

Kissed by God

Luke 15:20

Anna Maria Korathu, a social worker in Seattle, once wrote an article entitled, *"In My Grandmother's Garden."* She began that article with these words:

"One day, while weeding, I asked my grandmother where God lived. She looked at me with a twinkle in her eye. 'Close your eyes. Sit very still, and you will hear God.' After a while, I opened my eyes, feeling sad. 'God didn't come.' 'Did you feel the breeze on your cheek?' Grandmother asked. I nodded. 'How lucky you are! God has just kissed you!' And I knew I had been kissed by God in Grandmother's garden."

http://godsfriends.org/Vol9/No1/Grandma_Garden.html

There is an old Jewish legend about the way that Moses died. You may remember that God told Moses once to *speak* to a rock to provide water for the people. But in anger and frustration with the people's demands, Moses *struck* the rock. For this act of disobedience, God told Moses that he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. According to an ancient Jewish legend, Moses begged God for forgiveness for this sin 515 times. But God would not reverse the decision. So Moses asked that God would change him into an animal, and at least let him touch the land. But according to the legend, God refused to do that. Instead, God told him, He would allow Moses to see the land from a distance.

But this same legend then goes on to say that God granted Moses a very beautiful death. When it came time for Moses to breathe his last, God leaned down from heaven and ended Moses' life with a soft, gentle kiss. Deuteronomy 34:5 describes it this way: *"And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said."* The phrase "as the Lord had said" is in the original Hebrew "by the mouth of the Eternal," and this is where the legend originated that Moses was ushered from this life to the next by a kiss from God.

This legend led to the teaching by the ancient Jewish rabbis that there are dozens of ways to die, but when a person dies in his sleep, he is said to have been “kissed by God.”

A legend from Norway tells us that “before being born, each soul is kissed by God and then goes through life always, in some dark way, remembering that kiss and measuring everything in relation to its original sweetness. Inside each of us, there is a dark memory of having once been touched and caressed by hands far gentler than our own. That caress has left a permanent imprint inside us, one so tender and good that its memory becomes a prism through which we see everything else.”(Ron Rolheiser)

A kiss to begin life, and a kiss to end it. But those are merely legends, and we have no way to prove any of them. The phrase “kissed by God” has been used in a lot of different ways to indicate that someone or something has been blessed in a special way. A woman who is especially beautiful or a man who is very handsome might be described as having been kissed by God. It has been said that the voice of opera singer Pavarotti has been kissed by God. It seems that the term is used to describe anyone or anything that is especially beautiful or gifted. A little girl was once told by her mother that the freckles on her face were God's kisses. In a poetic way someone once wrote that “*Sunsets are God's way of kissing the earth goodnight.*”

The phrase is used to describe a happy moment, when perhaps life took a pleasant turn. In July 2006, when 67-year-old Rose Donnellan of Ohio won \$4 million in a lottery, she declared that “God kissed me on the forehead.” She said that she was “going to kiss Him right back,” indicating that she was going to make a generous donation to a local children’s charity. And the phrase is used in so many syrupy, sappy ways that it almost loses its meaning.

But today I want to use it in a way that perhaps will change your life. I want you to think about the interaction of God with our lives, those times

when the veil is lifted and we are suddenly aware of His presence with us. It may be in a gentle breeze or gust of wind, or the sudden fragrance of blooming flowers, or the song of a bird. It may be that moment when you realize for the first time in Spring that the trees are just on the edge of bursting into life with new growth. I distinctly remember one autumn day for me when it happened in the falling of a single leaf onto the book I was reading—and I knew that I had been blessed with an awareness of His presence with me.

Sometimes God kisses us in the silence of the midnight, when no one else is around and we are completely unaware that God is even there, when He slips up behind us and puts His great arms around us and kisses us tenderly on the heart and whispers into our ears, “I love you, and I am here.” Sometimes it is in the sudden laughter of a child that we sense the nearness of God, and perhaps for just a moment, we are aware that something holy and sacred has occurred. It may be on a walk through the woods when you are merely enjoying being outdoors and breathing in the unmistakable aromas of sun-baked pine straw or damp rotting leaves, when suddenly God is there, and you know it, and your soul is lifted up and encouraged. God kisses us when we are with friends who love us, who don’t judge us, who accept us unconditionally.

John Calvin once said, “There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice.” To use our terminology of today, every blade of grass and every shade of color is a kiss from God. Or it may be in the glory of a promise-filled sunrise when God breaks through all of our distractions and mind-numbing cares, and kisses our souls through a vivid reminder that He is here. Hopefully you have had the experience of opening your Bible and reading those sacred words from God, and suddenly seeing something that God is showing you for that special time in your life—and you are aware that God is there! And you feel as though your soul has indeed been kissed by Almighty God.

It may be during a song that is especially dear to you. You may have spent some time alone with God in prayer, and suddenly, you knew He was there, taking up your burdens and bearing your sorrows and forgiving you of your many sins. *And you were kissed by God!*

Thomas DeWitt Talmage once said, “God puts His ear so closely down to your lips that He can hear your faintest whisper. It is not God away off up yonder; it is God away down here, close up—so close up that when you pray to Him, it is more a kiss than a whisper.”

