

CHAPTER I



What Do I Love?

Think about your life story. When did you experience joy? Galatians 5:23 says that one of the results of God's Spirit working in our life is that we will have joy. What brings you joy?

My son recently made a birthday card for a friend. "In joy your birthday," he wrote at the top, and drew a picture of a cake with candles, guarded by a Lego Bionicle warrior. He, of course, meant "enjoy," but really, he may have been on to something. If you enjoy something, you're "in joy." Right?

What puts you "in joy"? Do you ever experience joy? Did you experience it as a kid or a young person? How about lately? The things that bring you joy, that you love, will tell you about yourself, about your story. Looking at what brings you joy is a good first step toward listening to your life. By noticing what brings you joy, you get a picture of the unique way that God created you.

A lot of people I talk to seem to think that the fun stuff of life and the God stuff are in two different little compartments. This is dangerous thinking, because if that's true, why would anyone want to live a life of faith for very long? The things that bring

you joy—real joy—are gifts from God. God has been involved in the story of your life from the beginning, whether you noticed or acknowledged that or not. So if you notice—Where have I felt joy? What things do I love?—you can notice God. Because those things are gifts from God; they are things to pay attention to because God speaks through them.

Listening to your life has a purpose. You listen to it so that you can take who you are and put it into what you do. Jesus said he came that our joy would be full. Knowing what you love, noticing the blessings of God—that is the beginning of listening to him. And I think God speaks through the story of our lives, the things we already love, to guide us into the next chapter of the story—that is to say, to call us to do things we love in a way that blesses others and brings joy into our relationship with God.

So . . . what do you love?

Me? I love my children and my husband. I love Jesus. I don't always love them perfectly, but I'm willing to stick with it, to work on it.

I love the smoky, hazy smell of fall; I love snuggling with my kids in front of the fire on a winter afternoon; I love standing in my garden eating cherry tomatoes off the vine in summer; I love that deep breath-taking indigo of an early evening sky in spring.

I love books. Really a lot, I do. I'm one of the people Anne Lamott was talking about when she wrote:

Because for some of us, books are as important as almost anything else on earth. What a miracle it is that out of these small, flat, rigid squares of paper unfolds world after world after world, worlds that sing to you, comfort and quiet or excite you. Books help us understand who we are and how we are to behave. They show us what community and friendship mean; they show us how to live and die.¹

If you don't know what you love, think about your accomplishments. What do you feel proud of? What do you remember about your accomplishments as a child? Maybe you wrote a story or built a model or won a ribbon at the county fair. Maybe you had the winning project at a science fair or were a part of a winning team in basketball.

When I was in fifth grade, I set a goal of reading a hundred books (I told you I love books). I kept a list on purple notebook paper. I met that goal, and even though I didn't really tell very many people about it, it was an accomplishment that meant a lot to me. Looking back, that's just a little snapshot of what I am like as a person. It's a part of my story.

What would you guess former President Jimmy Carter would name as one of his greatest accomplishments? In 1984 Carter was in New York City and stopped by a Habitat for Humanity site where volunteers were renovating a six-story tenement in a rundown neighborhood. He offered to help, and eventually he and a group from Georgia returned to the project to work. "We slept in a church, and worked each day to help transform that old tenement into decent housing. It was dirty, sometimes dangerous work, but few accomplishments in life have given me greater satisfaction."²

This is a man who rubbed shoulders with world leaders and had held the highest office in the land. I'm sure he felt called to be the leader of the free world while he was in office. But after that experience, he decided to lend his name and influence to helping those who can't afford housing to have a roof over their heads. Doing that "grimy, sweaty work" and loving how it helped people gave him a sense of accomplishment, which led him to discover part of God's calling for this season of his life.

I want to consider these things, not just for the sake of self-awareness, which by itself can easily turn to self-absorption.

Rather, I ask myself who I am and what I love so that I can take it into the world and share something only I can give.

