

February 2012

THE SPICE

A taste of what's happening for women.

Transforming Love

Does God's love really make a difference in your life?

February is almost here, and with it comes Valentine's Day. Originally, February 14th was set aside to honor St. Valentine, a Roman priest martyred during the reign of Claudius II in approximately 270 A.D. But, as with most things that drift away from their spiritual moorings, Valentine's Day now often is a commercial endeavor used to sell chocolates, flowers, and other tokens of "love". It bears virtually no resemblance to the sacrificial love that compels a martyr to be killed for the sake of Christ.

So let's recalibrate our perspective: the love of God is an utterly and profoundly higher reality: it is powerful and transforming; it is unselfish to the point of sacrifice. Scripture tells us that the quality God most identifies with Himself is love: *"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."* (1 John 4:8)

Even better, God's omnipotent, comprehensive love can rescue us: *"...the Father... has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* (Colossians 1:12b-14)

This edition of *The Spice* includes the first of an occasional series that focuses on First Free women and how God's love has changed them.

Lisa Boyer has been active at First Free since 2004 and is the single mom of Jordan, age 15 and James, 7. She shares her story with us this month, answering our question, *"What difference has God's love made in your life?"*

"Understanding my new identity in Christ has replaced the old ideas I had of myself. I have noticed changes within me through God's transforming power, such as placing another's spiritual needs before my physical ones or taking time to have a heart to heart talk with someone instead of eating my lunch.

Throughout the last seven years God has shown me just how important I am to Him, and that He is truly my El Roi (God who sees me). He knows my heart and mind, the scars of my past, and my current struggles, but loves and accepts me as His own in spite of all that. He knows just how deep my need to be noticed occasionally and not forgotten truly runs.

I was born in Canton, Illinois, the second of three daughters. During my elementary school years, we lived abroad as my dad worked in Saudi Arabia; we also were able to take family vacations traveling the rest of the world. I finished high school and

First Evangelical
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THE WORD

"The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.'"

Jeremiah 31:3

THINK ABOUT IT

What difference has God's love made in your life?

college in the Philippines where I received a Bachelor of Science degree in Marketing.

Upon returning to the US, I was reunited with my grandmother and began to reinvent myself in this country. I can tell you that I am thankful God protects us before we accept Jesus as our Savior!! I call this time of my life "walking on the wild side", during which I was blessed with two gorgeous boys.

Jesus had been knocking on my heart for about a year before I actually answered the door and invited Him in on November 2, 2004. The following year was a blur of spiritual "mountain top" experiences, meeting new friends, and volunteering in various ministries at First Free. Soon reality set in, and work became my focus: God arranged for me to be hired and then promoted to an "on call" position working third shift. This schedule gave me plenty of downtime to read God's Word, journal prayers, read topical books about God, and essentially learn how to hear His voice and feel His Presence. Growing in my walk with Him has prepared me to share God's love in a first-hand way with those around me. Out of His overflowing love, peace, and contentment, I have developed a heart for women who have traveled paths similar to mine. With His enabling, I was led to invite some women from work and church and began a Bible study in my apartment.

A verse that has meant a lot to me is 2 Corinthians 12:10: "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

God has used this truth to really mold my thoughts, attitude, actions, and responses. Now I am turning to God for His perspective and wisdom instead of reacting to things with my own understandings. This just proves to me even more that God loves me enough to change me from the inside out!! The more time I spend with Him, the more time I crave with Him. The more time I invest in praying for my boys, my family, my God given friends, and everyone else, the more time I anxiously anticipate evidence of God's hand in their lives and His power and interest in me during the chaotic times. He will never abandon me – regardless of what kind of "time" I happen to be in."

A Heart Warming Soup



Ingredients

- 2 (28 oz) cans of whole tomatoes (reserve juice)
- 2 TB brown sugar
- 4 TB butter
- 1 small onion chopped
- 2 TB tomato past
- 2-3 TB flour
- 2 (15 oz) cans or one carton of chicken stock/broth
- 2 fresh red peppers roasted*
- 1 cup prepared pesto
- 1 1/2 cups half and half

Directions

Heat oven to 450 degrees. Line a baking sheet with foil. Squeeze the seeds out of tomatoes and discard. Arrange the tomatoes on a baking sheet and sprinkle them with brown sugar. Bake until liquid is evaporated and tomatoes caramelize (about 30 min).

Heat butter, onion, and tomato paste in large pot. Sauté until onions soften. Add flour and cook for 1 minute. Gradually add chicken stock and reserved tomato juice. Bring to a boil. Add tomatoes and peppers and puree until smooth with an immersion blender, or remove from pot in small batches and puree in a food processor or blender. Return to pot, simmer 15 minutes. Five minutes before serving, add pesto and half and half.

