

Chapter 8



“Aunt Jo”

Romans 13: 9

“Love thy neighbor as thyself.”

In Psalm 136, the sentence, “His love endures forever,” is repeated 26 times; a strong indication of how deserving God is of our continuous praise for His endless love that never fails. To Mary, God's endless love was never more evident than when Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, offering a free gift of eternal life to all that would receive it. Additionally, in 2 Timothy 2: 13, God also promises to be faithful even when we are faithless, a covenant Mary strongly believes and trusts.

These Bible scriptures are so precious to Mary that every daily prayer from her lips includes the words, “Thy will be done.” Her recognition of God's promised faithfulness and covenant of loyal love have caused her to follow a clearly marked path in her daily walk on earth. How could she not reach for the hand, or follow in the footsteps of a Heavenly Father whose love would be hers for a lifetime and beyond? With the promises and examples from Jesus, how could she not love her neighbor as herself?

After all, God had heard the cry of a 3 year old orphan and provided a place of safety and love for her in Ella Thompkins' generous heart. Due to this warm harbor offered a little girl left desperate and alone, Mary will say today, “The love I was shown during my childhood and beyond was not mine for the “keepin, but mine for the givin.”

Thus, in preparation for the new name, “Aunt Jo,” Mary will tell you that she started hearing the voice of God, called the Holy Spirit, so clearly after she was married that it was immensely startling. Many times when driving her car, she found it necessary to pull to the side of the road, turn off the motor, and simply sit and listen. His voice would speak to her frequently, guiding her every footstep.

Her first remembrance of hearing His voice was at age 25, when she says she was just full of herself. Mary described it by saying, “I thought I was so cute, but was not cute at all. There is a good cute and a bad cute. I would party with friends, drinking and cursing right along with them as if I belonged there. But one day when I started to show anger to others, a strong voice appeared in my head saying, “They are people just like you. Forgive them!”

After that, Mary received guidance from God's voice, the Holy Spirit, everywhere she went; while sitting on a river bank, cooking in the kitchen, or during her dreams at night. Without her full recognition, Mary's relationship with God was becoming more intimate as each day passed. He was patiently and loving preparing her for a name change that would remain with her for many years; “Aunt Jo.”

Thus, it was through her success as owner of Pascall's Smokehouse that she would be given the opportunity of sharing her enormous love with others; especially children. As Mary cooked and pleased a huge base of satisfied customers, it would become clearer to her each day that the journey on this earth was not about self, but God The Father and his destiny for her life.

Successful Business Woman

As Pascall's Smokehouse became known for that delicious “COME BACK SAUCE” that Mary's “taste bud” created, the faces of new customers could be seen daily. Word of mouth was spreading the news like wildfire. In fact, it became necessary for Mary to increase her staff just to handle the steady flow of orders.

Since Grant had every confidence in “Madam Queen's” ability as a savvy business woman, he had decided to return to his long time position with Frisco Railroad. He was also astute in realizing that two strong personalities trying to call the shots would not be beneficial to the business.

Therefore, the little restaurant that opened with only two people soon was being staffed with additional employees. Not only did the increased staffing make things easier, but also gave Mary more flexibility with her schedule.

Consequently, it was due to this flexibility that Mary was able to spend valuable time with the customers; especially the children. Since children have an uncanny built in radar to access the human heart, they were drawn to the love that radiated from Mary like flies to sugar.

Also, given the fact that Pascall's Smokehouse was on their route from school, Mary would look up everyday to find happy eyes and sweet little faces desiring her attention. They would tenderly ask, "Aunt Jo, do you have a treat for us?" Thus, from that day forward, Mary's name became "Aunt Jo" to the children throughout the community. In addition, word soon spread that "Aunt Jo" had an endless supply of bubble gum, sweets, and laughter that were free for the asking to every child, regardless of skin color. Therefore, if they did not find "Aunt Jo" at the restaurant, they would knock on her door at home.

When "Aunt Jo" was at home, she always made it a point to be a friendly neighbor to everyone. Thus, the Browns that lived next door to her had children who were crazy about their "Aunt Jo," too. Their affection for each other was so great that one became her god child; a strong bond that has been passed down to each generation. Even today, the descendants of this family visit her at Christian Health Care and carry on the feeling of kinship.

"Aunt Jo's" Playground

When friends of the Brown children came to play in their yard, "Aunt Jo's" property automatically became their playground, as well. Also, many of the children were enrolled in child care at the Boys and Girls Club located directly across the street from "Aunt Jo's" home, which made stopping off at the Brown/Pascall backyard a fun and natural daily happening. All this activity made the two combined yards resemble the school playground at recess. As community members passed by, it was a common occurrence to see "Aunt Jo," along with her dogs and cats, right in the middle of the activity.

