

CWRmagazine

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



*"But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."
(Luke 15:20, NKJV)*

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Everlasting Love

Greg Albrecht

“I have loved you with an everlasting love...” —Jeremiah 31:3

Of all the beautiful affirmations of love in the Bible, or elsewhere in literature or song, Jeremiah’s bold, unqualified assertion of the unparalleled love of God for us—for YOU—is perhaps the most staggering. Of all the love songs, ecstatic rhapsodies and blissful poems ever written, this eternal declaration of undying love soars into heavenly places, where the limitations of earthbound human love can never go.

Think about it. There has never been a “time” (as we humanly experience time) when Father God did not love us. There will never be a “time” when he will not love you. He has always loved us, still does and always will.

He will never stop loving us because there was never a time when he started to love us. His love is unending, without boundaries or limitations. God will always love YOU.

No matter what we do—no matter how badly we screw up—no matter how big of a mess we make of our life—there is nothing we can ever do that will cause our heavenly Father to turn away from us. He has, still does and always will love us with an *Everlasting Love*.

A FATHER’S LOVE

Russell Crowe plays an Australian farmer in the 2014 movie “The

Water Diviner.” Based on a true story the movie is about Joshua Connor, an Australian farmer who travels to Turkey four years after the World War 1 battle at Gallipoli.

Gallipoli is the focus of an Australian and New Zealand solemn day of remembrance—it recalls an April 1915 battle in Turkey when young Australian and New Zealand soldiers were slaughtered by Turkish forces. The national tragedy of Gallipoli is observed to this day on April 25 as ANZAC day—ANZAC an acronym for Australia New Zealand Army Corps. It is a day of remembrance commemorating those who died in all wars, but it is Gallipoli that stands as a symbol of a national tragedy.

In the 2014 movie, “The Water Diviner” Australian farmer Joshua Conner is believed to have intuition about where to dig wells (thus the “divining” of a location where a well can be dug and water found). His successes and failures at finding water on his property in Australia are the backdrop for the instincts he employs in finding his lost sons—fallible instincts, of course, as the character of Joshua Conner says in the movie, “I have dug a bunch of dry holes, too.”

After Gallipoli Joshua Conner and his wife are notified that their three sons died, but they are MIA and thus their bodies would

not be returned. Four years after Gallipoli and a year after the end of World War 1 Joshua’s grief-stricken wife commits suicide and in 1919 Joshua, devastated and heartbroken, armed with his discernment and undying love, undertakes the long voyage from Australia to Turkey to bring the bodies of his boys home.

While “The Water Diviner” takes liberties with history (as most movies do), the foundation of the story is endless love. Joshua Conner loses his wife Eliza—and decides to make some sense of life and bring the bodies of his three MIA sons home and bury them on his farm. It’s all about Joshua, the father, in search of his sons—Art, Ed and Henry—a *father who still stops at nothing to find his sons and bring them home*.

After Joshua Conner arrives in Istanbul he leaves no stone unturned trying to find his sons, and in the process becomes a nuisance to the British military who are trying to keep the peace following the War.

In one telling scene two military officers are talking about Joshua Conner’s relentless quest to find the truth about his three sons. One officer says to the other that he can’t just stop everything he is doing to help every father—parents should, he says, just stay put and let us as authorities find out the answers about those Missing in Action.



Russell Crowe in "The Water Diviner" (2014)

The other officer says, "Perhaps, but this Joshua Conner is the only one who came looking for his sons."

I won't spoil the movie or the story should you wish to read it, other than to say that the movie is an incredible illustration of *Everlasting Love* on the human level. Joshua Conner's wife is dead. His three sons are dead. But his love continues, unabated and undiminished.

GOD NEVER GIVES UP

God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—will never give up on us. Christless religion often puts the emphasis on how we must search for God, but the gospel of Jesus Christ is clear—God will relentlessly and incessantly search for us.

While the Bible clearly says that God's love proceeds from him, produced and given by him, and that there is nothing transactional about his love, human religion seemingly cannot quite fathom that fact. The Bible says that God's love is not about us loving God, but about him loving us "*first*" (1 John 4:19).

Yet, throughout human religion, including that found within Christendom, the emphasis is often reversed. The sense of Christless religion is that God loves us *after* we love him first, and thus the divine beauty of God's love is dragged into the gutter of human attempts to earn and deserve his love.

God will always and forever search for you and me and everyone we love and hold near and dear

because every man, woman and child is of infinite value to him. He loves us all dearly, even during those times we run away and hide from him because of our guilt and shame.

The *Everlasting Love* of our heavenly Father means he will stop at nothing—he will meet us wherever we are. In fact, that's the entire meaning of Jesus' birth. Jesus came "down here" from the eternity, the safety, security and holiness of what we call heaven in order to reveal the fullness and depth of God's love. He came to be one of us and with us. Jesus came into the barnyards and swill

of our lives, willing to meet us in our filth and our failure.

He did not come, as his divine mission is often devalued and misunderstood, to convince God to love you and me. Jesus did not come to placate an angry God filled with wrath, who, apart from Jesus, would have demanded that we pay for our sins and flaws. Jesus is himself the gift of God's love to us. The love of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—cannot be divided. God's love is indivisible, without limitation, without any variation or shadow of doubt.

Without God's love we are nothing. Without God's love, compliance with religious ceremonies and rituals and obedience to religious rules, regulations, dogmas and doctrines is nothing.

Without God's love, it matters little how much we pray, how much we study the Bible or how hard we work trying to help others and overcome our own problems.

Without God's love, to paraphrase Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:2, all our efforts to please and appease God are but meaningless and even annoying sound—a clanging cymbal or as Eugene Peterson translates 1 Corinthians 15:2, "the creaking of a rusty gate."

