



A Love Worth Giving: Living in the Overflow of God's Love

By Max Lucado

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Low on Love?

Finding it hard to love? Someone in your world is hard to forgive? Is patience an endangered species? Kindness a forgotten virtue? If so, you may have forgotten a step -- an essential first step. Living loved.

God loves you. Personally. Powerfully. Passionately. Others have promised and failed. But God has promised and succeeded. He loves you with an unfailing love. And his love -- if you let it -- can fill you and leave you with a love worth giving.

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A Love Worth Giving: Living in the Overflow of God's Love By Max Lucado Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1115674 in Books
- Brand: Thomas Nelson
- Published on: 2002-09-01
- Released on: 2002-09-01
- Format: Deluxe Edition
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.29" h x .87" w x 6.10" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 240 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author

More than 120 million readers have found inspiration and encouragement in the writings of Max Lucado. He lives with his wife, Denalyn, and their mischievous mutt, Andy, in San Antonio, Texas, where he serves the people of Oak Hills Church.

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Chapter 12

A Cloak of Love

Love . . . always protects.

1 Corinthians 13:6–7 niv

We hide. He seeks. We bring sin. He brings a sacrifice. We try fig leaves. He brings the robe of righteousness. And we are left to sing the song of the prophet: "He has covered me with clothes of salvation and wrapped me with a coat of goodness, like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding like a bride dressed in jewels" (Isa. 61:10).

In the 1930s, Joe Wise was a young, single resident at Cook Hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. Patients called him the "doctor with the rose." He made them smile by pinning a flower from bedside bouquets on his lab coat.

Madge, however, needed more than a smile. The automobile accident had left her leg nearly severed at the knee. She was young, beautiful, and very much afraid. When Joe spotted her in the ER, he did something he'd never done before.

Joe took his lab coat, bejeweled with the rose, and placed it gently over the young woman. As she was wheeled into the operating room, the coat was removed, but she asked to keep the flower. When she awoke from surgery, it was still in her hand.

When I tell you that Madge never forgot Joe, you won't be surprised. When I tell you how she thanked him, you very well may be.

But before we finish the story of Joe's cloak, could I ask you to think about your own? Do you own a cloak of love? Do you know anyone who needs one? When you cover someone with concern, you are fulfilling what Paul had in mind when he wrote the phrase "love . . . always protects" (1 Cor. 13:4–7 niv).

Paul employed a rich word here. Its root meaning is "to cover or conceal." Its cousins on the noun side of the family are *roof* and *shelter*. When Paul said, "Love always protects," he might have been thinking of the shade of a tree or the refuge of a house. He might even have been thinking of a coat. One scholar thinks he

was. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* is known for its word study, not its poetry. But the scholar sounds poetic as he explains the meaning of *protect* as used in 1 Corinthians 13:7. The word conveys, he says, "the idea of covering with a cloak of love."¹

Remember receiving one? You were nervous about the test, but the teacher stayed late to help you. You were far from home and afraid, but your mother phoned to comfort you. You were innocent and accused, so your friend stood to defend you. Covered with encouragement. Covered with tender-hearted care. Covered with protection. *Covered with a cloak of love.*

Your finest cloak of love, however, came from God. Never thought of your Creator as a clothier? Adam and Eve did.

Every clothing store in the world owes its existence to Adam and Eve. Ironing boards, closets, hangers—all trace their ancestry back to the Garden of Eden. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they needed no clothing; after they sinned, they couldn't get dressed fast enough. They hid in the bushes and set about the task of making a wardrobe out of fig leaves.

They craved protection. Well they should have. They knew the consequences of their mistake. God had warned them, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not even touch it, or you will die" (Gen. 3:3).

Of course the one tree they were told not to touch was the one they couldn't resist, and the fruit of the tree became a doorknob that, once pulled, permitted a slew of unwanted consequences to enter.

One of which was shame. Adam and Eve had felt no shame. Then they felt nothing but. Hence they hid, and hence they sewed, but the covering was insufficient. What is a grove of trees to the eyes of God? What protection is found in a fig leaf?

Adam and Eve found themselves, like Madge, vulnerable on a gurney—wounded, not by a car, but by their own sin.

But what would God do? Had he not announced his judgment? Hadn't his law been broken? Didn't justice demand their death? Is he not righteous?

But, we are quick to counter, is God not love? And weren't Adam and Eve his children? Could his mercy override his justice? Is there some way that righteousness can coexist with kindness?

