

Today marks the second anniversary of Debbie's death. At the end of the service today we will commemorate her life by dedicating a bench for our playground that has been given in her honor. After the service our family will gather to unveil the bench on the playground. You are welcome to join us at 1:00pm.

As I have reflected on Debbie's life for the last two years, I have been greatly challenged by the way she lived and by the way she died. Her love for Jesus was easy to see in the amount of time that she spent alone with Him and the way she worshiped Him. Her love for people can be seen in all the testimonies that we have received that describe her character. She made you feel like that she was especially fond of you and that God was especially fond of you.

Debbie's secret was in her own personal security in God's love!

1 John 4:16-19

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

KJV

This did not come without a struggle. But it was a battle she won even when her body was overcome by cancer.

Her struggles with her own personal security in God's love were reflected in the development of the character of Mrs. P.J. About 20 years ago, an image was formed in her mind of what it meant to be the perfect home school mom. This included the way she treated me, the way she organized her home, the way we ate, and the way she trained our children. She could envision our children becoming like the perfect families we saw at home school conferences. They would always love one another. They would not love the world. They would all be musical and they would all dress alike at important events. There were at least three great obstacles to the fulfillment of what she could envision. We did not have all girls but had four older sons. The second obstacle was that all of our children have a free will. A third obstacle was the image did not fit who God had made Debbie and me to be.

This struggle became a fire that God used to set Debbie free of the fear of man.

She learned thru many trials that her personal security and identity should only be found in Christ and not in her performance or the performance of those for whom she was responsible.

This prepared her for her greatest trial the last seven and one half months of her life. She finished well.

I believe that it was in the year 2000 that I released Debbie from that image of the perfect home school mom. I released her from any responsibility for the correction of discipline of our older sons who were still living at home. I released her from my expectations for the organization of our home. I even released her from my expectations for how much money she spent on groceries and the needs of our children. I told her that I wanted her to be free to be who God had made her to be. She discovered creative memories. She discovered running. She discovered a new relationship with her teen age boys. She discovered Novo ministries. She went to Africa for the first time. We discovered a love in our relationship that was better than what we had ever imagined. There was no question in my mind that she held me in high esteem but she did not fear me any more. She became more secure in my love than she had ever been in the prior 23 years of our marriage. I did not judge her anymore for things that I had judged her for in the past.

We discovered perfect love.

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My children have felt judged by me for not being our image of the perfect home school children. It is my greatest failure as a father. They have said that they know I love them but they have not felt that I love them unconditionally. I have been an obstacle in their understanding of God's perfect love. It has been a great hindrance to our relationship. We are making progress but it is taking years to undue what I created.

If you have felt judged by me for not being my image of the perfect home school mom or dad or child or church member, please forgive me. I want to lead you into a deeper understanding of the love of Christ. I know that if I can lead you into that understanding, you will love Him and want to become who He has made you to be.

Recently, some have asked me how I have been at fault as a leader in our church. What I did to Debbie and my children is my greatest sin against this church. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. For this I have been wrong. Please forgive me.

How do you become secure in God's love for you?

The last two years has been a journey back to the cross. It is only a fresh revelation of Jesus and the cross that has made me feel secure in God's love again. My faith in the Father's love because of Jesus is the anchor of my soul.

Thru the cross I have come to understand that our suffering was necessary to understand the love that God has for us. We would have never known God's love if He did not allow us to suffer. The angels certainly did not understand it. We would have never have known His perfect love for us if there was not sin and the need for redemption.

He allows us to suffer because He wants us to have a deeper knowledge of His love for us. Suffering tests our faith in His love for us and purifies our faith in His love for us. Trials are always the medium of God's revelation of Himself to us. We learn far more about His love for us from the valleys then we do from the mountain tops.

In a fallen world, the Father does not have to arrange for us to suffer. All He has to do is allow the fallenness of nature and men's fallen nature to run their course. The innocent suffer with the worst sinners.

Try as you might to totally insulate yourself from such suffering, you will not succeed. The fires He allows in your life will be determined by His sovereign will and His plans for you so you have nothing to fear.

When we come thru the fire, we are more secure in His love and we love Him more. It is this security that allows Him to live His life thru us.

When you love Him, His life in you is what you desire more than any thing the world has to offer. Then you can say with Jesus, Father glorify you name.

You must know the love of the Father thru Jesus to begin this loving relationship. He offers you that knowledge today.

The character of Mrs. P.J. was created to communicate her struggles with her failures and disappointments as a home school mom with four older sons. This struggle was only intensified by the fact that she was a Pastor's wife and our family lived in a fish bowl. She always began with a confession or a disappointment. God would then speak to her in a way that affirmed His love for her and gave her hope.