

Comforts from the Cross

– *Celebrating the Gospel One Day at a Time* –



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CROSSWAY BOOKS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Comforts from the Cross: Celebrating the Gospel One Day at a Time

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Published by Crossway Books

a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: The DesignWorks Group, www.thedesignworksgroup.com

Cover photo: iStock

First printing 2009

Printed in the United States of America

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PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-0555-3

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-0556-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fitzpatrick, Elyse, 1950–

Comforts from the cross : celebrating the gospel on day at a time / Elyse Fitzpatrick.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-4335-0283-5 (tpb)

1. fChristian women—Religious life. 2. Bible N.T.—Meditations.

I. Title

BV4527.F583 2009

242'.2—dc22

2008053282

VP	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	09			
14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Introduction

I love celebrations. I love parties and getting together with friends and Christmas trees and water slides in the front yard. I love barbeques and Thanksgiving and birthday candles and having our church small group over for dinner and fellowship. The Lord has blessed my husband, Phil, and me with the perfect party house and “the more, the merrier” is our motto. There’s something intrinsically wonderful about being with others around a shared joy, isn’t there? Give me a birthday party or any holiday party and a houseful of guests and I’m in my element. I know that this kind of ruckus drives some people batty. Not me, I thrive on it. In fact, one of the dearest thoughts of heaven to me is the marriage supper of the Lamb. Sounds like a party. I can’t wait.

Through this book I’m inviting you to join me in a month’s worth of daily “celebrations.” These celebrations won’t center on temporal fetes like birthdays or national holidays or even the Mad Hatter’s “Un-birthday.” Instead, they’re all about Jesus Christ: his incarnation, sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, ascension, and ongoing reign as Lord of all there is. In other words, we’re going to be celebrating the gospel.

I’m assuming that right about now you might be wondering why you would need to celebrate the gospel every day. You might think you already know it; in fact, I’m pretty sure that most of you do. Most of you would be able to clearly articulate the facts of Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection. But this book isn’t about mere facts, although these facts are true and significant. This book is about how those facts are to inform, free, gladden, and enliven your soul every day—when you’re struggling to balance the checkbook, stuck in traffic or in a hospital bed, or just bored with the same-old-same-old. These facts

are so much more than mere facts, and yet, the longer we walk with God, the more likely we are to forget about them. Here's my perspective: nothing, and I mean *nothing*, is more important than Jesus Christ and the gospel, and this gospel is meant to be remembered and celebrated *every day*.

So, here's your invitation: join me for the next month, won't you? I'm praying that the Spirit will use our time together to comfort, transform, and encourage you as we revisit ancient realities and dust off the truths that once enflamed our hearts with first love.

(Oh, by the way, if you're not sure that you're a Christian, I've included a short summary of this really great news in Appendix 1. You can turn there now before you start reading, so that you'll understand what I mean when I talk about being a Christian. Thanks!)

Day 3

Presented in Splendor

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church
and gave himself up for her.*

EPHESIANS 5:25



Yesterday I told you that your heavenly Father has no wrath left for you. He doesn't have any wrath left because he poured out all of it on his Son. And just in case you think there is a possibility that you might careen into it again, let me remind you that wrath is the result of breaking the law, and the law no longer applies to you. You are no longer under obligation to try to obey the law as a way of earning favor with God, because every demand of the law has been satisfied in Jesus Christ. His frown has been replaced by a smile, by love, and by an eager anticipation of the day you wed his beloved Son.

In all the kind and loving ways that a devoted groom anticipates his wedding day, Jesus Christ is anticipating his. Here's how Paul describes the work Jesus has done in preparation for that celebration:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Eph. 5:25–27)

I know that the focus in this verse is usually on the command to husbands to love their wives, and it's not wrong to use it in that way.

But this verse is not primarily about our earthly husbands. It's about the self-sacrificing love that the Savior has for you, his bride. Listen to what he's done and how he thinks of you.