According to Genesis 3:21 it can. The verse has been called the first gospel sermon. Preached not by preachers, but by God himself. Not with words, but with symbol and action. You want to see how God responds to our sin?

"The Lord God made clothes from animal skins for the man and his wife and dressed them" (Gen. 3:21).

The mystery behind those words! Read them again, and try to envision the moment.

"The Lord God made clothes from animal skins for the man and his wife and dressed them."

That simple sentence suggests three powerful scenes.

Scene 1: God slays an animal. For the first time in the history of the earth, dirt is stained with blood. Innocent blood. The beast committed no sin. The creature did not deserve to die.

Adam and Eve did. The couple deserve to die, but they live. The animal deserves to live, but it dies. In scene 1, innocent blood is shed.

Scene 2: Clothing is made. The shaper of the stars now becomes a tailor.

And in Scene 3: God dresses them. "The Lord . . . dressed them."

Oh, for a glimpse of that moment. Adam and Eve are on their way out of the garden. They've been told to leave, but now God tells them to stop. "Those fig leaves," he says, shaking his head, "will never do." And he produces some clothing. But he doesn't throw the garments at their feet and tell them to get dressed. He dresses them himself. "Hold still, Adam. Let's see how this fits." As a mother would dress a toddler. As a father would zip up the jacket of a preschooler. As a physician would place a lab coat over a frightened girl. God covers them. He protects them.

Love always protects.

Hasn't he done the same for us? We eat our share of forbidden fruit. We say what we shouldn't say. Go where we shouldn't go. Pluck fruit from trees we shouldn't touch.

And when we do, the door opens, and the shame tumbles in. And we hide. We sew fig leaves. Flimsy excuses. See-through justifications. We cover ourselves in good works and good deeds, but one gust of the wind of truth, and we are naked again—stark naked in our own failure.

So what does God do? Exactly what he did for our parents in the garden. He sheds innocent blood. He offers the life of his Son. And from the scene of the sacrifice the Father takes a robe—not the skin of an animal—but the robe of righteousness. And does he throw it in our direction and tell us to shape up? No, he dresses us himself. He dresses us *with* himself. "You were all baptized into Christ, and so you were all clothed with Christ" (Gal. 3:26–27).

The robing is his work, not ours. Did you note the inactivity of Adam and Eve? They did nothing. Absolutely nothing. They didn't request the sacrifice; they didn't think of the sacrifice; they didn't even dress themselves. They were passive in the process. So are we. "You have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it. God has made us what we are" (Eph. 2:8–10).

We hide. He seeks. We bring sin. He brings a sacrifice. We try fig leaves. He brings the robe of righteousness. And we are left to sing the song of the prophet: "He has covered me with clothes of salvation and wrapped me with a coat of goodness, like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding, like a bride dressed in jewels" (Isa. 61:10).

God has clothed us. He protects us with a cloak of love. Can you look back over your life and see instances of God's protection? I can too. My junior year in college I was fascinated by a movement of Christians several thousand miles from my campus. Some of my friends decided to spend the summer at the movement's largest church and be discipled. When I tried to do the same, every door closed. Problem after problem with finances, logistics, and travel.

A second opportunity surfaced: spending a summer in Brazil. In this case, every door I knocked on swung open. Two and one half decades later I see how God protected me. The movement has become a cult—dangerous and oppressive. Time in Brazil introduced me to grace—freeing and joyful. Did God protect me? Does God protect us?

Does he do for us what he did for the woman caught in adultery? He protected her from the stones. And his disciples? He protected them from the storm. And the demoniac? He protected him from hell itself. Why, Jesus even protected Peter from the tax collectors by providing a tax payment.

And you? Did he keep you from a bad relationship? Protect you from the wrong job? Insulate you from _____ (you fill in the blank)? "Like hovering birds, so will [the Lord Almighty] protect Jerusalem" (Isa. 31:5 jb). "He will strengthen and protect you" (2 Thess. 3:3 niv). "He will command his angels . . . to guard you" (Ps. 91:11 niv). God protects you with a cloak of love.

Wouldn't you love to do the same for him? What if you were given the privilege of Mary? What if God himself were placed in your arms as a naked baby? Would you not do what she did? "She wrapped the baby with pieces of cloth" (Luke 2:7).

