

# Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

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# The Dance

"Hear, O Yahweh, and be gracious to me;  
O Yahweh, be my helper."  
You have turned for me my mourning into  
dancing;  
You have loosed my sackcloth and girded  
me with gladness,  
That my glory may sing praise to You and  
not be silent.  
O Yahweh my God, I will give thanks to You  
forever."

*Psalms 30:10-12*

**M**Y FIRST OFFICIAL DANCE, with real music and real girls, was in junior high—eighth grade, to be precise—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.

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—seemed to me cool, calm, and maddeningly mature. They didn't seem the least bit affected by the same churning and misgivings that plagued me.

But that day 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 as I would a fragile china doll, not daring to breach the hallowed distance between our two shuffling bodies.

The song that was playing 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 delicate hand in mine, and the de-

lightful 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 elderly brain.

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.

But then, after a while, we come to realize that instead of taking up residence, we have only cracked open the door—that though our eternity with Him 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, 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 living seriously with Christ.



**T**HE CHRISTIAN LIFE has been in existence for almost two-thousand years. In that long span of time it has become a well-oiled, brightly polished industry, replete with marketing departments, salesmen, highly paid CEOs, accountants, and customer service representatives. Travel the roads of the US—especially in the deep South—and every other number on the radio dial will present a different flavor of gospel message; flip through the television channels on a Sunday morning in any part of the country and the viewer will see everything from evangelicalism and Pentecostalism to perfectionism, determinism and Catholicism. Within each formal denomination there are subgroups that apply a slightly different twist on the beliefs of the larger group; outside of the denominations are the more radical sects and cults that spring up around the beliefs and teachings of, typically, an individual.

Even within the more established, traditional divisions, such as Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, or Lutherans, one will hear leaders or teachers that press specific priorities that define their own small niche. One preacher may emphasize the love and grace of God, while another may emphasize obedience to His commandments; one may push missions and evangelism, while someone else will push fellowship within the body of Christ; one may preach exclusively from the New Testament, while another preaches only from the red-lettered words of Jesus.

With so many different voices preaching so many different flavors of Christ, how is a believer to know the one that is true? And without that knowledge, how are we to know what to expect from Him?

**...which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are**

**foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.**

*1 Corinthians 2:13-16*

We really do not live in a spiritual age. The history of man includes epochs in which God—or a pantheon of gods—has played a more integral role in the conduct of civilizations, but this is not one of them. We live, instead, in an age of (to be kind) secular self-determination, where human problems are solved by human solutions. God, for many people, has become an inconvenient appendage to the glories of civilized society—an ancient old man hovering impotently over the vast and resplendent accomplishments of modern man. We pull out God, like a dust-covered old doll from the back of the closet, to offer Him uneasy homage on His special occasions: At Christmas we brighten our faces to celebrate Christ's birth; at Easter we look sad and remember His suffering and death.

So in an age where the unseen has become unimportant, we are called—oddly, it would seem—to have a “personal relationship” with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. At a time when man himself has become the pre-eminent god, we are told to embrace as a Brother and Lord the unseen Son of an invisible God. And whenever He fails to live up to the behavior we've been told to expect, where do we turn? To which voice do we listen for the answers to our lingering doubt?

Whenever I have a misunderstanding with my wife of fifty-four years, it doesn't occur to me to consult with her dad, or the next-door neighbor, or the village innkeeper. I don't ask the opinion of her best friend or the local postmaster. No, when she has somehow failed to live up to my expectations—or, more often, I have failed to live up to hers—I go directly to her. I ask, then listen to her answer, directly from the source.

And whenever I have a misunderstanding with Jesus, it doesn't occur to me to turn on the radio to seek out a voice, or turn on the television to find a preacher to watch. I don't consult the annals of the various conventions to determine a denomination's official stance on the subject. No, when I think Jesus has failed to live up to my expectations of His behavior—or, more often, I have failed to live up to His—I go directly to Him. I ask, then listen to His answer, directly from the source.

**Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

*Hebrews 4:14-16*

It is His Dance, you see; Jesus is leading. When there is a misstep, He is the one who will get me back in step. When I trip over my two left feet, Jesus is the one who picks me up, supports me in His strong arms, and whispers encouragement into my ear. Does He care that I have questions and doubt? Oh, yes, He does. And in the gentle touch of His embrace through prayer, and through the timeless counsel of God's words in Scripture, Jesus graciously answers every one of my questions, every doubt that springs from my having to live in a fallen, alien land.

The Dance begins at the cross, and it is there that our love is periodically renewed. But beyond this, our Life-Dance with Christ is conducted in the mundane normalcy of everyday life. The Dance is played out amid business meetings, changing diapers, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow, mending children's clothing, taking out the garbage, working the third shift, and in the marriage bed. The Dance is a tapestry of spiritual love woven intricately throughout the highs and lows, the disappointments and ecstasies of the believer's life.

The Dance is a glorious ascent from the leaden soil of earth into the gravity-defying arms of Jesus. It is not escapism, but a re-energizing of truth in a maelstrom of lies; it is a raft of peace in a churning sea of discontent. For the Christian, eternal life with God and the present indwelling of the Holy Spirit are automatic; the Dance with Christ, however, is optional.



