

Pictures of Jesus

Knowing Jesus,
Following Jesus
and Representing
Him Well



Dave Weiss
Photos by Donna Parcell

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Illustrations by David C. Weiss, AMOKArts.com

ISBN-13: 978-1511508971

ISBN-10: 1511508973

Library of Congress Cataloging-in Publication Data

Weiss, David C., 1963-

Pictures of Jesus: Knowing Jesus, Following Jesus and Representing Him Well

ISBN

1. Weiss, David C., 1963- 2. Christian nonfiction—United States

3. How to

Introduction

I've been privileged to do my presentation *Pictures of Jesus* all over the U.S. and one thing almost always happens. Someone, sometimes many people, will come to me and say, "I wish so and so would have seen this, he/she would have been really blessed by it." I've heard this so many times that I finally decided to write the presentation in book form so people could share it with their loved ones. My hope is that this book will help the message of *Pictures of Jesus* to spread much further than I can take it on my own.

All of us who follow Jesus are *Pictures of Jesus* to the rest of the world. We need to be the best *Pictures of Jesus* we can be. This book will show you how to be that picture and how to share His message of love and hope, in word and deed, with all those who need to hear and receive it.

When I do the *Pictures of Jesus* presentation, I paint five large paintings, the longest of which takes 12 minutes, the rest take under six. All of them are pictures of Jesus, though they don't all look like it. I combine this with telling the stories I share in this book, as well as some video, drama and more. The paintings in this book are primarily the paintings I create in *Pictures of Jesus*. The vast majority of them were created in front of a live audience, though a few were created in advance to help to enhance the story and generate the video clips used in the presentation. Thanks to Donna Parcell for taking the photographs.

Thanks also to the many churches, camps and other venues that have allowed me to present *Pictures of Jesus* to your congregations. I have been blessed by all of you.



What does God look like?

There once was a little girl named Sally. She was five years old.

Sally was a kindergartner, and for all intents and purposes she was a wonderful child. Her teacher loved having her in class, except for one thing. For some reason, Sally did not like making art. When her teacher introduced an art project, Sally would either shut down or act up. This grieved Sally's teacher, who realized how important creative expression is for children. She was at her wits end on what to do about it.

Finally one day the teacher got an idea. She would let the children free create. She would provide the art supplies and allow the children to create whatever they wanted. Something happened. It was as if a switch flipped in Sally. All of the sudden, Sally was creating, and not just passively. Sally was creating with great passion. Art supplies were flying. Sally was into it and her teacher was so excited.

The teacher practically ran to the back of the room where Sally sat and exclaimed, "Sally, Sally, what are you making?" Sally said with all the confidence and exuberance only a five year old can muster, "I'm making a picture of God!" Her teacher smiled and shook her head. "Oh, Sally, No one knows what God looks like." Sally said...

"They will when I'm done."

No one knows what God looks like....

It's true, we don't know what God looks like, but Scripture gives us some clues. Scripture says that Jesus is "... the image of The Unseen God..." So we know God looks like Jesus. Then what does Jesus look like? No one knows that either. Oh, we think we do. Long haired, bearded, flowing robe and tremendously handsome. That might be right, or it might not. The reason you think you know what He looked like is because of people like me...

Artists...

But think about it. How many different ways have you seen Jesus expressed in art? He's been portrayed as being of pretty much every race. He has been shown in the garb of virtually every era. He's been portrayed by a lot of different artists from Sally to Rembrandt. And we're probably all wrong.

To me, I know exactly what Jesus looked like. He looked like Warner Sallman's *Face of Christ*. I know you've probably seen this piece. It's painted in beautiful earth tones, lots of rich browns. It's a closeup with Jesus serenely looking to the heavens. It's been printed over half a billion times. A print of *Face of Christ* could literally be owned by one person in 12 on the entire face of the earth. The reason I know it's what Jesus looks like is because from my earliest memories, my Grandma Rose had one sitting on her piano and the same print was hung in the front of the church where I surrendered my life to Christ, years ago at the age of 22. To me, this is what Jesus looks like, but once again, I am probably wrong.

Back when the church was the primary patron of the arts, back in the Renaissance, it is said that many painters had female models sit for their paintings of Jesus. The reason for this was they wanted to make Him look beautiful and fair and I get that. After all, think about the beautiful thing Jesus did for us on the cross, but is it accurate? Then think about the movies. You've never seen an ugly guy play Jesus, have you? Of course not. I'm waiting for someone to make a movie starring Brad Pitt as Jesus. But again, most of that is probably wrong.

You see Scripture says, “He had nothing in His appearance that would draw us to Him...” Translation: He may not have been all that handsome. As a matter of fact he may not have been handsome at all. It seems God didn’t want people to be drawn to Jesus by His outward appearance. (Consider that for a moment. The only person in all of history who had some say in how He would be born to look, seems to have chosen to not be attractive...) Rather it seems God wanted us to look straight to Jesus’ heart. After all Scripture says, “Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.” Maybe God wanted us to see Jesus as He sees us.

The truth is, Sally’s teacher was right. We don’t know what Jesus looked like, but here’s what we do know. Scripture says we were created in His image. 1 Corinthians 5 calls us to be Christ’s ambassadors, His representatives. Here’s what that means:

To the rest of the world, to those who do not know Jesus Christ, to those outside His Church, Jesus looks like us. You and I are pictures of Jesus and it is our job to represent Him well.

How are you representing Jesus?

Representing Jesus

“Well here we go,” you might be thinking. “Every time a preacher starts to talk about representing Jesus, you know what comes next. He’s going to start telling about sharing your faith.” Well, it was the last thing Jesus told us to do before He ascended. Usually the last thing someone tells you, is something important, and if that person happens to be God incarnate, we might want to take it seriously.

