

LETTING YOUR
CHILDREN
LEAD YOU
TO
GOD

Discovering His Love for You

Michael Gagné

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all who are struggling to find meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in life.

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Author's Note

This book is a series of reflections on how everyday parenting experiences led me to realize how loved I am by the Source of all life. But it is also a love story—a love story in which I hope you can see yourself as a character in the narrative.

The term “parent” is used often. Whether you are a biological parent, an adoptive parent, or a foster parent, please know I am referring to you when I use the term “parent.”

Please note that your purchase of this book will enable the gift of scholarships to first generation college students from economically disadvantaged families hoping to leverage education as a means of escaping a life of poverty.

Disclaimers

While I am Christian, I do *not* intend this to be a book of Christian thoughts, but rather, thoughts about a Higher Power who guides us, should we choose to be aware of that guidance. That Higher Power is referred to by many different names, based on each individual's faith and religion. Because each of us has our own unique perspective, that Higher Power may be male or female whose skin color and looks may vary. Without any disrespect or belittling of those characteristics above, it does not matter for this discussion.

While my nomenclature and generalization may offend some, that is not my intent. I understand that there are differences in principles and beliefs among various religions. Religious comparisons and judgments are outside the bounds of this book. Candidly, the intent is to convey the hope that, in spite of those religious differences, the beliefs common to all religions are that human life is sacred, that we are all created as a result of Love, and that we find true peace when our lives reflect our beginnings.

Fundamental to this discussion is the premise that this Higher Power is 100% love. Not 99.9% but 100%. I am too human to understand what that really means. What I do know is that I will never be able to achieve that level of selfless love. A Love that

is completely consumed in a direction away from self. A Love in which every second of His being is infinitely focused on His children. There is not one moment where that love is focused on Himself. The only way that I can even begin to understand what Love means is by looking at how I love my own children and seeing the depths and strides to which I would go as their parent—then realizing that those depths and strides are only a fraction of the lengths to which someone who is 100% love would go. That driving force is incomprehensible to me.

It means that in spite of my best intentions and selfless love for my children, my love will never come close to the source of Love who created you and me. One could interpret this as a mockery of human love. It is not. It is simply stating the incomprehensibility of what the true depth of love can be.

It was through my role as a parent that I glimpsed what His love is really all about. It wasn't until I became a parent that I realized how loved I was as the child of my parents—and even more so by Him as my Creator. As I matured as a parent, I began to sense what forgiveness is, recognizing that the point of forgiveness, on the Divine level, is less for the forgiver than for the one who is forgiven.

In the first draft of these reflections, I sought to refer to this Higher Power with different genders, different religious names. I realized that, while the intent was to be inclusive and respectful of varying beliefs, it became very confusing and distracting to read. Because of the religious beliefs in which I was raised, I am referring to this Higher Power as He/Him. But please understand, this is a necessity of language and not my determination that this Omnipotence is, in fact, male. For my purposes here, a discussion of the gender of this Power is counterproductive because it will not change the fundamental principle of 100% love. More importantly, I can't fathom referring to this source of Love as "It"!

As I mentioned above, I am a Christian. It was how I was raised. I have written one chapter that is Christian in nature, though it is reserved until the end. Any Christian references are not intended as coy acts to convert you but rather to share with my fellow Christians my thoughts on the topic being discussed. In the end, all that matters to me is that we live our lives as close to 100% love as is humanly possible, regardless of our stated religion.

In complete transparency, I am not currently practicing any religion. For me personally, religion gave me a springboard in which to achieve the ultimate goal, which is a deep personal relationship with God. What I attempt to accomplish each day is an ongoing dialogue with Him. Often it is nothing more than telling Him how deeply in love with Him I am, that I would give my life for Him, and then being still and listening. Our lives are to be panes of glass through which others see this power of Love in our words and actions. I pray that when my earthly journey has ended and we are united, He has a lot of paper towels and Windex!

Finally, I am an evolutionist who believes the first nanosecond of action which initiated this evolutionary journey was an act of creation and free will (more on that later). An act of Love. What followed is the evolution of humanity as we know it today.

Summary: these are all my disclaimers. I am humbled that you would even consider reading this book. If there is something in here which resonates, then I am ecstatic. Reread it many times so that you fall deeper and deeper in love with Him. Since life is about learning from one another, I would invite you to share your thoughts and inspirations with me so that I may gain a greater appreciation of your experience as a parent, a child, and an individual searching for the greater purpose that guides us all.

Introduction: The Journey

Life for me is a journey. A never-ending journey—until, of course, the day I take my last breath and this first journey ends. We'll leave a discussion of the journey after life to another time. Days before I turned twenty, I had a death experience. It was quite peaceful, but it was short-lived (fortunately—otherwise you wouldn't be reading this!). More on this later.

As a journey, whether physical or spiritual, we have many opportunities to take twists and turns. And, as in life, some of our spiritual journey we may have no control over, other than how we deal with the curves in the road or unplanned “road construction.”

Life, unlike a planned vacation, didn't wait for you to start the journey. Life started without you, and time keeps marching on whether you want to march or not. You did not decide when, where, or to whom you would be born, and for many years afterward, you did not make decisions about your journey.

