

## Rewiring Our Image of God

If you can do it, think of God unedited by how you're *supposed* to see Him. Not what religion or your mind tells you—oh, God is love—but your heart. What images come to mind?

Principal?

Dictator?

Judge?

The image I fight is of Him standing in front of me with folded arms saying, “Well, you’ve sure screwed up a lot but I have to let you in anyway.”

It’s probably why I cry every time I read Luke 15. You know the passage. Whole books have been written on it, music videos done, modernizations have tried to convey the message in a more compelling way. And there’s good reason for all the focus. It is the entire gospel in twenty-two verses. With it, Jesus encapsulates the core of the Father’s heart towards us.

The part that reduces me to tears? The first part of verse 20:

Luke 15:20 "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. " And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' (NASB)

My Bible has little notations down the middle of the page sometimes showing the literal translation of a word, and in this case it puts a whole new spin on the verse. Before I dug into the literal translation of *ran*, *embraced* and *kissed* I pictured the Father jogging up to the son, giving him a swift hug, a pat on the back and a quick kiss on the cheek. A kind of Jewish-Italian-Mafia/Marlon Brando thing. “Welcome back to the family kid!”

Wrong.

This is how I’d write the translation based on the literal meaning of the words:

Luke 15:20 "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and **raced toward his son like an Olympic sprinter. When he reached him the father nearly knocked him to the ground with his passion and joy. Seizing him with all his strength, the father wrapped his son up in his arms, and squeezed him tighter and tighter into his chest as tears flowed down the Father's cheeks onto his beard. The father kissed his son feverously over and over and over again.**

That’s how God feels about you.

Notice two more things before you go. When did the Father do the things above? Before the son confessed or after? And what was the Father’s reaction after the son did confess?

He ignored the confession.

And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

Amazing.

He doesn't even address the sin.

Don't get me wrong. God abhors sin. Cannot abide it. But that's why He sent Jesus; to abolish it forever.

But there are no folded arms, no cruel scolding, no tyrant or dictator to be found. Only unbridled passionate love.

Ask Him. Ask Him now to rewire your thinking about who He is.

And run into his violent embrace.

## **Stickers Too Cool to Use**

I grew up in the 70s so you can imagine what those stickers looked like; flowers, smiley faces and psychedelic colors.

But the reason I treasured the stickers is they were customized. Yep. Each sticker said things like, “Far out, Jim!” “Jim turns me on!” “Keep on truckin’, Jim!”

Now you understand the headline above, don’t you? I was ten. You couldn’t use stickers like these just anywhere. No way. I had to find the perfect place. So I held onto them.

Weeks. Months. Years. Uh, yes, decades.

I found them recently, thirty years later, in a shoe box stuffed with hot wheels and other childhood memories. And I had a light bulb moment.

I have a friend that says anything worth doing, is worth doing badly. In other words, the perfect moment to attempt something, the perfect circumstances to use your gifts almost never happens. The planets rarely align while birds outside your window sing Handel’s Messiah, signaling you to take action.

Maybe never.

You’re probably never going to get it exactly right. But if you take action, even the tiniest action, at least you’ve done something.

So peel off your favorite sticker and use it. Today. God says walk as wise men and make the most of your time (stickers) because the days are evil.

My stickers? I was in the garage when I found them, so now they’re on the sides of my table saw.

Pretty groovy huh?

## **Throw Caution To the Wind? Not Good Enough. We Must Crush it**

A couple summers back I stood on the edge of a twenty-foot cliff looking down on the crystal waters of Lake Chelan, willing my heart-rate to get below 160.

It wasn't the fear of jumping. I'd already done that at least ten times.

It was the flip.

My family and another family had been climbing and jumping for over an hour when my buddy-thrill-seeker A.C., flipped from the cliff and spluttered to the surface with a laugh on his face and a challenge in his eyes.

I ignored it.

My eleven-year-old, Micah, however, did not.