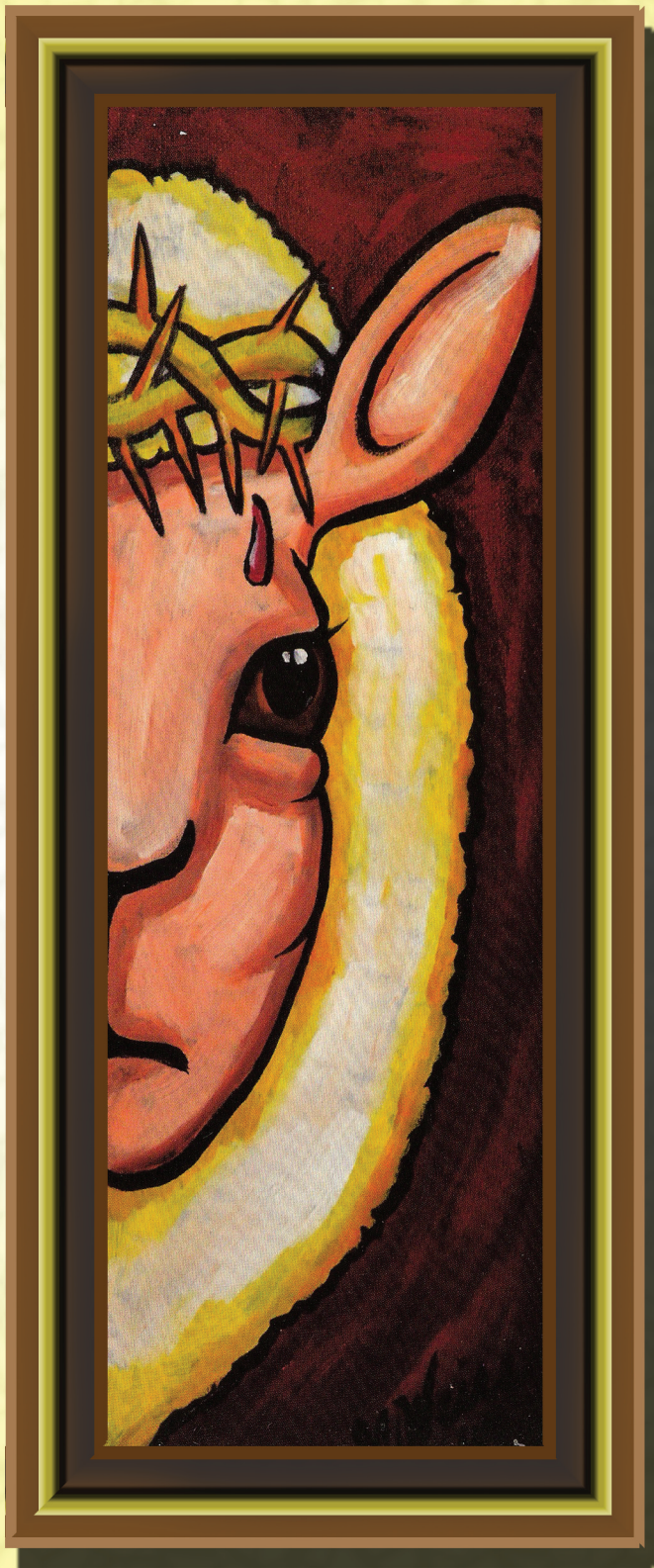
But faith sharing can be scary. I have seen some of the most confident people I have ever met turn into quivering piles of goo at the thought of it. One of the biggest arguments against sharing your faith comes down to some form of, “I don’t know enough about Jesus. What if they ask a question I can’t answer?” Well to the latter point, “I don’t know” is a valid, honest answer. It’s even better when followed up with, “...but I will look into it and let you know.” Secondly, if you’re a believer, (by the way if you’re not, or you’re not sure if you are, please keep reading) there is one story of Jesus that only you are qualified to tell. It’s the story on which you are the world’s foremost expert. It’s the story of what Jesus has done in your life. That is a story any believer can tell, and the truth of that story will attract more people to faith than any doctoral thesis on Jesus ever will. Every believer has a story to tell.

Secondly, and I know this will surprise you, but you can know two of the most important things there are to know about Jesus, two things every single person needs to know about Jesus, if you know nothing more than His name and I can prove it.

Let’s look at that name...



Dave Weiss painting Jesus on the Cross. (photo by Donna Parcell)



Jesus

Scripture calls it “the name above every name.” Further we read that at the name of Jesus “every knee will bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” The name Jesus is a very important name. To really get the significance of this, I would like to tell you another story, about another name...

My name...

My name is David. No surprises there. If you read the book cover you already know that, but what you may not know is why my name is David.

I would love to tell you that the reason my name is David is because on the day I was born, my father took me in his arms and held me up to heaven (ala *The Lion King*) and said, “Look at this child. He’s perfect. He’s awesome. He is everything I could have ever wanted in a son. Words cannot express the love I feel for this child. I need to give him a name that shows the love I have for him and so I will name him David, because it means ‘beloved’ in Hebrew.” I would love to tell you that, but I can’t...

...because it’s not true.

Then, I would love to tell you that my mother looked down into my crib, after giving me life and said, “Look at this child. Even at this age, I can see the amazing potential held in his little body. I already know he is going to do phenomenal things, write a best selling book, create art that will one day hang in The Louvre, maybe even be president (okay that last one might be a stretch). I need to give him a name to live up to. Something that will challenge him to become the very best he can be. I know, let’s name him after someone in the Bible who did great things. Perhaps Jesus, no that’s too much pressure for any child... I know, let’s name after the mighty warrior, artist, poet, prophet, king. Let’s name him David.” And I would love to tell you that too...

... but I can’t because it’s not true either.

No, my name is David for a much more pedestrian reason. My name is David, because my father's name is David, and his father before him, my grandfather, was the original David Weiss. My grandfather, upon hearing my mother was pregnant with what would be his first grandchild (me) issued a proclamation. Were the child to be born male (as I was) his name would be David and he made this proclamation to anyone who would listen and probably quite a few people who wouldn't. He told so many people, so often, that my poor Grandma Rose, got sick of hearing it. She was so sick of it, that on the night when I was born, when she received the call, she got off the phone and told my Grandpa they named me Jeffrey.

I'm told that news was not well received.

Why do I share this story? Because, although He does not have the baggage my Grandpa had, our heavenly Father was also quite insistent as to what His Son's name would be. As a matter of fact, if you read the birth stories of Jesus in both Matthew and Luke, you will see that God had messenger angels tell both Mary and Joseph that the child, His only Son, would be named Jesus.

Why Jesus? Well because Scripture tells us, "because He will save His people from their sins."

You see the name Jesus means, "Yahweh will save" or "Savior." From before He was born, from before time began, God's intention was to give Jesus to be our Savior. That baby in the manger was already a man on a mission. His very name declares it.

You may have noticed, I started this chapter off with a painting of a sheep. Actually, it's not a sheep, it's a lamb. Why do I paint a lamb as a picture of Jesus? Do you remember when John the Baptist introduced us to Jesus? He said, "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." It's another revelation of God's plan.

Centuries before, around the time of Moses, God set up the sacrificial system. Lambs were put to death, sacrificed for the sins of the people. I don't necessarily believe that God did this because He liked the smell of burning lamb's flesh, though I am familiar with the passages that referred to the burning of sacrifices as "a sweet Savor before the Lord." I also don't think God called for

this sacrifice because of any malice toward the sheep species. After all God created sheep and He made few things more beautiful than an innocent baby lamb. No, I think that God set up the sacrificial system to show us three things.

