

# *Reflections*

Volume 30

1

*St. Paul Ministry*

February 2018

## **Grace Found Me**

### **Blessings to All:**

As we get older, we reflect upon our lives. It is true and all of you that are reading this Newsletter, know that it is true.

Some of us look back on our happy times. Perhaps when we were in High School and innocent and our first boyfriend or first girlfriend. The joy of being appreciated and belonging.

Some of us look back on our sins and relive them and wish that those thoughts would disappear into the wind as they show us our selfishness and our weaknesses.

But the good news is that you still have time to reflect upon your life and give your past to Jesus. For He came for us! He came for all of us so that we can one day live without reflecting upon our past, but to enjoy eternal joy.

You are not alone in reflecting. Your spouse, children, grandchildren and close friends also experience these things.

So, what do they mean? And why do us humans have to remember things in our past, which we want to leave in our past?

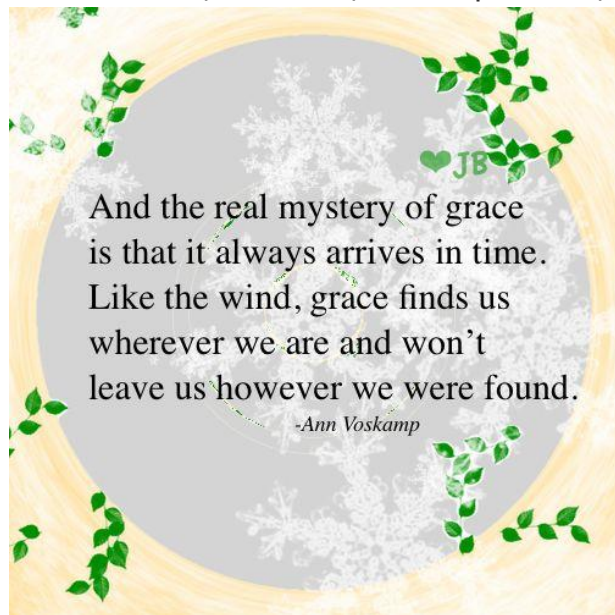


I believe it is Grace that brings these things to light and allows us to move past them into the Hope of Jesus, who Saves...

Isn't it better to give our past that bother us to Jesus? Yes, it is. He will take our past that haunts us and dissolve it into His love for us sinners. Perhaps it is the way of Grace to rid our minds of yesterday's faults...and to say to ourselves...Oh I wish I had done things differently. Or perhaps we just want to beat ourselves up a little more? Whatever the reason for memories that

give us the feeling of regret...leave them at the feet of Jesus. He told us that He takes our sins upon Himself, so that we are free with His forgiveness and sacrifice.

Many of you who receive this Newsletter are Eucharistic Ministers of Holy Communion; Parents; Grandparents; Spouses; or busy raising children. Each using



the gifts that God has given you. Be strong Christians for today and tomorrow and leave your past faults in the past. His Grace will surround you and bring you home.

God never leaves you alone. Even though your thoughts of the past might seem otherwise. God's Grace is your protection. Count on it. Jesus Saves.

God looks upon you as His children and provides you with the Hope through Jesus of a future life of joy and no regrets, in Paradise.



If anyone suffers with a memory of injury and perhaps a hope of revenge upon that person, give it up. Be a good person, even if it hurts. Forgive the past hurts and move toward Grace.

Release the weight of unforgiveness so that your spirit will not be burden anymore with this weight. Give Grace a chance to move you past things...into the future of peace in the spirit. All of us have time to be "good people". Start today, to think about the Grace that found you. Be happy and be an example of God's Grace in you...So that others seeing you can see the

