

FIRST FRUITS
31 Flashes of Biblical Perspective
(An Excerpt)

Alycia Christine Sears

Purple Thorn Press

FIRST FRUITS: 31 FLASHES OF BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE (AN EXCERPT)

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Alycia Christine Sears
On Facebook as Alycia Christine
www.alyciachristine.com
alyciachristine@gmail.com

Purple Thorn Press
On Facebook as PurpleThornPress
purplethornpress@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION
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FIRST FRUITS IS my first attempt to create a photography devotional book as encouraging as my current skills can achieve. The book's title refers to the Biblical passage: "He (God) chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." -James 1:18, NIV

Much of my work is motivated by my continuing fascination with the breathtaking beauty all around us. I'm continuously amazed by the visions of peace, joy, love, and hope that I spy through my camera lens and wonder why I often miss such treasures when the hectic pace of life pushes me inexorably through each day's many scenes. So many times, I have to slow down and remind myself of all of the minute miracles placed about me. The lens allows me to catch my breath one moment and then lose it in reverence with the next.

Seeing life as interpreted by a camera is a magnificent gift. It is an art form unique in the fact that the artist must be at the scene in order to capture it. This allows the photographer to create not just a beautiful image, but a poignant memory as well. I hope that each observer will gain a new knowledge of God's infinite love for all of us through these shared moments of memory.

This devotional's contents are organized using the fruits of the Spirit as a guide:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." -Galatians 5:22-23, NIV

All scriptures were faithfully copied from the Holy Bible using the NIV, NKJV, NLT, and WEB translations where indicated and have been reviewed by Pastor Patrick Mulholland of First Assembly of God in Pecos, Texas. The descriptions, poetry, and prose are all gathered from my own writings.

I pray these images and their corresponding reading will help guide you to find your own brilliant flashes of biblical perspective.

[O*] Alycia

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LOVE
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WE ALL NEED love. A person is never whole without giving and receiving love. To that end, none can successfully walk through life without love. Deprived of it, we would surely perish in our despair. To understand love is to understand God. After all, the beloved disciple John tells us "love is of God" and "God is love" (see 1 John 4:7-8, WEB). Therefore if God is love, then Paul's discussion in I Corinthians 13:4-8a, NIV could be interpreted as God is patient, God is kind. He does not envy, He does not boast, He is not proud. He does not dishonor others, He is not self-seeking, He is not easily angered, He keeps no record of wrongs. God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. He always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. God never fails.

Ambiance



Photograph's Description

This magenta-colored lamp adds romantic ambiance to the corner of this room in Manitou Springs, Colorado. Shot in July 2011.

Artist's Commentary

When the lamp in this room is turned off, it looks like a simple purple shape. Yet when it has the power of electricity flowing through it, this lamp becomes an object captivating to emotion and imagination. It is a beacon both beautiful and powerful.

So many people I meet are like an unlit lamp. Many plod through life with their soul's switch off and expect their outward image – beauty, intelligence, fashion, education, charisma, wealth, religion, et cetera – to prove to others just how special they are. Yet such lightless lamps are devoid of purpose and easily forgotten compared to those humans fully jolted by the power of love.

Suggested Scriptures

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

“There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”

-John 3:16-21, NLT

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PEACE
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PEACE. FOR SUCH a soothing thought, peace is truly a controversial idea. Some believe peace can and must be maintained only through negotiation. Others believe that the prize of peace is most often attained by paying the price of war. Some believe inner-peace can be attained through a strict regimen of meditation, good works, or prayer. I believe my relationship with God directly affects my soul's level of peace. I believe that rebelling against or fighting for control of my life with the author and finisher of my faith will garner me nothing but strife, doubt, and fear.

Conversely I believe that following Christ's teachings and guidance willingly through love will allow me to amass great amounts of peace even in extreme circumstances such as those the Apostle Paul records in his letters to the early Christians. After all, Christ did not promise us that his way would be easy. Indeed Jesus told us to rejoice when others hate us because of our devotion to him. That being said, Jesus promised to be with us in our trials and sufferings and to give us his peace that surpasses all understanding.