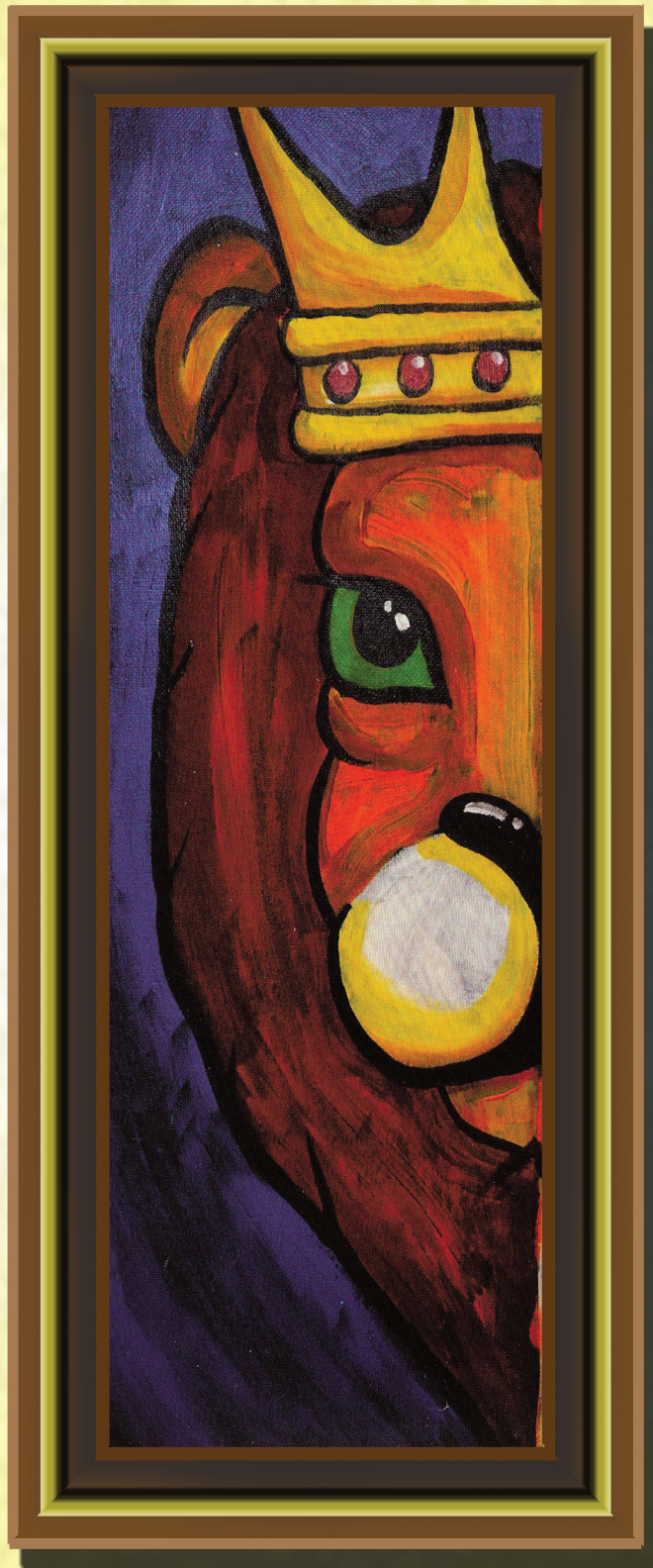
First: Sin costs. Sheep were valuable and God demanded a perfect one. Every time a sacrifice was needed, there was a price to be paid, a loss to be sustained. This was a very literal picture of an indisputable fact, every time we sin, sooner or later, there is a price to be paid and the very real chance of a life destroyed, which brings us to our next point.

Secondly: Sin kills. Scripture tells us there is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood. The first sin brought death with it into this world, and the world has been dying in it's sin ever since. This is another picture, a reminder that the wages of sin is death. Sin brings death to those who God loves most, you and me, so God in His perfect love had to save us from ourselves.

Thirdly: The sacrificial lamb was God giving us a picture of Jesus, preparing us for the ultimate sacrifice for sin, once and for all. Jesus came to be our savior, to die in our place, a self-sacrificing hero, rescuing us from a hopeless existence and an eternity separated from God. He is the ultimate gift of God.

His name means “Yahweh will save.” He is the Savior. So if you know the name Jesus, you know a truth that the rest of the world needs to know and desperately needs you to share.

But there's more to the name...



Christ

It's not His last name, you know that, right? There was a time when I didn't. I figured He was Jesus Christ, son of Joseph and Mary Christ. After all, that's how we usually do it in the U.S. Christ is not His last name. It's His title. The name means "The Lord's anointed." It's the Latin form of the Hebrew word "Messiah." It means "King, Ruler, Lord." The Christ is the King God promised would rule on David's throne forever. (1 Kings 9:5) The Christ is the long awaited King and that is great news. Jesus is the Christ. This was also announced in the birth stories when the angels proclaimed to the shepherds that the child born in Bethlehem was the Christ.

For much of the world, this side of Jesus is much harder to accept. For many people, the idea of a God who would lay down His life for His people is quite appealing, but the idea of a King and ruler... Not so much.

I think part of the reason for this is an almost genetic opposition to anything involving coming under authority, also known as the sin nature. Equally difficult is the fact that, at least for people in the U.S. We have no idea how to deal with a king. The reason for that is simple, we don't have a king, we have a president. There is very little respect for the position. After all, we can hire him and fire him every four years He's got two legislative bodies and a judicial branch to deal with, each of which was put in place to pretty much oppose his will. We can protest against everything he does, and if he messes up badly enough we can even impeach him and remove him from office. His job, ostensibly is to do the will of the people. While the president is our leader, in many ways, he answers to us. That's not how it works with a king.

To really get this, I want to take you down a bit of a rabbit trail. Don't worry. Stick with me. I am going somewhere with this.

There are a lot of people in the church who complain about contemporary worship music. I've never really understood this. All music of the church was at one point contemporary, and I have no doubt in my mind that should I live long enough and the Lord tarries, today's contemporary

music will be in tomorrow's hymnals, and I will find myself complaining about what comes next. One of the major complaints of the people in this set is that the lyrics are too repetitive. This also puzzles me. Are they concerned the music will be too easy to follow, memorize or sing? But I digress. There is a song where the songwriter seems to have gone out of his way to prove their point.

The song writer is Darrell Evans, the song is called *Trading My Sorrows*. For the record, I love this song, but it does prove their point. The verses are fine, spiritual and uplifting, but then we get to chorus, which goes, "Yes Lord. Yes Lord. Yes, Yes, Lord, Amen." That's the chorus and it's repeated several times more than the almost mandatory three. It's really, really repetitive, but do you know what else it is?

It's a great Spiritual truth.

