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THE  
*W*ONDER  
of HIS LOVE

NANCY STAFFORD

Multnomah® Publishers *Sisters, Oregon*

THE WONDER OF HIS LOVE

published by Multnomah Publishers, Inc.

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc.,

7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920

© 2004 by Nest, Inc.

International Standard Book Number: 1-59052-325-3

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For information:

MULTNOMAH PUBLISHERS, INC. • P. O. BOX 1720 • SISTERS, OR 97759

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Stafford, Nancy.

The wonder of His love / by Nancy Stafford.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-59052-325-3 (pbk.)

1. God—Love. I. Title.

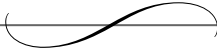
BT140.S7193 2004

231'.6—dc22

2004007348

04 05 06 07 08 09 10—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

This book is for anyone who is starved for wonder, who yearns to venture deeper into the heart—and arms—of the Father, who longs to glimpse the wonder of His love.



*Thank You . . .*

Heartfelt thanks to my friend and champion at Multnomah, Bill Jensen, for your continuous support and affirmation and for entrusting me with this wondrous message of God's love. My gratitude to my editors, Judith St. Pierre, for your friendship, skill, and sensitivity, and Larry Libby, for your insightful contributions, kindness, and great encouragement. Thank you, Jennifer Gott, for "being there" and for all your gracious help. Many thanks to my precious mother and my brother Tracy, my friends and steadfast "prayer gals," especially Gayle Miller and Mylin Stoddard. To my husband, Larry, thank you for demonstrating God's faithful and gentle love to me every single day of my life. And with my whole heart I thank my Lord—whose love leaves me in perpetual wonder and takes my breath away.



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# SHADOWED LOVE

*We fix our eyes not on what is seen,  
but on what is unseen.  
For what is seen is temporary,  
but what is unseen is eternal.*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:18

*I* REMEMBER A MORNING not so long ago when my life seemed to be crashing down—family crises, health concerns, infertility heartache, financial worries, a frustrating stall in my career. The California sun was shining through my bedroom window, but it felt like someone had drawn the shades. It was so very dark.

You've been there, too, haven't you?

Sometimes we are desperate to see God, but we can't because it's so dark. "We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes" (Isaiah 59:9–10).

Have you been groping your way through dark places? Have you faced hardships or heartaches that have left you wondering, *Where are You, God? Are You even here? I can't see You!* Perhaps your life seems black as night, with no sliver of light, no ray of hope. But hold on! The mystery of God is that He dwells—and shows us His love—even in the dark.

Difficulties will come to all of us. God allows us to go through dark times and hard circumstances that fly in the face of our expectations, challenge our logic, drain our emotional energy, and make us want to give up. Some trials come because of sin—our own sins or those of others. Some are the work of the enemy of our soul, Satan. And some are simply due to the fact that we live in a fallen world.

When the trials come, we cry out, *But God, if You love me, how can You allow this in my life?* He answers, "I have allowed this in your life because I *do* love you."

In prayer that dark morning, I sensed Him whisper to my heart, "You aren't being punished; you are being *tested*. When I'm squeezing you in your circumstances, I'm actually squeezing you close to My heart. Think of it like a hug—when I squeeze you, I'm squeezing you tight to Me. Lean

into Me, rest in Me, hold on to Me in the dark. Stop struggling, let Me hold you tight. I'll whisper what you need to know. Even if I do take everything, you still have Me. Isn't that enough? I'm going to squeeze you tight until that's enough."

Even if we've known God a long time, all too often we still try to walk by sight, not by faith. We see things through the eyes of our own understanding, not God's. So sometimes He has to turn out the lights. He hits the main breaker, plunges us into deep darkness, and then asks us to seek Him there.

Solomon wrote, "The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud" (1 Kings 8:12). God came in a cloud and revealed Himself to Moses. He said, "[I am] the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Exodus 34:6-7). God wants us to come to Him—not just for the blessings He gives, but for who He is. And He promises that if we seek Him, we will find Him. "Come near to God," the apostle James writes, "and he will come near to you" (James 4:8).

"Our God, the God of our fathers, is a hidden God," Stefan Zweig writes. "And not until we are bathed in sorrow are we enabled to discern Him."<sup>3</sup> In pain and struggle and difficulty, we see Him in ways we never have before. In the darkest night season, our eyes finally adjust and we begin to

get a glimpse of His power and mercy and love. True faith is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). Through all our difficult circumstances, God is leading us to have a faith like His friend Job, who said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15, NKJV).