When I was a teenager, I organized a summer Bible study for some of the girls in my youth group. They were young women who had questions about the Bible. We'd sit on the front porch and read and discuss. No adult told me to do this or to set it up. God just opened the opportunity and I grabbed it. I didn't win an award for it, and sometimes not all the girls would show up. But it was an accomplishment just to have done it, and one way of listening to God is to reflect back on that part of my story. What does that tell me about God and about what he wants me to do?

Listening to that little chapter in my life's story, I realized that I love to teach. I love to discuss ideas. I didn't know what I would do with that at the time. Now, I did not become a famous Bible teacher. But I do teach and engage in conversation with people about spiritual things—through books, through leading studies or classes, through conversations with friends or my kids. It's part of what God has called me to do. I know that, in part, because of the experiences like that summer Bible study, of noticing what God gave me to do and how I felt doing it.

What is something you accomplished, even a small thing? What did you enjoy doing when you were younger? The answers to these questions—even the questions themselves—will tell you how to live your life.

I know that the life I ought to live includes books, and for me that has meant both reading and writing. It's where I find joy. That is, it's one of many places where I connect with God. When I read something profound or well written, it's like a worship experience. I just say, wow, God, thanks for giving these words and ideas to this writer. Thank you for bringing this book across my path, to help me see things more clearly or just think.

Sometimes I'll be at the computer, trying to figure out how to put words around the ideas that swirl in my brain, and the words will suddenly just come, and I'll just get them down, knowing God has given them to me. This doesn't always happen. It's when I show up and do the discipline of writing that sometimes God gives me ideas and words. I feel his smile at those moments, and I'm reassured that I'm doing what I should be doing, what he's called me to do. This makes me love God more—that he would be that good to me.

Being a parent and a gardener, being a writer and a friend—these are some of the ways I try to live into my identity as an image-bearer of a

supremely creative God. This is the life I am listening to. I have the privilege of being these things. So what am I going to do with that?

Sitting here writing with the window open, thinking about how to craft the words, showing up at my computer to write, even when I might want to be out just sitting in the garden—that's a creative expression that comes not just from my efforts but from my identity as someone created to continue creating. Knowing what I love will not tell me all the things I will do, but it will direct me toward a path.



If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

—C. S. LEWIS³

~ Listen to the Voice of Love ~

As you think about what you love, what you are really trying to determine is where God gave you gifts. Joy is a gift. Accomplishments are a gift, a source of joy. They come as a result of our efforts joined with God's gifts to us.

We sometimes discount our accomplishments, or what we love. But these things matter. Not just to us. They matter to the people we will love and serve and help. Like the people Jimmy Carter and his teams build homes for. When we determine what we love, we see in it a way to love others and also see how we are loved.

God loves us enough to give us good gifts. When we ask, "What do I love?" we are really asking, "What good gifts has God given me?" For example, we may have people in our life—friends or family—that we love. They are a gift from God. We may love the beauty of nature—another gift. We may love doing certain things. Our ability to do them and do them well is a gift from God as well. By looking at what we love, we see where God is present in our lives. Those good gifts are his words to us. He is saying that he loves us enough to give generously to us. Through the things we love, he is calling us beloved.

Sometimes when I am teaching or serving with a team at church, I say, "I can't believe I get to do this. I get so much out of doing it." There's a paradox: I'm giving of my time, but I feel like I'm the one who receives. I'm doing something I love, something that God enables me to do, and through it, I express his love to others.

Henri Nouwen wrote:

Every time you listen with great attentiveness to the voice that calls you the Beloved, you will discover within yourself a desire to hear that voice longer and more deeply. It is like

discovering a well in the desert. Once you have touched wet ground, you want to dig deeper.⁴

In order to listen to God, you have to know what he sounds like, to pick his voice out of the crowd. All day we think things, and people tell us things. Some of those thoughts, as well as words from others, come straight from God, and some don't. How can you tell which is which? Here's the thing: God always speaks with the voice of love. That doesn't mean that he always tells you what you want to hear. The voice that says, "Do the right thing," or, "It's going to be all right"—that's God. The voice that says, "You have screwed up again, so bad that you're unlovable"—that's not God's voice. He calls forth the best in us but not by condemning or shaming us. He does indeed call us beloved.

