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JESUS  
MORE

*PHIL RYKEN*

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*Loving Jesus More*

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*We give thanks to God always for all of you, . . .  
remembering before our God and Father your  
work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness  
of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Thessalonians 1:2–3



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# Preface

Writing teachers usually advise their students to “write what they know.” They say this because the best books come from authors who have intimate personal experience with the subjects they write about.

To tell the truth, I do not always follow this advice, and this book about loving Jesus is a good example. When it comes to loving Jesus, I’m no expert. Just ask my family, or maybe the people who work with me every day. So I am writing what I *don’t* know—or don’t know as well as I should.

Here is another truth, however: I want to love Jesus more. I also want the campus I lead to be saturated more and more with divine affection. I want it to be common for us to express love for Jesus—not just when we worship in chapel, but also when we share a meal in the dining hall, play the last movement of a symphony, score the winning goal in a soccer match, or talk over the day’s events with friends.

One of the ways I grow the most spiritually is by teach-

## Preface

ing the Bible. So during the 2012–2013 academic year I decided to preach a series of messages on loving Jesus more—not because I am a very good lover, but because I wanted to learn, and help my students learn, too.

Those chapel messages have been edited here for a wider audience. I am grateful to Lynn Wartsbaugh and Lydia Brownback, especially, for their help in getting this book ready for publication.

I am dedicating what I have written to Chaplain Pat, Chaplain Vic, and Chappy K—three Wheaton College chaplains whose loving encouragement in Christian discipleship, faithful ministry in the Word of God, and reverent leadership in public worship have been a blessing to my life and ministry.

# Where Love Comes From

The goal of this book is to help people grow more in love with Jesus.

How important is it for us to pursue this goal? At the beginning of his classic devotional text, *The True Christian's Love to the Unseen Christ*, the Puritan Thomas Vincent wrote:

Love to Christ being so essential unto true Christianity, so earnestly looked for by our Lord and Master, so powerfully commanding in the soul and over the whole man, so greatly influential on duty, I have made choice to treat this subject of love to Christ, and my chief endeavor herein shall be to excite and provoke Christians unto the lively and vigorous exercise of this grace of love into the Lord Jesus Christ, of which incentive there is great and universal need.<sup>1</sup>

## LOVING JESUS MORE

To make the same point more simply, there is hardly anything we need more in the Christian life than more love for Jesus. But this is a daunting challenge. Part of the challenge is personal: Will we really love Jesus more as a result of reading this book? But behind this lies the even greater challenge of comprehending God's love for us, which is the true and ultimate source of all love for him. How can anyone do justice to the great love of God?

A.W. Tozer wrestled with this question in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, where he described the love of God "as an incomprehensibly vast, bottomless, shoreless sea." Tozer observed that if we are going to understand God, "we must try to speak of his love," for God is love. Yet this is difficult for even "the loftiest eloquence," as he explained:<sup>2</sup>

All Christians have tried [to explain God's love] but none has ever done it very well. I can no more do justice to that awesome and wonder-filled theme than a child can grasp a star. Still, by reaching toward the star the child may call attention to it and even indicate the direction one must look to see it. So as I stretch my heart toward the high shining love of God someone who has not before known about it may be encouraged to look up and have hope.<sup>3</sup>

As we consider God's love for us in Jesus, which is the source of our love for him, we are "reaching for the stars." But even if we are not able to "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Eph. 3:18–19 NIV),

at least we can point toward it and say, “See, there it is: the love of God in Jesus Christ.” And the more we see this love, the more our hearts will grow in affection for our Savior.

## Loving Jesus Less

I have given this book the simplest title I could: *Loving Jesus More*. But this title presupposes yet another problem. If we say that we want to love Jesus *more*—or that we ought to love him more, whether we want to or not—then we are admitting that we do not love Jesus as much as we should. Logically, the only people who can love Jesus *more* are people who love him *less*. And unfortunately this is true for all of us. Our love is limited—not just for one another, but also for Jesus.