The baby Jesus, still wet from the womb, was cold and chilled. So this mother did what any mother would do; she did what love does: She covered him.

Three decades later another lover of Christ did the same. This time the body of Jesus wasn't cold from the chill; it was cold from death. Joseph of Arimathea had it lowered from the cross. Just as Mary cleansed the child from the womb, Joseph prepared the Savior for the tomb. He washed the spit from the face and sponged the blood from the beard. "Then Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth" (Matt. 27:59).

Mary dressed the baby. Joseph cleansed the body.

Wouldn't you cherish an opportunity to do the same? You have one. Such opportunities come your way every day. Jesus said,

I was without clothes, and you gave me something to wear." . . .

When," [the people asked,] "did we see you without clothes and give you something to wear?" . . .

I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me." (Matt. 25:36, 38, 40)

Do you know anyone, like Madge, who is wounded and afraid? Do you know anyone, like Adam and Eve, who is guilty and embarrassed? Do you know anyone who needs a cloak of love?

Have you ever had a teenager in trouble? You hear the garage door open after the curfew hour. You climb out of bed and march to the kitchen, and there you find him at the counter. The smell of beer is on his breath. The flush of alcohol is on his cheeks. This is serious. He has been drinking. He has been driving. You have a problem, and I have a question. What are you going to give your son?

Are you going to give him a lecture? He deserves one. Are you going to give him three months with no keys? That may be wise. Are you going to give him a life sentence with no parole? That may be understandable, considering your worry—but don't forget to give your child a cloak of love. At some point over the next few hours he desperately needs to feel your arm around his shoulders. He needs to be cloaked, covered, blanketed in your love. Love always protects.

Know anyone who needs a cloak of love?

Have you ever heard anyone gossip about someone you know? Ever seen human jackals make a meal out of a fallen friend? "Well, I heard that she . . ." "Oh, but didn't you know that she . . ." "Let me tell you what a

friend told me about him . . ." Then all of a sudden it's your turn. Everybody is picking your friend apart. What do you have to say?

Here is what love says: Love says nothing. Love stays silent. "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8 nasb). Love doesn't expose. It doesn't gossip. If love says anything, love speaks words of defense. Words of kindness. Words of protection.

Know anyone in need of a cloak of love?

A few years back I offered one to my daughters. The whirlwind of adolescence was making regular runs through our house, bringing with it more than our share of doubts, pimples, and peer pressure. I couldn't protect the girls from the winds, but I could give them an anchor to hold in the midst. On Valentine's Day, 1997, I wrote the following and had it framed for each daughter:

I have a special gift for you. My gift is warmth at night and sunlit afternoons, chuckles and giggles and happy Saturdays.

But how do I give this gift? Is there a store which sells laughter? A catalog that offers kisses? No. Such a treasure can't be bought. But it can be given. And here is how I give it to you.

Your Valentine's Day gift is a promise, a promise that I will always love your mother. With God as my helper, I will never leave her. You'll never come home to find me gone. You'll never wake up and find that I have run away. You'll always have two parents. I will love your mother. I will honor your mother. I will cherish your mother. That is my promise. That is my gift.

Love, Dad

Know anyone who could use some protection? Of course you do. Then give some.

Pay a gas bill for a struggling elderly couple.

Promise your kids that, God being your helper, they'll never know a hungry day or a homeless night.

Tell your husband that you'd do it all over again and invite him on a honeymoon.

Make sure your divorced friends are invited to your parties.

And when you see a wounded soul, shivering and shaken on a gurney of life, offer a lab coat and leave the rose.

That's what Dr. Wise did. And he didn't stop there. As Madge recovered, he paid visits to her room. Many visits. When he learned that she was engaged, he hung a "No Visitors" sign on her door so her fiancé couldn't enter. Madge didn't object. Her diary reads, "I hope that handsome young doctor comes by to visit today." He did, that day and many others, always with a rose. One a day until she was dismissed from the hospital.

And Madge never forgot. Her response? She gave him a rose in return. The next day she gave another. Then the next, another. As they started dating, the daily roses still came. When they married, she didn't stop giving them. Madge convinced the Colonial Golf Course across the street from her house to plant roses so she could give the doctor his daily gift. For nearly forty years, every day—a rose. Their younger son, Harold, says he can't remember a time when there wasn't a glass in the refrigerator containing roses for his dad.³

A cloak of love. A rose of gratitude.

Have you been given the first? Then take time to give the second.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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