

“I love this book—it shows the compelling beauty of Adventist doctrines.”—Gary Krause, director of Adventist Mission, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists



# Reckless Love

ADVENTIST BELIEFS  
AS STORIES OF  
GRACE

BRUCE MANNERS

Copyright © 2010 by Bruce Manners.

All rights reserved. Except as provided under Australian copyright law no part of this book may be reproduced in any way without permission in writing from the publishers.

The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy of all facts and quotations as cited in this book.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked “NIV” are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978 by the International Bible Society, used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Proudly published and printed in Australia  
by Signs Publishing Company, Warburton, Victoria.

This book was  
Edited by Nathan Brown  
Copyedited by Talitha Simmons  
Cover design by Nathan Brown and Mitchell Harris  
Cover image by Skip ODonnell/iStockphoto.com  
Text design by Mitchell Harris  
Typeset in 10.5/14.5 Berkeley Book

ISBN 978 1 921292 57 6 (print edition)

ISBN 978 1 925044 05 8 (ebook edition)

## Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1 Reckless Love](#)

[Chapter 2 Let's dance](#)

[Chapter 3 The challenge of choosing](#)

[Chapter 4 Lessons for Timothy—and for us](#)

[Chapter 5 God's not looking for heroes](#)

[Chapter 6 Fully alive](#)

[Chapter 7 God has a plan—it's personal](#)

[Chapter 8 Waiting in hope](#)

[Chapter 9 A small controversy](#)

[Chapter 10 God's gift of time](#)

[Chapter 11 More than daffodils](#)

[Chapter 12 A Friend in high places](#)

[Chapter 13 Reprise, with angels](#)

[Group discussion guide](#)

# Introduction

God is love.

This is the assumption that drives this book. Love impacts on everything God does. Creation makes no sense unless there's a love factor involved. Neither does the story of Noah. Or Abraham. Or Moses. Then there's the history of Israel and Judah. Only love explains the Babe born in Bethlehem—and His death at Calvary.

The message of our risen Saviour's return is a love promise. Salvation by grace through faith in Jesus is a gift that's only possible because “God so loved . . .”

This book is about Adventist biblical teachings—doctrines, if you prefer—but it's written to discover elements of grace and God's love within them. It's written with the belief that each teaching is, in some way, about God working to restore the relationship lost at Eden. It's an endeavour to demonstrate how Adventist beliefs can be couched in terms of grace and relationship within the story of God at work for the people of planet Earth. There's nothing new in this thought, notice the following:

The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary.<sup>1</sup>

There's also an attempt to make it practical in answering the “so what?” question.<sup>2</sup> This question asks how we respond to God in our being and living. There's something compellingly attractive about the story of God and His grace, and the lengths to which He's willing to go to restore the relationship between Himself and His children. As His people live out the story God has for them, they help give the Word reality.

The origins of this book go back to conversations I've had over several

years with Adventists longing for something deeper in their Christian experience. In their comments, there's often the thought that Adventist beliefs leave them cold, are too legalistic or don't help in their relationship with God. This led me to take another look at church beliefs to discover concepts of grace and relationship within them—a task that proved not too difficult at all.

It wasn't difficult because God is love.

## Group discussion guide

You'll find a group discussion guide at the end of this book. This was prepared, on a chapter-by-chapter basis, as a resource for readers who want to use this material in a group situation. The guide is designed to aid discussion. I'm convinced there's much more to God's reckless love within biblical teachings than what is presented here. I pray that further discussion will help unearth more. Of course, the discussion guide may also prove useful for your own study or devotional time.

## Thank you

I thank the people at College Church for their help in preparing this book, even if they didn't know they were. It started life as a preaching series, and the thoughts and suggestions individuals shared about what I'd presented helped shape what is written here. I also thank Nathan Brown and the team at Signs Publishing Company for what they've done in both polishing the text and creating an attractive package to present it in. They're good people to work with.

Finally, I thank Margaret for her encouragement to write this (despite the fact she knew it would take me into that distracted-writer's zone for long periods of time). I also thank her because she continually demonstrates what love is like.

1. Ellen White, *Gospel Workers*, page 315.

2. Following Reinder Bruinsma who suggests, “‘Having’ the right doctrine is important, but doctrinal truth means nothing if it is only intellectual assent and does not impact on us in a very personal way; if it does not change us; if it does not ‘set us free.’” (*It's Time to Stop Rehearsing What we Believe and Start Looking at What Difference It Makes*, Sycamore Tree Books, Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, Idaho, 1997, page 15.)

# Chapter 1

## Reckless Love

God is reckless with His love—outrageously reckless. He always has been—and always will be.

Consider the following scenarios:

• • •

*Scene 1:* The prodigal son’s request went something like this: “I want my money and I want it now! Why should I wait until you’re dead?”

Outrageous! But so was the response: “OK.”

The response was outrageous because the father had the right to refuse such a request. He had the right to tell his son to wait and the right to point out how improper this request was.