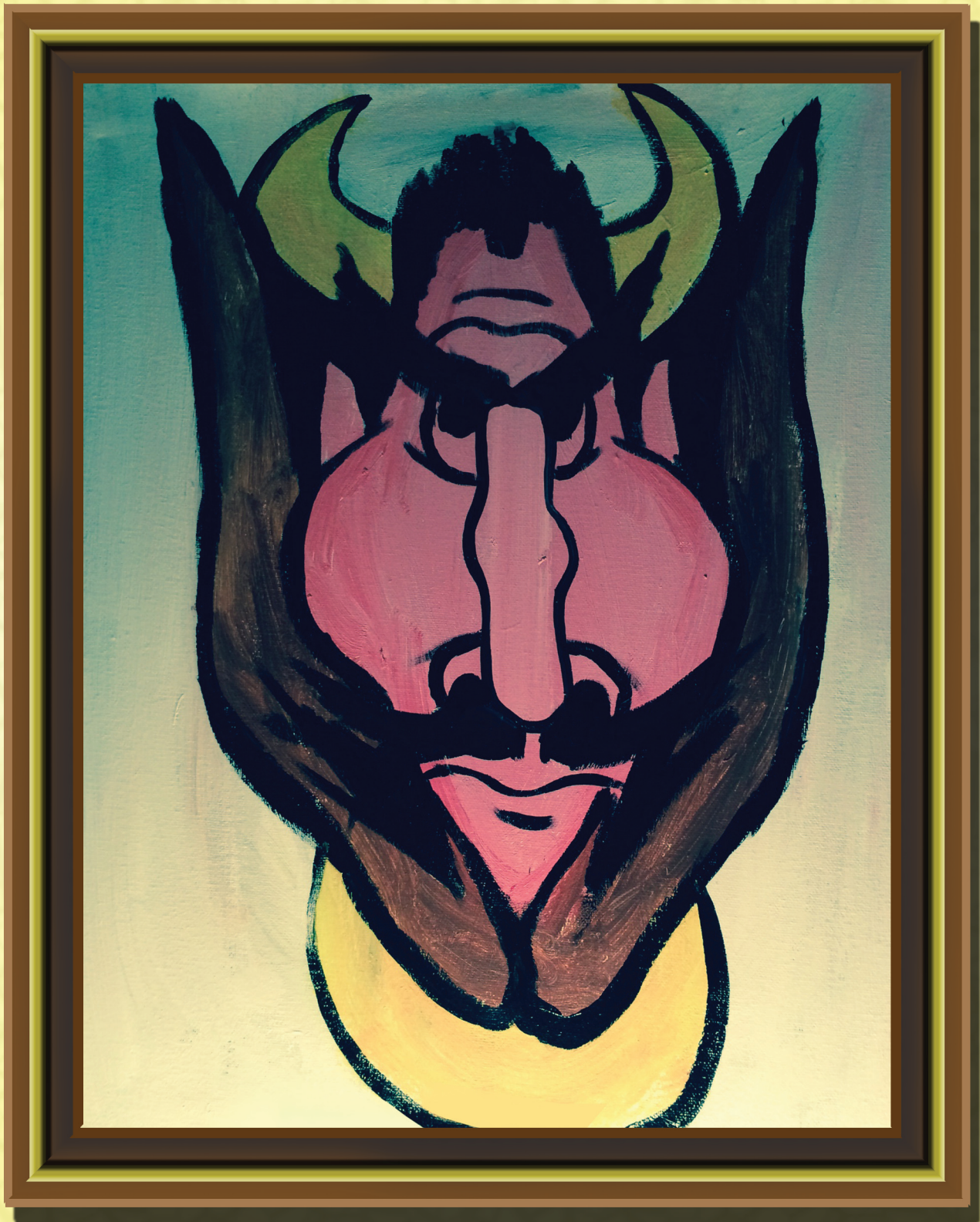
The thing is, you don't say no to a Lord. When a Lord, a King, gives a command, posts a decree, there is only one proper and acceptable response, "Yes Lord" and so it is with God. Our only proper response is total obedience. Of course we all fail in this area, but the standard remains. God is our King, Christ is our King. He deserves no less.

Submission to the will of God seems to run so counter to our instincts. Most of us tend to prefer a god who does what we want Him to do, when we want Him to do it. We regularly hear people question how a good God could allow suffering and pain. I get that, and regrettably there have even been times where I have felt that question form at the back of my mind. Here's the thing. If God is only God if He does my will, He's not God, I am, and this much I can tell you, I make a puny god. I imagine you do too.

He created the universe. He knit me together in my mother's womb. He knows my story, not to mention the story of the whole world, from beginning to end. He saw the conditions that our

sin, sin for which the wages are death, have created in the world. The fact that He shows us any mercy at all is miraculous. Instead of being wrathful and vengeful, He sacrificed His only Son and Himself to be our Savior. If that is true, and it is, He deserves to be Lord and He deserves my obedience and submission. He is God and I am not. Neither are you.

In the painting at the beginning of this chapter, I painted a lion. The reason for this is simple. In the book of Revelation, Jesus is referred to as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. This reflects His position as the promised King who will rule forever and we need Him to be King of our lives. True, we need Him to be our humble sacrifice. We need Him to be our Savior but we also need Him and His power to protect us in this world. We need Him to be Lord, to rule over us, and we need Him to be the lion, because there is another lion in this story.



The Other Lion

You've looked at the title of this book and it's not a misprint. This book is called *Pictures of Jesus*. When you look at the painting on the opposite page, you will quickly see that's not Jesus. And you're right, but do you remember when I told you, there is another lion? Well here he is. Scripture says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he might devour." Satan is the other lion and since he was cast out of heaven before the creation of Eden, he has been on a single-minded, seek and destroy mission. His whole goal on this earth is to destroy what God loves most, namely you and me. Like it or not, you and I wear a target in this world.

Like a roaring lion, he usually does not attack the center of the herd, where the most opposition lies. Instead, Satan prefers to strike from the shadows of darkness at the fringes of the flock. The broken, the wounded, the hurting and especially those who stray from the protection of the Shepherd, are his choice delicacies. I know this first hand because he almost got me.

Remember those kids in school, the ones everyone picked on? I was the one those kids picked on, or at least that's how it felt most of the time. When I was really little, I always sort of believed I would be some sort of entertainer, because I was always putting on shows for my younger sister, cousins and anyone else who would sit still long enough. I loved it, but the human target years of elementary school beat all that out of me. All I wanted to do was blend in and hide. I became more and more shy and withdrawn. Art was my refuge.

I should also point out that I didn't really have a faith to speak of. My family was what I would call nominally religious. We went to church up to confirmation, which we sort of treated as if it were church graduation. Basically by the time I was 12 years old, I felt like I knew everything I needed to know about God. Church was the domain of little kids and old ladies and I had outgrown it. I was a man now and not many men went to church, at least not the men I knew. By the way, if any of the young readers read this, I need to tell you, that was a really bad plan. In those times, when I needed God the most, I really had no connection to Him.

I spent most of my time feeling alone against the world and it was profoundly depressing. And all the time, the other lion was whispering in my ear. “You’re useless. You’re worthless. This is the best it will ever get. Why do you even try? You’re an idiot. You’re a loser.”

Like many people, I have the uncanny ability to take a bad situation and make it much, much worse. I started to look for ways to fit in and did things to fit in. I didn’t get involved in hard drugs, because I have a dad who used to tell me if I ever did drugs, he would shoot me. I now know that was hyperbole. Back then I wasn’t so sure. Don’t be hard on my dad, by the way. That hyperbolic threat probably saved my life, because I was so desperate to fit, I would have done just about anything. I have great parents who love me. They tried to help me and didn’t always know what to do to help a really broken, hurting kid. I needed something (Someone) bigger, but the other lion was working double-time to keep me from making the connection.

Instead of using hard drugs, I began to drink and before long I was deep into a really bad drinking problem. If I wasn’t an alcoholic, I was about as close as one can get to being one. I drank to excess and never stopped until I got sick. This was the height of foolishness. Alcohol is a depressant. People who are already depressed do not need to add any thing called a depressant to the equation. I would be the life of the party for a little while, but it always ended the same. Me, drunk out of my mind, looking at my problems through the bottom of a bottle, which is a lot like looking at them through a magnifying glass. I was in real danger and the other lion was right there, pulling me down, pushing me to the fringes and coming in for the kill.

The end came one night. I often thought of suicide at the end of a drunken evening, but something always stopped me. This night was different. This night was bad. This was the night I would follow through. This was the night it was over. I was raging drunk and I had the method in mind. It would be quick, it would look accidental. Then something happened. Something that will weird out some of my readers. In the midst of the chaos in my mind, as the other lion was coming in for the kill, I had a vision. Now you might want to write this off. You may want to say I was hallucinating. You might be right, but I doubt it. No I believe I had a vision because it transformed my life forever. I saw my Nana, my aunt and my sister looking down at me. They had black veils over their faces and they were crying. I wanted to stop them, to comfort them but I couldn’t speak. I couldn’t do anything. I realized I was seeing my own funeral and I came to a realization. I didn’t

want to die, but I couldn't live the way I was living another day. Then from somewhere in the back of my mind, I remembered something I learned in church ten years before and I prayed. Not some flowery prayer in King James English, but merely the three word prayer of a desperate man. "God help me..." over and over and over again. You are reading this book because He did.