As the years went on, you were allowed to make some decisions for yourself until, at some point in life, all of the decision-making process was up to you. Of course, the manner in which you were raised plays a large part into how you look at life, people, and circumstances, and it certainly influences some

of your decision-making strategy. We are all unique and, of course, we want to put our personal stamp on life. But when faced with options, what helps us make the choice? What is the influence that wins out when we are faced with the choice of A or B as the deciding path?

As I mentioned earlier, I was raised a Christian—Catholic, to be exact. I could have been raised Protestant, Jewish, Islamic, or anything else, but, as I stated above, many things were outside my control—the religion in which I was raised being one of them. Be that as it may, I was born to parents who were Catholic and Protestant, and the raising religion . . . well, Catholicism won out. (It really doesn't matter, so let's agree it's a non-issue!)

My maternal grandmother was very religious in her simple Cajun way. I remember, as a child, going to church and watching my grandmother read her prayers and say her rosary. It always seemed detached from everything else that was going on. Although, in those days, Mass was in Latin, which of course was an even stranger language than Cajun—so no wonder Gran-nie did her own thing. Every morning and evening she said her prayers and a rosary.

My mother, while I don't remember her being "religious," was always asking God for guidance. But then, she had three biological children and five stepchildren, and guidance was probably something that she needed painfully (in addition to more sleep). After having raised all of us kids, I do remember that she actually had time to pray. I noticed when I would visit that, like her mother, she would say her prayers in the morning and evening. It was only in her later years that I realized how devout she was, and probably always had been—but, I'm ashamed to say, it just was not a part of the limited filter through which I viewed her as I was growing up. After all, life was all about me—or so I thought at the time.

Introduction: The Journey

Having been raised Catholic, serving as an altar boy at 6:00 a.m. Mass, and with my mother working as the church secretary, I contemplated priesthood as a choice in life. I began considering this in the 9th grade but decided I was too young to make that decision, so I went on with my high school years. One of the nagging questions I had at the time was, how could I be a priest as well as a parent? I wanted to have children. But I put that in greater hands than my own and decided that, by delegating, I didn't have to think about it anymore.

After high school, I wasn't sure about college. My father offered to get me a job as a roughneck on a rig. I had to get up at 4:30 a.m., work in the heat of South Texas, carry mud sacks up a flight of stairs—and I swear the mud sacks weighed more than I did. A summer of this convinced me I needed an alternative strategy, so I decided to pursue college. My parents were of very meager means, so there were no college funds set aside for me. But I was determined.

My college day started at 4:00 a.m. when I threw a paper route. I arrived back at the apartment to get my quadriplegic roommate up and ready for school, since I cared for him in exchange for room and board. I always hoped he had no accidents during the night, or a bath and stripping the bed had to be added to the schedule. His classes started at 8:00, so off we went. I checked on him at noon, which usually entailed draining his ileostomy bag, and then I picked him up at 5:00, cramming in my classes and assignments as I could. Then it was time to prepare dinner, bathe him, and put him down just before 10:00 p.m. because I had to get to the local grocery store and stock shelves until midnight. Four hours later, the routine repeated itself. All this, and yet I was barely getting by. Fortunately, the summers were the time to make some cash and save it for the next school year.

Life has a way of throwing detours our direction. During the

summer after my sophomore year, I was working at a shipyard when I was in an electrical accident involving a winch truck, four of us steadying a metal sign, and a too-close encounter with a power line. In the few seconds after 7200 volts and I made friends, I realized that I was going to die and that I had enough time to ask for forgiveness. Then peace set in. Unfortunately, of the four of us involved in the incident, two of the men didn't make it. For myself, after twenty minutes of CPR, I was revived. It was a very peaceful experience for the time I exited this world and attempted to enter the next, but I guess there were bigger plans for me.

As a result of the accident, I had no money to return to college. The idea of attending seminary resurfaced, which was made possible by the generosity of my local diocese, and so I decided to pursue it, leaving the future to a Higher Power with much more wisdom than myself.

While I ended up not becoming a priest, I did leave the seminary having developed a much more personal relationship with God. They were wonderful years that I will never regret because I began to see that the emphasis of life needs to be on making a difference in other's lives.

Post-seminary, I stayed involved with the church and different ministries as I attempted to use the talents given to me. But there was always a missing piece of the puzzle that I spent many years trying to figure out. How could I put flesh and reality to this Being called "God"? More importantly, how could my understanding of His love for me move from an exercise of the brain to an experience of the heart?

While I wrote this book largely about how parenting helped me understand how I was loved by God, this is also about being a child and understanding how my parents thought and cared for me. If at this point in life you are not a parent, you are certainly a child. Sadly, many realizations I arrived at as a parent were

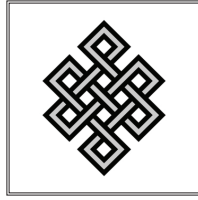
found late in life, and I didn't adequately convey to my parents how much I realized and understood what they were trying to do for me.