When have you known that you were God's beloved child? It may have been in a moment of quiet or when you were with a few people who know you well and love you in spite of that. It may have been in a moment when you were serving others in some way or creating something beautiful. Or when you felt lonely and afraid and then, somehow, you felt reassurance from God himself or from someone God put in your life to encourage you. Knowing that God loves us puts the story of our lives in a whole new light. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you've had encounters with God. But perhaps you did not recognize whose voice you were hearing.

That voice is there all the time, but sometimes it takes us a while to develop the ability to hear it. There are steps you can take, though, to tune in to it, to become aware of God and the voice that calls you beloved. I mean, sometimes we think God is just telling us what to do or what not to do. God does want to guide us, to have us make good choices. But he also wants us to know we are loved, because people who are loved make choices based on that. It seems to me that the good gifts he gives us remind us of

that love. So I think we have to put ourselves in a place where we can receive those gifts.

Give yourself permission to live your life in a way that reflects who God made you to be. For example, if you are an introvert, make sure you schedule time to be alone. If you like to work with your hands, schedule time for doing that. It's not an indulgence. It's something that feeds your soul and allows you to listen.

I hear the voice of love very well when I am out of doors. God created me to love the outdoors—and gave me the gift of being a good observer. I see God's touch in every leaf, every bird, every flower. Gardening is experiential worship for me—noticing the miracle of growth, touching the earth. So I make it a spiritual practice to spend some time outdoors each day. It's part of listening to the voice of love. When I go for a walk in autumn and see a particularly brilliant tree, all decked out in red and gold, I think, wow, what a creative and amazing God! It feels like a gift from him to me. I feel like he's saying, I know you love beauty, so here's something special for you to enjoy. If someone does something like that for me, it makes me feel loved. So when I experience the joy of being in God's creation, to me it is a reminder that he loves me.

My husband loves sports. When he thinks about times of joy and accomplishment, especially from his childhood, those moments are often connected with sports—basketball, sailing, tennis. As a couple, we've learned that he is happier and saner and more joyful if he can spend time regularly playing tennis or sailing. I encourage him to take time for those things, because I know it brings him joy, and it is easier to live with him when he's happy! If we can engage in activities that bring us joy, we are reminded that God is good and generous and wants us to have joy, fun, freedom. And my husband finds he is more generous—he can give more to others—when he has been replenished by physical activity. He's also extroverted, so he loves doing sports with other people. It's

part of how he extends God's love to others—to engage in fun activities with them.

Where have you felt joy? Do those things regularly. Are there people in your life who are positive and encouraging? Spend time with them; let them remind you that God is generous and kind. It's not always easy to remember that. Knowing your God is good and that you are the recipient of that goodness, that you are loved, even in the tough times, does take a bit of faith—faith enough to believe the voice of truth rather than the voice of doubt, the one that tells you that you are not good enough, that you couldn't possibly be worthy.

We sometimes think of faith as something we have or we don't. Many people can point to a time or a day when they put their faith in Jesus or decided they had enough faith that they could at least believe there was a God somewhere. But that's not the end of the story. Faith is something we need to get a little more of every day. We move on from “Yes, there is a God” to “God cares” to “God loves me personally and unconditionally.” That's a journey, right there. And we take it a step at a time, asking for and receiving a little more faith, just enough each day. How do we do that? We have to “listen with great attentiveness to the voice that calls you the Beloved,” as Nouwen said.