He determined to love you and so gave himself up for you. He fell as a sinner (though he was innocent) into the hands of the living God. Consider the power of the love that motivated him to intentionally plunge himself into a fiery furnace that burned with relentless wrath, bearing in a few short hours an infinity of hellish misery. He bore intense suffering in his body and soul so that he would be granted the right to have you, a redeemed sinner, for his bride. As the Apostles' Creed says, "He descended into hell." He gave himself up to hell so that you might be his delight in heaven, and he was faithful to accomplish his goal.

He has set you apart for his own pleasure, just the same way that an engaged man declares, "This woman is mine, and though we're not actually husband and wife yet, she belongs to me and I to her." But Jesus is not like a modern fiancé, waiting to see his bride in the gown she chose for the wedding day. No, Jesus has taken on the responsibility to dress you beautifully, too. It's his delight to dress you in garments that befit your calling as the bride of the Lord of lords. Here's how the prophet Isaiah describes this transformation:

He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isa. 61:10)

He has clothed you in a "robe of righteousness." He is the priest with a beautiful headdress, and you are the bride adorned with jewels—not just a pretty dress but a gown bejeweled with precious gems interwoven with golden thread. When he looks at you, he smiles with contentment and deep affection. He has cleansed you completely so that you are radiant, without any stain or shadow of guilt or impurity. Your wedding gown is just as it should be: glistening, white, pure.

Even though we may recognize these words as true, I know that it's still a temptation to give in to vain introspection—to examine our record, our accomplishments, our growth—comparing ourselves to others. *Her dress looks prettier than mine. She's always so kind and*

I'm so selfish. The Lord must love her more than he loves me. Then, when we focus too narrowly on our sin, we compound our guilt by hiding from Christ in shame. *I'm sure he's disappointed with me. I dare not come to him. I just hope he doesn't notice how defiled I am.* We're like a bride who insanely shreds her gown because she thinks that other brides are more beautiful and then hides in a corner, ashamed, self-condemning, wretched. All she sees is her shame. She doesn't notice that her dress remains as it always was: beautiful, whole, clean. *But I did that again! But I was selfish and angry!*" is the refrain that resounds in our hearts. This refrain needs to be replaced by a proclamation: Christ has given himself up for our disgrace. His blood has washed away all our impurity. He has completely cleansed us so that we're without spot, wrinkle, or blemish of any kind. No stain, no disgrace, no defect. All our shame is gone, and he declares us to be holy. But that's not all.

He has presented you to himself "in splendor." This is what he thinks when he looks upon his bride: *Isn't she magnificent! She's gorgeous, glorious, noble, honorable.* Think in terms of Princess Diana on her wedding day and then let your imagination soar. That gown, that honor, that glory. That's how he sees you. *Ah, this is my beloved bride. Isn't she beautiful?* he thinks. Are you able to see his adoring smile?

As you face this day and all of the disappointments, failures, and vicissitudes of living life here in this defiled world, think: *He won't fail to present me to himself "in splendor" because it has, in fact, already been accomplished. I feel inadequate, dirty, ashamed. He sees me as being honorable, glorious, noble, magnificently beautiful; filled with splendor through and through because of what he's done.* And remember this: you're not beautiful just because you have been allowed to play dress-up with some other beautiful bride's wardrobe; no, he's made *you* holy—spirit, soul, and body. *Presented in splendor? Me?* Yes, "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thess. 5:23–24). We're not playing dress-up. This is who we really are. You might pray:

Father,

Cause me to have faith to believe that you can accomplish even this. Help me to think of myself as a beautiful bride, not as an embarrassment or dis-

grace to you. As I have opportunities to serve you today, help me remember what you've made me to be. In your love you've completely cleansed me and adorned me with jewels and clothed me in a gown woven with threads from your righteous life. Cause me to celebrate the splendor you've bestowed on me today and let me rest in the healing beams of radiant love emanating from your smile.

AMEN