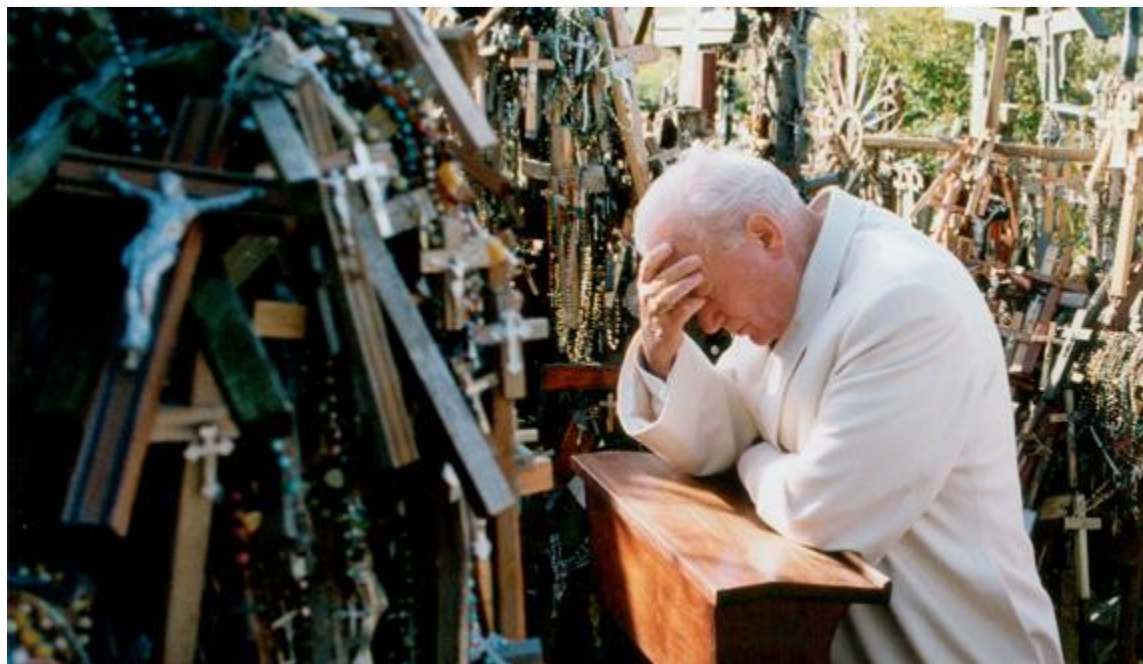
Grace that is working within you. Be a Light that shines in the Darkness.

# The Prophetic Challenge of St. John Paul II

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Grace is Always Looking For Souls Even On Saturday Night Live

By: [Carl E. Olson](#), Editor of the World Catholic Report, April 2015



The first time I *really* thought about Pope John Paul II was when I watched him being ripped to shreds.

Not literally, thankfully, although there was actual ripping involved. I was an Evangelical at the time, a year removed from Bible college and living in Portland, Oregon. One evening, in October 1992, my housemates and I tuned into "Saturday Night Live", which was notable since I rarely watched television and I had little interest in watching Irish singer Sinéad O'Connor perform. But I did watch, and therefore saw her take a photo of John Paul II and angrily rip into pieces while snarling, "Fight the real enemy!" O'Connor's act caused a furor and forever altered her then-promising career.

I had been raised in a Fundamentalist home and had spent my youth mouthing the usual anti-Catholic nonsense about Catholics worshiping Mary, worshiping a piece of bread, and worshiping the Pope. In Bible college, my views began to change, in part due to reading the poetry and fiction of Catholics (Gerard Manley Hopkins, Flannery O'Connor, no relation to Sinéad) and Anglo-Catholics (C.S. Lewis, T.S. Eliot, Charles Williams). A host of other topics and questions followed, and around the same time I watched Sinéad O'Connor lash out at the pope, I was also reading books on Church history and discovering the writings of the early Church Fathers.

I then began to read some of the writings of John Paul II—and I was instantly hooked. Fight the real enemy? Turns out the enemy, for me, had been a truckload of stereotypes and misrepresentations about the Catholic Church.

After entering the Church in 1997, I was able to study John Paul II's work in a more systematic, rigorous way in pursuing a graduate degree in theology, reading all his encyclicals, his "theology of the body," and various apostolic letters, exhortations, and addresses.

Now, ten years after his death, it is difficult to select a specific point within John Paul II's rich teaching that stands out above the rest, if only because it is such a remarkably rich and cogent whole, a mosaic that rewards repeated study and contemplation. That said, there are two aspects I want to note here, on the tenth anniversary of his passing (2015) from this life to the next. The first is his teachings on deification, or (in Eastern terms) theosis. (A coming to God).



