

A Revelation of the Father's Love

Jack and Trisha Frost

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It was the voice of my stern, disapproving father saying the words I had longed to hear for so many years.

"Son, I love you. Everything is going to be all right."

It was 1972. Because of an LSD overdose, I lay in a semi-comatose state in a hospital bed in Daytona Beach, Florida. My dad was cradling me in his arms and running his fingers through my shoulder-length hair, telling me—his rebellious, misfit son—that he really loved me.



This couldn't be happening, I thought to myself as I listened to the faint beeping of medical equipment. My dad was telling me he loved me! The same overpowering dad who—two years earlier—had shoved me to the floor in our home, grabbed a pair of scissors and violently cut off my hippie-style hair after telling me I was a disgrace to the family. Now he was tenderly whispering to me about love, forgiveness and acceptance. Even though I was in a drug-induced fog, his words sank deep into my soul.

"Son, I love you."

As a boy, I had longed for dad's approval and affection. I just wanted him to smile at me, or to say that he was proud to be my dad. Yet when I opened my heart to receive his love, I always was left empty and disappointed. I was now 19 years old, yet I could not remember one time in my life when my dad had held me close, or said those words. As a result of the rejection I felt, I had ceased being my father's son and never wanted to see him again.

Like so many men from his generation, Dad didn't know how to express affection. He was a good man and would have died for me. But to him, showing emotion was a sign of weakness. Because he had grown up during the Great Depression, and lived in a fatherless home, he built a fortress around his heart to protect himself from pain. Then he went to war and learned even more survival skills. Later, he expressed his love simply by providing for his family financially, and by teaching his two sons to survive in a merciless world.

He always told me: "Never be weak by showing emotions or tears! Be tough! Be a man!"

For years I had tried unsuccessfully to be the tough man that my father wanted me to be. Yet as I lay in that hospital bed at a time of ultimate failure, Dad was holding me in his arms and expressing love for me. He was not aware that I could hear his voice, or that I could feel his arms around me. I had been willing to stop being my father's son, but my father was not willing to stop being my father. His commitment to me was greater than my commitment to him.

That was perhaps my first glimpse of Father God's unconditional love--and of His desire to express His affection to me, even though I had failed miserably. It would be several more years before I would take the first step to receive that amazing love.

Driven to Achieve

Dad was a respected man in our community, and his athletic abilities—particularly his skills as a professional tennis instructor—won him plenty of honors in Daytona Beach . I tried to meet my dad's expectations in sports and to perform well enough to earn his approval, but I was awkward with a tennis racquet and never seemed to impress him. Dad regularly reminded me—in harsh words—that I wasn't good enough.

He would scream at me like a drill sergeant when we practiced on Saturday mornings: "Put your arm into it! Be a monster! Don't be such a wimp! Men don't cry! You are so pitiful!"

These ordeals would leave me in tears. I felt like such a failure, yet I wanted Dad's approval so much I kept striving to perform for him. If only I could hit the ball right, I told myself, then Dad will be proud of me. I did not realize that an ungodly belief was growing stronger and stronger in me. I was slowly being consumed by a deep fear of failure and rejection, a fear that caused me to feel worthless unless I performed well enough to win my father's approval.

This ungodly belief produced rotten results in my twenties when I became a commercial snapper and grouper fishing boat captain. Driven by a relentless desire to prove myself, I aspired to become the best fisherman on the southeastern coast of the United States . Everything I did in life began to revolve around my dream to become what people in the fishing business call "top hook."

Like my father, I had to be the toughest and the best. And like my father, I developed a fierce temper. Any member of my crew who caused us to lose fish, or who disappointed me in any way, faced the brunt of my anger. I became known as the Captain Bly of the Carolina coast. I was a screamer and tyrant. People did not want to mess with Jack Frost in those days.

I would often risk the lives of the crew by spending a week or more off the South Carolina coast in the winter, riding out 40- to 60-miles-per-hour gales and 20- to 30-foot seas in a 44-ft boat so we could claim the coveted prize. I was driven by my fear of failure—and by a cruel ambition that left no room for compassion for anyone. I had to be the winner at all costs. In my warped way of thinking, I was nobody if I did not outfish everybody. I did not realize that deep inside, I was consumed by an unconscious desire to win my father's approval. That nagging void had become a cancer that was eating me alive.

