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Where Has All the Love Gone?

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Series: Living Lessons from Proverbs

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Where Has All the Love Gone?

I want to ask you a question! The question is this: Can you imagine walking through a store and suddenly coming across something so valuable, that in order to have it, you would be willing to sell everything you have? A treasure so rare that you would gladly give up *everything* you own—your home, your car, your stocks, your bonds, your job, everything, just to possess it? *Can you imagine anything that valuable?* Jesus tells us there is such a treasure!

In Matthew, chapter 13, beginning with verse 44, the Master says this:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. (Just for the treasure.)

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)

The Bible says there *is* a treasure so priceless that giving up everything else in life is incidental to owning it and cherishing it, to appropriating and appreciating that treasure

That treasure is Jesus Christ! He is the pearl of Great Price!

And at one time or another in our Christian lives, nearly everyone of us has said to God, “Lord, I’m willing to sell *all* that I have. I’m willing to give up all that I own. I’ll turn my back on all my accomplishments if need be, just to follow *You*, Lord, whatever it takes!” (Have you every prayed like that?)

We’ve nearly all said that at one time or another. Chances are, God won’t call on us to do that. He may—He has the right to—but chances are, He won’t.

Chances are, instead, He’ll simply let the telephone or the doorbell ring while we’re watching television or eating dinner, and see what really matters to us—pleasure or people.

And as we grumble or turn our backs on people with needs, He will quietly whisper, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the

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least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me;” and thus remind us, if we’re not willing to give up an hour for Him, how can we say we’re willing to give up *everything* for Him?

Chances are, He’ll confront us with a choice: There’s something we really want to buy (but don’t need), and there’s someone with a real need that we could meet instead. He wants to see in reality which is more important to us, pleasure or people?

And as we choose to satisfy our want, while overlooking another’s need, He may quietly say to us, “Inasmuch as ye have done it *not* unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it *not* unto me.” He might be saying, “Don’t tell me you’ll give up everything if you won’t give up that unnecessary item for one of my children.”

Or He may bring someone into our lives who takes but never gives—who drains us, who takes from us (the way we do from Him). Someone who intrudes on our privacy, someone who wants counsel when we want sleep. He is testing us to see what we treasure, pleasure or people.

And when we ignore their pleas for help and go our way, He will quietly say,

Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did not to me. (Matthew 25:45b)

How can you say, “I give up everything,” when you refuse to give up an hour of sleep?

He may not ask us to sell all that we have and give it to the poor and come follow Him, but He *will* ask us—in fact He has already asked us—if we are *willing to do so*; and He will test that willingness in a thousand ways. Consider Luke 14:33 in the Amplified Bible.

So then, whoever of you does not forsake—renounce, surrender claim to, give up, say goodbye to ALL that He has cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:33 Amp)

Surrender claim to, say goodbye to, *all* that He has.

You see, Jesus did not come to teach us how to take what was ours; Satan had already taught us that! Jesus came to teach us how to give away, how to turn loose of everything we have. He came to teach us how to give in order to teach us how to live. He came to demonstrate how to give a life away!

The Christian life is a progressive series of choices, tough

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choices. And in reality, the real choice boils down to this: What will we do with this Christ-centered life we are in the process of receiving? Will we save it? Or give it away?

Will we cling to it and become self-righteous fools? Or release it with total abandon into the lives of everyone we touch?

- the poor
- the needy
- the prisoner
- the hungry
- the lonely
- the seeker, the searcher, the scorner?

If we try to keep it, it will rot like the manna the children of Israel tried to store up in the wilderness. But if we learn to give it away, one day at a time, our lives will begin to overflow like channels of a fountain that never run dry.

Christians! We were not called to be storage tanks but pipelines—pipelines through which flow the very life of Christ Himself, giving Himself away!