It is in the saving Cross of Jesus, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the Sacraments which flow forth from the pierced side of the Redeemer (cf. *Jn* 19:34), that believers find the grace and the strength always to keep God's holy law, even amid the gravest of hardships. As Saint Andrew of Crete observes, the law itself "was enlivened by grace and made to serve it in a harmonious and fruitful combination. Each element preserved its characteristics without change or confusion. In a

divine manner, he turned what could be burdensome and tyrannical into what is easy to bear and a source of freedom".



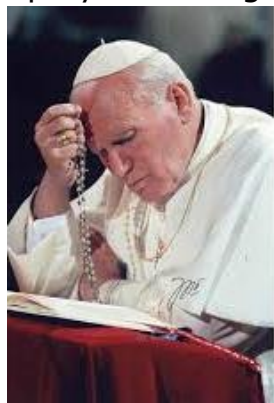
John Paul II understood, having stared into the face of raw evil many times, that we are tempted to believe that the call to holiness is a burden imposed by a heavy-handed, despotic deity. We are inclined to feel that we must follow our passions in order to be "fulfilled" and to be "authentic," to use the language of our therapeutically-oriented culture.

In this context, appropriate allowance is made both for *God's mercy* towards the sinner who converts and for the *understanding of human weakness*. Such understanding never means compromising and falsifying the standard of good and evil in order to adapt it to particular circumstances. It is quite human for the sinner to acknowledge his weakness and to ask mercy for his failings; what is unacceptable is the attitude of one who makes his own weakness the criterion of the truth about the



good, so that he can feel self-justified, without even the need to have recourse to God and his mercy.

An attitude of this sort corrupts the morality of society as a whole, since it encourages doubt about the objectivity of the moral law in general and a rejection of the absoluteness of moral prohibitions regarding specific human acts, and it ends up by confusing all judgments about values.



There is much more. But it is clear to me that Saint Pope John Paul II was prophetic, and his understanding of the human condition and his insights into the moral challenges of our time are not out of date or only for certain Catholics. They are for the whole Church and the whole world. "Through the moral life," John Paul II stated, "faith becomes 'confession', not only before God but also before men: it becomes witness."

The great pontiff from Poland was one such witness, and he challenges us today to be the same.

## Christian Convert from Iran Converting

### Muslims in Sweden



Annahita Parsan, who fled Iran, has converted hundreds of Muslims in Europe to Christianity. (Courtesy Annahita Parsan). From escaping Iran through the mountains as a Muslim refugee, to surviving domestic abuse and imprisonment in a Turkish prison, to carving out a life in Sweden, Annahita Parsan's story is the stuff of a Hollywood movie.

Parsan, a convert from Islam to Christianity and mother of two, has emerged as one of the most prominent religious figures in Europe, both because of her unlikely geographic and spiritual pilgrimage and her decision to reach out to Muslims with the gospel -- at great personal risk.

"My life is completely different since coming to Jesus," said the 47-year-old Parsan, whose memoir, *"Stranger No More: A Muslim Refugee Story of Harrowing Escape, Miraculous Rescue and the Quiet Call of Jesus,"* was published late last year.

Parsan was raised in a Muslim home in the ancient Iranian province of Isfahan with her parents and four siblings, she told Fox News. She was married at 16, and just after Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 she gave birth to a boy, Daniel. Iran quickly became a different place under the Ayatollah Khomeini, and when Parsan's beloved husband was tragically killed in a car accident – she was just 18 – she was forced to surrender custody of her son to her husband's father, in accordance with the law. After several months, she bravely and successfully fought to get back her son.



After two years, I decided to marry again. His situation was like mine; his wife had died," Parsan recalled. "But soon, he began beating my son very badly... I was pregnant again, and it was impossible for me to divorce."

On the heels of bringing a daughter she named Roksana into the world and with the Iran-Iraq war raging around them, Parsan's husband Ashgar compelled them to flee in 1984 across frozen mountains into Turkey in the dead of winter. Without identification papers or passports, Turkish authorities tossed Parsan and her husband into a terrifying prison in the country's Agri district for illegal entry. However, after a harrowing month they were released and traveled to Istanbul. There they spent nine months scrounging for enough funds to make it to Denmark.

It was in this tiny Scandinavian country where the seeds of her eventual spiritual transformation were planted.

"In about the first or second month there, a woman came to the door to speak about God. But it was not in my interest," Parsan recalled. "I was so angry, I was so unhappy. But she came back the next day with a small Bible, so this time I asked Jesus to help me."

