

## **GOD'S FORGETFUL NATURE**

Pastor Joyce Anderson-Reed/June 22, 2008/La Paz, Mexico

### ***Psalm 103 (The Message)***

*1 O my soul, bless God. From head to toe, I'll bless his holy name! 2 O my soul, bless God, don't forget a single blessing! 3 He forgives your sins - every one. He heals your diseases - every one. 4 He redeems you from hell - saves your life! He crowns you with love and mercy - a paradise crown. 5 He wraps you in goodness - beauty eternal. He renews your youth - you're always young in his presence.*

*6 God makes everything come out right; he puts victims back on their feet. 7 He showed Moses how he went about his work, opened up his plans to all Israel. 8 God is sheer mercy and grace; not easily angered, he's rich in love. 9 He doesn't endlessly nag and scold, nor hold grudges forever. 10 He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve, nor pay us back in full for our wrongs. 11 As high as heaven is over the earth, so strong is his love to those who fear him. 12 And as far as sunrise is from sunset, he has separated us from our sins. 13 As parents feel for their children, God feels for those who fear him. 14 He knows us inside and out, keeps in mind that we're made of mud. 15 Men and women don't live very long; like wildflowers they spring up and blossom, 16 But a storm snuffs them out just as quickly, leaving nothing to show they were here. 17 God's love, though, is ever and always, eternally present to all who fear him, Making everything right for them and their children 18 as they follow his Covenant ways and remember to do whatever he said.*

*19 God has set his throne in heaven; he rules over us all. He's the King! 20 So bless God, you angels, ready and able to fly at his bidding, quick to hear and do what he says. 21 Bless God, all you armies of angels, alert to respond to whatever he wills. 22 Bless God, all creatures, wherever you are - everything and everyone made by God. And you, O my soul, bless God!*

Do you remember the pot-bellied pig craze about 15 years ago when people were spending hundreds of dollars to own one of those exotic house pets imported from Vietnam? Anybody know someone who bought one? My brother-in-law did.

Well, this craze started when breeders of these particular pigs claimed two things: that these mini-pigs were very smart and that they would only grow to a weight of 40 lbs. For some reason, many people apparently loved the idea of a smart, mini-pig running around the house for, thousands of these pigs were sold.

Well, it turned out that the breeders were only half-right. These pigs were very smart. Some could even be trained to walk on leashes and use litter boxes. But they often grew to weigh as much as 150lbs or more! Another drawback that the owners of these unique pigs discovered was that they often became openly aggressive -- not at all pet-like.

So, what did people do with their unwanted pot-bellied pigs? Well, according to an article in the U.S. World & News Report, a man named Dale Riffle came to the rescue. Someone had given Dale one of these pigs as a gift and he fell in love with it -- even though it never learned to use its litter box and in fact developed a tendency to eat carpet, wall paper, and dry wall.

In fact, Riffle loved his pig so much that he sold his suburban home and moved with his new pet pig, which he had named "RUFUS," to a 5-acre farm in West Virginia...and then he started taking in unwanted pot-bellied pigs and before long the guy was living in "hog heaven". Soon he had 180 pig residents on this farm!

And these pigs don't just live there...Riffle treats them to a luxurious lifestyle. The article states that these little porkers snooze on beds of fresh pine shavings every night. They wallow in mud puddles. They soak in plastic swimming pools to piped-in classical music. They wait in line for one of Riffle's belly rubs. And these pigs never need fear that one day they will become bacon or pork chops. Believe it or not there is actually a waiting list for unwanted pigs wanting to get a hoof in the door at Riffle's farm. Riffle says, "We are all put on earth for some reason and I guess pigs are my lot in life."

How could anyone so love pigs? What's even more amazing: How could a holy, perfect God so love sinful people like us?

But that's the central theme of the Bible: that our majestic, all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly holy, God is passionately in love with imperfect, sometimes openly rebellious, frequently indifferent people like you and me.

You see, in many ways sin makes human beings even more unlovely than Riffle's pigs. Listen to the bleak picture that Romans 3:10-17 paints of the human race:

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of

cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways and the way of peace they do not know."