When we open the Scriptures, we discover that we are not alone in this limitation (which, in a way, is encouraging). The failure of God’s people to love their God is one of the most pervasive themes in the story of salvation.

We see this all the way through the Old Testament. The story of the children of Israel is really a love story. God has a heart full of love for his people, which he proves over and over again by what he says and what he does. “I have loved you with an everlasting love,” God declares. “Therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you” (Jer. 31:3).

The children of Israel were called to respond to this everlasting affection by loving God in return. Every day devout believers would confess their love for God in heart,

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soul, and strength (see Deut. 6:4–5). Yet they repeatedly failed to live up to their promises by turning their hearts against God.

One of the ways that God confronted this failure was by styling himself as a wounded lover. His passion smolders on the pages of the Old Testament. Understand that God's romance with his people was a spiritual marriage. So when their hearts grew cold, it was the ultimate betrayal. The imagery that the Old Testament uses to describe this marital breakdown is shocking. On occasion God compared Israel to a groom who cheated on his wife, or to a virgin who became a prostitute (e.g., Ezekiel 16). In the book of Jeremiah God actually files for divorce on the grounds of spiritual adultery (see Jer. 2:1–3:5). But he never gives up on his love covenant with his people. To exemplify his undying love, he tells his prophet Hosea to return to a wayward woman and take her to be his wife all over again.

We see something similar in the New Testament, where the followers of Christ often fall out of love. When Jesus warned his disciples that the hearts of many would grow cold (Matt. 24:12), he knew what he was talking about. The first generation of the church was also the first generation to love Jesus less. By the end of the New Testament, John was already warning the first Christians in Ephesus that they had forsaken their first love (Rev. 2:4).

Notice that in every case the people who struggle to stay in love with God are people who have experienced his blessings directly. The children of Israel had every

reason to love God. He had delivered them from slavery, conquered their enemies, and established their kingdom. Yet even in a land of milk and honey, they fell out of love with God. Or consider the church in Ephesus, which was planted by the apostle Paul, led by Pastor Timothy, and later led by the apostle John—the evangelist of God’s love. Despite this exceptional care, the Ephesians succumbed to spiritual entropy; their hearts grew cold.

### **All Out of Love**

What has happened to your love for Jesus? Maybe you are falling more in love with him all the time. Jerry Trousdale has written about the way this is happening across the Muslim world in his book *Miraculous Movements*, which has a thrilling subtitle: *How Hundreds of Thousands of Muslims Are Falling in Love with Jesus*. This is a marvelous way to describe the Christian life, as a romance with Jesus.

According to Trousdale, it is happening all over the Muslim world: people who grew up reading the Koran are falling in love with Jesus. He tells the story of a man he calls “Zamil”—a successful businessman, prominent citizen, and leader in his local mosque. One night Zamil had a dream in which Jesus appeared to him and claimed to be the Light of the World. Zamil was blinded by the light, and when he awoke, he was unable to see. Soon he came into contact with local Christians, heard the gospel, and gave his heart to Jesus. Naturally, he prayed that God would



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restore his sight. But God did not answer that prayer, or protect him from the jealousy of family members who disowned and dispossessed him. Yet the Holy Spirit gave Zamil such a passionate love for Jesus that he could not keep the gospel to himself. Zamil went to nearby villages and started preaching the good news of Jesus and his love. When Trousdale met him two years later, the blind evangelist was already planting his eighth church!<sup>4</sup>

When we are truly in love with Jesus, we will overcome any obstacle to advance his kingdom. Yet it is all too easy for our affections to move in the opposite direction. Thomas Vincent gave his readers a simple way to test the extent of their love for Jesus. “When you leave Christ quite out of your discourse,” he wrote, “it shows that you have not an abundance of love to him because, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth will speak of their riches. Such as have much love to pleasures will be often speaking of that subject; such as love their friends much will be often speaking and commending them when they are in company. And when you speak but little of Christ, it is a sign that you love Him but little.”<sup>5</sup>

As we look back, we may well realize that there was a time when we were more in love with Jesus than we are today. Maybe that time was when we first came to Christ in repentance and faith. We were so happy to receive the free gift of eternal life that Jesus was the sole object of our affection. Or maybe we felt more that way later on. God helped us, healed us, rescued us, or provided for us, and

we could only respond with loving gratitude. Our hearts were moved in worship or humbled by the amazing gifts we had received, and it was natural to say, “I love you, Jesus, for loving me the way you do.”