But everything changed in 1980. That's when God's overwhelming love broke finally broke through. I was twenty-seven years old at the time, and my life was in shambles. I had been addicted to drugs, alcohol, and pornography for more than 10 years—because I was constantly seeking a way to escape the pain caused by this fear of failure. My anger was out of control, and as a result I constantly wounded my wife, my son, and others with my words and demeaning looks.

In a desperate attempt to escape this pain, I took my fishing boat out to sea one day in February 1980. Once I got forty miles off the North Carolina coast, I cried out to God for three days, asking Him to make Himself real to me.

“Oh, God,” I prayed earnestly, “please do something. I’ve hurt everyone around me. I’m miserable. I don’t know why I feel so driven. It’s like something inside me is pushing me to the edge of insanity. I don’t know why I am so harsh. I feel like I am being poisoned from the inside. Please help me.”

It was then, when I was at the lowest place in my life, that I encountered the unconditional love of Christ for the first time. I prayed a simple sinner’s prayer and asked Jesus to enter my heart. Instantly His presence broke the chains of alcoholism, drug addiction and pornography. In a moment’s time God gave me a new heart. The burden of sin lifted, and I felt true joy for the first time.

I had tasted of the Lord’s goodness. But it would take years for me to find total deliverance from the fear of failure that had made me such a driven man.

Performing for God

After my conversion, I became active in church life and quickly learned that my tendency toward performance orientation operated well in a religious environment. I simply transferred my ungodly beliefs, my fear of failure, and my aggressive striving into church work. I thought that the best way to win God’s approval and acceptance was to do things for Him, and also to win the favor of the Christians around me.

It seemed to be perfectly natural to express my love for God by building my identity through hyper-religious activity. Many of the Christians around me seemed to think the same way. The more we prayed, fasted, read our Bibles, witnessed to strangers or attended church meetings, the more acceptance we could gain from God.

But this false understanding of God’s character came with a high price. After working so hard to please Him, I had no lasting joy, no peace, no rest, and no energy left to convince my wife and children that I loved them more than ministry.

As I began to pastor a small church in 1984, my childhood filter system for earning love and acceptance translated ministry into an aggressive zeal to win souls and to build the fastest growing church in our denominational district. Just as I had been willing to do anything to be the best fisherman in the southeastern United States, now—as a Christian leader—I wanted to achieve my spiritual goals so I would receive the praises of men.

I wanted to look good to everybody. But underneath the veneer of success, I was an unhappy man with a miserable family. My commitment to “the ministry” was far greater than my commitment to my wife, my children or any other loving relationships. When I was at home, I was irritable and impossible to get along with. Everything I did was tainted with anger.

My countenance became stern and serious, and my preaching became legalistic and demanding. I focused on biblical truth, but my heart was empty of love. I knew the theology of God’s love, but I had not truly encountered it. I could quote verses in Scripture about His unconditional acceptance of us, but it was a foreign concept to me.

As a result, I began comparing myself to others in ministry, thinking they were more blessed or more gifted than I was. This fostered a competitive attitude, rooted in jealousy, that made it almost impossible for me to relate to other ministers, or to anyone in spiritual authority in a healthy way. I became a master of disguises. I would sit at ministers' conferences with a smile on my face. Underneath my clever religious mask, I viewed successful church leaders with an attitude of rivalry and judgmentalism.

I couldn't stand the thought that they might be successful. If they were blessed, I felt deprived. If they experienced some form of failure, I secretly rejoiced. My heart was sick with pride.

Finally in 1986 I acknowledged my need for healing and went through some deep, healing prayer ministry to uncover the roots of anger, drivenness, and lack of intimacy. This experience impacted so many areas of my life that by 1988, my wife, Trisha, and I spent the next seven years teaching seminars about emotional healing in many churches throughout the country.

I felt so free! Trisha and I were effective in ministering to pastors and other church leaders as we helped them find healing in their marriages and families. But I soon realized that my own deep struggle with performance orientation was not resolved. Even after we began the healing prayer ministry, I would often fall back into my old habit patterns of aggressive striving. I kept giving my wife those demeaning looks, and speaking to her in stern and rigid tones. And when I was caught in this cycle, I couldn't see that I was the one at fault.

Outwardly, I was a man of moral integrity and godly character. I never had a moral failure. I was an aggressive pursuer of God, praying and reading the Bible for two or three hours a day and doing all the right religious things. But inwardly I lacked the ability to express love at home. I was joyless. I had no inner peace. I was driven by spiritual ambition because I had built my identity and value systems on position, power, and possessions. My faithfulness, duty, and service were not a response of true love to God; they flowed instead from a desire for personal gain and reward.