I went to stand beside Micah as he struggled through the pros and cons of flipping. I wish I could say my attention was 100% on him and his choice, but I shifted between encouraging him and trying to make the voice inside shut up. The voice saying, "If he does it, you have to do it."

Micah's flip was perfect. A silky smooth rotation, feet smashing into the azure water and a beaming countenance when he surfaced.

At that point I made a deal with God—as if I needed confirmation. I told Him if someone would come up to me ask if I was going to flip, I'd do it. If not, I'd leave—with forty pounds of regret hanging around my neck.

One minute later my wife approached.

Yes, of course I flipped. A.C.'s wife even got a picture of it.

What's your flip? The thing in your life you know you must do? Mend a relationship? Quit a job and start a new one? Write that book?

Too often we/I live with caution as our intimate friend, when it can be our most insidious enemy.

The thing that came to mind as you read this? You need to do it.

In the moment you act, and crush caution, I believe great freedom will come.

## **You Still Haven't Found What You're Looking For?**

Even if you don't have one of U2's albums, you've heard the name Bono; maybe you've seen him profiled on a TV magazine show, or seen footage of him meeting with world leaders.

But this isn't about politics.

It's about U2's song, "*I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For.*"

Now the knee jerk Christian reaction to a song like that is, "What Bono looking for is Jesus."

But those of you familiar with U2 on more than a cursory basis know a number of their songs speak of Jesus quite prominently and back in the mid 80's the contemporary Christian music scene embraced them as one of the more notable Christian bands.

My point is not to debate the spiritual condition of Bono or the other members of U2 since only God can accurately judge the heart; it's to have you consider the words of the song for a moment.

*I believe in the kingdom come  
Then all the colors will bleed into one  
Bleed into one  
Well yes I'm still running*

*You broke the bonds and you  
Loosed the chains  
Carried the cross  
Of my shame  
Of my shame  
You know I believed it*

*But I still haven't found what I'm looking for  
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for*

Sound like Bono might have met Jesus? It does to me too. But it still isn't enough for him. With that in mind roll this question around your cranium for a few seconds:

In the I'll-admit-what-I'm-really-thinking-deep-down-inside-moment ... have *you* found what *you're* looking for?

I haven't either.

If I'm honest, the song strikes a chord with me because I can relate to it. Intimately.

At times I almost catch what I'm looking for, but never completely. Sometimes it's there in my peripheral vision of experience but when I spin towards it, it vanishes. Oh, you understand that? You've been there? Where you almost touch it ...

A conversation with a friend that takes the relationship deeper than we've ever been. A time of laughter with my wife that is a waterfall of joy. A masterpiece of crimson and gold smeared across the sky at the end of a summer day and it's almost within my reach.

A day in the heart of July on the Oregon coast where the trees are brilliant green and the waves are foaming cotton. Times of worship where I'm lost in the Spirit of God, staggered by my imagination and emotion.

But it's still not enough. I haven't found what I'm looking for.

Most of you are already ahead of me.

We're looking for eternity aren't we? We're looking for the final restoration of our mortal bodies into perfect, eternal ones. Where our struggle with the flesh and the enemy and the pull of the world vanish like morning dew.

We're looking for that moment when we see Jesus racing towards us with a smile that would blind those on earth and He cries, "Well done! Come enter into a Kingdom of glory beyond comprehension, made for you before the foundation of the world!"

We're looking for friendship and community without all our insecurities (and theirs) weighing it down. For dazzling summer mornings that go on forever. For bodies that will never grow tired or old. To dance with abandon, to let all our inhabitations go and be truly free of every chain that now holds us back from the glory He longs to restore to us.

If you're still with me, then one more question:

If we know what we're really looking for, why do we invest so much time into things we're *not* really looking for?

## What If You're *Not* Tough?

“When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”

That ancient cliché might have inspired you to greater heights when you first heard it from a coach or some cheesy late night motivational speaker on TV.