I am hoping to share some insights I have gained in the struggle to make sense of parenting and offer them for your consideration. While parenting was the task at hand for a considerable part of my life, this is really about the struggle of understanding who God is and how this seemingly distant, non-physical Being plays into my everyday life and interactions. It just so happened that parenting became the skit, the medium through which I began to understand the broader perspective of this meaning, this understanding I was searching for.

Some would read the above and try to speculate that the implication is, unless you are a parent you can't get what God's love for you as a child is all about. I'm just saying I wasn't smart enough to understand what His love was all about until I became a parent.

What follows are a number of my own parental situations and observations, and how I began to understand there was a greater force at work, caring for me and loving me in the same personal way that I was doing with my own children.

The chapters that follow are intended to be stand-alone reflections. As a suggestion, read one chapter a week, then spend that week reflecting on how the words relate to you and your children—if you are a parent—as well as how they relate to you as the child of your own parent(s). And then, how does that translate to where you are in your journey of purpose? I hope that a Higher Power is a part of your journey.



Infinite Love

According to Merriam-Webster, *infinity* is a noun. I was not aware of that—but how appropriate, since God is Infinity, and the person of God is a noun. Merriam-Webster says this: “The quality of being infinite; unlimited extent of time, space or quantity as in boundlessness; an indefinitely great number or amount as in the infinity of stars”; and so on. The point is that infinity has no bounds.

As humans, sure, we can understand the definition, but it is hard to grasp the concept because we are finite. We have no human experience of infinity. We are born only to die. A day is bound by 24 hours, a year by 365 (or 366) days. A vehicle has a finite amount of fuel. Nothing in our life has the ability to be infinite. We are bound. And as such, our frame of reference is always bound by some limitation.

Yet He is infinite. That Being will survive all of mankind, will survive the planet we live on. He has been, is, and will be. If a Being is infinite, then every aspect of that Being is infinite. We know, as humans who are finite at our core, that any trait or character or action in our life is also finite. It can be no other way.

God’s love is infinite. It is without limits, even if our perception and understanding is limited. He is not bound by our limits

but rather offers His love without limits. Why? He has no choice. That is the hard part to wrap our heads around. He cannot be anything other than limitless in His love toward us, in the same way we cannot be infinite in anything we do. We are bound by our finiteness. He is bound by His infiniteness. His forgiveness is also bound by His infiniteness—it is forever.

We are so conditioned as humans that our actions will dictate or affect how someone else feels about us. Yet our actions do not deter His love for us. He has no choice in the matter. He is 100% love, and our actions play no part in governing that quality about Him. He may be saddened by our actions when they are disrespectful or hurtful of ourselves or others or Him, but He cannot gate His love for us as a result. Impossible.

As parents, our love for our children is as close to infinity as we are able to achieve. Regardless of the number of children we have, we are given the ability to love each one without bounds. And while there may be periods of anger or disappointment at the actions of our children, we still love them without fail. It's because they are our own.

God doesn't need hall passes to issue, or limited-time offers of love or affection. It would be an impossible event for Him. He loves—regardless. Yet, while He feels hurt and disappointment, every moment is a new moment for Him in His opportunity to love us with no regard for anything except His infinite love.

In the child-rearing process, we often put boundaries in which our children can move, teaching that there will be no severe consequence, provided they stay in those bounds. Punishment ensues if the bounds are violated. In the transformation to adulthood, those boundaries should be eliminated (unless you remain a helicopter mom/dad). What's impressed upon our kids is the fact that their decisions always have an impact on themselves, and they often impact others. In some cases, the consequences are felt

beyond their immediate circle because, as a person in a society, we are all connected.

I have often heard a friend of mine comment how she viewed the struggles in her children's lives as God putting obstacles in front of them so they could learn. I never knowingly put an obstacle in front of my children as a means of learning. One of my children rear-ended someone in their early days of driving—something each of us has probably done (I know I have!) at least once in our own driving career. I couldn't imagine seeking out someone and devising a plan where they would take off at an intersection to give my child the sense that the road ahead was clear, only to have them apply their brakes so they could be rear-ended in an effort to teach my child to be a more responsible driver.

The perceived obstacles in our lives are nothing more than our inability to listen with clarity to understand the direction we are being guided. He is always telling us what is the best choice to make, but we are often praying (and when we're talking, we can't be listening)—or we don't want to hear anything other than what we believe the right outcome and action would be, given our inability to be anything other than finite. Good intentions notwithstanding.

We are all #blessed. Some people choose a single event in their life to be #cursed, or some people make a decision to impact other lives via their actions and relegate #cursed to them. Our actions, fortunately, don't change His love for us. We are always loved infinitely by the Lover.



This week, reflect on your actions, and ask if those actions would be any different if you possessed the ability to act only out of 100% love. Ponder what it would really feel like if you could completely grasp the knowledge that you are loved beyond your wildest dreams. How liberating would that be? How much less effort would you have to expend on materialistic pleasures to boast your feeling of being loved, if you knew it at your core?

Someone asked me once if I loved myself. I thought for a moment and responded that, no, I don't love myself. I don't even think about loving myself. Why would I? That would require me to take time away from doing for others and focus that energy on myself. Instead, I just tap into His infinite love for me, and that is all I need to experience fulfillment and love.