About two weeks later, my younger sister, who was really concerned about how much I drank, decided I drank because I was lonely. (She was right.) So she decided to do something about my loneliness. She set me up on a blind date with a co-worker. My sister, smart girl that she is, neglected to tell me two very important things about this girl. The first was that the girl didn't drink. This was terrifying for me because I thought I needed a few drinks just to be able to talk to a girl. By the way if any of my young male readers see this and think it might be a good idea, trust me when I tell you, that is another bad plan. By the time you have had enough drinks to be confident enough to talk to her, you will no longer be worth talking to.

The second thing my sister didn't tell me would have been the deal breaker, but I didn't find this out until late the night before the date, when it was too late to cancel. You see the other fact about this girl was her dad was a pastor. I hadn't been in a church in ten years, I was still very much struggling and failing to be sober. I figured this guy would take one look at me and throw me out. I was terrified.

At the same time, I had always promised myself that if I ever did get a girl to go out with me, I was going to be a respectable guy. I would never be one of those guys who pulled up to the house and honk the horn. No, no matter how scared I was, I was going to pull up to the house, walk up to the door, meet her father, shake the man's hand and then take her out on our date. By the way, to any of my young female readers, If a guy is not ready to come to the door and meet the man who loves you (or should love you) most, that guy is not ready. Turn him down.

I got a reprieve. Her dad was not home. Instead I got to meet another family member. His name was Shadrach. Shadrach was not human. No, the best way I can describe Shadrach is he was 100 pounds of snarling teeth. He was the family German Shepherd. I pulled up to the house and before I could open the door, I saw two giant paws on my window. I'm pretty sure he thought I was a dentist because he showed me all his teeth. He barked and snarled and growled. He foamed at

the mouth. Cujo had nothing on Shadrach. Even in my pre-Christian days, I didn't think it was appropriate to name an animal who was clearly demon possessed after someone from the Bible or, for that matter, that a man of God would have a demon possessed pet.

I honked the horn.

She came out, called off the dog, we went out on our date and we had a great time. We began dating and the next week when I finally did meet her dad, he not only didn't throw me out. He was kind and loving to me and he answered all my questions. He was a great guy with a great daughter (and a scary dog who hated me almost until he died).

The girl started inviting me to church. I had no desire to go to church, after all I had graduated, but I ended up in the church for the same reason every guy who has no interest in church ends up in church, a girl invited me. I didn't want to go to church. I didn't like church, but I liked her so I thought I would go once or twice to make her happy and then Christmas and Easter, weddings and funerals, I would go with her and everything would be fine. But there was a problem.

You know how we tell the little children that the church is God's house, and to some degree it is, though what building could contain God? Well I showed up in God's house that first Sunday and the best way I can describe it is, God was home. I can't say I had a conversion experience at that moment, but in the faces of those around me, I saw what I was missing—peace and grace and forgiveness and a whole bunch of other things. Before long I wanted to go to church, and one night, at a revival meeting, I raised my hand, walked down the aisle, asked Jesus into my heart and became a follower of Jesus Christ.¹ And that's when it happened...

Jesus turned my life around.

¹(Folks from some faith traditions may argue that conversion actually happened at my confirmation and you're right, it should have. The problem was not with the church or with confirmation, so much as the problem was with me. I did not take it seriously. I went through the motions. I needed more and praise God, He was patient with me until I came to Him.)



I wish I could tell you it was smooth sailing from there forward, but it wasn't. All I can tell you is becoming a Christian was the best decision I've ever made in my life and not long after, I made the second best decision I ever made, I asked the girl to marry me. We've been married for almost three decades now and it's been wonderful.

One of the big struggles in my pre-conversion days was fear. You remember I was the human target kid. Fitting in was never my strong suit. I was especially terrified to speak in public. This manifested in, of all places, Sunday School. I was loving Sunday School, because I was learning so much. The Bible was opening before my eyes and I was thrilled, except for one thing. We would take turns going around the table reading Scripture. The closer it got to being my turn, the more nervous I would become, until, when it got to be my turn, the nerves took over completely. I stammered and stuttered as if I couldn't read. I was embarrassing and the other lion, was right there to make it worse. "You're not really fitting in here either. You sound like you can't read. They'll think you're stupid..." I'd get more and more nervous and it got worse and worse.

Then not long after I came to Christ, I hit another bump. The church did something for me that I recommend every church do for it's new members. They got me involved. They got me plugged in to a ministry and gave me some ownership in the church. This is so crucial, but there is something even more crucial, getting a person involved in the right ministry. One day the phone rang. Someone from our church's nominating committee was on the other end of the line, asking if I would consider being put on the ballot to be a trustee. I was so excited, I said I would love to be considered. Then I got off the phone and called my now wife, then girlfriend, and asked, "What's a trustee?" She said, "They're the guys who fix the building and work on the grounds" and then with a little apprehensive pause in her voice, she said, "Why?" Which sounded a lot like "What did you do?" You see, she knows something about me that you might not know yet. When I paint my pictures, you can clearly see, I am in my element. The problem is, if you watch me use a paintbrush, you watch me use the only mechanical tool I can use with any degree of proficiency. Beyond that, put a wrench in my hand and I lose 50+ I.Q. points. I'm terrible at all things mechanical and of course, since our Lord has a sense of humor, I won the election.

I became a trustee, and I showed up at all the trustee functions, and I tried and the other trustees were great and so patient with me, but you know how sometimes you can tell that people are

being patient? Well, that's how this was. I've had a lot of growth in this area now, but at the time, I didn't stick with things I wasn't good at for very long and you'll never guess who showed up... Yep, the other lion.

Wait, I thought you said you became a Christian. Doesn't that mean he has no power over you? Well, yes and no. You see, Jesus took care of my salvation, but the enemy can still attack, still hit us. His attack just changes. Where before he wanted to drag us off to an eternity separated from God, now he just wants to strip us of our effectiveness, make us lose faith, fall off mission, sin grievously or just plain give up.

I was struggling, and the other lion was right there. "You're terrible at this. You're just making it worse. Aren't you embarrassed? Maybe you should just not show your face around church for a while. They don't want you here. You're a waste of time and space." I have to admit at times he was getting through but so was Jesus.

One day my pastor came up to me. He said, "Dave, I want you to do something for me." Well, to be honest, after having said a quick yes to the trustee thing, I was a little hesitant to agree to doing anything, but this pastor had sown into my life. He was teaching me a lot. I knew he cared about me and I loved the guy, so I said, "Sure, what do you want meet do?"

He said, "I want you to paint a backdrop for Vacation Bible School." I was in shock. I almost fell over because I actually knew how to do that. I could do that and do it well and I did it well. I did it so well, and I don't say this to boast, but I did it so well that other churches would come to our closing program and sign up to take turns using it. My backdrops became my ministry to the entire community. It was great, for about two years.

Then for the third year, the director of the skits came to me and said, "This year, you're going to be in the skit." I felt the nerves come over me and I said, "I can't do that, I can't speak in public." He's a nice man, so I know he said it nicer than I remember it, but here's how I remember it. He said, "Dave, this is a character who wears a stupid costume. This character does stupid things

all week long. This is a stupid character. You will be perfect.” I couldn’t argue with his logic so I did it and I can’t say I was perfect, but it was a small church and no one died so they let me do it again.