So even though I couldn't see or understand what God was doing during that dark time, I chose to trust Him. All alone, broken and bleeding, I lifted my head and opened the Book. Fumbling for comfort I was certain I wouldn't find...I found it. My eyes landed on the soaring climax to Peter's first letter: “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:10).

Oswald Chambers put it like this:

There are times, says Jesus, when God cannot lift the darkness from you, but trust Him. God will appear like an unkind friend, but He is not; He will appear like an unnatural Father, but He is not; He will appear like an unjust judge, but He is not. Keep the notion of the mind of God...strong and growing. Nothing happens in any particular unless God's will is behind it, therefore you can rest in perfect confidence in Him.<sup>4</sup>

During that shadowed season of my life—and in the dark seasons since—I relaxed in God’s arms. I stopped groping along on my own, trying to squint my eyes to see. Instead, I began to search for Him in the darkness. And as I did, I caught a glimmer of one of the unseen mysteries of the spiritual life: Some of God’s deepest truths and richest wonders are hidden in the darkest shadows.

God is sometimes in the darkness. And He sometimes asks us to enter the darkness, too; to be willing to go through the cloud to come to Him. And as we do, we see His mercy in uncertainty, His power in the dark clouds, His love in the shadows.

I thought again of Moses. Because he went into the dark cloud, he got to meet with God. “Then Moses entered the cloud as he went up on the mountain” (Exodus 24:18). Let’s be willing to see God in all the loving ways He manifests Himself to us. Let’s not be afraid to enter the cloud.

---

*Lord, I want to know You more deeply.*

*I want to walk by faith, not just sight.*

*Help my eyes to adjust in the dark.*

*Reveal Yourself in these shadowy  
depths in ways I've never known before.*

*I'm entering the cloud, Lord.*

*I want to see You,*

*I want to meet with You—even there.*

*Show me Your love and*

*faithfulness in the shadows.*

*Amen*

---

# FARSIGHTED LOVE

*“For I know the plans I have for you,”  
declares the LORD.*

JEREMIAH 29:11

*I* WAS SIX WHEN I GOT MY first pair of glasses.

When the ophthalmologist slipped them on my nose, I could hardly believe my eyes. That moment opened up a whole new world for me. For the first time, I could read all the lines on his chart. I could read the big letter **E**. I could read the next line and the next, and even the little bitty line on the bottom—F A X T H U P Z.

On the drive home, I was in a state of euphoria. “You mean there are individual leaves on the trees? Look...there are strings between the telephone poles. Daddy, watch out, there’s a dog running across the street! I’ve never seen *that* before!”

I’m nearsighted. Without glasses, I can’t see very far. But unlike me, God is farsighted. If I didn’t know better (and I do), I might conclude that God is so farsighted that He can’t even see what’s right in front of His face. Things so obvious that even *I* could see them—*without* my glasses.

If God could see up close, surely He would have seen that Zacchaeus, hunkering in the sycamore tree, shading his shifty eyes, was a thief. He would have seen that Rahab, living in the house built over the gap between the walls of Jericho, was a harlot. He would have seen that Saul of Tarsus, persecuting and tormenting the followers of His Son, was His archenemy. And surely He would have seen that Nancy Stafford, dabbling in mysticism and bowing to the idols of materialism, self-centeredness, and sensuality, was a hopeless pagan.

Surely He could see all that. He’s God. God sees everything, right? Right. But God doesn’t see us as others do. In His love, He chooses to see who we will *become*, not who we have been.

When God looked at Zacchaeus, He saw a man as small in spirit as he was in stature, yet so desperate for love that he would go to any length—or height—to catch a glimpse of



Jesus. In Zacchaeus, He saw the perfect picture of repentance—a man so changed by Love that he withheld nothing and then lavished on others the love he had received.

When God looked at Rahab, He saw not a hardened prostitute, but His precious daughter. He saw strength, courage, and a radiant virtue that *He* would bestow on her. And looking down the long years with that far sight of His, He saw Rahab as the great-great-grandmother of King David, the woman from whose line His own Son, Jesus, would one day be born.

When God looked at Saul the persecutor, He saw Paul the evangelist. Inside this man consumed by hate, He saw a man who would be consumed with passion for His Son and the author of many of God's greatest love letters to the church.

And when God looked at me, He saw through my picture-perfect exterior, my illusion of confidence and happiness. He heard my silent scream of desperation, and He came near. He held out His hand and wiped my tears; He burned the idols of my life in the fire of His love. In me He saw a woman, broken and available, who would one day share with others, as best she could, the wonder of her Lord's transforming love.

I'd say God is pretty farsighted, wouldn't you?

