

APPROACHING GOD

Lisa Repko Borden

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*For Byron
and our children,
Jesse, Trevor, Colin and Heather,
who teach me every day how to
know and love God.*

*And for Haley,
because, when we were thirteen,
I promised.*



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Foreword

I think it was that gnarly old sage A. W. Tozer who said that the most important thing about any one of us is the very first thing that comes into our minds when we hear the word “God”. That being so, this exquisite little book leads us deeper into the most important discovery of our lives: a fuller, more familiar, encounter with God.

Whisper that three-letter word to Lisa Borden and she hears wonderful associations such as “friend”, “father”, “mother”, “healer”, “guide” and even “artist”. She approaches God with confidence and joy. What a contrast this is with so many of my friends, who tag God’s name with judgmentalism, male chauvinism, religious terrorism, boredom or, merely, tragically with irrelevance. In such a context the epiphanies of love celebrated in *Approaching God* are as radical as they are refreshing. Tozer understood that if we misunderstand God we will misunderstand everything else in life. For instance, if we consider God cruel and uncaring, our reflex reactions are likely to be fuelled by fear and a desire to control. Similarly, if we doubt God’s existence, we will probably be driven by an existential urge to accumulate selfish experiences in order to impose meaning upon the apparent absurdity and pointlessness of life. But if we allow the reality of God’s love – depicted so beautifully in this book – to seep osmotically into our subconscious, then we will

become increasingly kind, creative and prayerful.

No fewer than thirty-five times the psalmist says of God that “His love endures for ever”. The fourteenth-century anchorite nun Julian of Norwich, who endured her fair share of suffering, reflected on the implications of such unquenchable love and concluded simply that “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well”. At the heart of Lisa Borden’s message is an ancient certainty that God’s love is constantly bubbling up and breaking through in the very simplest stuff of life, even the darkness and pain. Since, as the apostle Paul writes, “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28), the greatest surprise in the long litany of tears that makes up human history will surely be (and I can imagine a heavenly drum-roll even as I dare to type the words) that *ultimately everything is going to be OK*.

I have the joy of knowing Lisa well, although I never knew just how beautifully she could write until now. She is my friend, and together we’re caught up in a global community of people seeking to live at the intersection of prayer, mission and justice. We have often laughed and talked together, and she really does live the stuff that she writes about in this book. She became a missionary (I bet she hates that word!) and kissed the American dream goodbye in order to raise her family on three separate continents. Her insights have therefore been enriched by many cultures, not least that of Tanzania, where she wrote this book,

and her faith has been tempered by faithfulness over many years. Lisa has come to reflect so many of the characteristics of God explored in this book (and she’ll *definitely* hate me saying this bit!): she’s a wise guide to many, a kind friend, a quiet healer, a good parent and, yes, as you’ll see, she’s an artist too.

Speaking of parents, I especially love Lisa’s chapter about God as Mother. This oft-forgotten biblical aspect of divinity is, I believe, an essential key to unlock the good news of the gospel for so many people who have been damaged, deserted or just plain disappointed by their human fathers.

Maybe it makes sense to conclude with a simple prayer of approach:

Lord Jesus, may we approach You through the thoughts and the words in this book. Open our eyes to read between the lines, that we may approach Your world with new grace. Open our ears to new vocabulary, that we may approach our neighbours with words that heal. And open our hearts to be surprised, relieved and changed by the old, old gospel of your love, that we may even approach ourselves with the message of salvation. Amen.

Pete Greig

Guildford, England

www.24-7prayer.com

without ceasing

*and this is how we pray
backs nestled into the hammock
faces turned toward the stars
the warm air lifts against us
and we are quiet, quiet
as you, God, speak to us
about how big you are*

*and this is how we pray
sitting on the leaf-strewn ground
peering across the pattern of sun and shade
to the clear pool under the giant fig
where the monitor lizard slips through the water
and we whisper our worshipful thanks
again and again*

*and this is how we pray
standing in the kitchen
speaking out the worries in our minds
telling this perfect parent God
just how small our faith feels
conscious of how sweetly ludicrous
our doubts must appear*

*and this is how we pray
curled into our duvets
safely tucked in on this wind-blown night
thoughts far from here
with our friends who sit in vigil
waiting for a precious life to pass
maybe even tonight*

*and this is how we pray
with longing
and with hope
with stress
and with joy
with daring
and with simple words*

God as Friend...



after you left

*stone-cold heart
hard-pressed
tomb-still*

*i stand here
knowing only
that they killed you
then stole my chance
to wrap you
in the sweetness
you deserve*

*a gardener's voice
breaks into the emptiness
i hear my answer
from across a thousand miles
of loneliness*

*mary
he says
mary*

*my dead heart
startles*

*and chokes
awake*

*this vacant place
that was my chest
rushes warmth*

mary

*a creator's power
invoking life
where there had been none*

mary

*and i knew you
i knew you*

*by the way
you said
my name*

