

PERSPECTIVE

APRIL 2017

LOVE WORKS:

HOW THE

LOVE OF

GOD INSPIRES

ACTION



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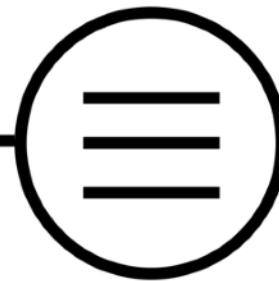
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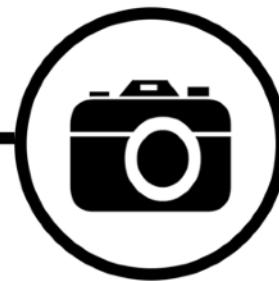
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Love Works: How the Love of God Inspires Action

Many inspiring stories have orphans as main characters: Superman. Snow White. Harry Potter. Luke and Leia. Peter Pan.

Why is this? These stories tap into the innate feeling this world is not our home. As C. S. Lewis wrote, “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.”

This is why adoption is such a comforting doctrine. To be adopted is to realize you were made for another world and, in fact, another person. You were made for God.

Mount Vernon has a growing number involved in foster care and adoption—including my wife and me. But our emphasis as a church is not on adopting others. Rather, our focus is on reveling in a loving God who adopted us. This is the love that inspires us to serve in a number of practical ways, including orphan care.

THE DOCTRINE THAT COMFORTS

Adoption is a unique doctrine to Christianity. We can call God our Father. There is no such concept in Islam, for example. To be a father implies having a son. The existence of our eternal Father demands an eternal Son—a Father and Son forever in fellowship with each other. Adoption means, by the power of the Spirit, we can share in this fellowship.¹

To have been adopted indicates we were, at one time, not in God’s family. This is how Paul wrote about the status of the Gentiles before God added them to his family. Ephesians 2:12 describes the bleak homelessness of the Gentiles: “[R]emember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Can you empathize with someone who has no relationship with Christ, no earthly family, no place at the dining table of the Lord, no hope, and no heavenly Father? Such were all of us before our adoption through Christ.

About ten years ago, friends of ours adopted a beautiful little girl. Their journey culminated in a day at the courthouse. The judge presided over a packed room. The arduous process of adoption finally came to an end.

Draped in his long, black robe, he soberly addressed the young couple. They should treat her as if she had been born to them—she possesses all the rights and privileges of a biological child. Then the judge struck the desk with his gavel, and it was so. That precious girl, once far off, had been brought near. She now had a home.

GOD’S BIG PLAN

There is nothing trivial about adoption. It gets right to the heart of God’s big plan for humanity. In one of many references to adoption in the New Testament, Paul describes it as the plan of God from before there was time:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:3-6)

If you are a Christian, this passage says at least five things about your spiritual adoption:

- Your adoption is cause for God’s praise. God is to be blessed because he is an adopting God. His mercy, on display in your adoption, means he is worthy of worship. Who would give rebels a seat at his table? Only God.
- Your adoption means you lack for nothing. You have received “every spiritual blessing.” You have so much more than Annie who danced around Daddy Warbucks’ mansion. You have mothers and brothers and sisters. Even more, you have a heavenly Father. There is no longer anything you need that you do not have in Christ.
- Your adoption is deliberate. God did not accidentally or casually adopt you. He didn’t choose you because all the good ones were taken. “Before the foundation of the world,” God set his sights upon you. He chose you, purposefully and graciously. He picked you before you did good or evil. God predestined you.

- Your adoption is through Christ. Christ is the instrument of adoption. His work, planned by the Father and applied by the Spirit, made him your brother. Your adoption culminated not with a gavel, but with a cross. It is through this cross the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ became your Father, too.
- Your adoption is evidence of God's love. He did this "in love." This is the only reason we're given for God's glorious adoption of rebels. Because of this powerful act of love upon you, you no longer need to be afraid of sin, trapped by loneliness, or unsure of your salvation. As Paul wrote: "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father! So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal. 4:6). God loves you.