But what if you weren't tough back then?

Even worse, what if you're not tough today?

I'll let you in on a little secret. Very few of us are tough. Most of us are scared shitless.

About a year ago Darci and I and another couple, in an evening of absolute vulnerability, described how we saw ourselves, in detail. Frightening. But as each of us spoke the look on the others faces wasn't sympathy or judgment; it was bewilderment.

It just didn't make sense.

"I'm ugly." "I haven't accomplished one thing of value in life." "I'm a poor friend."

We each wondered how the other could think that. It wasn't true.

We don't see ourselves as others see us. And we certainly don't see ourselves the way God sees us. We believe the lies.

And that is our problem.

I don't think we need to be tough to get going. We just need to clearly see how God sees of us. If we did the chains would fall and we would step into our glory. So easy to say with the mind. So difficult to grasp with the heart.

As Brennan Manning often quotes, “God made man in His own image and man has returned the favor.” In other words we have created an image of God that is often stern, unrelenting, disappointed in us and ready to rain fire on the tiniest of missteps.

And so we readily accept the names the enemy gives us: Loser. Ugly. Sinner. Disappointing. Inadequate. Lazy.

So how do we turn it around? How do we see ourselves the way God sees us? Three things that might help:

1. Read the Word. There we discover how God truly feels about us.
2. Choose to fight back. When the thoughts come, the lies attack, speak the truth of the Word. It is our sword against the lies.

3. Gather others around you that will fight for your heart and speak truth.

Man has been given the ultimate gift; volition, freewill, choice. God will never force us to choose fight. It's often why our prayers of "Oh Lord, take this away from me ..." aren't answered. God is saying "*You* do it. I've given you all the tools necessary to climb out of this ... so make the choice and climb." (See Eph. chapter 16)

Think parting of the Red Sea. It was God, but Moses had to choose to do his part and lift his staff. Think Jericho. God couldn't march around the city for Joshua. He had to choose to do that part.

Walk on water? I believe Jesus would have given any of the disciples the ability to do it. But Peter was the only one that chose to get out of the boat.

We can act or remain as we are. Our choice.

What will you choose?

## **I Wish I Knew My Wife Better**

I got lucky in love.

Do Christians believe in luck? Alright, call it blessing, divine design or destiny.

Whatever your term, Darci mesmerized me from the moment I met her at Western Washington University in the fall of 1983. She was my dream girl and twenty-two-years later the feeling has only intensified.

We know what each other is thinking at a glance. Complete conversations with just our eyes are typical.

But there's so much I will never know. I don't know what it's like to walk down stairs, pain shooting into my knees with every step. She can't wholly understand the stress of running a business and never feeling like you're truly off work. I can't know what it's like to live with two boys and a husband that are pack rats.

Yet it's as close in this life as I'll come to knowing another completely.

We desperately long to know and be known, and though the gift of exceptional closeness with a spouse or friend sometimes happens, we still see each other through the glass darkly.

Now the good news: In the new heaven and on the new earth, we will know and be known by the One who longs for us with His whole heart. And we'll know our husbands, wives, children and friends more deeply, more completely than is possible here and now.

Plus there will be hundreds, thousands, millions of people from across the nations and across the centuries for us to get to know, each and every one fascinating, engaging and full of riches.

It's coming. Don't worry. It's coming.

## So Why Didn't You Try It?

Do you have any regrets?

Me too. Many.

But I have some good news. Life is a dress rehearsal.

Back in the early 90's I had a quote above my desk that said, "*Life is not a dress rehearsal.*" It was supposed to make me get out there and do something bold and brave and revolutionary.

All it did was make me feel guilty.

My hesitancy was often fueled by the thought that since life is NOT a dress rehearsal, I better not screw it up and I'd better not try anything until I knew it would work, knew it would turn out right for me and those around me and knew it was a safe bet.

