

Freeing the Prisoners of Love

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Have you ever felt as if you are a prisoner of love? Does the caring, compassionate heart within you yearn to express itself fully? Does your best attempt at loving meet with misunderstanding, even rejection? Do you go to sleep dreaming of a time when it will all be different, a time when we will properly appreciate each family member, a time when our sense of family will encompass all of God's sons and daughters. Do you ache because the hope of peace seems so far from realization? If you do, you are a Prisoner of Love and as a Prisoner of Love your heart shares something profound with Our Heavenly Parent. God was the first Prisoner of Love and longs to be free to share her love to all of humanity.

After the Fall, how hard it must have been for God to continue to believe in Her Ideal as she looked at this world filled with pain and suffering. Children are intended to be their parents' joy, their treasure, and yet the bible states in Gen. 6:6 that "God grieved over having made man." How miserable for a parent to be so heartbroken. Try to imagine what God's thinking was like. "I worked for ages to shape a beautiful world, a world in which my children could find happiness, adventure, challenge and discovery. This world is a place where my children could celebrate life in a beautiful environment. I intended this world to be a home where peace and happiness would reign. Instead, I see a world of betrayal, indifference, violence and selfishness. How badly mistaken have I been. How can I keep believing, how can I keep trusting, how can I continue to love unlovable people?"

Yet, our Heavenly Parent somehow, despite the disappointment, the Providential setbacks, and the countless tears, continues to love. Love is what God lives for but it is also what imprisons Her. In a deep sense, our situation and God's situation are inexplicably connected. Since love needs to be freely given and freely received our God is pleading to us children, urgently whispering, "Please open the door of this prison, please bring my love out to the world, do this and you will release me from my suffering. Do this and your heart will be filled with joy."

Once you have heard that voice your life can never be the same. We may respond or we may hesitate to act, but we can never fully dismiss those whispered words, nor forget that pleading heart of Our Heavenly Parent.

Can a Flawed Person Liberate God?

Yet, despite our understanding of God's situation, we often fall into periods of deep self-doubt. It becomes easy to wonder, "How can I, a person with so many flaws, so many imperfections, help liberate God?" Our shortcomings are varied, it may be having failed at a job, or done poorly at school, or having difficult family relationships, or simply not living up to our hopes and expectation. The weight that these disappointments puts on our spirit can paralyze us into inactivity and blind us from realizing the incredible value of our efforts at liberating the heart of God.

How can we reignite our efforts to comfort God's heart? I suggest we look more deeply into the Parental Heart of God from the perspective of the Principle..

Liberating the Heart of God

In reading the bible and studying the Divine Principle we realize that God wants us to fulfill the 3 Great Blessings. When we take on our personal responsibility to fulfill these 3 Blessings we allow God's love to be present. The fullness of God's love is rooted in and expressed in the relations that take place in the family. When I try to envision what this means I visualize a happy family. Not just a small nuclear family of mom, dad, and the kids, but a family that includes grandparents, relatives, and my larger community. Community starts from the family but it expands to include my neighborhood, my state, my nation and this world. Included in community are all the things that make up a community ... animals, birds, trees, buildings, businesses, rivers, etc. My community is the fruit of all those that lived in it in the past. My community is for all those that come in the future. In a sense, community is beyond time and space.

It is in this kind of extended family and community that the Heavenly Parent wants to walk, share, play, work, eat, run and make love. This is what our Heavenly Parent longs for. Each step we make towards that goal is of Providential importance.

If you are Prisoners of Love you probably envision a community where harmony and cooperation are the norm. Each member of the family has a role to play in receiving, sharing and creating and this helps to generate love. Each member of the community is incredibly valuable, even irreplaceable. Human rights and civil rights are not a problem for we see something divine in each person. This kind of community is what we yearn for. Accomplishing it should be as natural as chewing gum.

Unfortunately, as a result of the Fall, selfishness has become the norm of how we think, of how we relate and of how we act. It takes incredible personal and collective effort to reverse that selfish tendency. This is part of the reason religions have been given to us. They train us to be other-centered rather than self-centered. For us to become an object of God we need to remove those things that do not belong to God. Removing our self-centeredness is essential.

Offering selfless service to humanity is one way we can more closely bind ourselves to the heart of our Heavenly Parent. When we freely offer selfless service we have an opportunity to become an object of the love of our Heavenly Parent. God can join us and fill us with Her spirit. In selfless service we can see God in the face of her children, we can become God's helping hands to those in need. Through selfless service we open up prison doors.

International Service-Developing as One Family Within God

During the nearly three decades of my work in international service, whether in Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, South America or the Caribbean, I have continually witnessed joy and celebration at the conclusion of a project. Often this joy is expressed through singing, dancing and large circles of hands clasped in friendship. Knowing how God is yearning to break down barriers that block us from loving each other it is clear that God is a part of these celebrations. In bringing young men and women of all races, cultures and religions together to serve people in need we are comforting the Heart of our Heavenly Parent and this is of Providential importance.