To be adopted is to be a part of God's big plan—a plan that began before he created the cosmos, and a plan that will eternally unfold as we enjoy him in the new heavens and earth.

PONDER THE FATHER'S LOVE

Jonathan Edwards once made a statement that particularly grabbed my attention: "God and Christ appear in the gospel revelation, as being clothed with love; as sitting as it were on a throne of mercy and grace, a seat of love, encompassed about with the sweet beams of love."²

God is love. The Father and Son have always and will always love each other with an outgoing love that boggles our finite minds. Left to our own devices, we are ultimately selfish. Untouched by the Lord, we are malicious, greedy, unkind, and mean-spirited.

In the book of Hosea, when God describes the punishment Israel deserves, he promises to relent. The reader is supposed to be stunned. "Really God, you are going to relent? How could it be that you won't punish us? After all, that's what we deserve." God explains: "[F]or I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath" (Hos. 11:9). Why will God relent of his wrath? Because he is God, not man. Full stop.

Think of this: we don't need God's help to exercise wrath or anger. Our sinful nature is quite good at demanding justice (at least when we aren't the ones being charged). But God is different. Yes, because he is holy, he will judge—he will come in wrath; but since he is love, he can and will acquit.

LOVE MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

You don't need to be a Christian to foster and adopt, to feed the poor and help the needy. But the only service worthy of the name, "Christian," is service soaked in love. 1 Corinthians 13:3, "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

But, if you *do* have love, your life will look radically different. Author Michael Reeves puts it this way: God "is love in such a profound and potent way that you simply cannot know him without yourself becoming loving."³ Love makes the difference.

Therefore, my desire is not to call you to foster care or adoption, but to the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father. I want you to remember your own adoption, and the inestimable love God showed you through Jesus Christ. My prayer is for you to be overwhelmed the Son would love the Father so much he would give up his life for you. I long for you to be stunned that the Father would love you so much he would give up his Son for you.

And if this is the love you know, if this love has gripped your soul, you will live differently than the world. As Edwards argued:

True discoveries of the divine character dispose us to love God as the supreme good; they unite the heart in love to Christ; they incline the soul to flow out in love to God's people, and to all mankind.... If love is so great a thing in Christianity, so essential and distinguishing, yea, the very sum of all Christian virtue, then surely those who profess themselves Christians should live in love, and abound themselves in works of love. If you call yourself a Christian, where are your works of love?⁴

WHERE ARE YOUR WORKS OF LOVE?

It's a good question, isn't it? Where are your works of love? Of course, there are many ways to serve the Lord, but here are a few, simple reasons to engage in orphan care:

- Parents in the trenches of foster care and adoption need help. Even if you don't foster or adopt yourself, you can serve families that do. Getting the necessary screening to provide respite to foster parents is a crucial ministry. Encouraging adoptive parents with a night out is an easy but meaningful way to bless them.

- ♦ Orphaned children need a home. In the state of Georgia alone, the number of state-sponsored foster kids rose from 7,600 children in 2013 to over 13,000 in 2016. Thankfully, some of these children will be reunited with their birth families. Sadly, many more will not; they are looking to be adopted.
- ♦ Orphaned children need the gospel. Children united to a Christian family don't just receive a home; they get the best news ever. God is the author of salvation, but we are the means. Orphan care is an opportunity to make Christ known.
- ♦ You need the gospel. Christians who have adopted often say something like, "Before I adopted, I thought I understood the gospel. After I adopted, it made more sense than ever." Christians engaged in orphan care strive to make a difference in a child's life. They quickly discover how God uses these children to deepen our love for our Father who adopted us.

Every believer is called to love God, his people, and our neighbors. Love comes first. How will this love manifest itself in your life? Perhaps in the ministry of foster care or adoption.