But as Robert Altman says, "*To play it safe is not to play.*"

As I moved into my late thirties mortality began easing down into my heart instead of just residing in my head. Yep, I began believing I was going to die some day. It made me consider all kinds of thoughts; for example, is eternity real?

I realized if you're a child of God a dress rehearsal is exactly what this life is. It's an opportunity to take chances and screw up and then try something else. This life is just a shadow, just the beginning, just the cover page of the glorious novel that never comes to an end. So blow it! Try it and fail miserably. Then try it again.

Look back on your life. What are the accomplishments you're most proud of? Without question the ones where you got out on the skinny branches and took a risk. Where you had to exercise a pinch of faith ... or maybe a truckload of faith.

Think of the parable of the talents. I'm not so sure it was about winning or losing as much as it was about taking a shot. The servant who did nothing? Not a pleasant outcome.

What would have happened if he'd risked the investment and lost all of it? Is it possible the master would have said, "Well done, you took the shot, you took the risk."? I think it's very possible.

Remember, anything you do knowing for certain it will work is sin. Did I just say what you thought I said? Yes. Whenever we do something without faith (the evidence of things not seen) it is sin. (Rom 14:23)

Planning on any sin today?

## Ripple On

You can't help it.

You're sending out ripples either good or bad, right now, from the lake called Your Life. Simply being alive means stones and pebbles are dropping into your water and those ripples are spreading out and impacting people.

For good.

And for bad.

Let's forget about the bad for a moment. That's right. Get it out of your mind. I know you've just thought about the seven bad ripples you believe you've sent out this week so there's no point in focusing on them; you've already done enough of that in the past few seconds.

And, let me digress for a moment here, the bad ripples aren't always as bad as you think they are.

In the mid eighties I was on air at a radio station in Seattle and every shift I would do an "air check". I stuck a cassette tape into a recorder that would only tape when the microphone was open, so at the end of the night I would have all the things I said during my shift all strung together with all the music taken out.

The first few times I dreaded listening back. I remembered every mistake, every little screw up in detail and I didn't look forward to hearing it again. But I was wrong. There were far fewer mistakes than I'd imagined.

Same with you. We rarely have sent out as many bad ripples as we think. There's something in our nature to focus on the bad and Satan doesn't help matters. He heaps the guilt and condemnation on for every little mistake. You say you're not sure it's the enemy? Well if it's not you, and not God (since there is no condemnation in Jesus; Rom 8:1) then there's only one voice left.

So resist the guilt and condemnation about what you did wrong and focus on what you did right.

Back to the good ripples. Just as we overestimate the bad ripples we underestimate the good. A smile sends a ripple. Saying hello sends a ripple. Praying for a stranger in the line at Starbucks (I suggest doing it in your head and not out loud) sends ripple.

Jesus says if we give a cup of cold water it won't be forgotten.

I believe Kingdom ripples don't fade away, they grow and continue on into eternity.

So ripple on. We can change the world in every moment.

## **Do You Deserve to Be There?**

Think of the men and women who are pillars of the Christian world these days. The revered ones. The esteemed ones. Those who are held up as consummate examples of the faith.

If there were a banquet in their honor and all of them were seated at a raised table at the front of the room ... would you deserve to take a seat next to them?

“No,” you answer, “I’ve done nothing.”

Well I think you’re wrong. And I think Jesus thinks you’re wrong. He says a giving a cup of cold water matters. Jesus says the woman putting in two coins matters much more than the thousands the rich people were putting in.

Mar 12:41-44 And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

Everything counts. Everything.

The world says he or she that accomplishes the most and is the most famous and has acquired the most money, toys or accolades is most worthy of honor. But Jesus says the opposite is true. He says the first shall be last and the last first.

I think when we get to heaven we’ll be not surprised, but shocked at who has the places of great honor.

Keep doing the small stuff.

Keep doing the big stuff.

It all matters.

I’ll see you at the banquet table.