

The place took my breath away even though I was only seventeen years old. The level of detail and decoration in the Castle Neuschwanstein in south eastern Germany was amazing. Gold leaf everywhere, in lay floors that looked more like artwork than something to walk on, and beautiful paint schemes that again were more art than wall. Its size was fitting for a castle. No expense was spared in the lavish details that made it truly a spectacular place.

Many of you probably have seen a place like that. A place you can remember for its “no expense spared” look. A place where everything is fancy and you can see it. It may not have been a castle in Europe but maybe a mansion you toured or a hotel you stayed at. Somewhere the design was so over the top that you couldn’t help but have your breath taken away.

Has God ever taken your breath away? A time in your life when God just did something so lavish you stopped and took notice. A time when God went over the top to get your attention or to show you just how much you meant to him. Are there times when maybe you think God won’t spare every expense for you or won’t be lavish towards you? Looking into the second lesson for today we see the lavishness of God towards us in Christ’s love...

Don’t lose the wonders of Christ’s love
The wonder of our identity
We are the window to the world

You have a lot of titles that describe you; husband or wife, parent or child, employer or employee. You’re a teacher, engineer, secretary, nurse, student, or a former one of any of those. These titles identify us in some way. They seem to be part of who we are. We go back to them for comfort when the world throws us into confusion. We get direction for our future from them.

But these titles do very little to give us significance in this world. We’re still not the richest, or the most powerful, or the most popular person in the world. We still struggle with loneliness, depression, and isolation. We worry about why someone has more than we do. We worry about keeping what we have. We worry that all too quickly someone else will come along and take what we’ve worked hard to achieve. A title does little to help. Our accomplishments, looks, or possessions offer us nothing in terms of identity.

There’s one title we’ve left off, one title that does give us significance. The apostle John reminds us of who we are. **“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”** How great that connection. It’s a special connection between God and us. So special that God knows your name. We’re family to him, connected to his identity which gives us identity. Like a wife taking the name of her husband. Everything that name brings to mind is now applied to her. Everything the name of God brings to mind is applied to us. The only way to have this identity is to actually be children of God. It’s hard to believe, but **“that is what we are!”**

Here in Oklahoma we know all about the damage that nature can do. Some people are so extremely afraid they move to other locations just to get away. All too quickly they find where they moved has bad weather too. The damage of nature, really the creation all around us, speaks to how powerful God is. Because that’s true, people become afraid of God. Is he an angry judge who’s going to throw fire down on us? Is he just waiting to get revenge? The world can’t really know because he’s hidden and distant. The world wants to know more, they want facts, and they want to reason things out. They want to understand how God works. That might be what we want too. What we really need to know is that we’ve offended him by our sin. We’re not perfect as he expects us to be. Our relationship with him was built on hatred, angry, arrogance, selfishness, and unfaithfulness.

One night I was driving home from a friend’s house late at night in the middle of winter. I drove through one of the new snow drifts across a street close to home. Never drive through the snow drift. I ended up in the front yard of someone’s home. I tried and tried to get myself unstuck but couldn’t. The only thing running through my mind was how I was going to have to wake my dad, get him out of bed, and have him help me. Would he have come? Of course. Would I have heard about it the next morning? Of course. But my dad would have come. That’s what dads do. They help out when you’re in a tough spot. Incidentally, I did get unstuck and didn’t have to get him to help.

God’s love for us is even greater. He wants to be called our Father. Not some cold distant God who doesn’t care. He’s a close God who wants to be active in our lives. How can we have this relationship with him? It’s only possible by knowing Christ. Christ gives us identity. Christ’s love makes us significant in God’s eyes no matter who we are. Christ’s love allows us to know the wonders of God. Christ’s love allows us to be called the children of God. Christ’s love set out on the rescue plan to bring us back from our separation from God. He rescued us and then sent the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts. He drew us to faith and now deepens that faith in the gospel.

You are one of 6.8 billion people on earth. Here in this country you are one out of 309 million. That’s an ocean of people and you’re just one tiny little speck. We can quickly feel lost and not special. In an effort to be accepted and with the group we might sink into the snow bank of people pleasing. The desire to be like others instead of standing up for our Christian faith is strong. We fall into the pit of laziness letting others do the work while we watch from the sidelines. Or we stand up to the world and the world laughs at us. We claim to be different from them yet so often we look like them. It gives the world ammunition to question our Christianity. We feel like failures. We don’t feel like God’s children.

One of 309 million is no problem. We have identity in Christ and it's real even if we can't see God face to face. We're his children and that will only become stronger for us the closer we get to him. One day it will be revealed. **"Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is."** The Last Day it will be fully known to us and to everyone else. On that day we will no longer be under Satan's temptation or our crosses. No more fighting death, fear, or tears. On that day we will know fully Christ's love for us. Our eyes will be opened to recognize the one who we talked to and the one who cared for us. He will be seen as the one who lavished his love on us. The glory of that day is hidden right now. But expect its arrival. Be confident our God who made this promise to us, and who sent his Son, will come through.

While you wait become a window to the world. Give people a peek at what God is like. It's an important task that we need to take seriously. Children of God mimic their Father. People should see in us the good deeds of the heavenly Father. This will lead them to bring glory to him as well. Because God loves the world we must love the world because we love God. Let that align your priorities to be set by Christ's love. Change the pattern of your life to match up with the heavenly Father's desire and will. Reorder your time across all phases of your life. Let Christ's love affect your calling.

Today many will take the time to remember their father. They'll thank him for providing. They'll give him gifts to show how much he means. They'll simply wonder at how he could remain cool even when they were acting terrible. While you remember your earthly father don't forget your heavenly one. Don't lose the wonder as his children. Don't lose the wonder of Christ's love that gave you your identity as a child of God. Don't lose the wonder as you show the world your Father and his son Jesus.