Didn’t he realise what his son would do once he had his hands on his inheritance?

Yes, he probably did.

We call this story the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Think again. The word *prodigal* means “extravagantly reckless.” Who was being the more reckless here? The son with his request or the father, who understood where it would lead?

God, the Father, has been reckless with His love from the beginning. He peoples a planet with humans who can choose to rebel. How reckless is that? But when they do rebel, He responds personally and plans a restoration. Love drives Him to respond with grace, not destruction. He proves to be the God of another chance.

• • •

*Scene 2:* “Go marry a prostitute,” God tells Hosea. “You will be a living parable of My relationship with My people.”

Hosea marries Gomer, whose name means “perfection.” Perfection? This isn’t the type of girl you brought home to meet your mother.

She presents him with a son, then a daughter and another son. Hosea's not certain if they're his children or not. She's so steeped in her adultery that Gomer may not be sure herself who the father is.

Here's the lesson: God's people have proven to be like a bride who's unfaithful before and after the wedding. Even so, He wants the relationship to work so much that He continually works at drawing them back.

Hosea pays the price to get his bride back. In the same way, God's willing to pay whatever it takes to get His bride back. Here's His plan: "I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion. I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as the Lord" (Hosea 2:19, 20).

"Why bother?" is the question. "Love" is the answer.

• • •

*Scene 3:* A baby in a manger. Jesus—the name says it all. For us Christians, this name falls easily off the tongue. It's the stock answer. He's the One we sing about. We say the name so often it can lose its impact.

At Creation, God gave us all the earth. In Jesus, our Father was reckless enough to give us all of heaven as well. It may not have looked like it, wrapped as it was in baby's flesh, but with this gift there was nothing else left to give.

Here is Immanuel, "God with us." Here is Joshua (Jesus), "He who saves." Here is the way, the truth and the life. Here is blood-bought salvation.

This salvation is not through our doing but through Jesus' doing. Our salvation comes in accepting what He has done. It's a gift. It can't be purchased. Our doing can never be enough—but our accepting is more than enough, for it draws us into the family of God.

No parable here, this is the reality: God so loved that He gave . . . Jesus!

• • •

*Scene 4:* Outside the gates of the New Jerusalem are the "dogs—the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idol worshippers and all who love to live a lie" (Revelation 22:15). We're tempted to think that that's where they belong—who would want them in the city of God?

But they are wanted! What isn't mentioned is that some within the gates

have also had these problems. They aren't inside because they've attained Edenic perfection or because of any goodness they may have. They're there because they're blood bought—they've washed their robes in the blood of Jesus (see Revelation 22:14). Their robes have been made white by the blood of the Lamb (see Revelation 7:14).

God's love is greater than any evil we have in our lives. He delights in welcoming us home and has saved us a place in the New Jerusalem. He truly is the Prodigal Father, waiting for His children to return to Him.

• • •

God as Father—that's how Jesus described Him. *Father* is a relationship word. For those who had an abusive father, a weak father or perhaps no father, this concept may have a negative or little meaning. Think of the God-as-father concept as like the father you should have had—only better.

Since Adam and Eve's disobedience, the Father has been working on bringing His family to wholeness again—to bringing His sons and daughters home. In fact, "salvation" is another way of saying that the relationship between the Father and His children is restored.

When we consider Bible teachings we should understand that, whatever the topic, the teachings say something about our relationship with God. They also say something about the love of God and His grace.

The Bible is mainly in story form, with pieces of wisdom and poetry thrown in. There are moments when Moses gives laws, when Jesus is preaching and when the epistle writers tackle issues. This is when we do find more structured teaching.

Even so, there is no attempt to pull together a complete teaching on any topic. In a sense, the Bible is like an ongoing discussion within a family. It has distractions and disorganisation, covering a number of points then leaving them and coming back to them elsewhere.

Fortunately, there's the Father's watch care over what is recorded. This means we can go confidently to the Bible to discover teaching about such things as the Sabbath, the Second Coming and what happens when we die. But we can't understand these teachings well if we forget they are also about strengthening our relationship with God and that they help to understand His grace.



What follows looks at various biblical teachings, and attempts to understand the elements of grace and relationship with God found in these teachings. It's an attempt and also a beginning because it's often difficult to pin down reckless love.

A warning: if you picked this up expecting to find a set of biblical teachings (doctrines, if you prefer) expounded in their fullness, you'll be disappointed. The aim is to look specifically at how grace is revealed and how the teachings demonstrate the Father working to restore the broken relationship He has with His children.

God is love. This makes Him reckless enough to want every Adolf, Idi and Osama in His kingdom. It's been this way since those first terrorists, Adam and Eve, destroyed Edenic perfection and it will remain this way beyond Eden's restoration.

We should expect the love of the Prodigal Father to be found in His teachings.

# End of product sample

This product is available at:

[AdventistBookCentre.com.au](http://AdventistBookCentre.com.au)



*Australia*