

LOVE



Sunday, December 20, 2015

In October of 2014 I was involved in a pretty serious car accident that left me with what's called a "traumatic brain injury" (TBI). I still have some lingering effects that may or may not go away, such as fatigue and some short-term memory issues. There is a difference, though, between my brain and my heart. I recently quoted Scripture to someone who was aware of my injury, and they asked, "How can you remember those verses?" My immediate Spirit-led response was, "Scripture comes from a different place than my brain." My heart recalls well, and it often reminds my brain.

As a part of my ongoing therapy, Shelly and I attend a support group for people/couples who have or had TBI. These are wonderful people who all share a common experience and are learning to work through it. The first time there, I listened to their stories. Some are now divorced because their spouses couldn't handle the struggle and the change in their lives. Hearing their stories, I realized that I had taken for granted that Shelly would walk with me through this; it never occurred to me that she wouldn't take this difficult journey with me. She has been the epitome of love and faithfulness to me, even though the changes have been hard at times - likely more difficult on her than I even know. This is an example of God's love to us!

Regardless of TBI, my heart has no difficulty calling to mind God's love for me:

"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:
Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."
Lamentations 3:21-23, niv

No matter what you are going through, let your heart call to mind God's great love for you.

Pastor Mike

Monday, December 21, 2015

The Father's Love

From the beginning, I grew up in a non-Christian home where my brothers and I were taught about Buddhism which was my mother's religion. Although I didn't know anything about Christianity, when I found myself alone in the woods after running away one night, I prayed for help, not knowing if anyone would hear. This wouldn't be the only time, as I ran away from home often. Years later, when I had hit rock bottom as an alcoholic, I began to learn about God through attending AA meetings.

As I was growing in my walk in faith, learning about my Father's love continued.

Having a child was one of my greatest joys. It wasn't until going through a very difficult divorce, and child custody that my faith was going to be tested. I didn't realize at that time what I was about to go through, loving my daughter.

The fight was on, court date after court date, lawyer after lawyer, losing everything I worked for. I learned that almost always custody usually goes to the mother. This battle lasted four years. To this day what my daughter had to go through still upsets me. I did get temporary custody, for about a year. The situation had gotten so bad for my daughter and I that I decided to give her back, so the insanity would stop. This was the toughest decision I had to make.

Reaching out to my Father in heaven in tears, praying on my knees, I was a broken man. My spirit was robbed of all hope, joy, and peace. I felt I couldn't do this anymore, I wanted to run away. Then one night I had a dream. My Father in heaven was telling me to be patient, your daughter needs you. I told Him I can't, I have nothing left; He told me, I will fight for you. I woke up strong and renewed. The next few court dates things started to change miraculously, and I was granted full custody of my daughter.

I cannot praise my Father in heaven enough, especially for the verse John 3:16. His love for His children is so strong, that He gave His only Son for us.

Thank you Father.

Nick Nichols

Tuesday, December 22, 2015

Ups and downs. Highs and lows. The best of times and the worst of times. Our lives are full of them. During the low times, we cry out for God - we need Him and we know it! With God's help we rise to the occasion and can experience a natural high. However, it's during these times that we should not forget what got us there – the power and love of God. If we forget about how God's love got us through the rough times, we may find ourselves trying to do things on our own. "I got this." "This isn't anything I can't handle."

As we read through the Old Testament, we see God's chosen people journey through the highs and the lows over and over again. It is at times, frustrating. "Ok, Israel, when will you remember all that God has done for you?" "Why do you forsake Him?" "Why do you worship other gods?" If I were God, I would have washed my hands of this chosen people and chosen another! However, it is a good thing for you and me (and the Israelites) that I am not. God disciplines His children for their disobedience and betrayal, but then He reaches out to them in love! Despite their selfish actions, God tells His children that He loves them and has a plan for them.

During this week of Advent, we recognize God's love for us in the fact that He would give His son as a ransom for our mistrust and betrayal (John 3:16). We remember that God reaches out to His creation in love. Perfect love. A love that is patient and kind; a love that does not envy or boast; a love that is not arrogant or rude; a love that rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends. (1 Corinthians 13)

As you journey through the holiday season, with all of its hustle and bustle, take time and remember God's love for you. The love that took the form of an innocent, little baby who would change our lives forever. Remember that God's love for you is not for the moment, but is without end! Walk with Him and learn from Him as you climb the mountain tops together, so that you will learn to trust in Him and His love for you.