The Bible has a lot to say about giving your life away. The Old Testament sketched an outline; then Jesus came and poured His life into the picture and brought it to life. The book of Proverbs, for instance, is filled with principles about unselfishness, but who could really even define unselfishness until that stark day in history, when God *Himself* gave *Himself* away?

The Old Testament spoke eloquently of giving to the poor and the needy. But who really understood giving until the living Son of God, the sinless one, tasting the burden of sin on our behalf, gave Himself for every one who would ever taste sin? Who really understood giving until Jesus gave Himself away?

We learn a great deal about kindness in the Old Testament, and indeed we are encouraged in the New Testament to be kind one to another. But who really understood kindness?

[Until] But after the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us... (Titus 3:4,5)

No one really understood kindness, until in kindness, Jesus gave Himself away. Listen to these sketches of generosity in Proverbs alone:

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Principles on Bountiful Giving:

It is possible to give away and become richer! It is also possible to hold on too tightly and lose everything. Yes, the liberal man shall be rich! By watering others, he waters himself. (Proverbs 11:24,25 TLB)

Principles on Spiritual Riches:

Some rich people are poor, and some poor people have great wealth! (Proverbs 13:7 TLB)

Principles on the Blessings of Generosity:

Happy is the generous man, the one who feeds the poor (Proverbs 22:9 TLB)

Principles of Ministering to our Enemies:

If your enemy is hungry, give him food. (Proverbs 25:21 TLB)

And on and on and on we read in Proverbs of unselfish acts and unselfish attitudes.

Proverbs paints us a line drawing of the generous, unselfish, Christian life. But until *God did it*, man really could not grasp what it meant to give his life away! Now we not only have the portrait, we have the power as well.

For the one who gave Himself *for* us, now lives *in* us so He *through* us can continue to give Himself away!

It is only when the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, without reservation, gives itself away, that the world is able to grasp at last, just what the love of God is all about. But when the church becomes self-centered, the world sees no love. And, I believe the question the world is asking today is,

Where has all the love gone?

Where is the first-century empathy that bound the early church together with the epoxy of love until they became literally a unique but diverse family who each considered each other's needs more important than their own?

Where is that driving oneness that Jesus prayed for in John 17 that caused the first-century Christians to "have all things in common" (Acts 2:44), not driven by compulsion, but rather by compassion.

Where has all the love gone?

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Has not the church, riddled with divisiveness, found itself drawn to opposite extremes, until the *issue* of love has overshadowed the *essence* of love, and our seminaries and our churches are so taken up with the *philosophy* of love, and the *theology* of love that they fail to demonstrate the *reality* of love. And so a world that is not interested in our philosophy or our theology assumes that in reality such love does not exist.

Where has all the love gone?

Where's the love that made God become a slave, a slave who gave His life for a world that spit on Him and mocked Him and rejected all He stood for? That love is now represented by a church that quivers and quakes at the very thought of persecution.

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Where's the love that floods hospitals with compassionate Christians concerned with the healing of the soul as well as the body. That love is represented today by a church that has to ask people to visit the sick, and even then, only a few will do it.

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Where's the love that penetrates prison walls with people who long to see those who are in bondage become truly free, so they spend their time and their strength in reaching out to touch someone through bars that cannot hold the soul?

That love is now entrusted to a church in which probably 98% of its people have never set foot in a jail or a prison to share real freedom with those who so crave it.

Where has all the love gone?

Where's the love that wraps its arms around the destitute and does not simply cry, "Go, be warmed and filled," but rather, being filled with Jesus, *does* something to ease the pain of their poverty—poverty long since relegated to a political system that finds itself inept to meet real needs?

That love now rests in the hands of a church in today's world that wants to see needs met without ever having to touch the unfortunate; a church that treats poverty as leprosy; that treats depression as a contagious disease; that thinks it's the job of paid staff workers to rub shoulders with the down and out.