I could not see the bondage I was in, but my family could! I felt I gave my wife nothing to complain about. After all, I was faithful to her and always provided for her needs. Trisha knew I would be home every night and remain loyal to her. I was a man committed to purity in marriage. I had not touched pornography since my first encounter with Jesus. I even told her I loved her every day.

But she felt unloved and rejected. Daily she battled the pain of being married to a man who gave his life to meet everyone else's needs (and his own) but did not have energy left to make his wife believe she was loved more than the ministry. As a result she had to wear her own disguises, suppressing the guilt and anger she constantly felt because her need for intimacy and emotional bonding wasn't being met. She fell into a severe depression, and well-intentioned church people made her feel guiltier.

"You are married to such a godly man," they would tell her. "You should be grateful instead of having these negative thoughts about him." After twenty years of living like this, Trisha was dying inside. Any hope for a better marriage was gone.

My children didn't fare any better. As more legalism crept into my life, the more unyielding and joyless I became as a parent. My three children could never do things

well enough for me. They didn't make good enough grades, they didn't perform well enough in sports and they never did their household chores to my satisfaction.

I would tell them I loved them, but I constantly pointed out every mistake and shortcoming. I demanded exact obedience, but I lacked the ability to express love, tender affection, and grace and mercy when they fell short. I read all the proper parenting books and tried performing up to every expert's standards, but something inside seemed to hinder me from expressing the love I felt inside.

By 1995, my 17-year-old son and my 14-year-old daughter had closed their spirits to any affection, correction, or advice I tried to offer them. They stopped looking at me in the eye because they feared the look of rejection I often gave. They hardly spoke to me because they were afraid of upsetting or displeasing me. My pride produced a desire in them to rebel, and they began to seek the acceptance they yearned for by hanging around the wrong crowd. And worst of all, they wanted nothing to do with the angry, legalistic God I represented to them.

Tears of Healing

Even though my family life was in shambles, God was still at work. In 1994, while I was leading some spiritual renewal conferences, He began bringing me a fresh revelation of His power and grace. There were times that I spent hours weeping at the altar. Yet during these dramatic encounters, I never equated His presence with what I know now as God's phileo love.

Phileo is a Greek word that means "demonstrated, natural affection." (See John 16:27). It is used often in the Bible to describe God's love. Yet I always tended to view God's anointing as His power—or His supernatural ability to do great things. I had no idea that His anointing could actually be a demonstration of His unconditional affection for me. I was so locked into this trap of performance orientation that I still did not break free from my aggressive striving—even after a powerful visitation of God's Spirit! In fact, as I experienced more favor and notoriety in ministry, my addiction to striving grew even stronger!

At that point my family had experienced enough of what I wrongly called "ministry." My wife and children knew I was worshipping a golden calf of self-centered religious pride. The ministry was all I talked about, all I lived for, and all that brought a smile to my face. I felt inadequate at expressing love and care for my family, so I gave myself to what I could do well—the ministry. It made everyone at home miserable. Trisha had had more than she could take. Our marriage was teetering on the edge of disaster.

Thinking that it was Trisha who had the real problem, I took her to a conference on emotional healing in November 1995. I wanted her to be happy with how God was using me in ministry, so she would finally develop an appreciation for all the sacrifices I had made for her.

During an afternoon pastors' session, many of the wives were at the front receiving prayer. Trisha was resting on the floor, praying and weeping quietly as I knelt beside her. Then someone from the platform began to pray. The words startled me:

"Father God, take all the men in this room who were never held by their fathers. Hold them close right now. Give them the love their fathers did not know how to give."

The anointing of the Holy Spirit fell on me immediately. I did not understand what was happening, but I knew something significant had begun to happen in my soul. I began crying like a baby as I lay at the altar. Such displays of emotion were not normal for me. I always had every emotion in check, especially in front of my wife, children, or other ministers. But my mask was off now. I was completely undone.

It was as if God transported me back to a time when I was only ten. I suddenly saw vivid scenes of me as a child, hiding in a closet at night, fearful of the yelling and screaming I heard in my parents' room. I remembered the fear, the loneliness, and the sense of abandonment. I felt the deep, painful ache for my father's embrace—an embrace he was not able to give me during my childhood.