To get a little more faith each day, to get that day's manna, we have to show up. We have to find a quiet place to be still—to know that God is. We have to look for friendships where we are both affirmed and challenged. We have to show up at church, then serve and worship and participate—all things that build faith a little at a time. We have to show up in our family or our community and keep giving love to people who are not always easy to love. And be real enough with them to receive their love and encouragement, even if it's imperfect. We have to decide to act in a loving way.

God is writing the story of your life, but you are also shaping it, just by living it. You may not have noticed God, but that doesn't mean he hasn't been there. That's why I think it is so important to pay attention, not just to what has happened but what is happening, what choices you are making. By listening to your life, you can find God in the story. And sometimes we need to deliberately choose joy—choose to do and think and say things that will increase our joy—to take the gift God is offering us.

When we listen to and heed the voice of love, we join God in crafting the story, in doing the work that has been going on, and

will go on. This voice does not always tell us what we want to hear, especially if we are heading in the wrong direction. But it always tells us the truth.

We have to tune in to what the voice of love is saying. One way to do that is to simply notice where God has blessed you.

I recently realized that some of my family members (including me) were getting a little out of touch with their own belovedness. We all were being tempted

to focus on what we didn't have, rather than what we did. We were listening more to fear than to love.

Sometimes a simple exercise can remind you of what is true. So we decided (actually, I decreed, if you must know) that we had to replace our negative thoughts with positive ones. So we began to keep a family journal. No secrets—we all can read it and write in it. We use it keep track of the blessings in our lives.

We call it our gratitude journal. At dinner together, we list five things we're grateful for in our day. One day in April we were



Joy is God's basic character. Joy is his eternal destiny. God is the happiest being in the universe. . . . As products of God's creation, creatures made in his image, we are to reflect God's fierce joy in life.

—JOHN ORTBERG⁵

grateful for the chives that had sprouted in the garden and the fact we could put them on the baked potatoes we had for dinner. We were also grateful that Scot had sold a house and that Melanie had a new bathing suit, which meant summer was coming. I don't edit the kids. If they want to be grateful for the dog or getting a haircut, that's fine. The important thing is to take time to notice. Keeping the journal makes us be intentional in a number of ways: about gathering for dinner, which is not easy during soccer season; about getting out the journal and coming up with a list of things we know are true; about checking our attitude. If we have a journal full of blessings, they can't all be accidents. Someone must love us. Being grateful is a way of listening, a way of noticing God in the story of your life. And that gratitude will lead us to joy.

~ You Are Gifted ~

If you listen, you will also hear God say, "You are gifted. I have given you gifts." Beyond the gifts of love and acceptance, God has given us spiritual gifts, which are abilities to serve or help or lead or encourage in a way that reflects the Giver and builds community with other people.

Our gifts enable us to extend our belovedness to others, to shepherd or encourage or show mercy to others. And if we listen to how God has gifted us and then actually use that gift to minister to others, we receive yet another gift: joy. You know that feeling, like hitting the ball on the sweet spot, knowing that this is what you were made to do and that God is smiling on the whole thing.

When I first started writing books on the spiritual life (which came as a surprise to everyone, including me, since I had been a newspaper reporter with a lot of doubts about my faith), a number of well-intentioned people (especially those at my

publishing house who were trying desperately to figure out how to sell my books) began asking me, “Do you do any speaking?” I’d always been a writer, but I hadn’t thought about having to have what marketing folks call a “platform”—a way to get your name out there by doing public speaking.

So I tried it. I had a friend who led a women’s group at a small Methodist church near my home. I went and stood in the church basement and talked about the things I had written about. It was pretty awful. The spoken word didn’t flow like the written one for me. I couldn’t go back and revise a sentence like I could on paper. My voice also sounded as if someone were standing behind me, choking me.

Afterward, I was actually relieved. Now I could just tell people: no, I don’t do speaking. I was fairly certain I did not have a gift for teaching. But for some reason, God opened a door for me to teach a class for women at my church. I laughed a little at God’s very good sense of humor . . . But then I started to panic.

