



Gaining
Christ

AN INVITATION TO THE DANCE

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MY FIRST OFFICIAL DANCE, with real music and real girls, was in junior high—eighth grade, to be exact, at a band picnic. I can't imagine a more treacherous, high-wire age at which to take such a traumatic first step.

At the close of that school year in 1965 I was all of thirteen, a brand new teenager in every sense of the word. Every nightmare ever visited upon the pubescent boy was visited upon me: raging hormones and racing corpuscles, quaking demeanor and explosive facial skin. I was scared of my own shadow and I was utterly, debilitatingly, petrified of girls.

Back in that simpler era of the mid-sixties in the heartland, the band picnic was a wholesome, well-chaperoned affair. Activities and

intentions were reasonably pure. Swimsuits were modest by today's standards, and even the shorts the girls wore reached almost to their knees. And when it came time for the dance, we all changed into the better clothes we had brought—the boys into slacks, and the girls into dresses.

To this young lad the girls were nothing less than fascinating aliens. I was at once drawn to and repelled by them. I couldn't take my eyes off them, but approaching them ignited primal vibrations that threatened to tear my body apart limb from limb. I wanted to talk to them, to carry on witty, urbane conversations, but all that came out were stumbling, stupid stutterings. The girls—even those younger than I—were cool, calm, and maddeningly mature. They didn't seem the least bit affected by the same churnings and misgivings that plagued me.

But as the afternoon wore on, and the tunes spun on the record changer switched to a tempo I could master with two left feet, I gathered my courage and asked Bonnie for the next dance. Bonnie was cute, and popular, and I don't know where I found the nerve to imagine she would ever condescend to dance with me.

Hands have never been so clammy as those I clumsily used to assume the position: One hand to hers, the other to the small of her back—and I didn't know whether to shout or faint. I held her like a fragile china

doll, not daring to breach the hallowed distance between our two shuffling bodies. The title of the song being played is forever gone, but the magical and mysterious moment when my hand dared to make contact with the back of that pretty white dress and take her small hand in mine, and the delightful surprise that Bonnie smiled at me, and actually seemed to enjoy herself, well, those memories are forever etched into the dusty halls of my now middle-aged brain.

THE LIFE-DANCE

How uneasily, even fearfully we approach the Life-Dance we are invited to have with the Lord—our holy Groom. There comes that sweet moment when we accept His unconditional love in the form of our eternal salvation. We reach out and take it—often in the abstract: the invisible God's love extended by grace, words of coaxing proffered often by a preacher. It is so easy that we think that that is all there is. A done deal. Finis.

But then we come to realize that instead of taking up residence, we have only cracked open the door—that though our eternity is secured, there has yet to occur the full-flowering of our salvation. We must step out and take the hand of our new Savior, we must risk our reputation and comfort to conduct the rest of our lives in His company.

It is a dance—an exquisite, breathtaking

dance with the dearest object of our affection. He is, in every sense of the word, our lover: tender, understanding, intimate. He stands before us with outstretched arms, saying, "Take my hand. Come into my arms, and I will show you things you've never dared to dream. Trust me to lead you through every step, every turn that would have been too much for you alone. I love you with all my heart; with all my body I gave myself for you. Come into my arms."

The voice of my beloved!

Behold, he comes

Leaping upon the mountains,

Skipping upon the hills.

My beloved is mine, and I am his.

He feeds his flock among the lilies.

Until the day breaks

And the shadows flee away,

Turn, my beloved,

And be like a gazelle

Or a young stag

Upon the mountains of Bether.

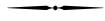
Song of Solomon 2:8,16-17 nkjv

But we stand there with knees knocking and palms sweating. We've never done this before! Can't we just admire from afar?

"You may," He says, so full and rich with grace. "But then you'll never become what I have planned for you. You will never reach that full potential unless you risk it all to

come dance with Me.”

So with clammy hands and a lump in our throat, we step forward, take His hand, and begin the Dance.



Our invitation to the Dance comes from the cross. Everything begins there. The cross is the navel of all eternity: everything before the cross accelerates toward it, while everything after looks back to it as its source.

The Christian’s deep, visceral longing to be with the Lord is based—at least in part—on what Christ did at Calvary. Our love for Him is based on the Spiritual and historical truth that He loved us first, with a love so profound and complete as to cast into shadow any similar expression of man.

“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

John 15:13

The longing is also a part of how we are made; there lies within every person a God-space—a space in which the Lord of heaven will perfectly fit, if only asked to come in. Since the Garden—since the first man created from dust, and the first woman created from him—man has been made with a God-space. In these first two the space came already filled, but since their fall, man and woman have been made with it vacant. Every person is made with the hunger, but only some fill it with its intended guest.

Others—and, regrettably, some in the body of Christ—fill this space meant for God with other things. Things of this earth. Impermanent things. Things that actually become obstacles to our gaining Christ.

Next week: “Things Getting in the Way”

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