~Aaron Menikoff

¹ For an edifying meditation on this great truth see Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (IVP, 2013).

² Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (Banner of Truth, 1969), 20.

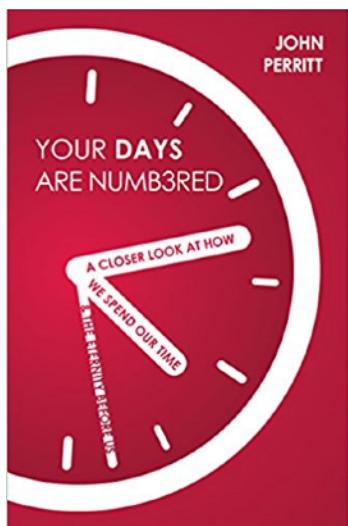
³ *Delighting in the Trinity*, 26.

⁴ Ibid., 21, 24.

Your Days Are Numbered: A Closer Look at How We Spend Our Time & the Eternity Before Us

Written by John Perritt

Bookstall Price \$13



Scripture commands the wisdom of using our time well, rather than wasting it. The use of time became quite personal for John Perritt during seminary when he received the assignment to record his day's activities in half-hour increments for two weeks. The assignment set John on a path to not only develop a theology of daily living, but also to consider the practical ways in which this might affect how one might choose to fill his or her schedule. He begins with the gospel, reminding the reader that "Jesus lived every second of His life to redeem your time" (p. 19).

Building upon that gospel foundation, Perritt equates time with our lives, and then spends chapters helping the reader consider hobbies, trivial pursuits, stewardship, Sabbath and daily non-negotiables. Often times, what keeps one busy are not sinful activities per se, but good things we must simply begin saying "no" to in order to make space for the best, most eternally valuable activities such as spending time with the Lord, serving at church, investing in family, or combatting social evils.

At 145 very brief pages, *Your Days Are Numbered* is on point and won't waste any of your days to read it. By keeping the gospel central, Perritt effectively challenges the reader to consider the stewardship of their time, while also providing many practical ways one can live out these convictions. For example, his treatment of the Lord's Day to cultivate Sabbath rest was profoundly simple, yet chock full of suggestions anyone can implement. He also, very pastorally, speaks to the control freak or the "fly by the seat of your pants" non-planner, who may both be tempted to miss the heart behind the central message of the book. I would highly recommend this short book to all who desire to spend their lives in light of eternity.

— RECOMMENDED BY CHAD IRELAND

Excerpts from
the Book

1

"Maybe the way in which we steward the time given us is *the* major problem with Christians today. Just maybe if we spent our time a bit differently from the rest of the world, issues like divorce, suicide, drug abuse, porn addition, and others, would start to be less of a problem."

—Introduction, p. 13

2

"I've noticed that what people call hobbies seemingly have very little to do with God. In fact, they often hinder their Christian walk with Him."

—Hobbies, p. 30

3

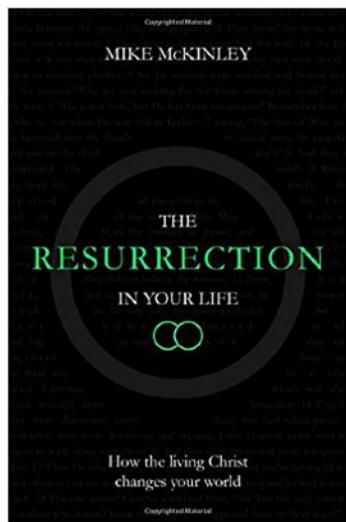
"Our days are made up of numerous mundane moments which end up establishing patterns of great significance. God uses these mundane occurrences to conform us more into the image of His Son."

