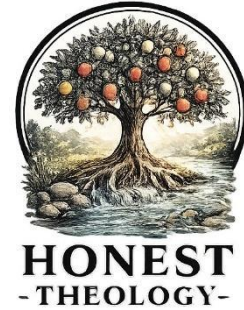


Love In The Strangest Places



I was blessed to work my professional dream job. It was teaching elementary school in an excellent school district at a time when teaching jobs were hard to find (back in the '80s). I viewed this as a gift from God and when I got my very first paycheck (I was making the incredible sum of \$13,000 a year!) I remember sitting at my desk and thinking, "I can't believe they actually paid me to do this!"

That's how happy I was.

I would teach in a variety of positions before I settled in what turned out to be my ultimate favorite: fourth grade. It was in this professional role that I loved that I would find myself – begin to realize that I really did have a skill and could really make a difference. Back in those early years when I was riddled with anxiety and low self-confidence this was truly incredible. Personal confidence would encourage me to be a unique, not necessarily by the book teacher that wore slippers (and her students could, too), played Louis Armstrong music during snack time, and popped popcorn during tests. I became known for my "Never-Again Projects" that would bring a pool into the classroom for a science project, get permission to come to school on Saturday to film a poetry video, do international food feasts when we studied immigration, and practice the hula to Don Ho music when we learned about Hawaii. I had a blast and I think the kids did, too.

But personally, my life wasn't so great. My personal anxiety, still alive and kicking, had begun to gain traction with clinical depression, too. Those two powerful issues can create a desperation that needs to be filled at all costs. No one could say I didn't make a serious effort with relationships; but God kept telling me, "No." As much as I would want one to work, there would be *something* that I just couldn't compromise on. (Hello, [Big Black Arrow](#).) I reached the point that during holiday times, when the kids asked what I wanted for a holiday gift I'd say, "Either a Christmas tree ornament or a tall, good-looking man." LOL. You see, teaching in an elementary school with an almost entirely female staff wasn't really the place to hold out any hope. I needed all the help I could get. And, *my biological clock was ticking*.

Scripture tells us we are supposed to be [thankful in all circumstances](#). My mother reminded me of this during one particularly low point and it ... annoyed me profoundly. For a period of time, I allowed myself to have less than spiritual thoughts like, "Thanks a lot, God, that I have had another failed relationship," or "Thanks God, that I'm still alone at twenty-eight," or even "Thanks God, that the profession I love so much will never let me meet an eligible partner." They were cynical, sarcastic thoughts – thought even now I wonder if, deep down, they contained the tiniest prayerful hope. I really wanted to be in a relationship and someday become a mom... more than being a teacher or a writer.

I heard somewhere (probably my mother... roll your eyes) that God would not bless you with *more* until you already appreciated the blessings you already had. Once again, that didn't go over well with me. It was like a slap upside my head. Had I ever really been thankful for how much God had blessed me with (it was a very long list)? Was I really just whining about the few things I still wanted? I determined to focus on my positive blessings which were both my

teaching and writing careers. I determined that this was to be my focus and made a concerted effort to do so.

We were studying immigration, always a favorite of mine. Almost a decade in the classroom, I could almost do it blindfolded. It involved a family tree project, a class trip to Ellis Island, and an international food feast that sometimes even brought in the administration and the newspaper. I always extended the invitation that if someone in the class had an immigrant who would like to come in and share what it was like to move to an entirely different country, I'd love a guest speaker! Over the years I had a grandpa come in and talk about World War II and various moms come in and make potato latkes, Ukrainian Easter eggs, and decorate our hands with henna designs. You get the picture.

After the holiday winter break, one of my students (Hi! TARA!!) spoke with me early one morning as we stood in the coat closet. "An immigrant works for my father and he says he'll come in and speak." "Great!" I said, "What country is he from?" (Thinking about heavy accents...) "England, I think," she said. And then she leaned over and whispered, "*He's twenty-nine and he's single!*" My first reaction? I said, "Ooooo, what's he look like?" The answer, "He's real tall with red hair."

King David [prayed](#), "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits...*" More importantly, Jesus [said](#), "*Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much, and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.*"

God has a sense of humor, you know. I like to envision occasional chuckles, eye rolls, and incredulous head shakes, too. We have to be on the right path to experience it all, however. We have to be [listening](#) and [open](#) and [willing](#) to follow where God leads. It's not a faucet you turn on and off, it's an environment you choose to submerge yourself in.

Yeah, we got married. But you need to know that we didn't go skipping off into the sunset throwing flowers over our shoulders. We were on again and off again for almost two years ... (it took Tara's younger sister – Hi BETH!) to finally cement the deal.

He was worth the [wait](#); God's timing is always perfect. I have always worried that those two little girls didn't realize how precious they were to my life. How could I ever thank them enough, right? God does work in [mysterious](#) ways and they are *always* to bring you to an unimaginable [joy](#).

P.S. Oh, and please don't miss that *all* those cynical, sarcastic thoughts I made to God *were actually true blessings*. Just imagine if those blessings hadn't happened when they did. I now know that sometimes the very things we complain about are the blessings God uses to lead us somewhere we never expected.

Scripture to maybe check out:

- [Psalm 100](#).

Bibliography notes:

1. For this post I used The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition put out by the 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Feel free

to research from you own translation or look up the many that are available on [Bible Gateway](#).

What are your thoughts about this post? Email me and let me know!
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