I sat down with my friend Debbie, who knows a lot about spiritual giftedness and who knew me fairly well, having been in a small group with me. I wanted to know what to do with these opportunities, since I obviously wasn’t very good at teaching. I also knew that she was very direct and honest and wise, so she wouldn’t pull any punches or tell me something just to try to make me feel good.

I told her that since I had been a small-group leader at church for years, I thought I was more of a shepherding person, not a teacher. I asked her what she thought I should do about these opportunities to teach. I wasn’t a teacher, I was sure.

She pointed out that through my writing and by leading small groups, I had been teaching all along. “Keri, people who are shepherds are the type who walk alongside others and guide and encourage and get really excited about any itty-bitty small step of

progress. They're very, *very* patient," she said. She paused and looked at me. "That's not you."

Great, I thought. I had been looking for honesty, but well, this was perhaps a bit more honest than I wanted. Not only was I bad at public speaking but, apparently, I was also seriously flawed in other ways! But Debbie, the wise woman, continued, "You want people to *get it*. You communicate really clearly when you're leading a discussion group or writing. That's teaching. Teachers want people to get it, to understand and apply things. You just need practice with the public speaking part of it, but teaching isn't the same as speaking. You've been teaching for years, just using a different method to communicate."

This, of course, terrified me. But sometimes God calls us to be braver than we think we can be. As I began to listen to what God was saying to me through this friend and through my life, as opportunities to speak kept coming my way, I realized I had a responsibility to the gift and the Giver to hone this gift, to use it and practice and get better. And here's the paradox: I began to enjoy it.

These days, I still prefer writing to speaking. And I still get evaluations that give sort of passive-aggressive, backhanded compliments about how I sound so much better in writing than when I'm speaking. Which I really have no problem with, honestly.

But I also get positive feedback. And regardless of the feedback, I feel pretty strongly that God has something to say through me, and I need to both speak and write, not so I can have a platform but because the voice of love needs me as one mouthpiece.

I write, yes, but I also teach with spoken words, whether it's in my home or a church basement or a retreat center. And I shake my head and wonder at how generous the Spirit is, giving gifts, because it brings me joy, and other people say it helps them. It's something I would never have experienced if I had listened only to

my doubts rather than to the voice of love. Because I was willing to trust God to help me do what I could not do on my own, I've let a little of his light shine through.

How about you? Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? The Bible says each of us has at least one or two. Your gifts, your passions, your abilities—these are not just skills you've cultivated but things the Spirit has entrusted you with. Knowing what you love can often point you toward your passion and gifts, but sometimes you have to try things for a while before you realize that you love them. That means taking risks, trying things out, listening to the opportunities that come your way and to what other people say that they notice in you.

Talk to others and listen: What do they see in you as strengths? Read books on spiritual gifts; attend a seminar or class on this topic.

Maybe you've been given the gift of encouragement. Like all gifts, the only way to develop this gift is to use it. Encourage your family, and express your creativity with cards and notes to friends, kind words to your children. Shaping the souls of our children with encouragement and mercy and love—that's expressing the creativity within us as well.

Maybe you have a gift of leadership, and you're having trouble finding a place to exercise that gift. Searching it out is not only helpful; it is necessary. And two people who have the same gift, say of leadership, may be called to different things. One may be called to lead in the marketplace, another in a small group at church. But if you are a leader, you need to actually lead, to find a way to use that ability to honor God.

God has something for you to do with your life, and he's calling you to use what he's given you in a unique way to serve him and other people. What is that? That's what you have to figure out. Start asking yourself the big questions: What do I do well? What do others affirm in me? What makes me glad?

I remember first encountering the work of writer Frederick Buechner in my senior year of college—a time to listen to your life in an almost terrifying way as you prepare to make your way in the world, find a job, get a life, answer with your actions the questions you’ve theorized about for four years: What will I do, become, be? Because I was graduating from a Christian college, there was not just the “find a job” pressure but an underlying demand that we determine somehow whether the job we chose, whether it was missions or banking, was “God’s will,” as if that were something simple to determine, and whether we were doing something that God had gifted us and called us to do. We talked about calling, but really, we had no idea. Then I found Buechner.

