

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16*

This well known Bible verse promises the ultimate gift of grace from our awesome God. It portrays his unbounded love which is available to each of us. It conveys the New Covenant of reconciliation and eternal life in God's Kingdom through Jesus Christ. It reveals the astounding truth that God himself covers our sins by his self-sacrifice. When we begin to comprehend God's great love for us, our hearts soften and we are drawn to him, and we come under his protection, direction, and provision. As we submit ourselves to his will, his blessings increase. How can I, how can you, how can we respond to such love and generosity?

I was a late bloomer in responding to God's love for me. For the first 57 of my 61 years I went to church most Sundays and heard hundreds of sermons. Yet my faith was a Sunday thing. I had never read the Bible. Prayer was for church and special occasions. I provided no spiritual leadership in my family and I was not a part of the Christian community. Although I am certain God was always nearby and blessed me in many ways, I had invested little thought or time in seeking a personal relationship with Him.

In May 2006, I was looking in our library for something to read. I pulled down several books but kept coming back to a study Bible a friend had given me ten years before. I sat down with the Bible in my lap and said this prayer: "God I know you would like for me to read this Bible. So I will and will keep an open mind until I complete it."

Over the coming months, as I read the Bible from beginning to end and prayed to know him, I encountered God in Jesus Christ. It was a gradual thing, but one morning I got it. The gospel truth, so powerfully captured in John 3:16, penetrated my heart. Through the simple acts of reading the Bible and approaching God in prayer on a daily basis, my heart opened to Jesus. I realized there was a much deeper relationship with God through Jesus available to me if I would only seek it. So I began to do just that. Since then God has been reorienting my life in ways for which I am profoundly grateful. These changes come gradually and are not conscious efforts on my part. They are most often changes of heart through something or someone God has placed in my path. God has become the central influence in my life. Like a Good Shepherd, he leads me as I give my life over to him day by day. I find that the more I trust God, the worries of life become smaller.

In response to God's love I try to discern where he is leading me to be involved in his kingdom. I have stepped up to the responsibility of spiritual leadership in my family. I am experiencing how God feeds my faith through fellowship in Christian community. He has led me to Bible study, Men's Life, Sunday morning adult small groups, a Cursillo reunion group, and other programs offered at St. John the Divine that unite and grow us in the Body of Christ.

We also respond to God's love by loving our neighbors. I love God back by lending a hand to friends or family, working on St. John's Habitat for Humanity team, serving as a Stephen Minister, or helping Mike and Maci Berkeley at Mexico Medical Mission. I don't do this for gain but can sense God blessing me when I reach out to others. It is his virtuous cycle of love.

Finally, God is changing the way I understand money. Money had too much importance in my life for a long time, and I confess this is an ongoing change. But God's love is putting money in its rightful place as a tool for sustenance and good works. My money belongs to God and he has appointed me steward. He wants me to use a reasonable amount of it for family and the rest to build up His Kingdom. My wife, Frances, and I share our treasure with a joyful heart these days, because we are grateful for God's love and grace in our lives.