Suddenly I realized that now, thirty-four years later, my heavenly Father was meeting the deepest need in my heart for a natural demonstration of a father's affectionate love. I had a direct encounter with the phileo of God. As I lay on the floor weeping, Father God entered that dark closet of my childhood and held me in His arms. For forty-five minutes, it was as if warm, liquid love flowed through my body and washed away much of the guilt, shame, fear of failure and rejection, fear of intimacy, and the fear of receiving and giving love.

My breakthrough finally came. My pride had been shattered. Until that moment I had never realized how deeply in bondage I was to striving and fear. But in that instant I felt free, and for the first time I experienced true rest. I had heard all my life that God loved me, but I had never lowered the walls of protection enough to personally receive a natural demonstration of His love and affection. Knowledge of His love had become a personal experience! Phileo was no longer just a Greek word to use to construct a theology.

I didn't stop weeping for five months. Every time I looked into my wife's eyes, or saw the pain that I had caused my children because of my lack of tenderness, the tears would begin to flow. Then I would kneel at their feet, weeping and pleading for forgiveness for the times I had harshly misrepresented the Father's love to them.

I knew the healing would not come instantly for them. My children's hearts had been closed to me for years. But now, the brokenness I was experiencing began to open their spirits. The Father's affectionate phileo love began to restore the heart of this father to his children, and the hearts of my children to their father, and it was breaking a curse off of our lives (see Malachi 4:6).

Four months after I received this unusual baptism of the Father's love (see Romans 5:5), my daughter, Sarah, gave me an essay she had written for her English class at school. It was entitled, "The Greatest Influence in My Life Is:" My eyes moistened as I began to read her words:

"The greatest influence in my life is my daddy! Through him, I have seen the eyes of Jesus and felt His unending love! At one point, not very long ago, my daddy was a man to fear. He was Captain Bly off the H.M.S. Bounty. Now he is as gentle as a lamb, and not to mention just as loving. Through watching my daddy change from being a hard man to being tender, he has influenced me to change. His new patience has helped bring me through a very difficult year. Seeing my father love and cherish God, like never before, has done miracles for me. Instead of referring to God like a Holy Being, he refers to Him as Daddy.

Now, instead of fearing my dad, I crawl up in his lap and I find a very cherished peace. What I cherish most about my father is his smile. I also love the way he sits with me and helps me with my faults in a loving way. Whenever I do something good, he notices that, too. My dad is changing in so many areas. I am so proud of him. Every time he looks at me, and smiles, I explode inside with joy. My daddy has been my greatest influence these past four months. I forgive him for being Captain Bly in my early years. I love you daddy!"

This overpowering revelation of the Father's love also began transforming my marriage, but it didn't happen overnight.

I had rarely been able to pray with or minister to my wife prior to my encounter in 1995. In spite of the breakthroughs I experienced with my children, something in me seemed to hold back from pursuing deeper levels of intimacy with Trisha. Because of some traumatic experiences of my childhood, I always kept my emotions and feelings under control around her. I daily said the words, "I love you," but I could not let Trisha inside. I did not want to risk being hurt again.

In March 1996 I went with a group of men to a conference in Canada, seeking a deeper revelation of God's love. During the first meeting, a lady at the altar prayed with me about some deep hurts I had encountered as a young boy. Through the supernatural leading of the Holy Spirit, this woman discerned that around age ten I had constructed thick walls of protection in my soul during the time that my father and mother were having extreme difficulties in their marriage.

This woman's prayers laid my heart bare. I lay on the floor weeping uncontrollably for two hours as the Father poured His comfort, love and affection into my wounded heart. When I got up, I knew that the wounds I experienced so long ago had been healed.

Then, during a subsequent ministry time that evening, what seemed like a river of God's love broke through all my fears of intimacy, and the walls I built so long ago began to crumble. For the next four days I wept as I realized the depth of pain Trisha lived with daily. She had always been kept at arm's length from the heart of her husband. I had unconsciously pushed her away. But when I arrived home from that conference I intimately ministered my love to her in healing prayer. She wept for hours as the Father took her back to some points of deep wounding in her youth, comforting her with His healing love.

God began to take our relationship into new depths of intimacy. We have hit a few stumbling blocks along the way, but each time the Holy Spirit would reveal past hurts where we had built walls of protection. We would move toward repentance, and the love of God would wash away hidden barriers and take us into deeper depths of love for each other.

During one of these times in 1998, I was prompted to write my wife a poem. I am not a poetic type, and writing these kinds of words was extremely uncharacteristic of me. But it evidences the power of the Father's love to transform the most callused husband!

