- These coins held considerable value = all (10) coins brought glory to the bride; but as long as a coin was missing; her beauty was marred & incomplete! No wonder the coin was so precious & invaluable to the woman!

I'm humbled how God always takes the initiative toward us = in our direction!
Of all the religions in the world;
Only Christianity pictures a God who pursues us; who cares to search for us.

One final picture that adds color to the God's true nature:

II. LOST SON

A. (Q) 1st part of the story of the prodigal son = Luke 15: 11 - 19

Scholars agree that the younger son was probably between the ages of 17 & 21 and He knew that if He demanded his way; no chance of authentic relationship. ☹

1. 1st unusual aspect of the story = was the son's request;

- Literally, the youngest boy literally told his dad = "You just aren't dying quick enough...times wasting away & I'm missing out on a whole lot of life. Give me my share of the inheritance ~ I want to cash out early"

2. Another unusual feature of the story = was the dad's reaction.

- He has just been deeply insulted by his own flesh & blood, but He just consents.
 - He allows the younger son to w/draw physically w/his inheritance taking the risk that both child & property would be lost great picture of faith

B. Bible says, his boy took his ½ of the inheritance & hit the road; met some new girls & learned some new bar tricks = big time ☺ Bible says that, "...he wasted all his money in wild living."

- At rock bottom ~ slopping the hogs which was not an upwardly mobile profession for a good Jewish boy ~ his mind drifted back to his HOME!
 - He sucks up his pride ~ ~ musters up an apology ~ ~ and hopes beyond all hope his daddy will at least let stay outside the main house w/the servants.

C. Don't miss his motivation = his return is not intrinsically motivated!

He does not return because...

- He has broken his daddy's heart =He stumbles home simply to survive ~ His journey into the "far country" has left him both physically & morally bankrupt ☹
- Disenchanted w/life, the young man weaved his way home; not from a burning desire to see his dad; but just to stay alive!

Ever been here - - your circumstances are upside down; abandoned by everyone in your new life; wishing you could just go home & be loved?

[INSERT] Max Lucado = a Mother's love

This is where the story takes yet another unusual turn...

C. (R) Luke 15: 20a = "...His Father saw him coming;" He was waiting...

D. (R) v. 20b maybe the most touching verse in all the Bible

- His dad did not cross examine the boy - - bully him - - lecture him on ingratitude or insist on repayment for his waste in the far country. [INSTEAD...]
- His Father was overjoyed just to see him, because HOME had never been the same since the day he had left!
- I actually believe the parable was misnamed by the early church. It tells us much more about a FATHER'S LOVE than a SON'S SIN!
- I'm finally beginning to see the authentic picture of GOD & His GRACE; these (3) parables are actually about ME!
 - I am the lost sheep that shepherd has left the flock to find;
 - I am the lost coin that the woman frantically searched until I was found. whom the Father scans the horizon each day;
 - I am the prodigal whom the Father scans the horizon each day; I am the beloved of God!

III. GRACE teaches us, that God loves because of WHO GOD is, not because of who we are.

A. Self – Esteem ~ Sociologists explain that our self-image @ the end of the day is largely dependent upon what kind of messages you have received from other people. Am I liked? Am I loved? We receive these answers from friends, our neighbors + family members that possibly validate our personal value = VERY dangerous!

B. Theory of the Looking – Glass self; [Sociologists explain...]

- You become WHAT the most important person in your life [wife – father – boss – money – coach – etc.] THINKS YOU ARE.
- GRACE means I am the one God loves - - NOT just words; but actions!
- [INSERT] a Dad's love
- Bible gives us a similar picture of God = (R) I John 4: 9 - 10

My intrinsic value TODAY is based on a God who pursued me @ my worst, a God who gave His very best so that I could be HOME with Him!