In another sermon we asked the question, “*What kind of kisser are you?*” We mentioned that there are at least two places in the Gospels where Jesus was kissed. One was when the unnamed woman stood behind Him weeping, then dried her tears from His feet with her hair, before covering them with kisses. The other was when Judas indicated to the guards in the Garden of Gethsemane which one they were to arrest, by kissing Jesus on the cheek. In both instances, the word used for “kiss” is one that indicates that they kissed Jesus repeatedly, over and over and over—one a kiss of love, the other a kiss of betrayal.

But there is one other place where the same idea is used. It is found in what we have come to call “The Parable of the Prodigal Son.” You are familiar enough with the story that we don’t need to go into much detail today. But you remember that the son finally “came to himself” as the Scripture says, and returned home. While he was still a long way off, the son’s father saw him, and ran to him, and kissed him. It is the same word as before: he kissed him repeatedly—over and over and over. The word carries the idea not only of repeated action, but it also indicates to us that these were earnest, eager kisses—so thrilled was the father to have his son home again. And in those kisses we can learn much about God and about ourselves.

1 God's kisses are for the present—He loves us.

Let's don't overlook the fact that in the parable we are the prodigal sons, and God is the father. We can read that story and dwell on that scene when the son and his father are reconciled, and we can learn a lot about God's love for us.

Look at Luke 15:20—*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him....”* Understand that these kisses were overflowing with love. And whenever God kisses us in our day, these are kisses of love. Human kisses can be so deceiving, as Judas made the attempt for his to be. But God is never hypocritical about His love for us, and He never kisses those whom He does not love. And since the wonders and mercies and blessings of God fall on every one of us, we need to clearly understand that God loves every one of us so much that that love cannot be measured.

Charles Spurgeon, in one of his sermons, commented on this scene from Scripture:

“The condescension of God towards penitent sinners is very great. He seems to stoop from His throne of glory to fall upon the neck of a repentant sinner. God on the neck of a sinner! What a wonderful picture! Can you conceive it? I do not think you can; but if you cannot imagine it, I hope that you will realize it. When God's arm is about our neck, and His lips are on our cheek, kissing us much, then we understand more than preachers or books can ever tell us of His condescending love.”

2 God's kisses are for the past—He forgives us.

We are told in Nehemiah 9:17 that God is *“a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.”* In Psalm 51 David prayed for forgiveness when he said, *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”* One of the great messages of the Bible is that we are sinners, and we have all

sinned, but a greater message than even that is that our God is a God who forgives.

The forgiveness is made possible to us through the death of Jesus Christ. We read in Ephesians 1:7-8, *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”*

Notice the order of how things happened here in the parable Jesus told. The son had his speech all thought out and rehearsed. But the father saw him, ran to him and kissed him repeatedly before the boy could even get the words out! He had already been forgiven! He had many, many sins to confess—the story Jesus told gives us only a hint of the darkness this son had been living in. As this plays out in real life, we are forgiven the instant we take that first step back toward God, when we “come to ourselves,” realize our sin, and realize that the only hope we have for forgiveness is to come back to God our Father.

3 God's kisses are for the future—He restores us.

In the speech the young man had rehearsed, he was only going to ask to be hired as a servant. At least here the servants had plenty to eat. Never in his wildest dreams did he imagine that he would be accepted back as a son! But when the father kissed him, things changed for that young man. The father would not have kissed him if he was only hiring him as a servant—kissing would not have been part of the hiring process! No, kissing his son over and over and over meant that the father was restoring the young man to all the rights and privileges of being a son in that household. The robe, the ring, the sandals—all of those things said, “This is my boy! And he’s come home!”

He didn’t care that his son was filthy and smelly, and that his clothes may have been covered with pig slop and were full of holes. The only thing the father cared about was that the son was home—and the father took immediate steps to restore him to the full status of being a son in that

household. The same thing happens to us when we repent of our sins and come back to Him.

Two centuries ago there was an English clergyman named Robert Robinson. In addition to his gifts as a pastor and preacher, he was an accomplished poet and hymn writer. After many years in the ministry he began to drift in his spiritual life. He left the ministry and traveled to France where he sank further into sin and lost his assurance. One night he was riding in a carriage with a Parisian socialite who had recently become a believer. She was reading some poetry to him and asked, "And what do you think of this one?":

*Come thou Fount of every blessing, Tune my heart to sing thy grace.
Streams of mercy never failing Call for hymns of loudest praise.*

When she looked over at him she noticed that he was crying. "What do I think of it?" he asked in a broken voice. "I wrote it; but now I've drifted away from Him and can't find my way back."

"But don't you see?" said the woman quietly. "The way back is written right here in the third line of your poem: '*Streams of mercy never ceasing*' -- Those streams are flowing even here in Paris tonight." Robinson recommitted his life to Christ and regained his blessed assurance.

Ron Kilpatrick, in *Doubt & Assurance*, (R.C. Sproul, editor. Baker Book House, 1993)

There are many ways that God kisses us. In every moment of the day, our Heavenly Father is reaching out to us and kisses us—in the brilliance of a sunset, the glory of the moonlight, the gentle caress of cool air on a hot day, the smile on a loved one's face, and the sweetness of rest, and in a myriad other ways. And in every one of them, God is kissing you with love, and forgiveness and restoration—past, present and future. Learn to let God romance you, and discover for yourself what it means to be loved with an everlasting love. Let every blade of grass, every relationship, every sensation you may experience throughout your life—even pain!—remind

you that your Heavenly Father loves you so much, and that He longs to fall on your neck, and kiss you—over and over and over..