Salvation by grace—in the vernacular of the church, “accepting Christ”—is not the ultimate destination, but only the portal through which we may enter the Dance. Oh, salvation is secure either way, but to realize the full and rewarding riches of a relationship with Christ, one must join the Dance.

The Body of Christ is filled with wallflowers. Every congregation or group of believers includes those who may have shown up at the school cafeteria for the event, but while others spin about with their partner, they have remained huddled on folding chairs along the outside wall. For reasons known only to them, they have decided to sit out the Dance, to remain spectators only of the One they claim to love. But those more courageous—those willing to step into the Dance and experience all the free-flowing riches of life in Christ—these are the brave souls who will realize everything He has to offer.

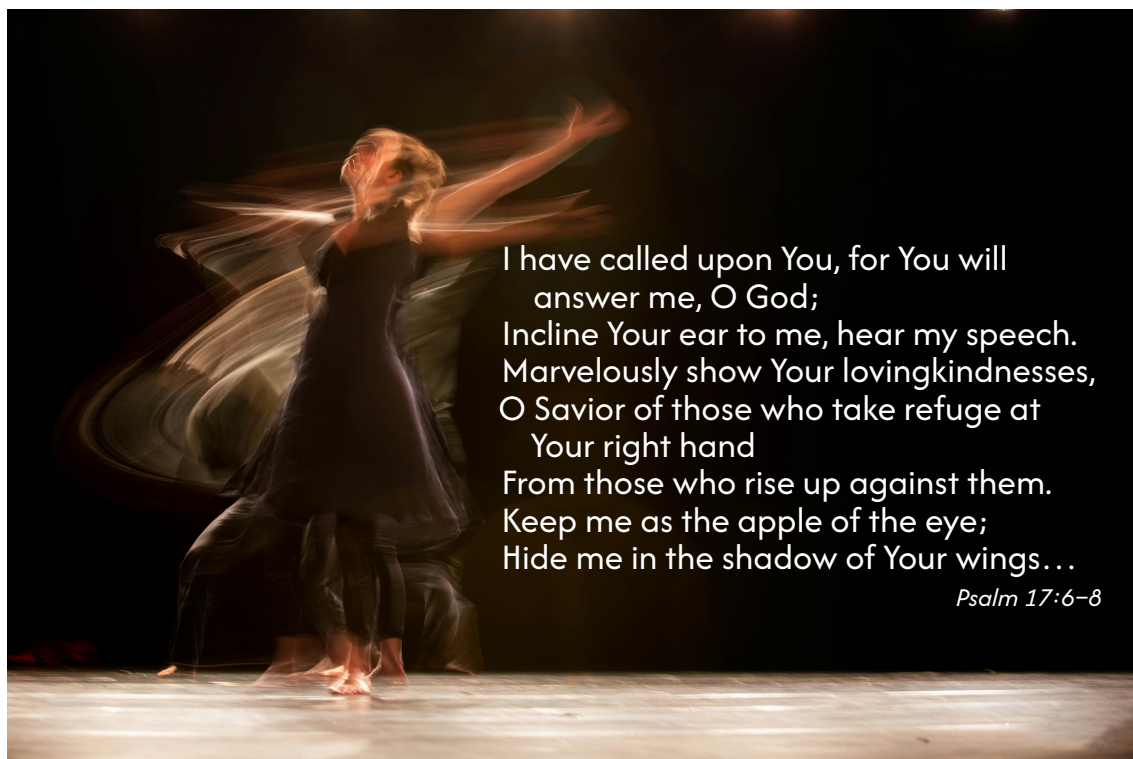
In my high school there was the venerable institution of the after-game dance: after every home football and basketball game the students retired to the school cafeteria to dance to the latest 45s or a home-grown band. My buddies and I spent most of those Friday nights huddled in cynical misery—making snide re-

marks about those out on the floor, while privately aching to be out there ourselves.

In our group there were certain “safe” girls—those with whom one could actually carry on a conversation without getting tongue-tied and stupid-mouthed. With these few we could gossip, and conjecture romances. *Would you ask Mary if Carol likes me? I really like Carol, and maybe if you asked her, she’d dance with me.*

We wince at the childishness of those days, but many of us are still behaving this way when it comes to our relationship with Christ. *Pastor, would you tell Jesus I really like Him, but He has to be the one to make the first move. He can find me sitting here in this comfortable back pew.*

Jesus Christ, the one who has already expressed toward us the fullness of both human and divine love, stands waiting with arms outstretched. With tender patience He invites each of us to join Him in the Dance. His deepest desire is that we will do whatever is necessary to know Him—and ourselves—to the full. This we will know only when we summon the courage to get up from our place of safe ignorance, to throw off the leaden, earth-bound weights that deaden our feet, and with holy abandon enter into His embrace—in the Dance! ♦



I have called upon You, for You will  
answer me, O God;  
Incline Your ear to me, hear my speech.  
Marvelously show Your lovingkindnesses,  
O Savior of those who take refuge at  
Your right hand  
From those who rise up against them.  
Keep me as the apple of the eye;  
Hide me in the shadow of Your wings...

*Psalms 17:6-8*



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