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Where's the love that shatters the man-made barriers of

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dissension and divisiveness and molds into an army of love men and women from all parts of the spectrum of sainthood who march to the common flag of Calvary, a love that has fallen into the grips of a people so busy categorizing denominations and criticizing diverse doctrines they fail to even visualize, let alone dramatize, the unity that still exists under the blood?

Where has all the love gone?

Where's the love that reaches across a neighbor's fence to heal his hurts in Jesus' name, that stretches across the miles with a fountain of forgiveness that brings healing and health to broken relationships, mending marriages, fusing families back together with a bond of love—a love that is now being assaulted even in the Body of Christ by the acid of the world's redefined concepts of love.

Where has all the love gone?

Our goal ought to be to find out—to search the pages of God's Word to find out the quality of that love when it's set free in Christ, and to recognize the barriers to that love that have caused it to cease flowing like a river into the hearts and lives of a thirsty world.

For one thing, it has gone the way of *inadequate definition*. If Satan wants to destroy a primary precept of Christian behavior, here's how he does it. He gradually changes how the church defines certain words. If he can just change the meaning of the words, he can, in one generation, change the basic theology of hundreds of thousands, and alter the course of the church.

One such example is the word "faith". Now Satan cannot successfully strike from the Scriptures the truth that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6); so he has simply slowly, redefined the meaning of the word "faith." What once meant "an active form of confidence in the will of a Sovereign God, that allows us to rest in what we cannot see", has been cleverly redefined. Just turn on your TV set and listen to much of the religious programming today. What is being called "faith", is in essence, a blatant form of presumption. It makes man's will an imperative to God, and man's prosperity essential to God's success, until man ultimately becomes God, moving his puppet-like deity whichever way he chooses.

Man demands prosperity; man demands healing; man demands pleasant circumstances, and all in the name of "faith".

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Now, the precept hasn't changed, but the concept has. And man is often not sure of the difference.

What has Satan done? He has simply redefined the word until what was intended to be a tribute to God's omnipotence has become a word that renders Him impotent at the hands of a misdirected church. It is an *inadequate definition*.

But an even greater example of inadequate definition is the word "love". The world (and in many cases even the church) has redefined love as an emotion; a "feeling" that causes one individual to respond to another individual, and so long as that "feeling" exists, the world says, "love exists". So husbands leave their wives, justifying their actions by saying, "I don't love her anymore"; even though Jesus commands husbands to "love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it." Real love is not a "feeling" followed by "squealing". Simply defined, love is the act of giving oneself away for another. It is unrelated to the feelings. It is unrelated to worthiness. It is unrelated to response.

Forget what the world says. Remember what the Word says. The best known verse in the Bible defines love perfectly. You need look nowhere else.

It's John 3:16. You know what it says.

For God so loved the world...

He what? Felt all warm and cuddly inside? No! God so loved the world, He G-A-V-E!

Husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church,
(Ephesians 5:25a)

How did He do it? He G-A-V-E Himself for us.

The description or the definition of His love is giving! And the degree of His love is unlimited! He so loved, He gave His only begotten Son, the most priceless thing He had to give. He gave it all, because when He gave His Son, He gave Himself away!

You and I, for the most part, don't really know how to give, do we? We're impressed with ourselves if we're able to scrape up some out-of-date, unusable discards to give to the Salvation Army or a missionary drive. Or if we take leftovers to a family in need, we call that giving. But when God gives, He gives Himself, the best He has, *all* He has, with nothing held back.

So that's the description of His love and the degree of His

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love. Now look at the destination of His love. Who did He give Himself for? For the Jewish High Priests? That might be partially understandable. Did He give Himself for those with impeccable religious credentials? That would at least be believable. Did He give Himself for those whose heart beat only for Him? That would certainly be defensible. No! God so loved the “Cosmos”—the whole world.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died [for who?] for the ungodly.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners [in rebellion to all that He stood for], Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8)

Now He turns and says to us, “Child, did you see that?”