Parsan said that over the next year she started to read the Bible, which she had to keep secretly from her husband. Eventually she asked God for answers to her questions and immediately felt a sense of calm and peace of mind that she had never before experienced.

"It was magic," she avowed.

But the calm and peace did not last. After one especially brutal outburst from her abusive husband, during the Christmas of 1989, Parsan tried to take her own life by overdosing on sleeping pills. She woke up in the hospital, her survival itself a virtual miracle, and suddenly the pieces of her disjointed life seemed to her to fall into place.

"I was too scared to go home, and the police came to the hospital to talk to me. Many people were helping me find a safe place to live, and I knew it was Jesus," she said. "And soon, the police called to tell me that they had uncovered a plot in which my abusive husband had planned to kidnap the children back to Iran. After that, we moved to Sweden, and the policeman told me that I have an angel on my shoulder."

After two years there she took the leap and was baptized. She and her children then lived quietly in the Swedish capital for a number of years.

Then in 2006, after surviving a horrific car accident, she decided that God had spared her life so she could spend it helping other Muslims come to faith in Christ.

After five years of intense study Parson was ordained in 2012 as a minister in the Church of Sweden.

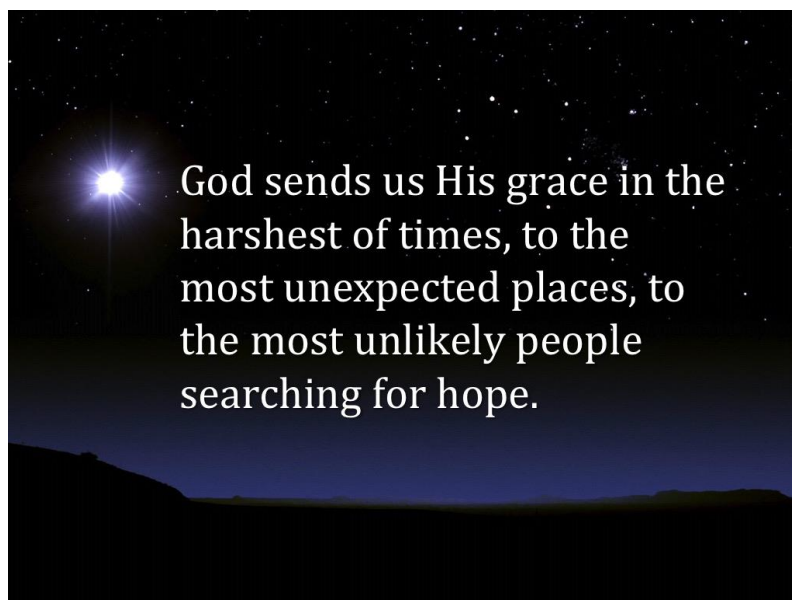
The former refugee is now the leader of two congregations in Sweden. She not only evangelizes Muslims, but she frequently trains churches to reach out to Muslims and disciple them once they join the church.

“I work specifically with the Muslim community, many are also Farsi speaking,” Parsan said. “Sometimes they come to the church because they are curious. Sometimes they are asylum seekers and sometimes they are just visiting from places like Iran and Afghanistan, so they secretly get baptized and then they go back.”

She says she has been instrumental in the conversion of more than 1,500 people over the past five years.

Because of her successes, Parsan faces risks other Church of Sweden ministers do not face. “I have serious threats at least a couple of times per year, a threat of a knife attack or a bomb attack. I have a police officer attached to my case I can always call, and we have security during our services. I have other threats from my own distant family members,” she added. “But for me, what I do is worth it. I hope people out there who have lost their faith, will maybe hear my story and be inspired to come back,”





## ***Mary Rose McGeady***



Sister Mary Rose McGeady, the Roman Catholic nun who resuscitated Covenant House, the nation's largest network of shelters for homeless youngsters talks about Covenant House and the importance of this great organization.

"If there's a more important job in America today than taking care of our troubled young people, I'm certainly not aware of it," Sister Mary Rose said when she was chosen to lead Covenant House in 1990, after the resignation of the Rev. Bruce Ritter.

