

## BodyLife Articles

### The Power of Living In Love

By Wayne Jacobsen

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*Life has taken some crazy turns for me since the last one I wrote in September. I will still continue to do these from time to time, but they will not be often or regular. This one is a bit different as well. Here are three related snapshots of what it means to live in the love of God.*

#### Live Where Love Leads You

So, I ended up with a publishing company. I'm not sure how it happened. I was helping a friend with a book he had written. I helped rewrite some of it with another friend, then represented it to the publishing industry. I wasn't a very good agent. I couldn't find anyone in the industry who thought it was worth publishing. So the author, another friend, and I decided to publish it on our own.

And we did. Then **The Shack** started climbing the best-seller lists and other companies wanted to buy it from us. To our surprise one of the largest publishers in the world approached us to enter a partnership with them, not only to help us get *The Shack* to a larger audience but also help with my books and others we think are worthy of publishing in years ahead. They bought into the vision of what we were doing and thought there was a significant space in the reading public for that vision.

So we formed a partnership with the Hachette Book Group, where we maintain our unique identity as Windblown Media. We can do just as much publishing with them as we want to, and yet are not obligated to put everything we do through the Hachette machine. They made it clear all along that they wanted to help us not hinder us. And while we were working things out with them, *The Shack* rose to the very top of the New York Times Best Seller List.

How did all this happen? Believe me, we have had some amazing laughter about it all. No one saw this coming and yet simply responding to him each day has brought us into a place we could not have conceived or conspired to get to.

But that's true about everything I'm involved in at the moment. Nothing I'm doing today, I set out purposely to accomplish. My plans for my life were very different than how things have turned out. Funny how that is! As a twenty-two year-old, freshly graduated from college, and newly married I had so many dreams and visions of the things I thought God wanted me to accomplish. I had confused my ego with his calling, my dreams for his and had assumed I knew what outcomes God had in mind. My first twenty years on that course proved horribly frustrating as I could not convince God to honor my agenda. The last 14 years have been filled with ever increasing joy and gratefulness as God's purposes have overrun my

own. And in every way he did something immeasurably beyond anything I could have asked or imagined.

**BridgeBuilders** began because God asked us to go love people at my children's public school. That one decision started a chain of events that has allowed me to sit in rooms at the most incredible gatherings of deeply conflicted people and help bring about peace. **Lifestream** started as a way to encourage people to experience a closer walk with Jesus and more relational engagements with others. That led to books, travel and website resources. **Windblown Media** resulted from simply helping a friend to tell a story God had put on his heart.

Perhaps being fruitful isn't a matter of starting something, following a five-year plan, and achieving it. Perhaps it is a matter of simply being able to respond to the people and situations around us with his love in our heart and his voice in our ear. For most of my life I have drawn too direct a line between what I think God wants and what I must do to get it. It seems Jesus warned us about that: *If you try to save your life you'll lose it. If you try to be first you'll end up last.*

He only asked us to love, one day at a time, whoever is before us in whatever circumstance we meet them. Everything else he wants to do will flow from that simple reality.

We have filled the world with ministries people have started to accomplish some great thing for God. Many of them never go anywhere. There are a lot of people who come to Hollywood to be a chaplain to the stars. They set up a ministry, beg for money to fund it, and then try to find a way to connect with those people. We do the same with missions and youth ministries. Start a program, fund it, then try and try to get people to take advantage of it.

What if we just started loving the people God puts before us each day, can you imagine what would spill out of that in terms of opportunity, ministry and even growing fellowship?

I think we have it all backwards. Jesus didn't ask us to start ministries. He didn't ask us to accomplish great things. He simply asked us to love others the same way we are loved by him and that will be enough for the whole world to know that we belong to him and that they can too.

People ask me all the time how they can start a house church or connect with other brothers and sisters on a similar journey in their region. Many are frustrated at past attempts that haven't worked out. While I think we can take advantage of Internet forums, email lists and directories to see if we can find people in our area growing in the same realities, that may not be the best way. I now encourage people just to listen to Father every day and live in love toward the people right in front of you. This has worked for Sara and me in our two recent moves and has brought a wealth of relationships locally that have just grown out of taking an interest in the people around us and discovering others who are passionate for the God we love. We don't have to start or join anything for that, unless of course he asks us to.

I am more convinced than ever that every thing God wants to do in the world will flow from us learning to live in his love and listening to him as we walk through life. This allows the opportunities in our lives to grow organically, rather than through the artificial means of organizing, promoting, and manipulating others. That may be why he told us his new command would simply be to love like we've been loved.

## **I Couldn't Let You Go Through This Alone**

### **Adapted from the Lifestream Blog**

This may just be the essence of community: "I couldn't let you go through this alone". The first time I heard those words it was from a good friend who walked beside me through the most painful experience of my life. We had shared some wonderful times together, but then he withdrew for a season from our relationship. I was so blessed when we reconnected in the midst of my trial. One day I asked him why he had disappeared for so long. His answer? "I could see that you were going to get hurt badly and I just couldn't bear to watch it." I understood his comment. He had been through something similar and I knew how painful it was for him to walk with me through mine. I laughed, "But you're here now at the worst of it."

"I know," he grimaced. "I couldn't let you go through this alone."

I don't know a better definition for community. It isn't always fun and games. Love will also not let people go through their darkest days alone. As painful as it may be to watch people we care about suffer, love won't let us be anywhere else.

