Godly Love
GODLY LOVE

A ROSE PLANTED IN THE DESERT OF OUR HEARTS

Stephen G. Post

FOREWORD BY
Dr. Robert H. Schuller

Templeton Foundation Press
West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania
To Sir John Templeton, who had such faith and hope in a love that never fails.

The whole world is grateful.
There is a beautiful message in the book of Isaiah, chapter 35, verse 1, and part of that verse reads, “The desert shall rejoice and blossom like a rose.” This idea has grounded my ministry in times of highest joy and deepest pain, suffering, and sorrow. . . . When you are in a desert, plant a rose. Plant a rose of liberation. Plant a rose of peace, a rose of reconciliation, and a rose of faith, hope, and love. And the desert will blossom.

—PASTOR OTIS MOSS JR., PREFACE TO

WHY GOOD THINGS HAPPEN
TO GOOD PEOPLE
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FOREWORD

Of all the books on love that I have been exposed to in my lifetime, I have never read a single one so profound, so intelligent, and so concise in economy of words. That matches the superlative quality of this book.

If people have been reading the greatest books on love they cannot consider themselves widely informed unless they read this stunning summary by a man who comes from a respected background in theology, psychology, sociology, and science. Stephen Post is a renaissance man whom I admire profoundly. This is a book that will become the classic
statement on what we in the Christian tradition know as agape love, revealed completely in the life of Christ.

Anyone who has heard Stephen Post speak on the topic of love, or who has spent a little time with him in quiet conversation, walks away with a sense of his depth and passion. He has devoted decades to this topic, and all of his accomplishments as a person of faith derive from his desire to understand here on earth the one thing that means the most in eternity—love. This book tells the story of his enriching relationships with M. Scott Peck, the great blues guitarist Reverend Gary Davis, the visionary philanthropist Sir John Templeton, Dame Cicely Saunders, and so many others who have enriched his life since youth.

Stephen Post founded the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love (www.unlimitedloveinstitute.com) with the support of Sir John Templeton in 2001. It is now considered the
premier research program in the world focusing on research into the ways in which the spiritual experience of agape love can shape and transform our lives in wondrous ways. From 20/20 to Michael Feldman’s Whad’Ya Know, from Talk of the Nation to the New York Times, from The Hour of Power to the United States Congressional Retreat, the work of his Institute has become known nationally and internationally. Few people have been able to creatively engage the popular culture so successfully with the ways and power of love.

This book is written in such an inspirational way that it will change lives for years to come. It will bring immense benefit to all who read it.

Dr. Robert H. Schuller
Founding Pastor
Crystal Cathedral
Godly Love
Love never fails.

—ST. PAUL,
LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS
Introduction

Years ago I visited a nursing home in Chardin, Ohio, and sat down with a man named Jim. He was deeply forgetful, having lost his grasp on the connection between past and present as a result of dementia. He could not respond to any of my questions about his two sons, although I looked him in the eye and called him by name as an expression of respect. But Jim had a twig that he placed in my hands, and when he did so he smiled with tremendous warmth and joy. If love were electric, the room would have been on fire. Jim struggled to get out just three words—the only three
When days grow dark and nights grow dreary, we can be thankful that our God combines in his nature a creative synthesis of love and justice which will lead us through life’s dark valleys and into sunlit paths of hope and fulfillment.

—MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.,

THE STRENGTH TO LOVE
words he spoke that morning—“God is love.” I was amazed, but I knew that people in his condition have good days and bad days; they are capable of some rare coherence on a good morning after a deep sleep.

I asked the nurse about Jim’s twig. It turns out that when Jim was growing up on an Ohio farm, his father—a devout Christian—loved him very deeply and treated him with great tenderness. Jim’s father gave the boy a chore every morning—to bring kindling in for the fireplaces. Like so many of those with Alzheimer’s, Jim had traveled back into his past and landed at the place where he felt most comforted, in the safe haven of love. For him, that twig symbolized the love of his father and the joy that Jim felt in doing a small, helpful chore early in life. I believe that for Jim it also symbolized Godly love. There, in the desert of deep forgetfulness, Jim was coping with the chaos of the present by clinging to emo-
tional memories that conjured up the power of love. We all have a yearning for Godly love. The embrace of Godly love is so powerful that, in Jim’s case, even the ravages of Alzheimer’s could not break it.

An Inspiration

I met Jim in 1988, and he inspired me to spend the next twelve years of my life doing research and writing about the power of love and spirituality in the lives of the deeply forgetful and their caregivers. When he handed me his twig, he ignited a fire of curiosity in my heart and my mind.

Godly love is the one thing in this universe that is fully reliable and worthy of our deepest trust, no matter how much hardship or heartache enters our lives. We encounter disappointment and loss in our fleeting lives, times of exhaustion when we have no love of our
own to give, either to others or to ourselves. It is in these deserts that Godly love can plant a rose in our hearts. As it is written in Isaiah 35:1, “The desert shall rejoice and blossom.”

At times in life we feel only the destructive emotions of hostility, bitterness, and despair. The desert has burned us out, and we can offer water to no one, not even ourselves. We feel that our very existence rests on some meaningless cosmic mistake, and we lose all sense of purpose. In the desert, everyday people who were once joyful retaliate against the gift of life in a downward spiral of rage or, at the other end of the spectrum, cool indifference to their fate and the fate of others. This sense of “nothingness” does not subside with the accumulation of wealth, or with yet another moment of hedonistic pleasure that begins to feel old, although such novelties may temporarily distract us from our nihilism. Even the seasoned mystic has a dark night of the soul.