



YOU. ARE. LOVED.

From the beginning:

One summer morning, I was about to walk away from my quiet time with God the Father. I specify God the Father since I often address Him according to my need. That morning, I needed the Father's ear. All this time later, I can't remember what was so pressing, just that this girl needed her Dad.

As I stood to walk away, I heard as clearly as I've ever heard Him speak, "You are loved." The words were choppy and specific, more like: You. Are. Loved. I paused mid-stand and then sat back down. With my eyes closed and a grin tugging at my lips, I said back to Him, "You are loved." I sat a while and listened, but nothing more happened.

I started to stand again but then stopped. Before I walked away from a word so intimate, I had to ask myself this question: What will my day look like if I live it loved? A few things came to mind, like how I would live out my day with purpose and intention. I was working on a massive revision project at the time and needed focus. I reminded myself that God would be with me. It was, after all, His kingdom work I was accomplishing. I knew I could live out my day trusting that He would provide what I needed.

That's about all I came up with, so I moved on about my day. Many times throughout the day those three words came to mind: You. Are. Loved. Each time, the memory made me smile, and a warm feeling washed over me. Different than my many decades before, I now know I'm loved by God the Father and Jesus the Son, my Beloved. Living loved is not new to me anymore. It's not something I take for granted by any means, but after about a decade of living loved, I know what love feels like. It's what I needed all my life. To me, love is the biggest deal. I wallow in it and revel in it and am constantly amazed by it. I now know that I was just as loved during my broken years as I am now, but I had failed to grasp it and pull it into my belief system. It was an elusive ideal that I knew was true, but I hadn't taken hold of it as my personal possession.

Later that night as I was settling in with my husband to watch TV, I was scanning through something on my phone while we waited for our show to begin. I heard music on the TV that caught my attention, so I glanced up. There were no words, but the tune was familiar. When I saw that it was just some commercial, I looked back at my phone, figuring the song was familiar because I had seen the commercial before.

For some reason, I glanced back up at the TV at just the right time and heard, "You are loved." That was it. The letters "ADT" appeared on the screen. It was a home security commercial that was using the Christian song by Stars Go Dim. The tune was familiar to me because I had used it at conferences where I had spoken. Of all things, the Jesus Loves Me conferences.

I was so blown away that I just sat staring at the TV. Father God had spoken those exact three words to me that morning in a way that stopped me in my tracks. He even made a commercial about it to drive the point home, like bookends at the beginning and end of my day. That was serious planning on His part.

When things like that happen and He begins to weave together chords of revelation through repetition, then I know He's up to something. The next morning, I began to jot down a few notes of how I might use this subject as a possible book or study. Since I was working on that revision project and knew I didn't have time to devote real attention to it, I decided to hold off a few weeks until vacation. I figured if God planned on me writing a book, then the fire would fall when the time was right.

I'm not sure that you can call what happened on that vacation fire falling. One event after another hindered me from devoting time to writing, until once, when I was at my most frustrated, the commercial came on again. It served as confirmation that I was to write about this topic someday.

That season wasn't His timing, but eventually, other small sparks of thought came together, fire fell, and I got started. Then I stopped again. Then fire fell again. Now I see that each delay has only provided deeper revelation and given me more insight.

One notable thought from my vacation emerged and has carried over into this book. An email devotional I read contained the following verse. It wasn't in my usual translation, but the timing of it kicked off one of those sparks of revelation.

"Yahweh, your God, is in the midst of you, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with joy. He will calm you in his love. He will rejoice over you with singing." (Zephaniah 3:17 WEB)

While in context a millennial promise, this verse expresses the reality of what we have in Christ. It happens to be one of those verses that often comes at just the right time as a reminder that God is here, watching and in charge.

I have begun with this long story filled with minute details of how this book came about for this reason: to illustrate and emphasize that God is in our midst, just as Zephaniah says. He is in the small details of your life and my life just as surely as He's in the big ones. That's where people miss God at His most loving, in the minutia of their daily lives.

As further proof of His presence along this journey, a major new component of the project was added well into the process of writing it. This book is divided into two primary sections. Part One contains the foundational concepts that highlight God's love and how knowing you are loved will shift your entire life's perspective. Part Two is made up of individual topics that depict what living loved can or should look like in that particular area.

Though I understood the connection and how the two parts were irreversibly intertwined and dependent on each other, I had been at a loss as to how to explain it with clarity. I was missing the imagery.

I continued to pray until the answer finally came just the morning before I was to speak on this You. Are. Loved. topic for the first time. It was early morning when I prayed, "Help me explain it. Give me a way to express it." I heard only two words: *a dance*. That was all it took. From there all the pieces fell into place. His love is the music, His Word the lyrics, and your faith walk is the dance you live out in relationship with Jesus.

That brings me back to Zephaniah 3:17, and how this phrase sings a new melody: *"He will rejoice over you with singing."* This life He has given us is His love song sung over us. I now offer this book as a verse in my love song of praise back to Him. I pray you draw closer to the lover of your soul so that you may hear the music of His love playing louder every day.

May your heart catch on fire so that you sing a love song in return with the way you live loved.

My hope is to show you what I've been shown, to tell you what I've been told, and to give you what I've been given. Recently, I acknowledged in prayer that I have no right to be writing this book. Jesus reminded me: Who better to write about the dance than one who's lived it?

I'm not a pastor, minister, or theologian. I am, however, a woman who has done it wrong most of my life. More importantly, I am a woman who has learned to dance to the melody of His love. I've been transformed in ways that I can hardly believe. Oh, I'm still a mess in many areas, but I've been healed by the love and grace of God. Nothing matters more to me than sharing God's love. I know of no better way to express the work the Holy Spirit has done in me other than through examples from my own journey. I am living the love song; come dance and sing along with me.

Grace and Peace,
Lisa