—The Mundane, p. 59

The Resurrection in Your Life

Written by Mike McKinley

Bookstall Price \$7



As we celebrate Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, our thoughts are focused on the glorious truth that our Savior has risen from the dead. Pastor Mike McKinley's book, *The Resurrection in Your Life*, takes this treasured doctrine and draws out its implications for our daily life as believers. In ten brief chapters, McKinley describes how the reality of Jesus' resurrection changes the way we live (22). We experience peace, hope, and joy because Jesus fulfilled His promise to defeat death.

With passion and clarity, McKinley connects the wonder of the Resurrection to our ability to trust and enjoy God. By examining the details of Jesus' final days on earth, we see that our faith doesn't end with a crucified Savior. The Resurrection turns everything we know upside down and reveals the ultimate meaning of the Cross, and of our lives.

Believers know they need the Gospel every day to sustain their faith. *The Resurrection in Your Life* will help you to slowly savor and engage with the details of Christ's resurrection. You will also be led to worship our almighty God who defeated our greatest enemy. Through Jesus' example, we see that suffering precedes glory. Through Jesus' resurrection, we have the power to endure suffering with joy. McKinley highlights the glorious truth that "Jesus always keeps his promises" (21) and so we can trust Him to fulfill every other promise. We need only to look back to the empty tomb to find hope and peace for today.

— RECOMMENDED BY ANDREA LEE

Excerpts from
the Book

1

"Our salvation is not found in [Jesus'] teaching or his philosophy or his example; if it were, we wouldn't need him to be alive."

—He is not here, p. 24

2

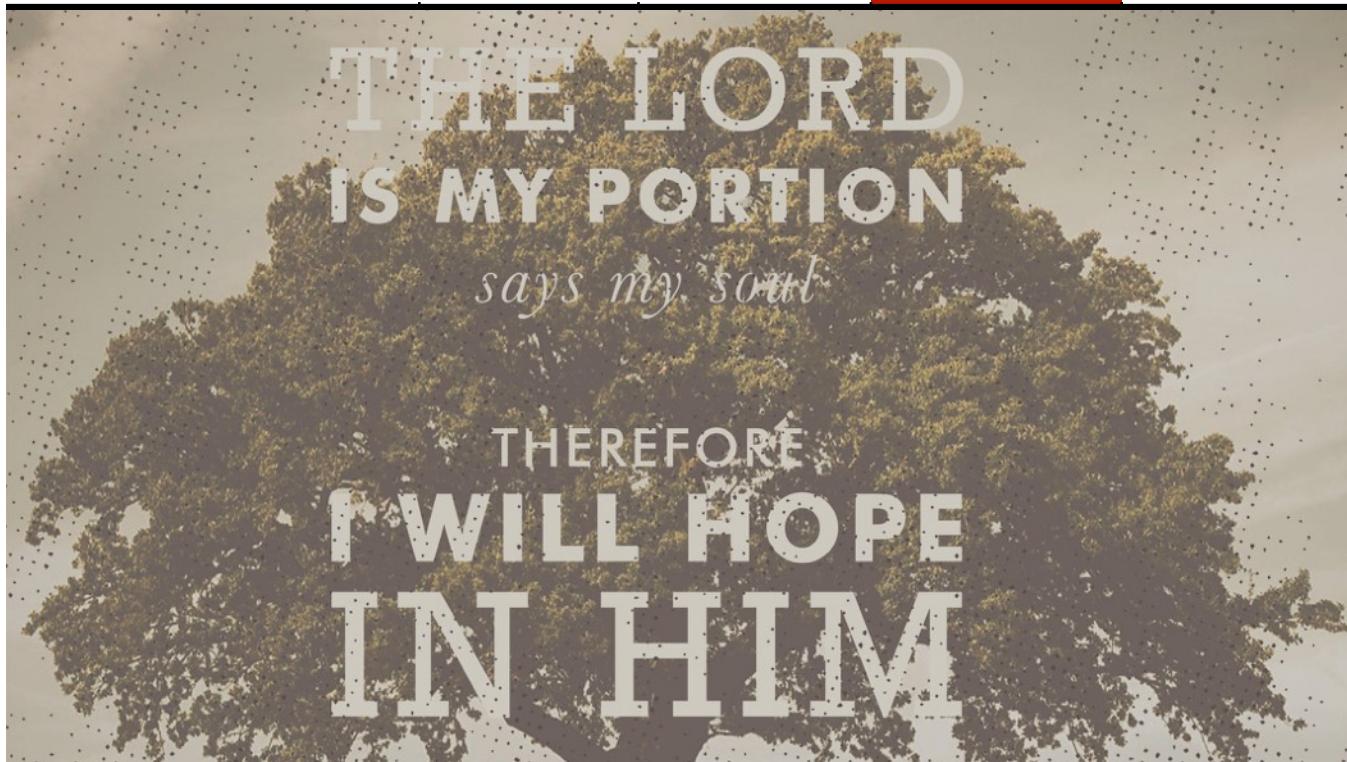
"Jesus kept his word to his followers; he suffered, and then he rose. If he was able to keep that promise, you can be sure that he will keep all of his promises to you."

