

# 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.

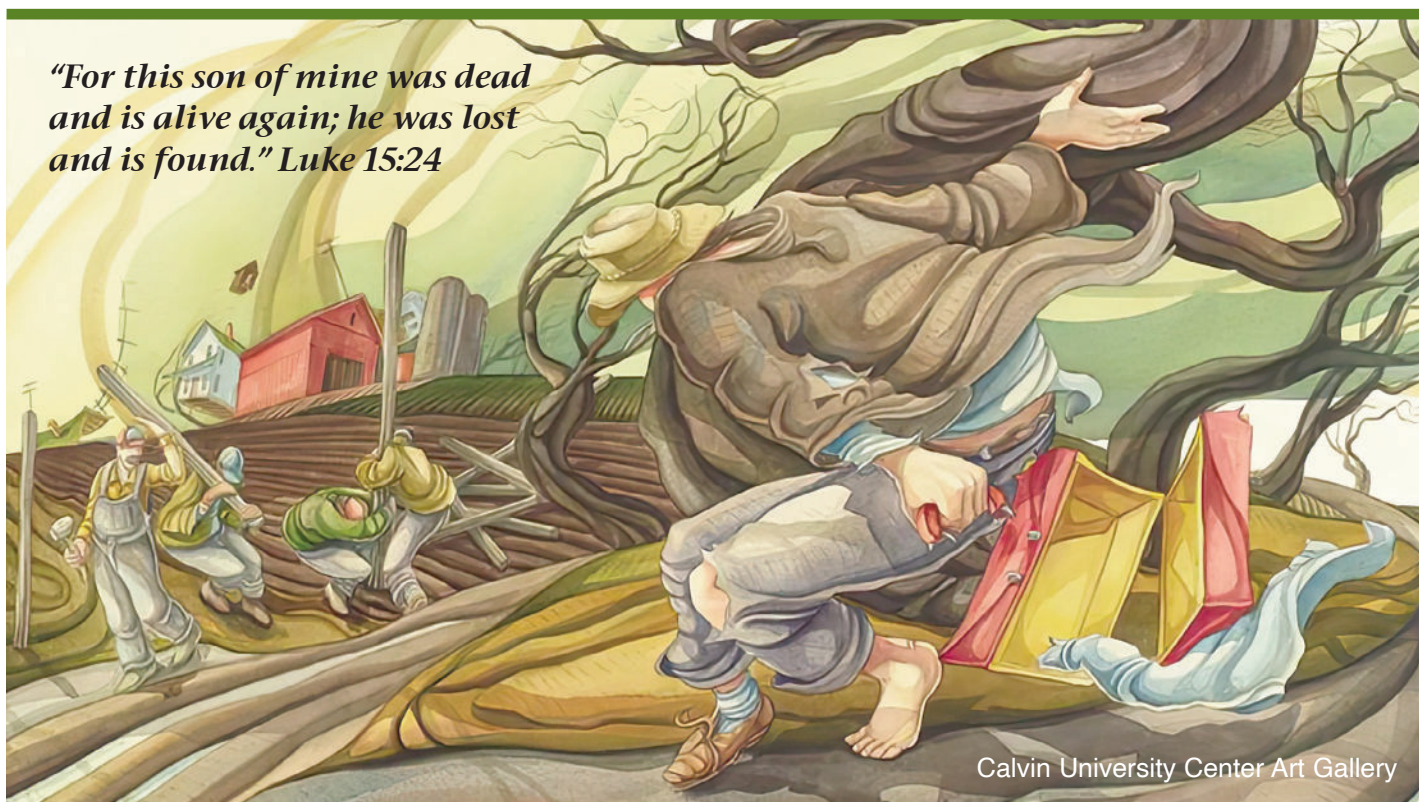
You may be lonely and alone—and you may wonder if anyone cares. I assure you that God cares and he always will. Always!

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.” □***

*Greg Albrecht is President and Editor-in-Chief of CWR/PTM.*



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# Two Types of Fathers

## Ed Dunn



*One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters.*

—George Herbert

*Fathers, do not frustrate your children with no-win scenarios. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.*

—Ephesians 6:4 (*The Message*)

*Every father should remember that one day his children will follow his example, not his advice.*

—Charles Kettering

*Fathering is not something perfect men do, but something that perfects the man.*

—Frank Pittman

There are so many joys to *fatherhood*, and as I am learning now in a second marriage, to *stepfatherhood*. There are also real challenges, many challenges, that are both experienced and learned from, *on the job*. I do not mind admitting that I am experiencing *lots of on the job* learning each and every day. It comes with new territory.

The roles of *father* and *stepfather* come with quite different expectations. As a *father*, I was directly responsible for raising a daughter (now an adult, living away from home). The *father's* role included providing food, shelter, clothing and an education. I was directly responsible for setting firm and loving boundaries, enforcing those boundaries, and, if needed, for any correction or discipline. I was directly responsible for the home environment and culture

my daughter was raised in. Most of us as biological parents share (or have shared) in these responsibilities.