Perhaps that moment has long since passed. Now life is filled with so many affections—all the other things we say that we “love”: the latest video game, our beverage of choice, a favorite hobby, the hometown team. We still love Jesus to some extent, but he’s like the old backpack that we’re comfortable with but no longer excited about. Or maybe he is like the crush we had back in high school, and now it’s hard to remember how we could have been so infatuated. If we are totally honest, we have to admit that we love our Savior less.

## **Love’s Channel**

If we are not content with loving Jesus less, but actually want to love him more, then we must learn how and where to get that love. What is the channel for receiving the love that will enable us to grow in our love for Jesus?

At first the answer may seem obvious. And it is obvious. We know that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Love is one of his defining attributes. We also know that “we love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). So, of course, God is the source of all our love, including our love for God himself.

We can be more specific, however. In Romans 5, as Paul begins to apply the saving doctrine of justification by

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faith, he says something significant about the origin and the channel of God's affection:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom. 5:1–5)

Here Paul simply is spelling out the implications of our justification. By faith in Christ we stand righteous before God and have confidence to face the coming judgment. Part of the proof for this justifying grace is our present experience of the love of God. The apostle then proceeds to explain that the love of God is the love of Calvary—the love Christ showed to us when we were still sinners by dying for us on the cross (Rom. 5:8).

But notice the channel of that love. The love we have within us—the love that is poured into our hearts—comes through the third person of the Trinity: “God's love has been poured into our hearts *through the Holy Spirit* who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5; cf. Rom. 15:30). Whatever love we have was put there by the Spirit of God. God has placed

his love into our hearts specifically through the delivery of the Holy Spirit.

When Paul tells us that the Spirit gives us the Father's love, he is not drawing a sharp distinction between the love of these two divine persons. The love of the Father and the love of the Spirit are one and the same love, for there is no division of affection within the Godhead. Yet this verse does highlight the distinctive role of the Holy Spirit in communicating the love of God.

People sometimes wonder exactly what the Holy Spirit does. We know who the Father is because most of us have fathers of our own, or know other fathers. We know the Son because we read his story in the Gospels. But who is the Holy Spirit? What does the Spirit do? This is part of the answer: the Holy Spirit puts God's love into our hearts. The great American theologian Jonathan Edwards said that the Spirit's office is "to communicate divine love to the Creature." When the Spirit does this, Edwards went on to say, "God's love doth but communicate of itself."<sup>6</sup> In other words, in giving us the Holy Spirit, God gives us his own love.

Consider how amazing this is, and how necessary. God does not expect us to love him with our own puny love, which is so feeble and fickle. Instead, he invites us to love him back with the love that he gives. God has a generous heart. He gives us so much of his love that we have enough left over to use for loving him. As Timothy Dudley-Smith has written in one of his gospel hymns:

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Safe in the shadow of the Lord,  
Possessed by love divine,  
I trust in him, I trust in him.  
And meet his love with mine.<sup>7</sup>

William Temple, who served as the Archbishop of Canterbury during World War II, illustrated the inward work of the Holy Spirit by drawing an analogy to William Shakespeare. “It is no good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear,” Temple said, “and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it—I can’t. And it is no good showing me a life like the life of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it—I can’t. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like his. And if the Spirit could come into me, then I could live a life like His.”<sup>8</sup>

This is what the Spirit does to enable us to live with Christlike love: he comes right inside us, and once he is there, he fills us with the love of God. Jesus told his disciples that he wanted them to have his Father’s love within them (John 17:26; cf. 1 John 4:16). The way he fulfills his promise and accomplishes this purpose is by sending us the Holy Spirit. Part of the Spirit’s ongoing work is to produce the fruit of love in the life of every believer (see Gal. 5:22). Whenever we look into our hearts and find even a small measure of true love for Jesus, this must be the work of God the Holy Spirit.

