

Healing Love

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Whether life is worth living depends on whether there is love in life. R.D. Laing

The meeting had been long, but exciting. The people were so happy in praising God, which they had done with such enthusiasm, that those whose personalities were not free stood out in the crowd.

At the end of the meeting, among those who responded to the invitation to receive prayer, was a tall, fine-looking woman. She walked quickly to the front and stood trembling among the others, her fingers intertwined in a tight clasp. As I laid my hands on her to pray I could feel the tremor of tension through the body. Her face was strained and set.

I started to pray, asking God to lift the feeling of rejection, remove the spirit of heaviness and clothe her with a garment of praise. She trembled the more. I continued praying: 'Lord, may she know that you love her as she is, that you receive her because you love her, not for her performance in life.'

Suddenly her body began to shake and the stifled sounds of restrained weeping could be heard. I looked at her. The tears

running down her pale face were bringing the mascara with them, forming dark rivulets. I continued to pray until I felt the trembling cease, calmness come. Now I looked and saw her lips quietly moving as she whispered, 'I love you, Lord. I love you, Lord. Thank you for your love.'

The hurting and the weeping had given way to healing and worship. Her soul was safe and secure in the knowledge of God's love, and now she was free to worship him.

At times we can feel ourselves trapped on the wheel of life, busied with busyness. Life becomes cold, demanding, frustrating, lonely. We find ourselves building a front before people, where the face smiles while the soul aches. Where the jovial laugh hides a crying heart.

Most of us have been concerned throughout life with what others think of us, and almost imperceptibly we have built up facades around the true self. We try to appear before others as we wish them to perceive us to be-which is rarely what we actually are. But in the presence of God it is impossible to maintain a pretence. Before the burning holiness of the Almighty, all that is untrue to ourselves disappears and what we are stands true before him.

John Steinbeck, the Nobel Prize-winning American novelist and playwright, in describing the way he came to terms with his true self, gave this account. 'I went into the mountains and stayed two years. I was snowed in eight months of the year and saw no-one except my two Airedales. There were millions of fir trees and the snow was deep and it was very quiet. And there was no-one to pose for anymore. You can't have a show with no audience. Gradually all the poses slipped off and when I came out of the hills I didn't have any poses anymore. It was rather sad, but it was far less trouble. I am happier than I have ever been in my life.'

We don't need to go to the mountains-just into the presence of God. In his presence there is no need for posing, no need for a facade. His love gently removes the spirit of heaviness, and his Spirit clothes us with the garment of praise. In the exhilaration of worship the healing hand touches the weary soul and renews it. What life has unravelled is woven afresh, what life has broken is put back together again. So effortlessly, while worshipping the Lord, the healing waters flow.

True worship can only come from the heart set free. Free to be oneself, to accept oneself, to know one is accepted and loved by God. Worship is the singing of the liberated lover running along hidden paths to rendezvous with the Beloved.

I have often been approached after preaching with the words, 'How did you know my situation? Who told you about me?' Others, after prayer, have said to me, 'You knew, didn't you?'

I've looked puzzled and replied, 'Knew what?', only to find they have been astonished at the accuracy of detail made known when praying for them. We need to realise: the God who made and redeemed us knows us through and through. He wants us to be aware of his intimate concern and love for us.

I recall walking at a convention among the people camped in the fields adjoining the auditorium-hundreds of tents and caravans with people making their lunches outside. Then I entered the cafeteria, where there must have been sixty or seventy people eating their lunch in groups, laughingly sharing the joys of the week.

It was there that I noticed her. She looked so miserable. Everyone else was bubbling with excitement and sharing their experiences, but she sat apart. She paid no attention to others. Indeed, it looked as though she was making a deliberate effort not to acknowledge that they were in the room. She ate her food with single concentration of mind.

'How strange,' I thought, 'amidst such happiness and joy to be so miserable.'

Within minutes of leaving the cafeteria I had forgotten all about her-until that evening, as we were worshipping in the meeting. During one of the songs of praise I noticed her, about three rows back. While everyone around was in an ecstasy of praise and worship, she stood transfixed, immobile, looking miserable, ensnared by the spirit of heaviness.

At the close of the preaching of the Word a large number of people came to be ministered to, among them this young woman. I made my way deliberately towards her. I felt that not only was it imperative that she should touch God, but that I was best positioned at that moment to pray the prayer of release for her.

As I touched her forehead with my hand she just broke and the tears and sobbing became intense. I called for one of the lady counsellors near at hand to take her aside and share with her a little.

Later, I found out her story. As a young woman she had been dreadfully abused within her own family. She had been constantly put down and told she was ugly while her sister was pretty, that she was stupid while everyone else in the house was commendable. She was isolated within the family. As she grew up, she turned in upon herself more and more and began saying to herself the *very* things others had said to her. Inevitably, she ended up convinced she was unattractive, that no-one wanted her around, that no-one would ever love her. She wished she had never been born.

Then a friend at work, realising the sadness of her life, had reached out to her to share about Christ and invited her to come with them to this week-long convention. Before she realised what she was doing she had said yes, overwhelmed at being invited to come to *anything* with others.

The side of her that longed to be involved had grasped at the opportunity but she was soon thinking to herself, 'What have I done? What kind of week is it? Will there be many there? I'm sure I'll seem a misfit.' But feeling it was too late to withdraw, she had come.

She had been surprised to see the thousands of people around so happy and excited. But instead of rubbing off on to her, their enjoyment, because it was in such stark contrast to her own sad state, had made her feel more of a misfit than ever.

That night in the meeting I had closed the preaching with, 'Whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever you feel, God loves you, too.' That was the trigger of faith for her. She knew it was God speaking to her and she had come forward to turn her life over to him.

I can't begin to describe to you the difference it made. Over the next few days, whenever I saw that young woman she was laughing and smiling; happiness was all over her. It seemed as though the years of despairing misery were wiped away in a minute. She entered readily into the songs of praise and worship. In the fellowship of his presence and his people she had come alive with the beauty of the Lord.

God loves you, too. The love of God is the strongest motivation for our worship. We love him because he first loved us

Erich Fromm wrote, 'Immature love says, "I love you because I need you." Mature love says, "I need you because I love you."' It isn't the form of our worship, our posture in worship, the place of worship; it is the love of our heart extravagantly overflowing in gratitude to God that brings a smile to the face, happiness to the heart, and sprinkles the joy of God on others.