A few more years passed and they asked me to teach. I said I couldn’t teach, but they said, “C’mon Dave, it’s third grade.” I got a little puffed up and said to myself, “Well, I am smarter than a third grader” and I was... except for one kid. This kid went on to graduate top of his class in high school, get a perfect score on the SAT, graduate Summa Cum Laude from Princeton, went to Oxford in England to be a Rhodes scholar, and now works in some amazingly powerful job. Even as an eight year-old his questions buried me, but it was another step.

Eventually I felt the call to ministry, became a youth leader, then an ordained minister, pastored my own church, founded a creative arts ministry, became a writer for an international youth ministry resource and now I travel all over painting pictures and sharing the Gospel. This man who was once scared to read Scripture in a Sunday School class and terrified to speak in public, has now spoken to thousands of people all across the United States. My life was radically transformed by two things. First of all, someone cared enough to introduce me to my Lord Jesus Christ and secondly, my pastor found my gift of art and showed me how I could use it to serve the Lord. You never know the good you’re going to do when you step out in faith and share the love of Christ, but that’s what being a picture of Jesus is all about.

Jesus did something scary in Scripture. In John 8:12 Jesus said something totally unsurprising. He said, “I am the light of the world...” It makes perfect sense. He is the one who came to shine light into our dark world. He came to save us to rescue us, to rewrite stories like mine, to make us brand new. Of course, He can say without hesitation that He is the light of the world, but then in Matthew 5, he turns it on us. He says, “You (as in you and me) are the light of the world.” This is the challenge. The perfect One calls upon the imperfect ones and tells us to reflect His light into the dark corners of our world. He tells us we are a shining city on a hill that cannot be hidden. He tells us to uncover our light and let it shine so that people will see it and praise our Father in heaven. That’s the essence of being a picture of Jesus.

How will you represent Him? How will you shine? How will you be a picture of Jesus.



Dave painting the other lion. (photo by Donna Parcell)



Dichotomy

Webster's Online Dictionary defines a dichotomy as a difference between two opposite things. In a way Jesus is a dichotomy. He's the suffering servant and the mighty King. He is sacrifice and ruler. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and He is the Lamb of God. He is the Savior. He is the Lord. He is Jesus Christ. Opposites wrapped into one person. Friend, we need Him to be both. No one can deny we need a Savior. Our sins convict us every day, but we also need Him to be Lord. We need Him to rule over us and guide us. We need to follow His example and live by His words. We need His power to stand against the other lion. We need Him to stand us up and straighten us out and if we are going to be faithful pictures of Jesus, we need to be sure to talk about and represent all of who He is.

Do we acknowledge Him as He is with our lives? Do we read and follow His Word? Do we reflect all of the light He has given us? He is Savior and Lord and not only do we need Him to be both, so does the rest of the world. I made the pictures of the lion and the lamb to line up on purpose, because only in Savior AND Lord together do we get the whole story.

Is He your Savior? Is He your Lord? Are you living to be a complete picture of Jesus?



The Collector

Before I start this section of the book, I feel I need to give a disclaimer. The following story is not a true story. It was born out of a nuisance email, the kind I usually delete without reading. For some reason, I read this one and as soon as I read it, I knew I needed to rewrite it and share it with the world. The reason I feel the need to give the disclaimer is people will often come up to me after a presentation, in which I act this story out, and thank me for my service. To be clear, this story is set in the Vietnam era of American History. I was a small child when the war ended. I did not serve, and so I must be clear, this is not my story, but it is a really good one. In order to really help you get the impact of this story, I am going to write the story as the script I use to present this drama. It is a two part monologue. The first half of the story is presented as the artist who painted the painting in question and the second half of the story is presented as the butler on the estate. I call this piece “The Collector.”

The Artist



“I remember it like I was yesterday. I was just about to graduate from high school and I had only one plan. I was going to go to art school and become an artist. The problem was we didn’t have much money, but that was okay. I figured I’d work a few years, save up and as soon as I had enough money, I would pick up and go. That was the plan and it was a good one except for one thing, it was 1970. Instead of going to art school, I got drafted. I was headed to Vietnam.

Now I don’t mind telling you, I didn’t really want to go and I was more than a

little scared, but before long, I found myself on a bus, headed for basic training. I was shakin' in my boots. We pulled up to another stop and this guy got on. He walked up to me, stuck out his hand and said, 'Hi, my name's Johnny.' Did you ever have a time when you met somebody and you just instantly knew you were going to be good friends? Well, that's how it was with Johnny. He sat down, we started talkin' and before long I wasn't quite as scared. Then the bus stopped and I got scared all over again. They started yellin' at us, shaved our heads, gave us a fine assortment of green clothes and we started runnin.' It felt like we were runnin' the rest of the day.

I didn't see Johnny again until it was time to turn in and when I did see him, he was wearin' his uniform with that little name patch over the pocket. I said, 'Yo, Johnny, that's hilarious.' He said, 'What's so funny?' I said, 'Your name.' He looked a little tense, 'What about my name?' I said, 'No, it ain't like that. It's just your name is John Forbeshaff and there's this guy who's supposed to have like the world's greatest art collection and his name is John Forbeschaff too.' Johnny said, 'Yeah, I know, he's my dad.'

Well I start bustin' a gut right, cause Johnny don't act like no rich kid, but when I looked at him, he wasn't laughin.' He started tellin' me all about his dad's collection and I was in shock. Here I am, this kid who wanted to go to art school, but instead gets drafted and ends up becomin' buddies with the son of the world's greatest art collector. It's almost like there's a plan or somethin.'

Well we did our basic training, and believe me, there ain't a lot of down time in basic, but any down-time I had, I was sketchin' and since there wasn't a lot to sketch, I ended up sketchin' pictures of Johnny. He got a little uncomfortable about that, but I told him, 'Look man, if I'm ever



gonna end up in your old man's collection, I gotta keep my skills sharp.' Then he'd just laugh and let me go. Johnny was alright!

Before long we shipped out and found ourself in country, Vietnam. Now I have to tell you, we Americans talk a lot about dyin' for your country, Well I got there and discovered I wasn't sure I wanted to die for my country and I was almost equally sure I didn't want to make some other kid die for his, but one day in the jungle, we ran into a few guys who did not share my conviction. They opened fire on us. I turned to run for cover but I was too slow. I took a hit and thought I was a goner, but just then, I felt arms around my chest. I looked up. It was Johnny, draggin' me to safety. He flinched and yelled out. I knew he took a hit, but he kept goin.' He dragged me all the way to safety. The medics started to work on me. I told 'em to go work on Johnny, but when I looked over, Johnny didn't need 'em. He was already gone.

I don't know if you could say anything good came out of that day, but if it was, it was that I was hurt too bad to go back, but I didn't lose anything I needed to paint. So, as soon as they shipped me home, I went to art school. When I got there, I had all these sketches, so the first piece I did was a painting of Johnny. It got good, too. I got an A, but sometimes I wish I would have painted a bowl of fruit. You know why? Bowls of fruit don't look back. Every time I looked at that painting, I started to hear something telling me that I needed to do something with it. To give it to someone. You know how sometimes you feel like you need to do something, and you know it's crazy, but no matter what, it won't let up? That's how this was and I finally, I gave in.