## Getting the Spirit

This assumes, of course, that we have the Spirit to begin with. We will never love Jesus at all without the third person of the Trinity. If he is the channel of God's love, then in order to love Jesus more we need to have the Holy Spirit. So as we examine our hearts, we need to ask whether we have truly received the Holy Spirit. Do I have the Spirit in my life? Have I experienced his regenerating power? Am I born again?

The unmistakable sign of the Spirit's presence is faith in Jesus Christ. This is what the Holy Spirit comes into our lives principally to do: give us faith and love for Jesus Christ.

Listen to the way that one former imam testified to the Spirit's power. It started with a conversation he had one morning with his grandfather, who was also an imam.<sup>9</sup> The two men were discussing the death of Mohammad. According to the Qur'an, when Mohammad was dying, his daughter Fatima said, "Father, you are dying, but where are you going from here and what will happen to us?" All Mohammad could say in response was, "Ask me anything from my wealth, but I cannot save you from Allah's punishment." Then he said, "By Allah, though I am the apostle of Allah, yet I do not know what Allah will do to me." The prophet himself was uncertain of receiving mercy.

The former imam remembered this conversation later, when he was reading the New Testament. A Christian missionary had challenged him to read the Gospel of John. He

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was happy to do this so that he could discover the Bible's mistakes and then argue with the missionary. But as he was reading, the man encountered the words of Jesus in John 14: "I am going to the Father. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know."

Immediately the man ran to his grandfather and asked him again what Mohammad had said when he was dying. After his grandfather recited the Qur'an, the man said, "Grandfather, look at Jesus. He said he was going to his Father and he would prepare a place for his followers, and after that he will come back. But Mohammad doesn't know where he is going, so which one would you follow?" From that moment on, the imam started to follow Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he fell in love with the Savior who actually knows where he is going, and has promised to take us there with him.

Understand that once you have the Holy Spirit in your life, he may not call very much attention to himself. The Spirit has such a strong desire to show us the Son that he is almost shy. Maybe this is true of each person of the Trinity, because they are always directing attention to one another. The Father wants to glorify his beloved Son (e.g., Matt. 3:16–17). The Son seeks to honor his Father (e.g., John 17:1). And when the Son promised to send us the Spirit, he boasted that the Spirit would enable us to do even greater

works than he did (John 14:12–17)! The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are never narcissistic, but always give one another the glory. There is mutual admiration within the Godhead.

The Spirit's love for the Father and the Son explains why the Spirit sometimes seems rather shy. But even if the Spirit does not call very much attention to himself, he is unmistakably there. Whenever we are impressed with the truth of God's Word, or convicted of our sin, or convinced that Jesus is the Christ, or motivated to worship, or empowered to serve other people, the Holy Spirit is at work. We know for sure that he is at work whenever we have true love for Jesus, because the Spirit is the channel of God's love.

### **Keeping in Step with the Spirit**

Once we have the Holy Spirit, it is vitally important to leave our lives open to his influence. If we want to love Jesus more, and if the Spirit is the source of that love, then we should do everything we can to keep the channel of his grace wide open.

The Bible gives some very specific instructions about our response to the Spirit. It tells us some things we should be sure to do, and also some things we should be careful *not* to do. On the positive side, we are told to “walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16) and “keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). This principally means following the words that the



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Holy Spirit has revealed in the pages of Holy Scripture. But it also means following the leading of the Spirit through his inward work in our mind, heart, and conscience.

When the Spirit speaks, be ready to listen. Learn how to hear his voice—not so much as an audible word (although if the Spirit chooses to speak that way, that is up to him), or as some sort of infallible indicator for daily decision-making (don't go around saying, "God told me to do this," or worse, "God told me to tell *you* to do this"), but as the gentle guide who is constantly drawing us toward true spiritual life. When the Spirit prompts us to pray, we should pray. When the Spirit gives us the impulse to share our faith, we should give someone the gospel. Believers who follow the inner leading of the Holy Spirit grow dynamically and work effectively for the kingdom of God.