We have often heard Rev. Moon speak of the tragedy of world hunger. Those that have studied his life have a sense of how much effort he has made to see that the poor have food, medical treatment, housing and a good education. This burning desire is a reflection of God's burning desire. The Bible reminds us that the first defense of the poor, the widows, and the orphans should come from people of faith. Religions of the world should be on the cutting edge of building coalitions to take care of hunger, to promote healing and reconciliation to help reshape the world so God can dwell with us more fully and freely. For this reason 28 years ago, Rev. Moon announced to religious leaders gathered at the Assembly for the World's Religion that he was initiating the Religious Youth Service as a way to show the world that the essence of religion is love not dogma, and the spirit of love is best modeled through selfless service. As result of this challenge, religious leaders sent 120 young representatives to the Philippines from 36 nations and seven religions.

I was blessed to be a part of that adventure. For six weeks, we worked, slept, ate and shared together good times and challenges. We came as strangers, often as antagonists for we were mixing Palestinian and Israeli, Pakistani and Indian, white, black, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Christian all together. In trying to live according to the highest ideals of our religion we were able to build mutual trust and this trust grew into friendship. Before we left the Philippines we had grown to recognize ourselves as different members of the same family of God. We felt so much joy at being able to serve the people of the Philippines but the most lasting satisfaction came from stretching our hearts and minds to embrace all those in our community as members of God's family.

It is my sense that the reason we felt so happy, the reason our lives were transformed is that by word and deed we had invited God to dwell in our community. How Heavenly Parent's had longed for this invitation. God had to be so happy to share Her love with this global community. God was liberated to love because we had taken down the barriers in our heart. This marked a new development in liberating God's love. As we are reminded in the book of Revelation: "The youth will lead the way."

Recently I returned to the Philippines with my wife and 22 young adults from the Generation Peace Academy (GPA). The program was sponsored by GPA and an NGO that was set up by Merle Barlaan. We were charged with building a food center at a local public school where many of the children were undernourished. Merle and her family had only recently moved from NJ back to her home in Bohol. Merle's community was poor but she had done some wonderful things to improve the situation. She helped build a learning center, purchased land and introduced a variety of cash crops that would benefit the larger community. Merle had a vision and was working hard to make it into a reality. What Merle wanted most was to have God visit her community but she tearfully shared that, "Our area is too poor to invite God to come. I have to work much harder so it is not so poor before I can invite God."

When I heard Merle's tearful voice I realized that God would not wait for the work to get finished. As our Heavenly Parent, how could God not want to help Her daughter when she is trying to do such a noble thing. It was clear that Merle's heart was bringing the spirit of God down to the community.

Our GPA volunteers worked hard at the school; we did construction work; we painted beautiful murals; we shared our cultures; we made friends with the engineer students, with the soldiers and with the teachers who helped. We all worked hard and worked well. Yet after all the hard work in hot conditions with simple food the engineer students, the soldiers and the teachers said they were the best weeks of their life. Our young church members also wanted to return to the community because their hearts were so moved. Everywhere our GPA volunteers went for sharing and cultural programs during Easter Week people came together in spontaneous celebration. It was a time of incredible joy.

Why do you suppose everyone was so happy? God wants so much to live and love through us. Our GPA volunteers were clearly living as brothers and sisters and they had come to serve their new brothers and sisters. This victory of love was a magnetic force that pulled a diverse community into feeling as a single family, God's Family. So when the community danced together, God's smile could be seen on the people's faces, God's laughter echoed into the night.

I witnessed the liberation of a part of God's heart and for this I am eternally grateful. International and domestic service projects can do much to open people's hearts and minds but the most critical place where we can liberate God is in our own family.

Establishing Family Capital: The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The family is the original school of love, the place where one learns to develop the fullness of a heart of love. Unfortunately, as a result of the fall, the school of love switched head-teachers and our Heavenly Parent was replaced by Satan. We lost the original blueprint and it was replaced by a lesson plan that often strengthened our self-centered ways. Reversing this course is not easy. Every individual and every family carries its history and that has been, in large part, a self-centered history. We as Blessed Families deeply want to create families that embody the spirit of loving care but we face many challenges.

Having 5 adult children has stimulated me to see the family in a different light. Our children no longer need to be cared for in the ways they did as a child. Each member of our family is a very capable person. Each of us has both unique strengths and particular weaknesses. If our weak points are not adequately addressed it could cause really serious problems. If one member of the family gets lost, in a sense, our family is lost. Like a chain, our family is only as strong as its weakest link. Since life has its cycles; we all go up and we all go down, so at any point of time I could become the weakest link.

The challenge our family now faces is to figure how 7 unique individuals, along with their partners, can work together to create something much greater than the sum of its parts. How can we support and encourage each other as individuals, as couples, as a growing family so that we can reach our fullest potential. History calls on us to try our best to meet this challenge for when we do Our Heavenly Parent is freed to express the fullness of Her love. When we try in our families to live according to the principle of love, no matter how far we are from that ideal, we are doing something great. Each step we make to forgive, to cherish, to recommit, is opening up a pathway. Each step we make helps us free our Heavenly Parent to love as She has longed to love.

If you want to be a true liberator, one who can release God from Her prison let us work on practicing love. Through a heart of service, we can do this in our home, in our community or in a foreign land. At some point we will see that these efforts have also served to liberate myself, my family and those in my community.