It all started when "Aunt Jo" look up and saw little children from the Boys and Girls Club standing on the sidewalk behind the fence watching all the activity in her yard. However, they did not have to remain on the outside looking in for long before receiving an invitation from Aunt Jo to join the fun.

Thus, it took only a short time before she was totally involved in their lives on a daily basis. As a result, each morning as the parents were dropping their children off before work, “Aunt Jo” could be seen out in the middle of the street directing traffic. She was not about to allow her precious children to be in danger of the passing cars. Also, many times, the children at Boys and Girls Club were the recipients of freshly baked treats that “Aunt Jo” delivered in person.

Over time, “Aunt Jo's” endless supply of patience and love penetrated deeply into the lives of the children and family members, as well. There was not a child that went unrecognized or unloved by this precious lady. Since not all the children received proper care from their parents, some would arrive hungry as well as unclean. However, it did not take long for “Aunt Jo” to come to their rescue. Rather than simply hold her nose and offer them food, they would not only leave with full bellies, but be bathed; wearing freshly washed and ironed clothing, as well.

All this volunteer work not only touched lives of many children and their parents, but also was valued highly by the staff. Therefore, as a result of the precious time given so freely, Mr. Calvin King and Mrs Kenyon, administrators at the Boys and Girls Club, showed their appreciation by organizing a special time of recognition called, “Josephine Pascall Day.” God's blessings of gratitude showered down freely on the life of His child that had distributed love, the greatest gift of the Spirit, in abundance to children in need.

In The Good Old Summer Time

Even though school was over and summer vacation had arrived, children were still being dropped off for child care at the Boys and Girls Club, which meant the continuation of fun at the Pascall home. When Mary shopped for groceries, she would always buy extra supplies for all her guests. Her friends have indicated that “Aunt Jo's” cupboards were not only full, but bulging with food for her children.

One incredible treat the children loved was the two freezers of homemade ice cream and a large sheet cake she always set up on the front porch. Everyday felt like a birthday party because of her delicious treat and lively spirit.

On other days, small groups of children were invited to an all night camp out in “Aunt Jo's” backyard. She would park her camper in front of her back door to be used as their tent. Then, to assure everyone behaved properly, she would sleep all night on the floor in the door way supervising all the giggles. All the children were very clear about “Aunt Jo's” rules and knew to obey them without question. Otherwise, there would be a full accounting in private with their friend, a meeting that would be conducted using tough love. When describing her method of discipline, she commented, “I made them mind, but I also made them laugh!” They understood that she fully intended them to show manners and use proper English at all times. Her goal was to help them develop the background necessary for functioning in society as respected and successful citizens.

Love And Patience Abounds

Once, her four year old niece, Treshna, needed to recite a poem for an Easter program. Although everyone felt she was too young to accomplish this task, “Aunt Jo” had the opposite opinion. Possessing great determination, she sat her niece in the middle of the kitchen table and worked tirelessly on the memorization of the poem. Later, when the audience heard Treshna's sweet little voice recite the poem perfectly and with great flair, their hearts turned to mush. Furthermore, as she concluded with a very proper curtsy, the listeners broke into deafening applause. It was through “Aunt Jo's” faith , love and encouragement that a miracle took place in that four year old child's life as she remembered all her lines and gave a flawless recitation.

Today, at age thirty, Treshna will tell you that she was always under “Aunt Jo's” feet; an act which formed the Christian principles she draws upon today as an adult and mother. In fact, those around Treshna describe her personality as being identical to that of “Aunt Jo”; a fact she holds close to her heart. Consequently, like “Aunt Jo”, she has already been assigned the name, “Mrs. T” by children in the neighborhood. While recognizing it as a compliment, she also is fully cognizant of the enormous responsibility that comes along with receiving this torch of love.”

Musical Notes Of Love

There appeared to be no limit as to the length and depth of “Aunt Jo's” love that was extended to the children in her community. When she spotted an opportunity

to touch the life of a child, her mind became creative and the reach of her hand tender and warm. One example of this extension of her love was demonstrated through her ability to play the piano. All the years of piano lessons her mother, Ella, had provided for her daughter were used for the glory of God, as well. Not only did “Aunt Jo” enjoy playing the piano at home as a way of relaxing, but offered to give music lessons to several children in the community totally free of charge. She would spend countless hours sitting beside little children that were interested in learning to play the piano and instruct them patiently. Her little students were then invited to return to her home and practice their lessons at anytime. Later, when “Aunt Jo” purchased an organ, the opportunity to learn this musical instrument was extended as well.

Holiday Time Arrives

Since God's love continuously poured out of “Aunt Jo's” heart like fresh sparkling water from an underground spring, holiday time was no exception. She never had to deck the halls or listen to the music of the season to get into the spirit because God's love was a never ending spring that flowed from her heart and penetrated deeply into the souls of young and old alike. Therefore, it was well known that no reservations were necessary at “Aunt Jo's” house. There was always a place set for one and all at her table at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter.