“We must be careful with our lives, for Christ’s sake, because it would seem that they are the only lives we are going to have in this puzzling and perilous world, and so they are very precious and what we do with them matters enormously,” Buechner wrote in an essay titled “The Calling of Voices.”⁶ His words resonated with me but also felt weighty and pressured, as if God were saying, whatever you do, don’t screw up. I tried to listen, but it made me nervous and afraid. I remember sitting in the student union reading those words to my fellow Lit and Philosophy majors and going, “Okay . . . How do we do this?”

So I was glad, as I read further in Buechner’s essay:

. . . Maybe that means that the voice we should listen to most as we choose a vocation is the voice that we might think we should listen to least, and that is the voice of our own gladness. What can we do that makes us gladdest, what can we do that leaves us with the strongest sense of sailing true north and of peace, which is much of what gladness is? Is it making things with our hands out of wood or stone or paint on canvas? Or is it making something we hope like truth out of words? Or is it making people laugh or weep in

a way that cleanses their spirit? I believe that if it is a thing that makes us truly glad, then it is a good thing and it is our thing and it is the calling voice that we were made to answer with our lives.⁷

Those words stirred my soul when I was twenty-two years old and embarking on a career. And they still do. I knew that “making something we hope like truth out of words” was one thing I could do, and loved to do, and wanted always to do, and was in fact what I had been doing for most of my life already. It was what gave me the “strongest sense of sailing true north.”

But listening to the voice of your own gladness is sometimes hard. Sometimes I don’t feel glad, and to try to manufacture it feels shatteringly naïve. It’s also hard to hear and pay attention to your own gladness, your own heart, when critics speak louder: if you must be a writer, why don’t you do the type of writing that actually pays well?

My inner critic has cousins, who may live in your heart, too. They might say things like: Why waste your college education staying home with your children? Your job is boring and mundane and couldn’t possibly make a difference to anyone. You may be happy and successful now, but pretty soon the other shoe is going to drop.

What gives you the strongest sense of sailing true north and of peace? It may be the thing you do for a career, and it may not. That’s okay. But if you don’t think you’ve ever felt that—well, maybe this book can help.

For me, if I do not write, I put my light under a bushel, or snuff it out, or at least plug up the place where truth wanted to flow out from God’s abundant supply to this place and time.

The universe will simply go on surging, looking for someone willing to turn on the switch and put the lamp on a stand—some-

one, possibly, who has much and will be given more, because they were willing to listen and to receive it!

Read, research, ask, listen. Try serving in different areas in your community, in your church. Find out how God has gifted you by trying different things. Investigating by simply doing things is a key part of listening to your life. I think if people figure out what gift God put in them, and then they use it, they help the voice of love shout a little louder in this world. And God knows, we all need that.

~ Listen for the Light ~

I think Jesus knows how easy it is for us to miss things, to simply not pay attention and not hear what he wants to tell us. That may be one of the many reasons he told people, “Consider carefully how you listen.” Wise counsel, of course. But look at the context of this comment:

No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him [Luke 8:16–18].

Until I was writing this book on listening, I never noticed Jesus’ comment in this passage. Growing up evangelical, I sang “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.” This, as we all know, means witnessing, telling others about Jesus and the four spiritual laws and how to get saved. I figured my light wasn’t very

bright since I did that only very rarely, and when I did I usually became lightheaded and felt I would faint. Anyway, listening had very little to do with it. Besides, why was that sentence about listening in there anyway? Jesus seems to be mixing metaphors. He's talking about light and seeing and then, suddenly, about listening?

Jesus does that a lot. He pays no attention to the conventions of storytelling; he mixes metaphors right and left; he talks in riddles and word-pictures that, he readily admits, confound the wise. The thing is, though, Jesus always speaks with the voice of love.