As a *stepfather* of two young men, however, I contribute to the home environment and culture in quite different ways. Sure, I share in the provision of food, shelter and clothing. I certainly wholeheartedly encourage education, and try my best to help with the homework when asked, to the degree I can still remember subjects taught to me over forty years ago. You can imagine how much help I actually provide. That said, I must operate differently when it comes to setting fair and loving boundaries, to enforcing those boundaries, and even more so in the correction and discipline departments. I am *not* the biological parent. To be honest, I do not always remember this distinction as well as I should.

My most effective days as a *stepfather* are the days when I serve as a coach, a mentor, a guide and as a friend. As a relatively new blended family, it works best when I let my spouse, the biological parent, be the parent. And, I embrace the role of step-parent. I greatly enjoy my roles as coach, mentor, guide and friend. The joys and fulfillments I gain are a true gift in my life. Having been both a parent and a step-parent, I am growing in my appreciation for both roles, different though they are.

As a *stepfather*, I provide an

additional voice in taking my step-sons *by the hand and leading them in the way of the Master* (Ephesians 6:4, above). The lesson here for me is, *less voice*. It is better to love their mother well, live in Christ Jesus true to my beliefs, and wait for a question, any question, from them. With four parents in their lives, there can be many voices. Setting an example is always far better than giving advice. This is never truer than when advice has not been sought. The boys would rather *see* a sermon than *hear* one from me, any day.

Most importantly, I try to remember that *laughter is indeed the best medicine*. Approaching life in a blended family, where children share time between two homes, works a little better when humor can find its way into day-to-day living. Life for any family these days, blended or not, can be full of challenges and difficulties. There are so many demands on our time and resources. Taking the time to find the lighter side of each day's events in the lives we share can help to create that loving environment.

As a *stepfather*, I greatly enjoy the role of coach, mentor, guide, friend (and at times, comedian) I play in the lives of two young men. As a *father*, I played (and still do play, and love) these roles in the life of my daughter. Being both a *father* and a *stepfather* is a true gift, and gives such meaning and purpose to my life. The *on the job* learning I experience each day certainly keeps me on my toes. As I said, it comes with new territory; day-by-day and by God's grace. □

*Ed Dunn is an Associate Editor of CWR/PTM.*



Alone is a word that stands by itself, carrying the austere, solitary beauty of its own meaning even as it is spoken to another. It is a word that can be felt both as an invitation to depth and as an imminent threat, as in ‘all alone’, with its returned echo of abandonment. ‘Alone’ is a word that rings with a strange finality, especially when contained in that haunting aggregate, ‘left all alone’, as if the state once experienced begins to define and engender its own inescapable world. The first step in spending time alone is to admit how afraid of it we are.

Being alone is a difficult discipline: a beautiful and difficult sense of being solitary is always the ground from which we step into a contemplative intimacy with the unknown, but the first portal of aloneness is often experienced as a gateway to alienation, grief, and abandonment. To find ourselves alone or to be left alone is a deep, fearful, and abiding human potentiality of which we are often unconsciously, deeply afraid.

One of the elemental dynamics of self-compassion is to understand the deep reluctance we have to be left to ourselves.

David Whyte  
‘Alone,’ Consolations



# Alone

## Stuart Segall

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* —Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV)

What does ‘created for good works’ mean? For the Christian, this is something we want to dial into, be aware of, and grow in!

We are deliberately designed in our heart and mind with skill and a purpose, by God, for his purposes. For all of us, we know salvation is a gift and grace from above, and yet we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works.” I emphasize that good works do not give us salvation, but they are meant to be the result of salvation.

What is just one of the many good works we can do as Christians and followers of our Lord Jesus? One special work is the comforting and consolation of those who are alone, those who suffered loss and are trying to recover from that.

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* (Matthew 5:4). The Lord will wrap His arms of love and comfort around those who trust in Him.

*“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”* (Psalm 147:3).

Grieving a significant loss takes time. Depending on the circumstances, it will be necessary for those in supportive roles and those grieving to be gentle with themselves, as the process can take weeks to years.

Grieving helps a person

gradually adjust to a new chapter of life. Full awareness of a significant loss can happen suddenly or over a few days or weeks. When we introduce this subject, it is important to understand this one important starting point to grieve—“everyone is unique.”

The grieving process does not happen in a step-by-step, orderly fashion. Grieving tends to be unpredictable, with dark, hopeless thoughts and feelings coming and going like a see-saw trying to find a balancing act.

Now, there are some stepping stones in the grief process. It is important to note that mourning that brings healing doesn’t bypass any part of the journey or process.

Several years ago, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-American psychiatrist, described grief in stages. Grief however does not always occur in easily definable stages, but it is good just to look at the pathway stones that come up when we grieve.