Next thing I know, I find myself on another bus with a canvas wrapped in brown paper laying on my lap. The driver dropped me off at the end of a long driveway and I started to walk up it. Every couple feet, I tried to turn around but somethin' spurred me on. I made it almost to the house when this British guy came at me, all prim and proper-like. He said, 'I'm sorry, Mr. Forbeschaff is not receiving any visitors because of the passing of his son.' I said, 'I know, he was my buddy over there.' That changed his tune and he told me he would see what he could do.

He led me into a foyer. I ain't never seen anything like it and I been to museums. There were Picassos, Vermeers, Dalis, Matisse's, Monets, van Goghs and more and after looking at every one, I looked at the paper wrapped canvas in my hand and I just wanted to run. I was almost to

the door when I saw him. No introduction was necessary, he looked just like Johnny. I said 'Mr. Forbeschaff, I knew your son. He was my buddy over there and he was a good man. I know this doesn't compare with anything in your collection, but I wanted you to have it.' He unwrapped the canvas and he smiled just a little. He managed to say 'Thank you' and then he broke down and I broke down, too and I ain't ashamed to admit it. Neither of us could say another word. We didn't have to. I knew I did the right thing."



The Butler

“I remember it like it was yesterday. There I was, working on the estate, in the garden, tending the roses, when I saw him and thought, ‘Oh no, not another one.’ You see, it seemed about once a week, I would look down the drive, and see yet another disheveled young artist carrying a canvas wrapped in brown paper, hoping to get his work seen by the great John Whitley Forbeschaff. One by one I turned them all away, but when this young man told me his story, I knew I had to see what I could do.

That young man will never know the good he did that day. It was the first time Mr. Forbeschaff smiled since the day he got the news of his son’s passing. The very next day, he made me take a million dollar Picasso off the wall and replace it with the painting the young man had done of young Master Forbeschaff. I used to catch him talking to it sometimes and it brought him joy for the rest of his days, until the day he passed.

That was a dreadful day. As soon as news of his death hit the wires, the phone began to ring. Not one person, not one, asked about the man. All they cared about was the art. Eventually it was decided that the estate and collection would be sold at auction. The executor asked me to stay on and care for the estate until it was sold. Of course I agreed. They were like family to me, and I to them.

The day of the auction was ghastly. There were cars up and down the drive. There were cars on the lawn, there was even one car parked in my roses. I was irate. In the house, the people circled the foyer like vultures, looking for what they would scavenge from the collection of the great John Whitley Forbeschaff. So obnoxious.

Finally the auctioneer strode to the podium and when he did he announced that the first piece to go up for sale would be the painting the young man had done of young Master Forbeschaff. Someone said, ‘Away with that, we want the real art!’ The auctioneer very calmly said, ‘I’m sorry, Mr. Forbeschaff’s will clearly stipulates that this piece must be sold first.’



He started the bidding at \$1,000, no one bid, \$900, \$800, \$700 no one bid. They began to snicker and laugh. They had no idea what this painting meant, or maybe they just didn't care, but I could bear it no longer. I looked in my wallet. I didn't have much money left, a single \$20 bill, but I raised my hand and shouted, '\$20!' I heard someone say 'Silly old fool, he doesn't even know it's worthless.' but I didn't care what he thought. The auctioneer said, 'I have a bid of \$20 do I hear \$25?' They began to laugh at me. He said again, 'I have a bid of \$20 do I hear \$25? Going once, going twice, sold!

I became lost in the moment, staring into the painted eyes of my long lost friend, and thinking of the joy this painting brought, when a commotion brought me back to reality. The people were in an uproar. I turned to look at the auctioneer and I realized he was packing his things. 'What

about the Picassos, the Vermeers, the van Goghs?' they shrieked. The auctioneer replied, 'I'm quite sorry, but the auction is over.' There were gasps, there were shouts, there was even a scream. He said again, 'The auction is over. The will also, very clearly, stated...

'the one who takes the son gets it all!'

There are so many things that vie for our attention in this world, so many things we can invest our lives in, but the story rings true. The one who takes the Son gets it all. If you think about it, you know this to be true. Think of all the things that we sacrifice our lives for.

Money: How much of our lives do we spend in the pursuit of money? Don't get me wrong, I know we all need money, but what priority does it hold in your life? Did you ever think about

what money really is? It's the picture of a dead man (money couldn't even save him) printed on a piece of paper. At the end of the day, it has value for one reason and one reason only, because we say it has value. Now some of you readers might be more astute investors. You might say, "Well yes, that's true. Paper money is vastly unstable, that's why I have my money in gold." Do you know what gold is? It's a shiny rock. It has value largely because we say it does. So often we fail to ask, is this worth what we sacrifice for it?



Art: One thing I hope I have made clear by this point is my love for art. Over the course of these pages, I have shared photos of sketch paintings I have done of some of the world's greatest masterpieces. The originals of these paintings are worth tens of millions of dollars. My favorite among them, Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* is reportedly valued at over \$100 million, but I have a question. Why are some paintings worth tens of millions but you can often buy an original painting at a thrift store for five dollars or less? What accounts for the disparity of pricing? Ultimately, we do. We decide what is valuable and it's fickle and it varies.

Take van Gogh for example. His paintings fetch astronomical prices on the rare events when they actually go up for sale. Yet when he was alive, it was quite different. During his lifetime, Vincent van Gogh painted over 900 paintings in ten years. At his level of excellence, that number is remarkable. Yet while he was alive, do you know how many of those paintings he sold? One, and not for tens of millions but for a paltry sum. He sold one painting and then he died penniless at the age of 37. Most people believe he died by his own hand, though some sources now believe otherwise. One could argue his paintings are so much more valuable because he's not around to make anymore. What a tragedy.

I often wonder what would happen if van Gogh could travel in time and see what we think of his work now. I wonder how his life might have been different if he had realized that one day he would be regarded as one of the greatest artists the world has ever seen.

The pity is, he, like you and me are worth so much more than what we can produce. We are valuable not because of what we can do, but by virtue of who we are. We are children of God. Loved and beloved. Masterpieces created in God's image. We're priceless pictures of Jesus, every last one of us and that is where we need to find our value. There is tremendous hope in being a child of God and even more hope in the idea that we are so valuable to God that He gave His only Son in our place to be our Savior. This is where our ultimate value lies and so the story rings true.

The one who takes the Son, gets it all.



Dave painting The Collector (photo by Donna Parcell)



Have you taken the Son?

The moral of that story is a great spiritual truth. We invest our lives in so many things but, when it's all said and done, the one who takes the Son gets it all. Jesus, God's only begotten Son, laid down His life for you and me. He died on the cross to pay a price we could not pay. He sacrificed Himself so that you and I could place our faith in Him and then He rose again to set us free. His death opened the door for all who would believe to receive eternal life. He is the Savior, but the question is, Is Jesus your savior? Have you taken the Son? Have you accepted Him as both Lord and Savior? If not, you can change that today.

You can pray and ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior. You can confess your sin, and ask Him to forgive you, and if you do, He will because He loves you. Pray this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I trust and follow you as my Lord and Savior. Guide my life and help me to do your will.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you just prayed that prayer and you meant it with all your heart, you've accepted Christ as Lord and Savior and you have joined the family of God. Praying that prayer is the first step in being a picture of Jesus. But now what?

Well, once we accept Him as Savior, we begin the life-long process of following Him as Lord. This is not a way of earning Salvation, it is a way of expressing gratitude for the gift of eternal life. This is a journey that is best walked with others, and not alone. I highly recommend finding your way into a strong, Bible believing church and beginning to read the Bible for yourself. These two things will help you to learn to follow Jesus and become a better picture of Him, so that people will be able to see you and praise Him, just like it says in Matthew 5.