Such a Love

Our journey has taken us throughout the earth
From pain and suffering our love did birth
Yet love did flourish from the shame and tears

Our love remained true all through the years!

What pain can hold back such a love as ours
Not shame, not fear, not even wounded hearts
For our love has conquered every wall
It has fought and grasped for passion's call!
It was your love that brought to me a rest
A love that my pain has put to the test
Yet you endured and gave of your best
Today it is the reason I feel so blessed!

What kind of woman could love as you do?
One who is beautiful, faithful, and true.
It takes one whose heart is made of pure gold
One whose life will be as a tale that is told!

Your love will be spoke of for ages to come
For it is the kind which lights up the sun
It is full of fire, passion, and zeal
A love that is not false but open and heals!

Your love fills my heart with visions and dreams
Faith, hope, and love my heart has finally seen
Your love has given me reason to live
Your love has caused my heart to want to give!

How could your love be so rich and free?
How could you love such a man as me?
How could your heart be filled with such desire?
How could you cause me to burn with such fire?

Certainly your love must come from above
How else could you know such a wondrous love
I long to return that love to you one day
With such desire and self sacrifice may I love, I pray!

Oh God, I could never repay what you have done for me
When you gave me her love, so beautiful, so free
Forgive me for all the years that I did blame
As an excuse not to love, because of my pain!

Unmerited favor I received when I first saw her face
Your love, through her, has revealed to me grace
Now I am honored to call her my wife
I will cherish and care for her all of my life!

I would go through the pain again and again
To experience her love that covered my shame

I would give my life, my wealth, and my fame
To love her and cherish her and give her my name!

When I finished reading this poem to Trisha, she began to weep with deep, convulsing sobs. It was as if the excruciating pain she had hidden inside for so long began to pour out of her. After about ten minutes the sobbing turned to gentle tears of peace and joy.

"All of these years, I never really could believe you loved me," Trisha told me. "For the first time, I now know it is true. I now feel loved by you!"

As the Father's love has brought restoration of intimacy to my marriage and family, it has changed my whole philosophy of ministry as well. I am no longer striving to be holy or to win God's favor. I don't want to do anything to hinder the intimate loving relationships that God has given me. Ministry is no longer something that I have to work or strive for. The comparisons, competition, and rivalry are fading away. Spiritual ambition is now but a shadow.

Most of the time I am motivated by a deep gratitude for being loved and accepted unconditionally by my Father. Ministry is simply an overflow of the love of God that flows freely through my marriage and family. As I receive His natural demonstration of affection for me, His precious phileo love, then I simply give it away to the next person I meet.

This restoration of love and intimacy in my life has been a process that has required deepening levels of humility and repentance on my part. I have certainly not arrived! I can easily get off center of the Father's love when my priorities get confused. I can still be pulled toward aggressive striving. But now, I do not stay in that condition for long. I quickly run back into the resting place of the Father's healing love, and peace is restored to my heart. I am then compelled to humble myself and repent to anyone who has been hurt by my striving. And I am then restored once more to a life of intimacy and love!

Do you know what it means to love God wholeheartedly? Is love for God reflected in faithful Bible reading, rigorous prayer or strict holiness? I think not. What reveals a genuine love for God is my ability to convince my family and others of my love for them. Without this, everything else finds its rewards in self-love. Doing great things—even religious things like preaching, winning souls, performing miracles, or feeding the poor—all have their own rewards. And we can do these things out of wrong motives. But the Bible tells us that we cannot say we love God if we do not love each other (I John 4:20).

Do you desire to fully know the Father's love for you? Would you like to encounter His unconditional affection? This book contains many of the precious truths that I have learned about the Father's love since I was touched so deeply in 1995. As you read and study these pages, I pray that you will do much more that develop a healthy theology. Rather, I pray you will experience your Father's holy embrace, feel His unconditional acceptance, and hear His tender words of love in deeper ways than you have ever known.

I pray you will hear the words that the Father spoke to His beloved Son in Mark 1:11:
"Child, you are the one I love, and on you My favor rests."

Questions for Discussion

- Describe your relationship with your own father and mother. Did you always feel unconditionally loved by them? If not, do you think this has affected the way you view your heavenly Father?
- Many people struggle to believe that God loves them unconditionally. They may feel ashamed of something from the past, or they may think that they must perform certain duties in order to win God's approval. In your life, what is the biggest hindrance to believing that God really loves you?
- Think about the relationships in your life. Do the people who are closest to you see the love of God in your life? If not, what do you need to experience in order to reflect God's love to them?

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