So all human beings are flawed because of sin. We are fallen creatures. Isaiah said that even our best attempts at goodness are as filthy rags in comparison to the holiness of God. But God loves us anyway.....even to the extent of wanting to adopt us as His very own. (Adams)

"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12)

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (I John 3:1)

God's grace and mercy allow us to become part of his family. In verses 8-12 of Psalm 103, we are given a clear picture of what God's grace is exactly like:

- Verse 8: God has a long fuse. "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love."
- Verse 9: God has a short memory. "He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever."
- Verse 10: God has thick skin. "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities."
- Verses 11–12: God has a big heart. "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

Have you ever pondered the fact that God doesn't just forgive, he forgets? He erases the board. He destroys the evidence. He burns the microfilm. He wipes the computer board. He doesn't remember our mistakes. For all the things he DOES do, this is one thing he REFUSES to do!

He refuses to keep a list of our wrongs.

When we ask for forgiveness, he doesn't pull out a clipboard and say, "When are you going to get this right? I've already forgiven you for that sin 516 times!" (Lucado)

No, God doesn't remember.

*As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* (Psalm 103:12)

God's heart, like the distance between east and west, cannot be measured. On a globe, if you go north, you'll eventually reach the North Pole, and if you keep walking in a straight line, you'll start heading south. Eventually, north meets south. Not so east and west. If I go east around the globe, I never reach west.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, you might recall the character of Edmund. Edmund was the brother who was deceived by the evil White Witch, believed her lies, and betrayed his siblings and Narnia to her treachery. Eventually, he is horrified by what he has done, but is so entrenched in his wrong choices, that he sees no way to escape. Aslan, the lion and true ruler of Narnia, sends a contingent from his army to rescue him.

And then we have this scene . . .

When the other children woke up the next morning, the first thing they heard was that their brother had been rescued and brought into the camp late last night; and was at the moment with Aslan. As soon as they had breakfasted they all went out, and there they saw Aslan and Edmund walking together in the dewy grass, apart from the rest of the court. There is no need to tell you (and no one ever heard) what Aslan was saying, but it was a conversation which Edmund never forgot. As the others drew nearer, Aslan turned to meet them, bringing Edmund with him.

"Here is your brother," Aslan said, "and—there is no need to talk to him about what is past." (pages 152-3)

*There is no need to talk to him about what is past.*

Grace forgets. Period. He who is perfect love cannot hold grudges.

"But I mess up SO MANY TIMES!" you exclaim. "How can God keep forgiving me?" You're right, it's a mystery, but it happens. And it's not like God is clueless about our nature. Even David, in this Psalm, reminds us that God knows exactly

who we are, what we're like, and how we tend to act: that we're made out of the dust, that we wither like grass, we blow away like the flowers in the field. In other words, we don't seem very substantial.

And yet, God still has compassion for us. He still chooses to walk beside us. No matter how many times our lives seem to be falling apart, he comes and gives us the courage to keep going forward.

Derek Redmond arrived at the 1992 Olympic Summer Games in Barcelona determined to win a medal in the 400-meter dash. The color of the medal was meaningless; he just wanted to win one. Just one.

He had been forced to withdraw from the 400 at the 1988 Games in Seoul, only 10 minutes before the race, because of an Achilles tendon injury. He then underwent five surgeries over the next year. This was the same runner who had shattered the British 400-meter record at age 19. So when the 1992 Games arrived, this was his time, his moment, his stage, to show the world who he was and just how good he was.

Derek's father Jim had accompanied him to Barcelona, just as he did for all world competitions. They were as close as a father and son could be. Inseparable, really. The best of friends. When Derek ran, it was as if his father were running right next to him.

The day of the race arrived. Father and son reminisced about what it took for Derek to get to this point. They talked about ignoring past heartbreaks, past failures. They agreed that if anything bad happened, no matter what it was, Derek had to finish the race, period.

The top four finishers in each of the two semifinal heats qualify for the Olympic final. As race time approaches for the semifinal 400 heat, Jim heads up to his seat at the top of Olympic Stadium, not far from where the Olympic torch was lit just a few days earlier.

The stadium is packed with 65,000 fans, bracing themselves for one of sport's greatest and most exciting spectacles. The race begins and Redmond breaks from the pack and quickly seizes the lead. "Keep it up, keep it up," Jim says to himself.

Down the backstretch they came, only 175 meters away from finishing, Redmond is a shoo-in to make the finals. Suddenly, he hears a pop. In his right hamstring. He pulls up lame, as if he had been shot.