**Note: to roast peppers, cut them in half, clean out the seeds, and place them skin side up on a broiler pan. Broil them for about 20-25 minutes or until you notice the majority of the skin turning black.*

Remove from oven and let cool. When cool enough to handle, peel off the black skins, and cut in large chunks. DO NOT skip the red peppers, they're the secret ingredient!



How Do I Love You? Let Me Count the Ways

They say actions speak louder than words. So put your love into action!

- ☺ Bring a meal to someone who is feeling overwhelmed with life.
- ☺ Offer to do one of your child's weekly chores and tell them it is because you love them.
- ☺ Arrange lunch with a friend and each of you invite someone who you have just recently met to join you.
- ☺ Surprise you husband by going to *his* choice of movie.
- ☺ Visit that elderly relative that lives alone-bring along a treat, pictures of the family, then read a passage of Scripture with them before you go.

Ministry Spotlight

Parent Connection

The Parent Connection is an opportunity for parents of Junior High and High School students get to know other parents, talk about life at home with teenagers, and get some good resource ideas.

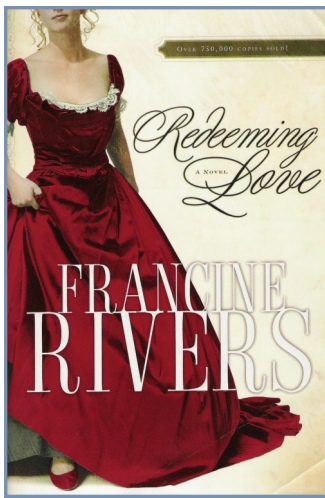
The next one is Sunday, March 4 from 12:00-2:00pm. Bring your own lunch to the High School room at First Free Church... your entire family is welcome! We will be showing a basketball game on our big screen for our sports enthusiasts.

If you are looking for conversation and encouragement, this could be the perfect connection for your family. If you have any questions, contact Rachael in Student Ministries at 815-877-7046 x255 or rachaelr@firstfreerockford.org

Media Morsels

Book Review

Redeeming Love by Francine Rivers



Join February's "Lit & Latte" book club as we read "Redeeming Love" by Francine Rivers. We meet on Monday, February 13 at First Free church. Come and share your thoughts and insights while enjoying your favorite coffee or tea.

California's gold country, 1850. A time when men sold their souls for a bag of gold and women sold their bodies for a place to sleep. Angel expects nothing from men but betrayal. Sold into prostitution as a child, she survives by keeping her hatred alive. And what she hates most are the men who use her, leaving her empty and dead inside. Then she meets Michael Hosea. A man who seeks his Father's heart in everything, Michael Hosea obeys God's call to marry Angel and to love her unconditionally. Slowly, day by day, he defies Angel's every bitter expectation until, despite her resistance her frozen heart begins to thaw. But with her unexpected softening come overwhelming feelings of unworthiness and fear. And so Angel runs. Back to the darkness, away from her husband's pursuing love, terrified of the truth she can no longer deny: Her final healing must come from the One who loves her even more than Michael Hosea does...the One who will never let her go. A life-changing story of God's unconditional, redemptive, all-consuming love.

For more information on "Lit & Latte" call Sue Nelson in The Scroll Bookstore at First Free Church (815-877-7046 x235) or email her at suen@firstfreerockford.org

Devotional

Love is a Choice ***1 John 4:19-21***

"We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister."

The Bible says that God is love. It also says that we love because God first loved us. If love is a choice for Him, it is a choice for us as well. At times it's an easy choice that costs us little and brings much satisfaction. But at other times, choosing to love means choosing to make ourselves open to hurt and rejection.

-The Mom's Devotional Bible, 1996, Zondervan, p.1310



February

A Taste of What's Happening for Women

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
			6:30pm Mercy Triumphs	9:00am Mercy Triumphs		
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
		7:00pm Daniel & II Peter Precept	6:30pm Mercy Triumphs	9:00am Mercy Triumphs		
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	7:00pm "Lit & Latte" Bookclub	9:00am MOPS 7:00pm Daniel & II Peter Precept VALENTINE'S DAY	6:30pm Mercy Triumphs	9:00am Mercy Triumphs		
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
		7:00pm Daniel & II Peter Precept	6:30pm Mercy Triumphs	9:00am Mercy Triumphs		
26	27	28	29			
		9:00am MOPS 7:00pm Daniel & II Peter Precept	6:30pm Mercy Triumphs			

Contact for more information



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