On the negative side, the Bible tells us not to "quench" (1 Thess. 5:19) or "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30). The Bible talks about quenching the Spirit in the context of prayer, worship, and the ministry of God's Word (see 1 Thess. 5:16–21). We quench the Spirit whenever we sense him leading us to do something and then fail to follow through. We know we should pray, but it seems like too much work, so we skip it instead. Our conscience is troubled by sin, but we never actually tell Jesus that we're sorry for what we have done, or failed to do. We sense an opportunity to share the gospel, but we are not sure what to say, so we change the subject to something trivial. These are all ways of quenching the Spirit.

It is also possible to grieve the Spirit, which we do whenever we persist in rebellious sin. After all, the Spirit is a *Holy* Spirit, and therefore as he lives in us, he wants us to be holy. The context in which the Bible tells us not to grieve the Spirit is noteworthy. “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths,” the Scripture says. “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (Eph. 4:29, 31). Bad language, hate speech, and words that tear people down grieve the Spirit of God.

All of this may help to explain why we are not falling more in love with Jesus. When we do not turn to God in prayer or encourage people in the gospel, then we quench the Spirit. When we curse God or speak against other people, we grieve the Spirit. As a result, we choke off the channel of God’s love.

The Bible warns of these dangers in order to encourage God’s full work in our lives. Rather than quenching or grieving the Holy Spirit, Jesus wants us to open our hearts to his love. There is still hope for us to grow in love because God does not give up on us. How amazingly gracious God is to give us his Spirit—the Spirit who even now is striving inside us to grow us in the love of God. God knows that we are not very good lovers. So by the Spirit he has poured his infinite love into our hearts.

A simple illustration may help to show how this works. When my son Jack was ten, he spent part of his summer at Honey Rock camp in northern Wisconsin. When he came

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back home, he amazed us by presenting a gift to each and every member of the family—all six of us. Each gift had been handmade at the craft shop. Each gift was unique, and carefully chosen for the recipient. When I asked Jack where he had managed to get the materials to make these gifts, he told me that he paid for his supplies with money from his camp account. Suddenly I realized that I had been the major financial investor in Jack's craft-making, gift-giving enterprise. Yet this realization did not diminish the heartwarming expression of the boy's love for his mother and father, or his brother and sisters. He took what he had been given and turned it into an expression of his love.

It is the same with the loving worship and heartfelt service that we offer to Jesus. God has put his love into our lives by pouring his Spirit into our hearts. So when we desire to love Jesus more, we are not limited to loving him out of our own small affection, but can love him with the abundant love that he freely gives.

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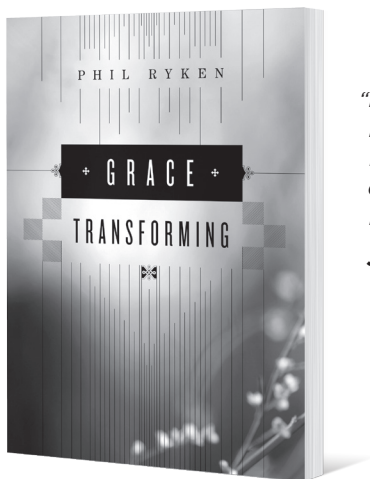
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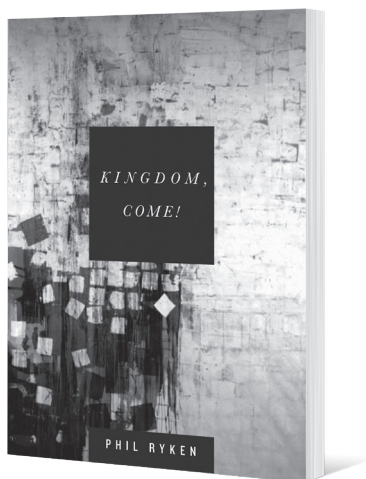
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