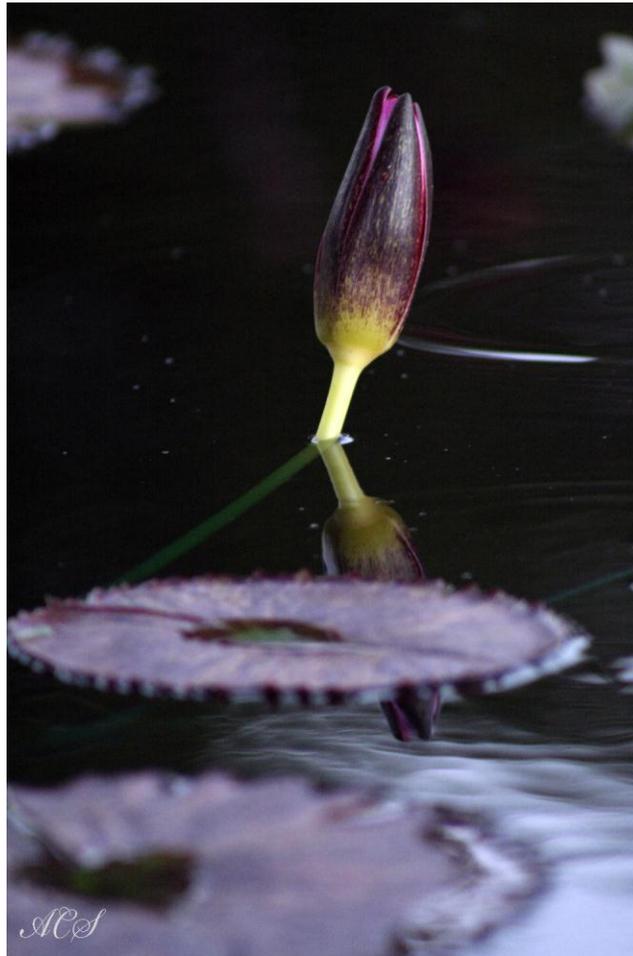
Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him. He who doesn't love me doesn't keep my words. The word which you hear isn't mine, but the Father's who sent me. I have said these things to you, while still living with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, give I to you. Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful."

-John 14:23-27, WEB

I believe it is Christ's overwhelming peace that is poignantly proclaimed by the hymn "It is Well With My Soul". The song was written by Horatio G. Spafford while he was grieving over the death of his four young daughters. How can a man so emotionally, mentally, and spiritually wounded from the loss of his children pen lines like "When peace like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul."? I believe Spafford's strength came because he used faith to choose God's peace instead of Satan's doubt.

So, is it well with your soul?

Budding Serenity



Photograph's Description

A lotus bud breaks the water's surface waiting for its moment of bloom. The ripples in the water are caused by minnows as they swim just under the pond's façade. Shot in San Angelo, Texas, in October 2009.

Artist's Commentary

"Serenity's Bloom"

Through wave and ripple,
Torrent and struggle,
I push toward the sunlit air.

Pregnant with potential,
Tested through trial,
I stretch up through the mire.

To me, you turn a face
Abounding in grace
As you touch the bud of my soul

Water below, heaven above
Abiding in love,
I bloom with serenity whole.

Suggested Scriptures

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

-James 3:13-18, NKJV

Twilight Reflections



Photograph's Description

An October sunset is reflected in the waters of a water lily pond in San Angelo, Texas. Shot in 2009.

Artist's Commentary

Nestled near the Concho River in San Angelo, Texas, there is a small park of manmade pools filled with scores of different water lily species. The lilies typically bloom from May to October, adding color and whimsy to this little piece of paradise. It was in this special place that I shot blooming buds, soft sunsets, and migrating monarchs with equal zeal. The park photo shoots remain some of my favorite memories of San Angelo and they always bring me peace in the midst of storms of frustration, fear or doubt.

Another thing that has always brought me peace is the following Psalm. While readers will never find the word "peace" anywhere in this passage, the themes of guidance and protection run deep within its verses.

Suggested Scriptures

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Will rest in the shadow of the Almighty[a].
I will say of Yahweh[b], "He is my refuge and my fortress;
My God, in whom I trust."
For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler,

And from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers.
Under his wings you will take refuge.
His faithfulness is your shield and rampart.
Because you have made Yahweh your refuge,
And the Most High your dwelling place,
No evil shall happen to you,
Neither shall any plague come near your dwelling.
For he will give his angels charge over you,
To guard you in all your ways.
They will bear you up in their hands,
So that you won't dash your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and cobra.
You will trample the young lion and the serpent underfoot.
"Because he has set his love on me, therefore I will deliver him.
I will set him on high, because he has known my name.
He will call on me, and I will answer him.
I will be with him in trouble.
I will deliver him, and honor him.
I will satisfy him with long life,
And show him my salvation."

- Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 ([a] God Almighty is El-Shaddai in Hebrew, [b] Yahweh is a sacred name for God originally represented in scripture by the Hebrew equivalent of YHWH),
WEB