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have [this quality of] love one for another. (John 13:34,35)

God was not selective in His love. He gave Himself for the whole world. He gave away His life for the ungodly. He gave his very blood for those who stood in utter rebellion toward His very nature. And then He turned to us and said, “Son, daughter, you want the world to know you’re a Christian? Give your life away like that. Not just to a select few who can return your love. Not just to those you feel deserve your love. Go out and give your life away to the rebellious as well as the seeker; for the destitute, the beggar, the lame (those with genuine needs). But also for the fool, the scoffer, the agnostic. Go out and give your life away. The more you give, the more you’ll live.”

Don’t you see what’s missing in the church today? We’re soaking it up, taking it in; we’re becoming a close-knit clique of sponges.

We even look at the church based on what we can get from it, rather than what we can give through it. We judge our church jobs based on what’s in it for us, rather than what that job will allow us to give. We look for a ministry that gives us satisfaction, rather than for a ministry that gives us nothing but a chance to give our lives away.

We search for “safe” places to invest our time, our money,

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and our reputations, but will still fit the description of a New Testament evangelical.

Jesus simply looked for the people with the greatest needs, and wherever he found them, He gave Himself to them, and then ultimately, He even gave Himself *for* them.

If Christians understood the concept of giving their lives away, no ministry in the church would go wanting for laborers. No one would have to beg for teachers or workers or helpers. No one in the church would have a need that was not met. No one would be sick and in need of comfort; hungry and in need of food; lonely and in need of friendship but that the flood of love from within the Body of Christ would literally overwhelm them.

You would never have to plead for people to take food to shut-ins, or visit hospitals, or nursing homes, or jails, or orphanages. The stream of grace flowing out from within the church would engulf the world, engulf our neighborhoods as we became servants, quietly doing whatever needed doing.

But where has all the love gone?

Why isn't the church giving itself away?

Why is it building monuments to itself with bricks and mortar, rather than monuments to Christ with tears and labors of love?

Why is it devising programs to perpetuate itself rather than giving itself away in order to give life to others?

Why is it so busy counting heads, basking in the glory of its numbers, rather than counting the cost of giving itself away and triumphantly declaring, "It's worth it!" Those are questions the world is asking when it asks,

Where has all the love gone?

So the definition of love is giving.

The degree of love is unlimited.

The destination of love is the whole world.

And the determination of love is salvation.

The reason you give yourself away is,

that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting (unending) life (with God). (John 3:16c)

We must not get sidetracked into believing that giving is an end in itself. You *give* your life so men and women can *find* life.

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And herein so many Christians, and so many churches have lost their way.

They understand love is giving, so they feed the hungry, give to the poor, lift the downtrodden, visit the sick, encourage the prisoner, and forget to tell them that the source of that love is Jesus; and the cost for that love has already been paid. Their sins have already been forgiven.

If we love the whole world and forget to give them the Gospel, *we haven't really loved them at all.*

God so loved, He gave. Why? So that whosoever believeth on Him might find life. The reason He gave Himself away is so people who were lost might be found.

So where *has* all our love gone? It has indeed gone the way of inadequate definition. We've forgotten that love is giving your life away.

In the case of the Christian, it is giving your life away for the whole world without reservation; dying, if need be, so those who choose to can find eternal life.

But you may be asking yourself the one fateful question, "What have I to give away?" May I simply remind you, every one of us has at least seven things to give, if we're willing to give our lives away.

First of all we can give TIME!

Time is the great equalizer of the Christian life. We all have the same amount! You may argue over your credentials, quibble over how much of a message you have to give away, but you do have time!

You have the same amount of time as the person sitting next to you. And only you can determine how that time will be used. If you invest it in people, every second will be eternal! If you cling to it, save it for yourself, it will slip away. You'll lose it.

Give it away for Jesus' sake, and you'll find it.

