

FOCUS – The book of the brave

by Captain Amanda Reardon Every Christian knows the importance of the regular study of God's Word. Within its pages, we find the revelation of God's nature and his provision of salvation. We also find instructions for holy living.

Occasionally, Scripture will slice through one's life like the two-edged sword it claims to be. This person reads a portion of Scripture perhaps one read many times before and is changed. Things instantly become clear and a new course of action ensues.

That is what happened to Nancy. Nancy was a classmate of mine in a course called New Testament Spirituality. One day, the professor read the parable of the prodigal son to us. We were asked to shut our eyes and imagine ourselves as the prodigal. Then he read it a second time, and we were to imagine ourselves in the role of the older brother. It was then that Nancy had her serendipitous moment.

Nancy, a middle-aged woman, is the older of her parents' two daughters. When she was a young woman, she played the role of the prodigal. During her untamed years she married a man who left her while she was expecting their child. Though she had deeply disappointed her parents, she returned home, pregnant and penniless. As in the parable, her parents showered her with love and affection. For the next three years they financially supported her and her baby. She was fully restored to the family, and enjoyed all the privileges that go along with that. Her sister, like the older brother in the parable, resented her gleeful homecoming, and their relationship became tense.

While sitting in class meditating on the parable, Nancy began to understand her sister. The sister had always been a good girl, but there was little mention of that in the family. She received no reward for her faithfulness. Instead, Nancy, who should have lost all privileges, received a piece of her sister's pie when she was unconditionally re-accepted by their parents. Some twenty-odd years later, their relationship is still strained. Nancy never understood why her sister seemed to harbor such feelings of jealousy toward her until she placed herself in the shoes of the prodigal's brother.

The next day, Nancy unfolded her story for us. Her parents are recently deceased, and left her responsible for handling their estate. This was another insult to Nancy's sister. Why should the once



wayward daughter be left in control of the inheritance? Hearing this, we classmates easily understood to what extent Nancy related to the parable. Once she felt connected with the parable, she readily understood that the words of Jesus were words that at last disclosed the mystery of her own sister's bitterness.

Armed with new understanding, Nancy is now sorting out what action to take. She plans to contact her sister and ask her if she feels like the brother in the parable. Approaching her sister in such a way will take courage. Perhaps it will provide great freedom for both of them as they release years of anger and alienation. But Nancy is also contemplating the distribution of the inheritance. To bring full healing, and demonstrate her love, she may grant the entire sum to her sister. Nancy was fully forgiven by her parents, but perhaps she will not feel that the matter is over until she makes amends with her sister. Maybe, in this case, words will not be enough. Maybe she will need to put her money where her mouth is.

I was struck by Nancy's story. How could anyone be so deeply moved that she might contemplate relinquishing her own inheritance more than twenty years after she had grieved her family? Surely Nancy is capable of responding in this way because she has allowed the Word of God to do what it is meant to do: it cut to her soul and revealed what she needed to understand; in this case, that being sorry could demand more than simply saying so. I cannot say that Nancy's sister has a right to expect that money, but perhaps Nancy needs to give it.

I have told this story to demonstrate the power of Scripture in the lives of those who allow it. It is my aim to extol God's Word. Yet, perhaps I have made it appear less than inviting. One must ask oneself, *do I want to subject myself to the kind of book that would make someone forego her inheritance? What would I be expected to give up?* Such questions make the Word more frightening than appealing. Maybe that's why so many Bibles sit on shelves. Not everyone is brave enough to open one up.

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