Father Ritter, who had founded the organization in two cold-water flats on the Lower East Side of Manhattan 22 years earlier, stepped down after several young men, some of them former residents of Covenant House, accused him of sexual abuse. He adamantly denied the accusations. An independent investigation commissioned by the organization found that although none of the sexual allegations could be proved, enough evidence existed, including evidence of financial irregularities, to warrant

Father Ritter's dismissal. No criminal charges were brought against him.

By then, with donations nearing \$80 million a year, Covenant House was providing services to 28,000 homeless young people in 11 cities across the country and in Latin America. But within a year of Father Ritter's resignation, donations had fallen to \$42 million, forcing the reduction of services throughout the network. In New York City alone, an outreach center was closed and more than 100 beds in shelters were

eliminated (including a floor for youths infected with the virus that causes AIDS), as were two of the three vans that took youngsters off the streets on frigid nights.

By the time Sister Mary Rose retired in 2003, donations had climbed to nearly \$130 million and new shelters had been opened in 11 cities, among them Oakland, Calif.; Anchorage; Vancouver, British Columbia; and Managua, Nicaragua. Under her direction, the organization's hot line (1-800-999-9999) became a 24-hour service. Covenant House now provides service in 26 cities and says it reaches over 50,000 youngsters a year.

Mr. Ryan, who called Sister Mary Rose "**the Mother Teresa of street kids**," said: "Come hell or high water, she was determined to clean up Covenant House. From ashes, really, she pulled Covenant House forward.

Even as a teenager, Mary Rose McGeady was serving children. Born in Hazleton, Pa., on June 28, 1928, she was one of three children of Joseph and Catherine McGeady. The family later moved to Washington, where Mary Rose attended Immaculate Conception Academy, operated by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. As a high school student, she spent every Saturday at St. Ann's Infant Asylum.

She joined the order in 1946. "I wanted to remain part of the community," she said. "When I told my parents, my mother cried. My father told me to give it a try, and if I did not like it I could come home."

Sister Mary Rose graduated from Emmanuel College in Boston with a degree in sociology in 1955 and six years later received a master's degree in clinical psychology from Fordham University. By then she had already worked with homeless and disturbed children at a child-care center in Boston and served as director of the Astor Home for Children in Rhinebeck, N.Y. She was an associate director of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Brooklyn when she was chosen to lead Covenant House.

She is survived by a sister, Catherine Pendleton. Sister Mary Rose went to Heaven in 2012.

**When she retired in 2003, Sister Mary Rose said, "I wish I could wave a wand and mend a child's broken heart."**



Magically or not, her efforts helped Tracy Jones-Walker, who was a teenager wandering the streets of Brooklyn, in 1990. Her family, immigrants from Guyana — including 16 brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews — lived in a one-bedroom apartment in Flatbush. After a fight with one of her sisters, said Ms. Jones-Walker, she "left the house and didn't go back." She ended up at the Covenant House crisis center on West 41st Street in Manhattan.

“Now I’m a senior analyst at a Wall Street firm,” she said in an interview. “Had it not been for Covenant House, I would have been lost.”



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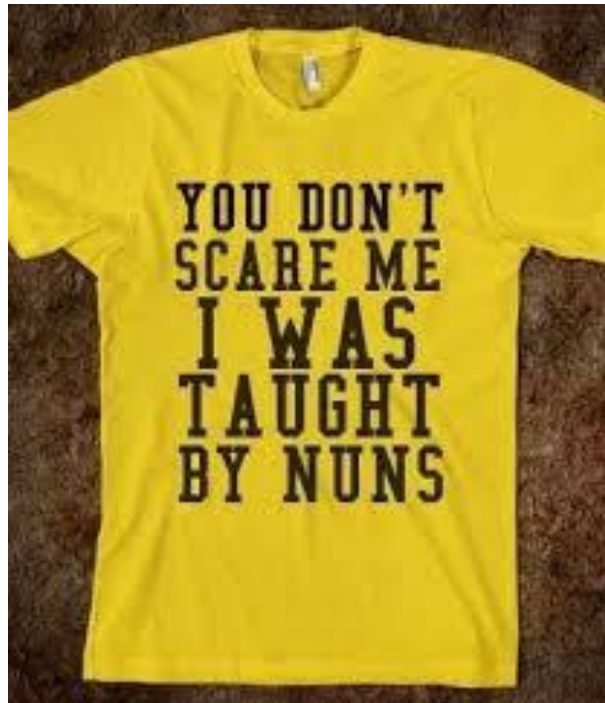
## Little Humor Section