His leg quivering, Derek begins hopping on one leg, then slows down and falls to the track. As he lays on the track, clutching his right hamstring, a medical personnel unit runs toward him. At the same time, Jim Redmond, seeing his son in trouble, races down from the top row of the stands, sidestepping people, bumping into others. He has no credential to be on the track, but all he thinks about is getting to his son, to help him up. "I wasn't going to be stopped by anyone," he later tells the media.

On the track, Redmond realizes his dream of an Olympic medal is gone. Tears run down his face. "All I could think was, 'I'm out of the Olympics -- again,'" he would say.

As the medical crew arrives with a stretcher, Redmond tells them, "No, there's no way I'm getting on that stretcher. I'm going to finish my race."

Then, in a moment that will live forever in the minds of millions, Redmond lifts himself to his feet, ever so slowly, and starts hobbling down the track. The other runners have finished the race, with Steve Lewis of the U.S. winning the contest in 44.50. Suddenly, everyone realizes that Redmond isn't dropping out of the race by hobbling off to the side of the track. No, he is actually continuing on one leg. He's going to attempt to hobble his way to the finish line. All by himself. All in the name of pride and heart.

Slowly, the crowd, in total disbelief, rises and begins to roar. The roar gets louder and louder. Through the searing pain, Redmond hears the cheers, but "I wasn't doing it for the crowd," he would later say. "I was doing it for me. Whether people thought I was an idiot or a hero, I wanted to finish the race. I'm the one who has to live with it."

One painful step at a time, each one a little slower and more painful than the one before, his face twisted with pain and tears, Redmond limps onward, and the crowd, many in tears, cheer him on.

Jim Redmond finally gets to the bottom of the stands, leaps over the railing, avoids a security guard, and runs out to his son, with two security people chasing after him. "That's my son out there," he yells back to security, "and I'm going to help him."

With Derek refusing to surrender and painfully limping along the track, Jim reaches his son at the final curve, about 120 meters from the finish, and wraps his arm around his waist.

"I'm here, son," Jim says softly, hugging his boy. "We'll finish together." Derek puts his arms around his father's shoulders and sobs.

Together, arm in arm, father and son, with 65,000 people cheering, clapping and crying, finish the race, just as they vowed they would.

"I'm the proudest father alive," he tells the press afterwards, tears in his eyes. "I'm prouder of him than I would have been if he had won the gold medal. It took a lot of guts for him to do what he did." (Story found on google.com, Derek Redman)

Let those words echo inside your heart a moment: *Come on, Son, let's finish this together.* Put your name in the blank. Come on, Jesse, let's finish this together. Come on, Jane, let's finish this together. Come on, Ruben, let's finish this together. Come on, Elaine, let's finish this together.

God knows everything about you. All your character faults. All your anger issues. All the grief that drags you down. All the relationships where you struggle. And he still chooses YOU. He loves you. He wants to finish the race with you! If you come to him with a humble heart and ask for forgiveness, he not only forgives, he forgets.

Why? How?

Galatians 3:27 tells us:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (RSV)

When we choose to believe in God's son, Jesus Christ, we become a new creation. We "put on" Christ. When God looks at us he doesn't see us; he sees Christ. We "wear" him. We are hidden in him; we are covered by him. (Lucado)

To us, it sounds presumptuous! And it would be if it were our idea. But it isn't, it's God's!

I don't know what's haunting you this morning.

That horrid lie.

The time you exploded in anger.

Those years spent in the hollow of Satan's hand.

The day you were needed, but didn't respond.

That date.

That jealousy.

That habit.

The things that give your spiritual walk a slight limp. You're still faithful. You still do all the right things and say all the right words. But just when you begin to make strides, just when your wings begin to spread and you prepare to soar, this sin comes back to haunt you. It emerges from the swamps of your soul and causes you to question yourself.

This is when you need to remember God's forgetful nature.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103: 12)

"I will be merciful to their iniquities." (Hebrews 8:12)

"Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you white as wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

When we have confessed and repented of our sins, when we come humbly before God clothed in the love of Jesus, then God forgives, God forgets, the slate is wiped clean.

Like the Psalmist, we too can sing, "Praise the Lord, O my soul!"

Let us pray . . .

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