Pastor Jason Worthington

Wednesday, December 23, 2015

Love Can Make You Rich

Imagine that no matter what happens in your everyday life, you can go home where someone who loves you is waiting to care for you and make you feel welcome; someone who has been thinking of how to make you feel secure and cared for. She will do everything she can to make your home a place of comfort and refuge. She is ready and willing to provide the encouragement and ease of strain you need.

How much more is the realization that no matter where you go, the great God of the universe is caring for you and providing for you in the same way with even greater love and resources!

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth
to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.”
2 Chronicles 16:9

And think how you feel when your granddaughter pauses a moment in her busy teenage life and tells you that she “loves you” then has to hurry on.

I am rich! Money and possessions have nothing to do with it. IT IS LOVE!

Norm Koenig



Thursday, December 24, 2015

It's hard to believe that it's that time of year again. How does the time go so quickly? Christmas is right around the corner. But what is the real meaning of Christmas? Is it the gifts under the tree, the lights on the house, the cards in the mail, family dinners, snow in the yard, stockings hanging in the living room? Perhaps it is wishing your friends and co-workers a "Merry Christmas!" Is this really Christmas? For our family it is one of the most joyous Christian holidays, a time to remember the birth of Christ our Savior. Christmas is a time to share our blessings with one another, and to be surrounded by the people we love. It is a time for giving, and more importantly, it is a reminder of how much God loves us.

For me this year, Christmas is a time of reflection. It's a time to remember how much God loves our family to have protected us, strengthened us, and loved us through some difficult times. It will be a time of continued healing and renewed strength. This Christmas will also be a season of great joy. Who would have ever thought we would have a daughter in the O'Neill family! We are absolutely thrilled to have Sean's wife, Jen, in our family and we love her so much. Christmas is a time of God showing His great love for us. Christmas is when we celebrate the birth of the Christ child. God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to be born, and His birth brought great joy to the world. Shepherds, wise men, and angels all shared in the excitement of knowing about this great event. They knew this was no ordinary baby, as the prophets had told of His coming hundreds of years before. And on that blessed evening the star stopped over Bethlehem just to mark the way for those who were looking for this special child. I invite you to read and reflect on God's love as you read Luke 2: 1-21.

Look at Christmas in a new way this year. Reflect on the love of Jesus and invite Him into your heart. You will then experience the love of Christmas and come to know the true reason we rejoice in this season... Christ!

Shelly O'Neill



Friday, December 25, 2015

Birthdays always make people feel celebrated and special – the center of the attention. Although they can be (and often are) celebrated alone, they are always much more fun when celebrated with family and friends. You've arrived at today's reading after 26 days of family moments; we have all shared the readings together of family stories and lessons – all part of your spiritual family tree.

Now we've arrived at the day to celebrate the birthday of the One who has made us all family. Whether you are reading this alone or with your family and friends, this birthday celebration is the largest gathering on record because you are celebrating with thousands of believers in Jesus who are gathered around His throne in heaven (Revelation 7) – all the saints who have gone before us, and at the same time you are celebrating with believers all around the world, including your West Valley Church family, who are also gathering and reading this today. This is a significant birthday!

Yet the One whom we celebrate today – the center of attention – has turned His attention to this world - to the hurting, and grieving, to the sinner, to the confused, and sick, and lonely. And He has turned His attention to *you*. He celebrates *you*. It is, to Him, as if this is your birthday. And in a way, it is:

“Jesus replied, ‘With all the earnestness I possess I tell you this: Unless you are born again, you can never get into the Kingdom of God.’ ‘Born again!’ exclaimed Nicodemus. ‘What do you mean? How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?’ Jesus replied, ‘What I am telling you so earnestly is this: Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Men can only reproduce human life, but the Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven; so don’t be surprised at my statement that you must be born again!’ ‘... God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it. There is no eternal doom awaiting those who trust Him to save them.’” (John 3:3-7, 16-18, tlb)

Celebrate Jesus' birthday today. I pray you will also celebrate your born-again birthday. And remember that you have come to this day with an enormous spiritual family tree to celebrate with!

Pastor Mike

Merry
Christmas





west valley church

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