

## *God Loves You: The Three Most Generous Words*

BY DAVID JEREMIAH

Ida Scudder came from a long line of missionaries. Some forty-three members of her family had given more than 1,100 years to missionary service; but Ida herself had no interest in following in their footsteps. She'd seen first-hand the pressure and poverty of missionary work in India, and she wanted a higher standard of living without the prolonged, painful separations she'd suffered as a child.

All that changed after Ida graduated from college and made a trip to visit her parents in India. One night as she sat by a lamp writing letters, three men knocked on the door of the missions house, one after another. The first was a Brahmin, begging someone to help his wife who was having severe problems in childbirth. The second was a high-cast Hindu whose wife was also in crisis during childbirth. The third was a Muslim seeking medical help for his wife, who was also having trouble delivering her baby.

Ida's mother couldn't go because she was ill. Her father couldn't go because the local culture wouldn't accept such contact with the opposite sex. Nor did Ida go as she had no training.

She later wrote, "I could not sleep that night—it was too terrible. Within the very touch of my hand there were three young girls dying because no woman would help them. I spent much of the night in anguish and prayer. I did not want to spend my life in India. My friends were begging me to return to the joyous opportunities of a young girl in America. I went to bed in the early morning after praying much for guidance. I think that was the first time I ever met God face to face, and all the time it seemed that He was calling me into this work. Early in the morning I heard the 'tom-tom' beating in the village and it struck terror in my heart, for it was a death message. I sent out my servant, and he came back saying that all of them had died during the night. I shut myself in my room and thought very seriously about the condition of the Indian women and after much thought and prayer, I went to my father and mother and told them I must go home and study medicine, and come back to India to help such women."

Ida did so, and in time she established the Vellore medical complex offering critical medical services to Indian women, along with strong doses of evangelism and Gospel witness. Today the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, is still offering help, hope, and healing—over 100 years later.<sup>1</sup>

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### Can We Hear the Knocks?

Missionary historians refer to this story as “Three Knocks in the Night,” and it teaches a powerful lesson. When we hear three knocks on our doors, we have three words on our mouths—the three most generous words in the world: “God loves you.” Those words turn into loving acts of kindness; for by its very nature biblical love is selfless, given without strings, and to whoever needs it.

We’re infatuated with the lovely, the beautiful, the educated, the refined, and the affluent. It’s harder to love those who have insoluble problems or unsightly traits. But true love isn’t based on the appeal of the recipient but on the grace of the giver.

In his book, *All the Doctrines of the Bible*, Herbert Lockyer wrote, “Natural love is based on the attractive qualities in its object. This is why we find it hard to love the unlovable and the unlovely. But the love the Spirit dispenses is not human, but divine, and consequently is not exclusive. It has no favorites, it can love the most unattractive.... It is the Spirit, then, who perfumes the life with love.”<sup>2</sup>

This is the way God loves you no matter what you’ve done, how you look, or where you are. He loves you regardless of mistakes or missteps. He loves you without concern for your station or status in life. His love isn’t determined by our attractiveness, but by His attributes.

This is what Moses told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 7:7-8: “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you.”

He loves us just because He loves us, and that’s our pattern for loving others. Think of your unreasonable boss, your prodigal child, your nose-y neighbor, your complaining church member, your dishonest associate, your sour relative, your infuriating spouse—whatever it is in your life that’s unlovely. Now think of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven...” (Matthew 5:44-45).

### A Love Challenge

This is the fuel that keeps our lamps burning. We’re surrounded by “pagans,” “heathen,” and “sinners.” But these are the ones for whom Christ died, and the love of Christ compels us to do all we can to help them experience the love of Jesus. The most generous thing we can give others is the Good News of God’s love. How? Why not devise a personal “Love Challenge” God for those you want to reach? Think of how you can let others know of your love and of God’s.

- Find a ministry to the homeless or to families facing food insecurity or

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to children needing tutoring. Connect with a Christian relief organization. Partner with those trying to touch the untouchables and love the unlovely.

- Make a list of people you don't like (yes, we all have some folks like that). Begin praying for them as Jesus instructed.
- Thank the Lord afresh for His great love for us, even while we were "yet sinners" (Romans 5:8 KJV).

Andrew Fearing once wrote about a wealthy widow living in a large house who decided to open her home and heart to orphans. Eventually she gathered thirty-six children and became a mother to them. She dealt patiently with all but one boy. He was thin, pimply, sickly, whining, irritable, sulky, and complaining. Try as she might, she couldn't seem to love him as she loved the others.

One day the peevish boy was more irritating than usual, and in desperation she grabbed his hand, dragged him to the porch, sat down on the swing, and told him to put his head on her lap and fall asleep. After squirming awhile he did so.

The day was warm, the birds were singing and the jasmine blooming. And the woman nodded off too. She dreamed she was in the place of the boy on her lap. Her head was resting on the lap of the Father, and she became conscious of her repulsive self, contaminated by sin. "Yes," she heard a voice say, "but I love you anyway, and My love will straighten you out and make you beautiful."

The woman woke and looked down at the dirty face on her lap. Stoking his hair, she bent over and kissed his cheek. He awoke and for the first time a smile came to his lips and a slight glow to his eyes. It was the beginning of a gradual and lifelong change.<sup>3</sup>

The most generous thing you can say or do for others is to let them know: "God loves you." His love should be on the tip of our tongues and at the end of our outstretched arms. Love is only good when expressed, and we can all do that. As the old African-American spiritual puts it: "If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can share the love of Jesus and say He died for all."



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<sup>1</sup> Ida Scudder's story is told by Ruth A. Tucker in *Guardians of the Great Commission* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids: 1988), 155-157.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 119.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Fearing, "Loving the Unlovely," in *Ministry Magazine*, May, 1967, at <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1967/May/loving-the-unlovely>.