God has grace-filled, long-range vision. Once we're forgiven, He chooses—no, He promises—to put our sins out of His sight forever: “Their sins and lawless acts I will

remember no more” (Hebrews 10:17). He sees into the distance and focuses on our glorious future.

I didn’t deserve to be chosen for such lavish, farsighted love. Neither did Zacchaeus or Rahab or Saul. Neither did you. No one deserves it. It is a gift—one that God freely offers to everyone. And He is just as committed to saving others as He was to rescuing us. No matter what people have done, God loves them—so much that He died for them.

He died for the parent who abandoned you.

He died for the husband who betrayed you.

He died for the boss who disappointed you.

He died for your best friends and your worst enemies.

He died for all of them as much as He died for you. Who knows what future He sees for them? Who knows what they will become in Christ?

Sometimes, even with my glasses on, I can still be very nearsighted. I can focus on the pettiest details, the smallest snubs, the tiniest offenses. I can put the flaws of others under my Coke-bottle-thick lenses and scrutinize them. But just as God doesn’t focus on our imperfections, we shouldn’t focus on the flaws of others. This doesn’t mean that we’re blind to the wrongs people commit or that we live in a state of denial. It simply means we choose to love so much that we take the long view of others’ faults and failures.

After all, we really don’t know what is in their hearts, do we? We don’t know their intentions, and we can’t fully understand their past, their pain, or their problems. But we

can, lovingly and graciously, extend to them the same benefit we've received from God. As Paul writes: "After all, who are you to criticize the servant of somebody else, especially when that somebody is God?" (Romans 14:4, Phillips).

God's love sees far beyond what we might consider glaring imperfections. "Love is never so blind as when it is to spy faults," wrote seventeenth-century Anglican preacher Robert South. He said it's like the painter, who, when he paints a portrait of a friend with an imperfection, pictures only the other side of his face. "It is a noble and great thing to cover the blemishes and to excuse the failings of a friend; to draw a curtain before his stains, and to display his perfections; to bury his weaknesses in silence, but to proclaim his virtues upon the house-top."<sup>12</sup>

When we truly love, that's the way we'll see it.

After all, that's the way Love sees us.

---

*Father, thank You that You  
see far beyond just today—  
and all the way into eternity.*

*You know the plans You have for me.  
I pray that everything I do will move me toward  
Your vision for me.*

*Help me become the person You intend for me to be.  
Give me Your grace-filled eyes to see others.*

*Help me to overlook offense  
and be blind to shortcomings.*

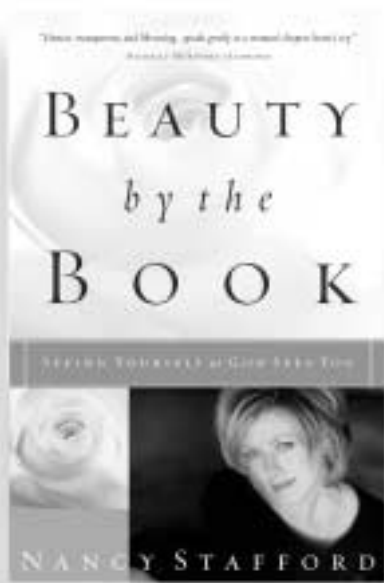
*Help me see others with eyes of love  
and grace . . . just as You see me.*

*Amen*

---

*“Honest, transparent, and liberating.”*

—MICHELLE MCKINNEY  
HAMMOND



1-57673-950-3

In an intimate dialog, Nancy Stafford bares her heart to readers, giving her own refreshing answer to our culture’s judgements about appearance. She reflects on *true* beauty—the beauty women discover through God’s acceptance, where they find “freedom from our pasts and freedom from the bondage of our image-obsessed culture.”

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—HENRY CLOUD, PHD

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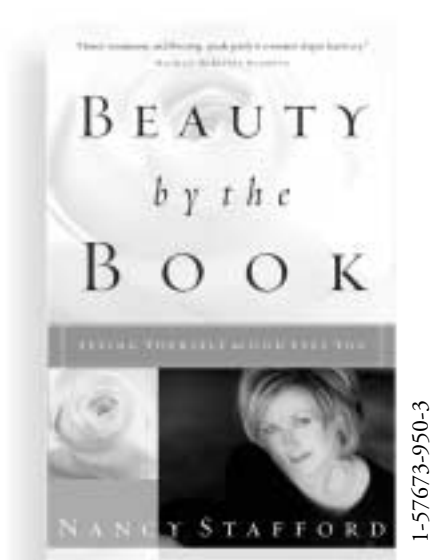


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