I was reminded of that recently as I read Tuesdays With Morrie by Mitch Albom. It's an old book I've wanted to read for a long time. It's about a professor dying of ALS, and a former student who shows up for the last chapter of his life. It offers lessons from the brink of death and many of them are breathtaking. Even though this man was not a passionate believer, he'd come to believe some things that are pretty consistent with the life of Jesus:

*"So many people walk around with meaningless life, they seem half a sleep, even when they are busy doing things, they think they are important, this is because they are chasing the wrong things, the way you get meaning in your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you and devote yourself to something that gives you purpose and meaning."*

And this: *"Love wins. Love always wins."*

I loved this book, enjoyed the lessons, but was most touched by this former student who would come and spend every Tuesday with his former professor in the last stages of his disease. He learned a lot, but also gave a lot - friendship on the brink of death.

At my brother's funeral a number of years ago one of his best friends stood up at his funeral and said that he couldn't bear to visit my brother as he suffered the final stages of multiple sclerosis. He wanted to remember him as he was, not in his weakened condition. When he was needed the most he couldn't bear to go. How sad!

The meaning of compassion is right in the word itself: "come to passion". Passion in the old English meant suffering. Thus compassion means "to run to suffering" - to be there at the worst moment because someone we love needs us. I love that. A good picture of this are the 9/11 rescue workers who were running into the World Trade Center when everyone else was trying to run out. Compassion means being there when it's incredibly difficult, not because we enjoy the circumstances, but because we love the person in them.

No one enjoys walking people through dark valleys or through painful reactions, but love says, *I'll be there for you. I may not know what to do or what to say. But I just can't let you go through this alone!*

## **A Plea for Love From the Sudan**

**By Michele Perry**

*Michele Perry was born in Florida with only one leg. After getting involved in the house church movement for some years, she sensed God calling her two years ago to the Sudan to care for children orphaned by violence. She rented a home and started taking in children. She now has 80 children she cares for around the clock and another 150 who come to her school each day. She also has an infectious passion for all things Jesus. You can find out more at: [ChangeTheWayYouSee.org](http://ChangeTheWayYouSee.org). After she read a copy of **So You Don't Want to Go to Church Anymore** she wrote me this email. Please hear her words. They are as direct from our Father's heart as anything you'll read:*

My day got interrupted with your book! A long-time friend told me I should download it, which I did in the London airport on my way home back to the bush of Southern Sudan. Three weeks later I got caught up in your story and my tissue box became my friend. I am a simple little white, city girl from Florida who is now in Sudan taking in orphaned children.

I was really relieved when Jesus called me to move to Sudan out of the west. When I got here I realized it was ten times more religious than anything I have ever seen. Leaders who actually know Jesus estimate maybe only three percent of people here actually know Jesus, really. The spirit of religion is so strong it feels choking at times - totally empowered by a spirit of fear. It is only Jesus as He truly is and His life that will draw them. He is the only one that can fix this mess.

When I was in the simple church movement I came to realize I was training people how to plant churches so nicely they could do it with out God. We were reproducing another box in which we were trying to

contain God and saying that our box was better than the other boxes. Now, after nearing two years in the war torn bush of central Africa I don't really give a rip whether it is house church or legacy church or cell church or open church, a sitting room, a sanctuary or a stadium - if people are growing in Jesus, walking in love with one another and being the face of His love to the world around them.

I don't want to have to figure out whether I should embrace, conform, reform or vacate the system. I don't have the time. Other things are too precious. I just want to do what He is doing and love people. I don't want to debate what is the right way to have church, because it all can become a box and a prison if not filled with His life. Why can't we all just focus on Him and fall in love with Him and love the people around us?

I don't want to figure it all out - I can't. I was just holding a dying woman in my arms in the hospital here whose family will not feed her or help her because the stench of rotting flesh is too bad and she soils herself and people are arguing if they should meet in homes or buildings. Last week a blind woman saw, this week a woman lay dying in my arms. I cannot figure it out. I don't even want to try anymore. If I can't embrace His mystery and love Him beyond my little understanding, I will limit the place I give to His majesty to be revealed in and through my life.

Meet under a tree, rent a cathedral, go on a hike with your family- but love people - learn about love.

Learn of him.

Live in him.

Have an encounter in him.

Live in encounter with him.

Be his encounter to those around you.

That's what he said to me last night. Can't we just do that? I don't have any answers or anything except a heart cry to love each person he sets in front of me and stay in his presence because I love Him more than I love anything. He is my life.

Thank you for describing the One I love more than life, so beautifully and accurately. It means a lot. I met him face to face when I was seven and He walked into my room. I have read or heard very few who actually describe the One who captured my heart as a little girl.

You have!

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Jesus couldn't have said it with any greater simplicity or clarity: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

Would we dare to believe that his instructions would really be all that we need to accomplish his purpose in the earth, influence the culture the way he desires, find freedom from our own failures and bondages, and find the fellowship that would most glorify him in the earth? I do.

The reason we don't experience his fullness in our unfolding lives is because we live as if we are not loved. Fearful he won't take care of us, we believe the lie that says God only helps those who help themselves. The most important thing we can discover is that the God of the Ages wants nothing more than for you to know him as the Abba - the tender Father who wants to sweep you up in his arms and transform you by winning you to the simple reality that no one loves you more than he does.

This is not just an intellectual conclusion; it is a revelation at the core of our being. Ask him to give you that. Pray that he will show you with ever-increasing clarity how much affection he has for you. Only then can life truly unfold!

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