—He is not here, p. 21

3

"What looks like a disaster to me has not taken [God] by surprise or derailed his intentions. If Judas' betrayal could be used by the Father to take his Son to the place where he would win salvation for humanity, then any other setback can be met with the firm knowledge that God is working in and through it."

—A New Witness, p. 80



"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."

The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.
It is good for a man that he bear
the yoke in his youth.

-Lamentations 3:24-26

Difficult circumstances and painful loss can test our faith and patience in the Lord's goodness. Of course, we rarely admit it. We don't want to be perceived as one who struggles with doubt. We may also be fearful. If we express our unbelief and impatience with the Lord's sovereignty, we fear that our upright reputation will be tarnished or a rebuke is forthcoming. Maybe we've "been here before" and fearfully anticipate the typical answers will be unsatisfying. What should we do?

First, we need to re-evaluate our priorities and where our hope really lies. We should ask, "Is the Lord my portion?" Is there settled resolution in your soul that your ultimate hope is in the Lord and nothing, or no one, else. Jeremiah was watching God's city, Jerusalem, being laid bare by the Babylonians. This was the place of security, calling, and identity for God's people. Yet, Jeremiah said the Lord was his portion because he found security, calling, and identity in God. Therefore, despite all of his outward loss, he hoped in the Lord. Are you able to do the same?

Jeremiah also waited on the Lord. Waiting is not easy. Difficult trials and circumstances make us anxious. We want resolution, and we want it now. We want to know there's purpose, and we demand to know it now. But Jeremiah instructs us otherwise. He tells us it is "good that one should wait quietly." He knows the Lord's character: He's faithful and merciful. He does not abandon his people. His promise will be fulfilled. The believer is to wait for the experience of God's goodness.

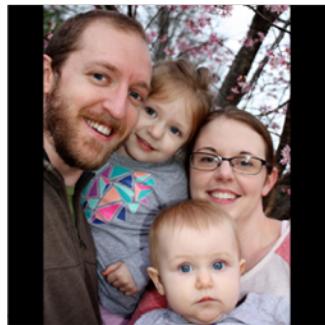
Until it comes, we remember that our waiting is not in vain because Christ has been raised from the dead. All of God's promises are, or will be, fulfilled because of Christ's resurrection. That may not seem immediately relevant to your situation, but it is. You want to know and experience the Lord's goodness again, and you may think it's there only when circumstances are going well. But that is a faulty foundation. The foundation of the Lord's goodness is in Christ's resurrection from the dead. So change your perspective; look to Christ; and wait patiently for the Lord to act in obvious ways so you'll see that he is good.

– BRAD THAYER

NEW MEMBERS



Pat Adams



**Brandon & Kendra
Davis
(Myla & Adley)**



Nathan Powell



**Jack & Marjorie
Roberson**



Katie Vines