**1. Denial, numbness, and shock.** Many will assume this first stage is not beneficial when in reality it may play an important part. This stage protects the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss, (so it is good to grasp its positive role).

**2. Bargaining.** This stage may involve persistent thoughts about what could have been done to prevent the loss. People can become preoccupied with ways that things could have been better. Intense remorse or guilt

may interfere with the healing process if this stage is not adequately resolved. The next two points can simply be identified without explanation.

### 3. Depression.

### 4. Anger.

**5. Acceptance.** In time, an individual may be able to come to terms with various feelings and accept the fact that the loss has occurred. Healing can begin once the loss becomes a part of the individual's life experiences.

Many counselors and therapists add this thought —“*adjusting to a new reality.*” The mourner and their support system need to be willing to practice empathy in navigating a “*new normal.*”

- Recognize that while we are tempted to fix everything, it is essential to allow a person to have their grief process and not try to “fix” them.

- If someone you know wants your company during such a time as they enter into the grief process, you can dock alongside them and figuratively approach them with what I am going to share with you that has served me in over four decades of grief counseling.

- Often the most helpful thing to do is simply to listen empathically, that is, with all your attention and focus, as if that person were the only person in the world.

Here are a few tips from author David Brooks.

### Be a loud listener.

When another person is talking, you want to be listening so actively that you're burning calories. Passionate, enthusiastic listening makes you feel good!

**Story-fy whenever possible.** I no longer ask people: What do you think about that? Instead, I ask: How did you come to believe that?

That gets them talking about the people and experiences that shaped their values. People are

much more revealing and personal when they are telling stories. And the conversation is going to be warmer.

**Do the looping,** especially with adolescents. People are not as clear as they think they are, and we're not as good at listening as we or they think they are. If you tell me something important and then I paraphrase it back to you, what psychologists call “looping,” we can correct any misunderstanding or wrong impression that may exist between us. Then, the person sharing with you knows that you do “get it” by looping back the correct thoughts.

### Turn the person you are talking to into a narrator.

People may be hesitant to tell you their story when they tell you a story. Maybe past responses have caused them to not really tell the story.

Ask them specifics about the narrative. *Who, What, Where and When* kinds of questions and they will revisit the moment more concretely and tell a richer story.

**Don't be a topper.** If somebody shares their loss and you come back with “I know exactly what you mean, I had such pain and agony when my... (your loss or pain explained).” You may think you're

trying to build a shared connection, but what you are really doing is shifting attention back to yourself.

These last 5 points were modified from the book “How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen” by David Brooks.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble”* (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4).

Comforting you is God's specialty, and comforting others is a wonderful work that we can do! Like Father, like son and daughter! It is well with our soul to be an instrument of comfort and consolation. □

*Stuart Segall is a contributing writer to CWRm and the CWRblog.*





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## Tender Mercies

52 Weekly Meditations



Ruth A. Tucker

Foreword by Greg Albrecht

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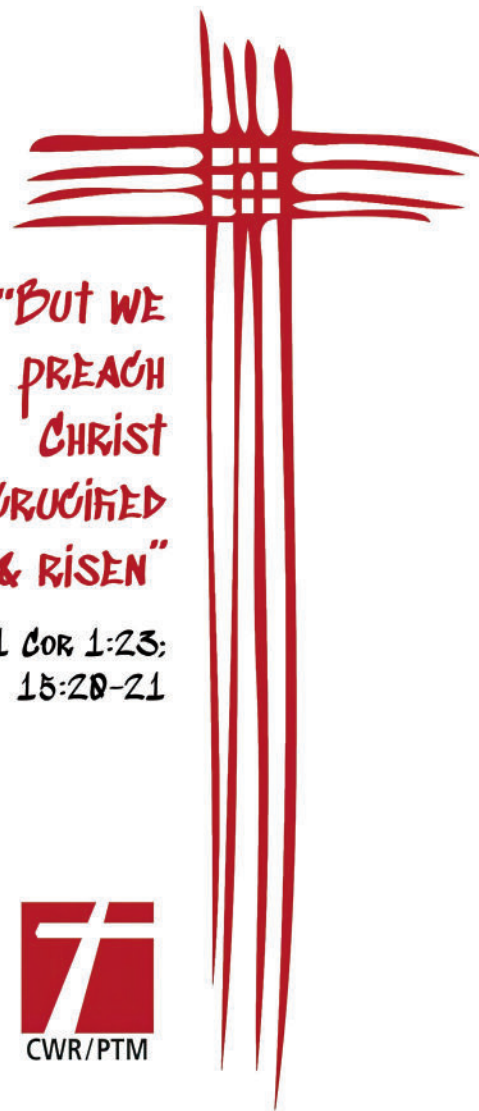


*The lotus, a flower that rises  
from the mud without  
blemish, is a universal  
symbol of rebirth.  
It crosses cultures and  
transcends religions to  
proclaim the tender mercies  
of our God.  
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1 COR 1:23;  
15:20-21



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