A word about church...

When I was first invited to church, I said the same thing a million people (probably more) have said, “The church is full of hypocrites.” I’m here to tell you, to some extent, that is absolutely true. The problem is so is every other group of human beings on the face of the earth. Let’s face facts. None of us can even fully live up to our own moral code, let alone God’s. When I was first entering ministry, a friend of mine gave me some words of advice I have never forgotten. He said, “Ministry is easy... except for the people.” It’s true and yet we also know, next to God Himself, people are the point of ministry.

I’ve also observed that the church is like an airport. Everyone, even the “pilots,” walk through the door dragging their own baggage and that is the point. The church is not full of perfect people. It’s full of broken people, living in a broken world. We come together to help each other out, support each other, love each other and be there for each other. Yes, sometimes we fail and we fail epically. People let you down, but ultimately when we come into the church, we come to celebrate, worship and learn about the One who will never let us down. We need each other in this pursuit. That is the beauty of the church. Oh, and one other thing...

The Church is the Body of Christ

That’s right, the Church is the ultimate picture of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 12 talks about how God brings all these different, diverse, people together—people with different gifts, talents, abilities, not to mention personalities, experiences and on and on. He brings them together precisely because they are different, because they have many things to do, to fulfill God’s mission on this earth. He matches strengths and weaknesses because no one person can do it alone. Hear this, that is by God’s design. He doesn’t want us to be independent. He wants us to be interdependent—building each other up and helping each other out and then reaching out until everyone has heard the message, seen and become part of this amazing picture of Jesus.

Each one...

There was a time in my life, when my priorities were out of whack, badly. I was so sold out to my art career, that the rest of my life was falling apart, my marriage, my relationship with my children and my relationship with God. It was a mess. I was working for a high profile client who had me convinced that he was going to make me rich and famous. Even though I was a Christian, there was still part of me that was the human target kid. This guy was going to make me into “somebody” and I was going to “show them all.” That’s what happens when we find our value in what we do, rather than who we are in Christ.

It seemed like no matter how hard I worked, something always went wrong and even though I was working on some pretty cool stuff, I wasn’t even breaking even, let alone getting ahead. One day, when I was praying, which was more like me yelling at God about how He was letting me down and not letting me succeed, I heard God. I can’t swear it was audible, but it sure seemed like it and it shook me to the core. He said,

“Your work is your God.”

I tried to deny it. I tried to argue my way out of it, but the voice was relentless and soon the thought invaded all my other thoughts. “Your work is your God.” Providentially, a group of men from the church were about to attend a Promise Keepers event called *Stand in the Gap* in Washington, D.C. I honestly didn’t want to go. I was clearly too busy, and yet something prodded me on. That day, October 4, 1997, changed my life.

There were over a million men on the mall in Washington and yet it felt like speaker after speaker stepped to the podium with a message for me alone. One by one they surgically cut away my defenses until I knew exactly what I had to do. On that day, I quit making art. I laid it down on the altar and swore to God I would never make art again unless I was doing it for Him. Some will not believe this, but I got my call to ministry that day. Without the constant pull of my idol, I was able to focus and really listen to God. That’s how I went from being an artist to being a minister.

I began to teach Sr. High Sunday School and later that year, I became the youth leader of the church. I loved it, but it didn't take long for me to realize that, though most of my students were raised in the church, they hadn't retained a lot of the basics. I began praying for a way to make my teaching "stick." I kept feeling like God was telling me to use art, but there was a problem. By now I was afraid to use art. I didn't want to go back to the mess I was. It seems I had forgotten the "unless I am doing (art) for you..." part of my vow.

I resisted for quite a while, even though the promptings continued. Finally one night at Vacation Bible School, God broke through. My son, Chris, was in the VBS skits that year. He was only four or five, but it was his job each night to be the town crier. He would come out on the stage in full costume with his little plastic horn and cry out the memory verse of the evening. On this particular night, he came out, blew his horn, unrolled his little scroll and said:

“Hear ye, Hear ye, the Word of the Lord.” And then he said, “Each one should use whatever gifts he has received to serve others...”

It's 1 Peter 4:10. I know it came out of the mouth of my son, but it sure felt like the voice of God. It was clear. It was time. My time of penance had lasted long enough, it was time to put my gift of art to work once again, this time as a teaching tool. That was the birth of AMOKArts.com and the creative arts ministry I have been privileged to do all over the U.S. I get to use my "whatever gift" to serve others and serve God.

Scripture alludes to fact that each of us has a "whatever gift." That includes you. You have a gift (at least one), it comes from God, and He invested it in you so that you could invest it in His Kingdom. What's your whatever gift and how can you use it to serve someone else? This is our calling and a big part of the meaning of our lives.

When we use our gifts to serve others in the name of the Lord, we serve God.



Dave acting out The Collector (photo by Donna Parcell)



Serving God

To conclude this book, I need to share one more picture. I didn't paint this picture. It's a photograph and I didn't even take it, my wife, Dawn, did. That being said, it may be the most important picture in this book. You see when I talk about serving God, almost everywhere I go, I can see the apprehension come up on people's faces. It's the same apprehension I had every single time I showed up at a trustee function, all those years ago. It's an apprehension that comes with a question. "What if I'm not good enough?" That's why you need to see this picture.

You see this picture was taken on a bad day. It was a day I probably would have skipped and yet today it feels priceless. Anyone who has ever seen me do a live painting should have no trouble seeing that I love to paint pictures. That being said, I hate to paint walls and on this particular day, that was what needed to be done. We have this old shed in the back yard and it needed painting badly. My wife had been reminding me for quite some time and there was finally no more putting it off. I didn't want to do it, but it had to be done. Then it got worse.

My son Chris, who was about three years old at the time wanted to "help" me. I did not want him to "help" me, but his mother, my wife, gave me one of those wife looks that let me know I'd better let him "help." So off we trudged to the wall. I gave Chris a brush roughly the size of his head and he began to paint. You can't really see it in the picture, but there's probably more paint on Chris than there is on the wall and there is more paint on the ground than there was on Chris. It was a mess and I remember being quite frustrated. How is it that we always seem to miss the moments?

You see today, even though I have shared this photo in countless places all over America, it's still rare that I don't choke up. Why? Because this is what serving God looks like. You're the little one. See there's nothing even the most gifted among us can do, that God can't do a billion times better all by Himself, but that's not the point. When I look at this picture, I don't see irritation and frustration anymore. There is only one thing I see. My little boy (he's a grown man now) in that bright shining moment, wanted to be with me and he wanted to be like me. (Author's note: I

can't write about it without choking up either.) This is what God desires when we serve Him. He doesn't need us, at all, not even a little bit. Instead, He desires us. He wants us. He loves us and it blesses His heart to see us, His beloved children, joining Him in what he is doing.

When we join Him in what He is doing, with all our flaws and all our mistakes, errors and messes, what shines through is His love. And when we shine with His love...

We become Pictures of Jesus.

You are loved by God. You are a Child of God. You're his spitting image.

You are a Picture of Jesus.

Be a good one.



Dave finishing up Lamb of God (photo by Donna Parcell)



To Bring
Pictures of Jesus

or any of my other presentations to your church, meeting, etc. go to the booking page of

AMOKArts.com

or write me at AMOKArts@aol.com