If you study the life of Christ, you'll see the two equalizing factors of using time. Jesus redeemed the time. He used it carefully, knowing how precious it was. But He never clutched at it as though it were His. He carefully gave it away.

He planned, but people were allowed to interrupt His plans. His whole life was an ocean of divine interruptions.

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A beggar crying by the roadside.

A lame man by a pool.

A woman reaching for the hem of His garment.

A funeral pilgrimage outside a city gate.

They weren't on His schedule, but they were on His Father's schedule, and so, wisely and unselfishly, Jesus gave His time away.

And we call ourselves Christians. We proudly bear His name; but when we chafe at those divine interruptions designed by God so we can give our lives away, is it any wonder people wonder,

Where has all the love gone?

Secondly, we can give MONEY.

You know what money is? Money is a tangible, negotiable evidence of love that God has entrusted to us to meet our needs and to test our generosity. We don't all have the same amount to give away.

So God is not testing us based on dollars given, but rather on the degree of sacrifice with which we give.

The widow who gave but a mite and became God's illustration of real giving proves the point. It's not what she gave that she was remembered for; it was what she had left after she had given that she was remembered for. She had *nothing* left. She chose to give her life away.

Take a close look at your checkbook, and you'll have a close look at just how generously you give your life away. Cling to it and lose it. Give it freely and you'll receive true riches.

Examine how you give and why you give, and you may find yourself asking yourself,

Where has all the love gone?

Thirdly, we can give our POSSESSIONS.

Possessions are the obvious evidences of how we've spent our money. A look at them will quickly tell us what's important to us. Are we laying up all our treasures on earth, or are we laying up treasures in heaven? But more than that, how jealous are you of your possessions? Are they God's to use as He sees fit? Or is your motto, "The Lord giveth and nobody better taketh away?"

Is your home open? Your car available? Or do you draw a

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net around your possessions—engrave them with invisible labels that say, “Borrow at your own risk,” and clutch at them as though they were yours, rather than God’s? If so, you might stop and ask yourself,

Where has all the love gone?

Fourthly, we can share our ABILITIES!

Your abilities are those natural talents given to you by God even before your conversion that can be used either to draw attention to you or to God. Example: Are you willing to sing or teach before an audience of admirers but never quite find the time to take God’s message to a lonely nursing home, or to the uncomfortable atmosphere of a jail, or to just one shut-in?

Are you handy with your hands, but those hands never quite make it to widow Smith’s house to fix her broken door, or even to your neighbor’s house just to demonstrate Christ by doing? Does “do-it-yourself” mean do for yourself, rather than giving that talent away? If so, you might want to ask yourself,

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Fifthly, we can share our SPIRITUAL GIFT.

I happen to believe we each have one. You may believe you have several. That’s not the issue. A spiritual gift is a motivating drive given to you at your conversion to equip you to minister with freedom.

No matter what your concept of Spiritual Gifts, two things are certain.

1- We are supposed to know what they are: we are admonished not to be ignorant of the Scriptures,

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I don’t want you to be ignorant [or uninformed]. (1 Corinthians 12:1 NIV)

2- They’ve been given to us to give away. Read Romans 12:6-8. It is a pattern of what you do with a Spiritual Gift. You simply give it away.

Spiritual gifts are no end within themselves, but if you are not knowingly exercising the unique spiritual energy with which God has equipped you, your ministry may be lacking in effectiveness, and you might honestly wonder,

Where has all the love gone?

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Sixthly, we share our EMOTIONS.

That's right, your emotions! Study the emotions of Jesus! His emotions never controlled Him. He never made decisions based simply on how He felt, but rather always on obedience to His Father's Word, Jesus always used his emotions to give Himself away—to the Father, and to people.

Are you afraid to give your emotions away? Afraid you might become vulnerable to *feeling* the hurts of others? Are you afraid to become more sensitive to people because you might get hurt yourself? Or because you did get hurt once? If so, you are missing the compassionate context of Christianity. By saving your life, you're losing it, and you can honestly wonder just where all the love has gone.