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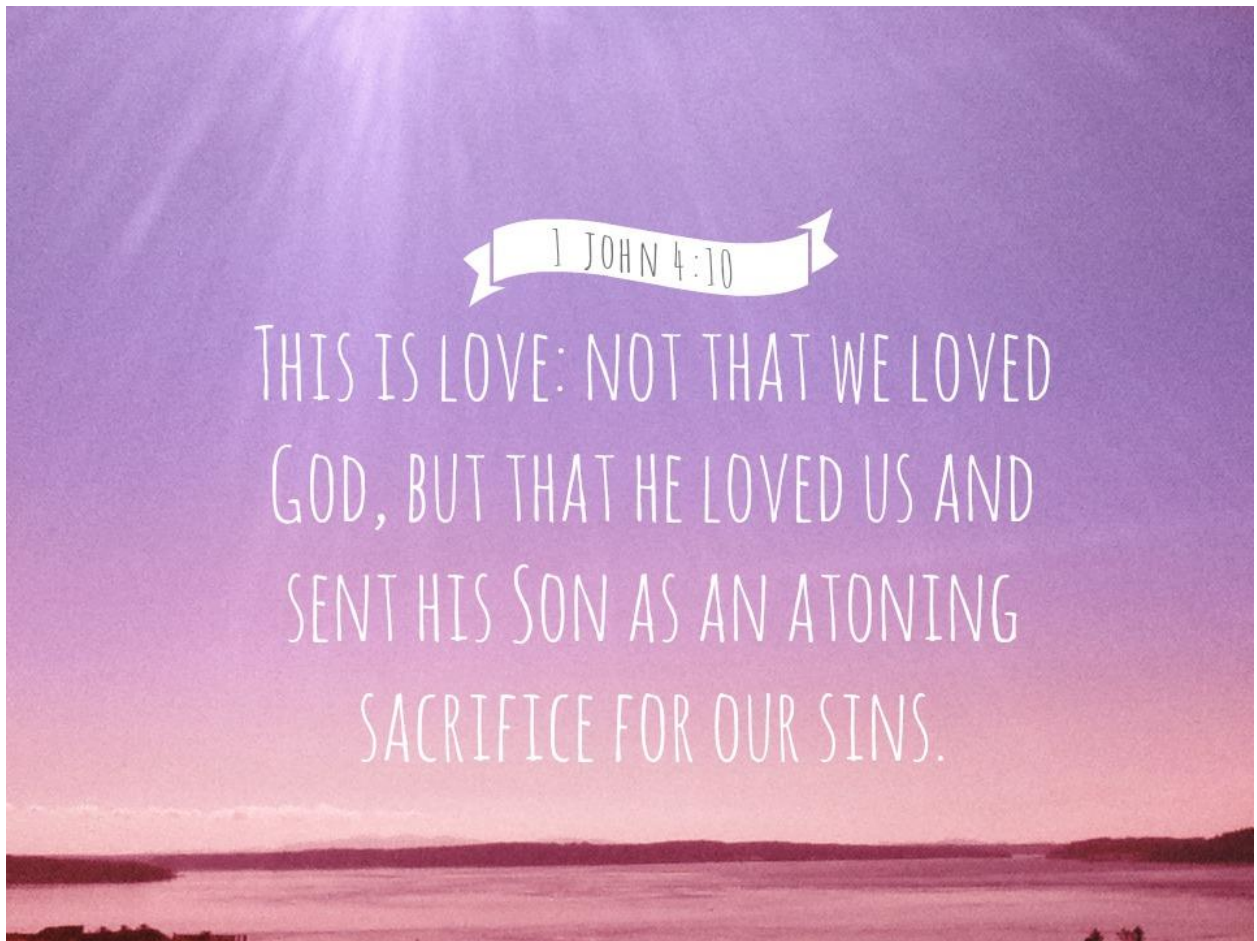
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“Hear that? People in heaven have ever-laughing life.”



**Bible Verse for the Month**





**Our mission statement is to motivate people to pray and to be Christian examples in their work, home and with others, for those needing the Light in a world of Darkness.**

**St. Paul Ministry, Cypress, TX**