How can a word—something we hear—be a light—something we see? It's the mixing of these metaphors that makes us think. By hearing and listening we become "enlightened." We just get it a little better than we did before.

It seems that Jesus especially loves to play with this idea of "light." Of course, it's not just a thing that we see but what makes understanding possible. He says, "consider carefully how you listen," right after talking about light, because words give us light or, in other words, understanding.

The Bible says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105). A little later in the same psalm, we see this truth: "The entrance of your words gives light, it gives understanding to the simple" (verse 130).

And if we think we've got it all figured out, and we don't need any more information, any more listening, think again: "even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

So we have to let the light shine, because the fact is, the light is there. If we don't listen and let it shine through us, it will shine through someone else. God will find a way. The Bible says, "The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth, to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chronicles 15:9). Another version puts it, "that he may strongly support those whose hearts are fully his."

In other words, the Spirit is flowing, moving, looking for someone to flow through. Jesus is the light of the world, and he wants to live in us, shine through us. We can join in, or we can stand by and let someone else step up. But if we're invited to dance, why wouldn't we?

Letting God's light flow through your life does not mean you will end up on the mission field or becoming a pastor. It may mean deciding that you are going to take a certain job, even if it doesn't seem to "advance" your career, so that you can spend more time with your family.

A few years ago, I wrote an article for the local newspaper about a woman from my church who went on a week-long mission trip to an orphanage in Mexico. She met many children, but one little boy in particular stole her heart. His name was Marco, and he adorable, but he was very sick. And in this part of the Baja of Mexico, the brain surgery he needed (a fairly common surgery in the United States) was not available. The missionaries at the orphanage said the child would die soon, and there was nothing that could be done. It happened all the time, and it was sad, but, unfortunately, not that unusual. The woman wished there was something she could do for Marco and his family, who lived on the \$1 a day or so that his mother earned picking tomatoes.

Through a rather amazing series of events, a nurse who was also on the trip found a neurosurgeon at the hospital where she worked who agreed to do the work pro bono. The woman was able to fly Marco up to Chicago for surgery, then she kept Marco in her home for about two months to recover, then brought him back to Mexico.

Some of her well-meaning friends told her she was crazy, but she said she felt God was telling her to help this one child. The way things fell into place told her she had to keep dancing, to keep going. She said the verse that kept coming to mind was, "Do not

withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act” (Proverbs 3:27).

So the woman listened to God, and then God’s light shone through her and a few of her friends. She still keeps in touch with Marco’s family, tries to help when she can. She’s tried to help them find better housing, better care for Marco. They are still poor; they have challenges she can hardly fathom beyond Marco’s health. But she listened to what God asked her to do and then did it. Beyond what she did for the family, she says, her life has changed. Listening and acting took her story in a whole new direction, taught her about listening to God, and her life will never be the same.

If I have just a little faith, generated simply by inviting the voice of love into a debate with the voice of doubt, daring to host a dialogue in the dark room of my soul, that act of courage alone generates enough light—or at least provides an outlet for God to shine—so that everyone can see a little better. But I have to choose to listen more closely, to trust the voice of love, even when doubt and fear shout and cuss. The voice of love calls me to make choices that are right but amazingly difficult. Listening to love is an act of trust. And when we trust, we get better at it. Our faith grows, and we can hear God more clearly. Which is why you and I are having the conversation of this book in the first place, isn’t it?



What sort of things do you “fool about” with, thinking they will bring you joy? What do you think Lewis meant when he said that we are “too easily pleased”?

Sit for one minute and list things that you could do to reflect God’s joy, to bring joy into your life. You might include anything from taking bubble baths, to playing with kids, to reading a great book, to eating more chocolate. Don’t edit yourself; don’t try to sound “religious” or even “deep.” Just brainstorm. Pick one or two of the items on your list, and do them today.