You have one more thing to give away. Perhaps we've saved the best for last.

Lastly, we can share a MESSAGE.

And that message was not given to you so you could clutch at it as though it were something to hold on to. It was given to you to give away. You have three messages, really.

First, you have the message of salvation. God did not save you to make you a vault in which to store a soul. He saved you to make you an amplifier through which to broadcast the same message He used to touch you. Save that message and you'll lose its power. Give it away, and it will multiply before your eyes.

Secondly, you have the message of transformation. Most of you have received in your lifetime thousands of words of encouragement; hundreds of Scriptural principles designed to make living the life you've been given exciting and fruitful. When you learn truth, you are accountable, not only to apply it, but also to give it away! To pass it on. It's an expression of real love when you do.

Thirdly, you have the message of your life! It is the accumulation of all God has poured into you! Your personality, your experiences, and your spiritual gift, are molded into a peculiar message, one not exactly like any one else's in the world.

The Message is still Christ! Its uniqueness comes through how Christ through your experience has equipped you to relate and to relay that message to others who can identify with you and thus with your message.

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It's why God wrote four gospels. The Gospels were the same, but the messages were different, because the men were different. If you're not giving away the message God has implanted in your life...

- the message of how to be born again
- the message of how to live the Christian life and
- the message of how Christ is living that life in you...then you're not giving your life away. And the world might honestly look at you and ask,

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You give those seven things away and your cup will overflow. The more you give, the more you'll live!

But you store up, save up, withhold any of those seven and your life will begin to decay, to deteriorate, and to diminish in power in that area. Jesus gave them all away with unlimited love, and because He did, He in us would do no less.

If you want an interesting study, take these passages: Matthew 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-26; Luke 17:32-33; and put them together in a personal paraphrase (in other words, write them out in your own words in the first person) and meditate on that passage through the week ahead. Then stop and ask yourself as you see people hurting and in need, as the phone rings, or the mail comes, and you find yourself withdrawing into yourself in order to protect yourself, instead of giving yourself away,

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You will find what those passages say is this: "If anyone really wants to follow me (not just follow my teachings; follow me, Jesus said) he will have to do this continually, every day he lives. He will have to deny himself, that is, choose to say no to what would normally occupy his attitudes and his activities, and take up his cross, make a deliberate, continuous choice to die to the flesh so the Spirit can soar. "Follow me," Jesus says, "Go where I would go, doing what I would do."

The passage goes on to say that you have two choices. Whoever will save his life (whoever clings to or regards highly his own personal ambitions or desires rather than giving his life away), will lose his life. He will never really experience life the way God intended it to be.

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But whoever will lose his life (abandon his own pleasures and ambitions, counting them as insignificant in the light of God's purposes), for my sake (to please me), he or she will find out just what life is really all about.

Then Jesus gives an example. "Suppose you were to get everything in life you ever wanted for yourself. If you were to gain the whole world (He says), what would it profit you (What would you have?) if you missed the meaning of life? In other words, He concludes, "What would you give in exchange for the will of God?" (see Mark 8:36)

Jesus said every Christian has two choices. He can cling to his life and lose it; or he can give his life away, and in the process of giving, find his reason for living. So ask yourself,

WHERE HAS ALL THE LOVE GONE?

Where has all the love gone
In this troubled world we're in?
Why does the church seem powerless
To move in the lives of men?

Where has all the giving gone,
Giving the way Christ gave?
Laying aside our self-righteous robes,
Donning the cloak of a slave.

Where have the words of Jesus gone
When He said, "Men, you must choose it;
Give your life away and live;
Or cling to your life and lose it!"

Where has all the love gone?
It's living in us today.
It's only waiting to be released
As we give ourselves away.

That's where all the love is,
It's waiting for us to give.
And when we do, the more we do,
The more we'll begin to live!

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