No matter the holiday, young and old alike knew that “Aunt Jo's” home would have tables placed all over the house, set and just waiting for the arrival of her welcomed guests. The aroma of fried chicken, potatoes, gravy, greens, hot rolls, cranberry jelly and golden brown fruit pies would be wafting in the air as friends came down the street to “Aunt Jo's” house. Therefore, the Pascall home was always the liveliest spot in the community because of the joy and grand celebration that would be in full swing most of the day. It is also important to note that her soul mate, Grant, took a very active role in her mission when returning home from his work at Frisco Railroad; support that was recognized and cherished. Many members of the community compared the celebrations to the loaves and fish in the Bible. This precious lady had the ability to keep the hot delicious food with an enormous spoonful of God's love flowing, without danger of ever running out! “Love thy neighbor as thyself” was a scripture that Mary was reflecting through her remarkable generosity of spirit.

Thread Of Love Continues

Year after year, “Aunt Jo” fulfilled God's destiny for her life by touching the lives of great numbers of children throughout the community. Although she never had children naturally, her wonderful spirit of “givin and lovin” was constant to one and all. Since she was taught to be color blind to race, her home and business were like a melting pot of personalities. When people who knew “Aunt Jo” the best are asked to give an estimate of the children whose lives she touched, the response is always the same. They just shake their heads and shout, “Hundreds!”

Today, the walls of her room at the nursing home are adorned with hundreds of photographs depicting faces of her precious children. The depth of her love penetrated so deeply within the hearts of those children frequenting her yard that even their family members, several generations removed, have been introduced to “Aunt Jo.” It is a very common occurrence to witness a steady stream of guests walking down the halls of Christian Health Care searching for their “Aunt Jo's” room. Instead of possessing the small stature of a child, they now are adults with graying hair, in search of their best friend; still desirous of being in her presence where the radiance of love continues to brightly shine.

When speaking with anyone about the impact she had on the lives of others, her reaction is so humble it is startling. She does not see her accomplishments as being much at all. She will look puzzled as to why her behavior appeared to be unique.

Once when she spoke to the writer about this fact, she said, “Honey, I didn't do anything special. I was always satisfied, no matter the circumstances and wanted to share all I had been given with others. God has richly blessed me all my life. If I was in a drought, there was always living water to drink. If I was sweating from the heat of life's challenges, He brought a cool breeze to my soul. If I was hungry, His manna from heaven gave my spirit energizing nourishment. All is well with my soul. His will be done.”

“Aunt Jo” will tell you the still small voice that has been her constant companion is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Once she recognized God had a destiny for her life and was eager to use her in His work, there was not a moment without His mighty presence. God was just waiting for her to recognize the love she was shown as an orphan throughout her childhood was not hers for the “keepin” but

for the “givin”; a lesson she learned well.

After this lesson was learned, the floodgates of heaven were opened and a rush of His mighty love penetrated every part of her being. After feeling this rush, her cup was always full to overflowing with the greatest gift of all; His love. Mary Josephine Pascall, known as “Aunt Jo,” then experienced God's supernatural activity that ignited her life with purpose.

Endless Flow Of Love Continues

As the seasons of “Aunt Jo's” life continued in an almost synchronized rhythm, wondrous miracles abounded everywhere in the lives of her precious children. The everyday gestures of love that appeared so common place in the mind of God's obedient servant were becoming stepping stones toward a bright future for many of these little souls. With the changing of every season, the promise for a better tomorrow, replete with warmth, light and hope, filled the air all around Fremont Avenue.

The passing of time that felt like only a moment to “Aunt Jo” brought the departure of her special children as they launched their journeys down the pathways of life. One day, as she sat quietly in a time of reflection and prayer, remembering each child by name, the sound of tiny knocks at her front door interrupted these bitter sweet thoughts. Opening the door she heard, “Aunt Jo”, do you have a treat for us? Can we play in your yard?” In anticipation of the answer, their little faces had looks of eager radiance, while wearing enormous expectant smiles; a sweetness that always struck at the core of “Aunt Jo's” heart.

This was to be the pattern of “Aunt Jo's” life that continued day after day throughout the seasons of time. Children arrived and all too soon, took wings and flew to the far corners of the earth, possessing the foundation of skills necessary for building productive lives. Perhaps while in the process of seeking their fortunes, the gift of God's love experienced through “Aunt Jo's” touch would be passed on to others.

Is it too much to imagine the doors belonging to the departed children being opened to the sounds of little knocks all over God's vast universe? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Hallelujah! Praise God! His love endures forever!



A young Mary (right) with her charges.
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)



Children playing at Aunt Jo's home
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)



Treshna and her brother playing with Gigi.
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)



Treshna, the child helped with poem.
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)



Mary Josephine Pascall Day held at Boys and Girls Club across the street from her home.
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens, Mary's great niece)

