

# Buckets of Love

by Kevin Ophoff

One night, not long ago, I had a dream. In my dream I saw a table. It was the coffee table from the youth garage. The table was situated in a big, black, kiddie pool. You know the kind: about a foot deep, but this one was bigger around than I could see. On this table were lots of different sized buckets. Some were big, some were the size of ice buckets, and some were as small as thimbles. Each bucket had a person's name on it. They were filled with various amounts of water. The two biggest buckets, about ten gallons each, had my wife and son's names on them. A third big bucket was tipped over, its water spilled into the pool. This was my daughter's bucket. She was killed in the winter of 2000 in a snowmobile accident. I awoke with a start, but unlike most weird dreams, the memory of this one didn't fade away.

As I frequently do when awakened at night I began to pray. These prayers are usually just listening prayers because I assume God has awakened me for some reason. This time the meaning of the imagery of the dream became crystal clear. The coffee table was my heart. The buckets were places in my heart that I had set aside for each person in my life. The water in the buckets was the love I had received from them. People could fill these buckets in my different ways: a lunch out; a dinner given during a time of sickness; a warm greeting. My wife's bucket would fill if I just saw her smile. My son's bucket would fill just by thinking about him. The thimbles were the hundreds of cards and kindnesses we had received in the days following Catherine's death. If someone's bucket was too small the bucket would enlarge to contain every drop of love sent.

There was a gaping emptiness in the space where Catherine's bucket had been. I knew that place. It hurt to go there, such desolation in a place where there had been so much love. As I studied the table I noticed there were about twenty little buckets beginning to occupy this space. They didn't fill the space, to be sure, but they were the first ones that I had ever let occupy this space. These buckets had the names of the kids in my Sunday School class on them. They filled a little each Sunday during class. I also filled them a little each time I thought about them and prayed for them.

One unique bucket on the table had a faucet with its supply pipe running down into the pool. The faucet was always on and the bucket frequently overflowed. I remembered that when I received this bucket a pitcher appeared in my hand. It flowed with "living-water." With the pitcher I was able to dip into the Jesus bucket and fill the buckets on the other tables, in other people's hearts. The big pool, I realized, was God. Our hearts were in His heart. Jesus was in our hearts: "I in them and you in me...". God had caught and saved all the love that had spilled from Catherine's bucket. I realized I would get it back later.

The following Sunday I tried to teach a Bible lesson to a bunch of very unruly junior high students. They were so sugared up from the snacks that there was no way I could get them to pay attention. I put the lesson sheets away and asked if they would like to hear about my dream. As I spoke they settled down and began listening intently.

The kids were especially pleased to find out that their buckets were beginning to occupy the space that Catherine's loss had left in my heart. We talked about how sometimes teens put buckets in their hearts inappropriately, like when they have a crush on someone. We carve out a big place in our hearts where we want a certain person's bucket to be, but the bucket remains dry as dust with unreturned affection. I could tell by their faces that they were being struck with deep understanding.

Then we talked about the pitcher I mentioned earlier. In many past lessons we had talked about how having the Holy Spirit in our hearts made us capable of being “other-centered”, that we were no longer self-centered, and that we could now love others as we loved ourselves. We discussed if it were possible to have an authentic “Jesus” bucket without having a pitcher too. We decided that some preachers gave people counterfeit faiths when they teach about that the Bible says faith in Jesus should bring you what you want to have a good life, like healing from sickness and prosperity. We decided that if you did not have a pitcher and weren’t busy bringing Jesus’ love to others that you had a false faith. If your faith in Jesus was all about you it was wrong.

Wow. That turned into a great lesson time. Even the more astonishing however, was the following weeks class. Another volunteer was teaching the lesson and referred back to my dream. The kids quickly parroted back all of the imagery and what we had discussed. I was astounded that they had remembered it at all let alone in such detail. Even when they don’t seem like they are, kids are paying attention.

Copyright: Coconut Mountain Communications, 2007