God's love is critically important—it is the central ingredient in our relationship with him. God's love is given by his grace—not in return for something we do. God's love is not about balancing the books so that we receive his love in exact proportion to how well we behave.

God's love is endless. God's love never stops. God's love never gives up on us.

Everything we do in this sad old world is finite—limited. Everything we do has an expiration date. That means, among other things, that our envy, our arrogance, our hatred and our pride has a termination date. Thank God for that!

There will be an end of hatred and bigotry and fear and shame and guilt and violence and war—but God's love will never end.

Perhaps you are enduring such a time right now—your grown children are far away from you—geographically and emotionally. Perhaps you have lost friends and neighbors and you feel “survivor's guilt”—almost like you are the last person standing.

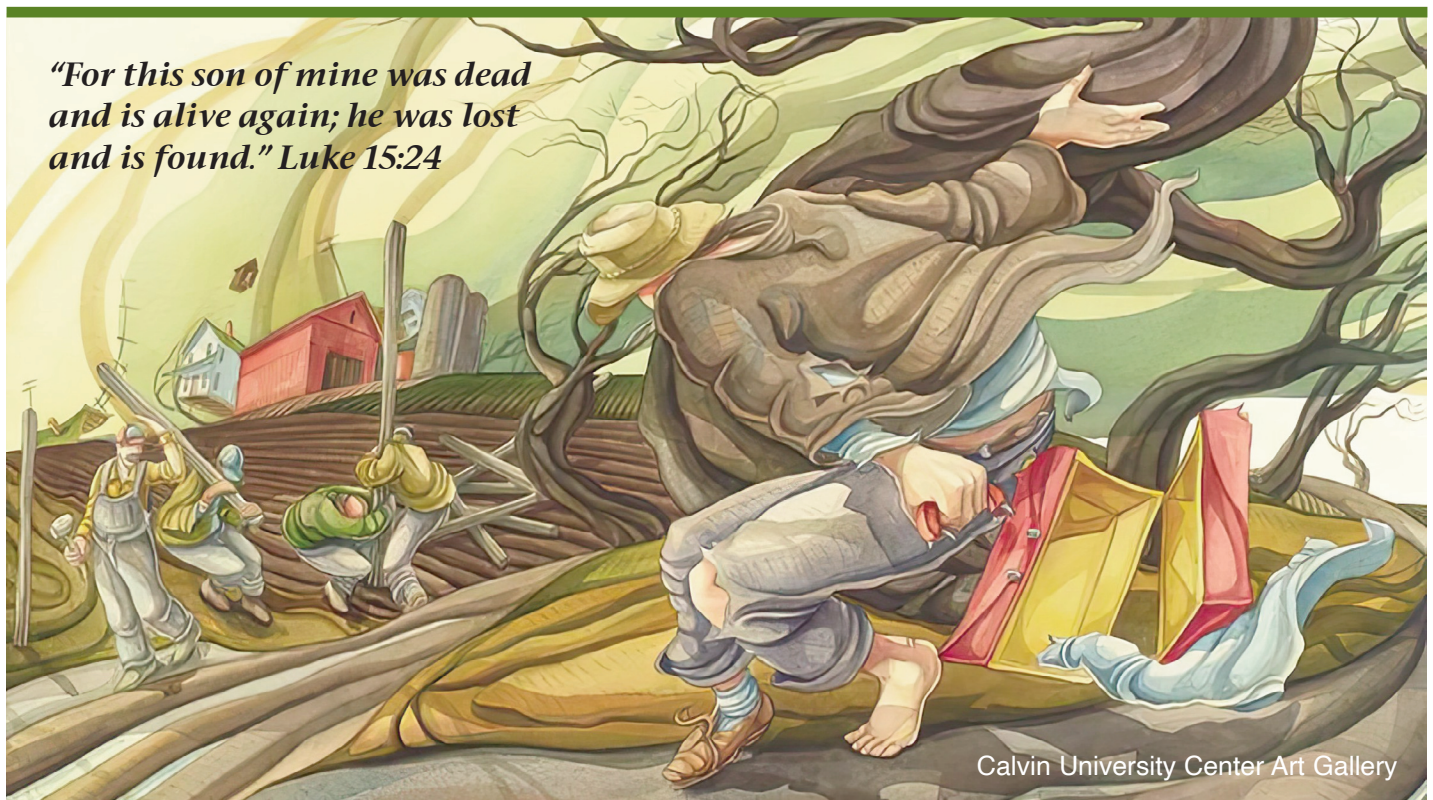
You may be lonely and alone—and you may wonder if anyone cares. I assure you that God cares and he always will. Always!

The world in which we live—a transitory world of time and space—a place of mortality and

from me,” says our loving heavenly Father. ***Nothing!***

Yes, this world is filled with loss and heartache and pain, but as Jesus said in John 16:33, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

The good news is that while this life will always include a long series of losses and grief, valleys and pitfalls—God will never leave us. The good news is that God is our Good Shepherd who will stop at nothing to find us, rescue us



Calvin University Center Art Gallery

YOU ARE NOT LOST— YOU ARE NOT BEYOND HOPE

God's love never ends, never stops, never quits. The final word is love. There are many times and ways in our lives in which we feel lost—there are many times when we feel God is far off, many times when we feel our lives have no purpose.

death—is a world that is a combination of the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly—but in the end, the world always has its way with everyone, and we all die.

But the good news is that God tells us “Don't be afraid. I am with you—yesterday, today and forever. Nothing can ever separate you

and forever embrace, love and accept us in his home, at his table, forever and ever.

Amen!

Our heavenly Father has truly “loved you with an everlasting love.” □

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