

GODS LOVE SURPRISE ©

by
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This true story competed against writers from five continents in the LITT-World 2002 writing contest. It won "Honorable Mention" and was published in the book, "Words That Changed my World."

I shall never forget that cold, gray, winter evening, when God suddenly emerged from his mysterious hiding place to make himself known to me. It was an unexpected experience--one that shocked me to the very core.

Widowed, my three small children and I lived in a small town situated on the bleak outskirts of the Utah desert. After putting the children to bed and stoking up the fire, I settled back in my Lazy Boy and reached for Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, a book I had picked up earlier at a garage sale. Flipping through the pages, a chapter heading caught my eye--*Looking for God in the fields of memory*.

Intrigued, I read the whole section of his analytical search for God, and found myself enjoying his thought-provoking questions--one in particular. *How is it that after finding God we recognize him, when we never knew him beforehand?* His answer, however, disturbed me.

His assertion was that since the ability to recognize can only come from our memories, then *that* is the place where God is to be found. By re-examining them--no matter how horrendous--we will find him in the midst of our story.

I bristled with indignation. *There is no way God can be found by doing that!* If there was any truth to Augustine's claim at all, it was that by recalling life's experiences, one could ascertain *if* God was there at all. I could remember every crucial event that took place in my life, and God was definitely *not* there!

Yet, I could understand this reluctance--there was certainly nothing loveable about me. My earlier years had been filled with hurt and ugliness, and if I could have perceived any incident in my life that made sense, *then* maybe I could say God was there. But there was no rhyme or reason to any of it.

Grabbing a pencil, I began formulating a response to prove Augustine wrong. But the long day suddenly began to take its toll, and I found myself wearily leaning back in the chair.

Resting in the half-light, half-darkness behind closed eyelids, something unexpected happened--certainly nothing I planned. All the events of my life, the unexplainable tragedies of the past, with their defeats, failures and disappointments, surprisingly erupted--even those dramas I thought I had hidden so deeply that I would never have to look upon them again.

I pushed the unwelcome scenes aside, but they kept reappearing as if pleading for some explanation to reveal their purpose in the scheme of things. This time there was no cramming them back into the dark recesses of my mind. I could do nothing but helplessly succumb, as the tangled, chaotic events of my life rushed forward in all their unintelligible disorder. To make any sense of their purpose was like trying to read a story composed of incoherent sentences and paragraphs out of sequence. Confronting me head on, all they did was reconfirm what I already knew--God was *never* there for me.

Again I struggled to free myself of the images, but to no avail. A full rehearsal of all the unhappy events of my earlier years began playing out before me--the good, the bitter, the perplexing and distressing. At the same time I could hear background music--sometimes

harmonious, other times dissonant and tuneless--as each life's event, like a musical note, moved forward and connected to the next in a cause-and-effect manner.

Similar to viewing a movie, I watched myself act out the old, pitiable scenes. The entire cast was there--estranged relatives, friends, acquaintances--down to the last participating, oftentimes unwelcome, actor. I encountered an abusive parent, re-experienced childhood fears, suffered through surgeries, tuberculosis, chronic health problems, near-death situations, and relived the time as a teenager when I tried to end it all. Life was simply not worth living. No one cared--not even God.

Then, like in a delusive dream, I found myself at a strange and unusual vantage point--I became both player *and* viewer. As actor, I was aware of my interaction with others; but as viewer, I had the unique position of standing afar off and watching the panorama. I could also see players concealed offstage waiting for their cue to enter. It was there that my attention riveted to one personality in particular--and recognition sank in. *It was God!*

There he stood, in the middle of my horrible story, completely absorbed in the music, measuring the tempo, calling the cues, skillfully directing and orchestrating all the scattered pieces of my life.

Under his commanding gestures, the chaotic and fugue-like events began whirling together in a spinning maelstrom of soul-awakening harmonies. Rhythms, patterns, order and disorders--the counterpoints of my life--moved in all their crescendos and dynamics, playing themselves out in a synthesis of unity and diversity. Gradually merging together in a connective continuity, they melded into a dynamic whole until the fragmented events were no longer discontinuous incidences, but riding upon a divine continuum. God was taking up all the scattered, jumbled, pieces of my chaotic life and arranging them into a definitive pattern--and the unique process was structuring the harmony and melody of *me!*

Shocked, I now had to acknowledge a Presence and design where I thought none existed. Contrary to what I previously believed, God had *always* been there, guiding and watching over me--even sparing my life on occasions. *He did love me after all!*

Watching in amazement, I delighted in the effusive experience. But as with all compositions that must come to a close, the notes of my life's events gradually began dissolving into the silence of the past, leaving only their combined effect to linger in the last reverberating tone. In the flow of quiet that followed--like the interpretive hush following a period at the end of a sentence--the final, impassioned note punctuated the full meaning of my schizophrenic existence, revealing purpose, design and significance.

I have no idea how long the experience lasted; but as I opened my eyes, my first impulse was to figuratively leap to my feet, applaud, and shout, *Bravo!*--not for myself, but for God who had been wielding the baton and orchestrating my life all along!

Moved to tears, my zero-level image of myself changed, and I saw the real me as desirable to God. I saw him as the ever-faithful Lover, and myself as the Beloved. He cherished me just as I was, in the midst of all the unfortunate situations, the messiness, fears and mistakes. In return, I loved him back with a love that was indescribable.

I immediately fell to my knees to express my gratitude—to call upon his name, and try in some way to say, *"Thank you."*

But the instant those two words formed on my lips, they fell short of their mark. They were not enough! I panicked--they did *not* express what I was feeling!

I groaned in frustration, groping for some way to possibly rephrase it with more meaning. But

try as I could, there were no words in my vocabulary to express what I was feeling.

What was I to do? How could I let him know?

In a final moment of utter helplessness--in an outburst intended only as rhetorical--I cried out:
“*Lord, how can I say thank you?*”

To my surprise, words flooded into my mind--a scripture--powerful, persuasive, and compelling it came, yet gently, peacefully and sweetly.

*“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,
and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

I was dumbfounded. *That’s how I’m supposed to say, thank you?*

In joyous relief I responded . . . “*Oh yes!*”

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Many gratifying days and years have followed, and I continue to bask in the wondrous afterglow of the experience--also in the assurance that whatever scenes lay ahead, even if seemingly discordant, chaotic and tuneless--God will faithfully be there in the sidelines, guiding and orchestrating the whole wondrous composition of my life.

Augustine was right. It is at the point of deep introspection and the strangeness of remembered experiences that God’s presence can be found.

THE END

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