

# Living in the overflow of God's love

Love... believes all things

## Lesson 12

"By all rules, Skinner was a dead man." With these words Arthur Bressi begins his retelling of the day he found his best friend in a World War II Japanese concentration camp. The two were high-school buddies. They grew up together in Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania---playing ball, skipping school, double-dating. Arthur and Skinner were inseparable. It made sense, then, that when one joined the army, the other would as well. They rode the same troopship to the Philippines. That's where they were separated. Skinner was on [a rescue mission] when [they] fell to the Japanese in 1942. Arthur Bressi was captured a month later.

Through the prison grapevine, Arthur learned the whereabouts of his friend. Skinner was near death in a nearby camp. Arthur volunteered for work detail in the hope that his company might pass through the other camp. One day they did.

Arthur requested and was given five minutes to find and speak to his friend. He knew to go to the sick side of the camp. It was divided into two sections --one for those expected to recover, the other for those given no hope. Those expected to die lived in a barracks called "zero ward." That's where Arthur found Skinner. He called his name, and out of the barracks walked the seventy-nine-pound shadow of the friend he had once known-- as he writes:

*I stood at the wire fence of the Japanese prisoner-of-war camp on Luzon and watched my childhood buddy, caked in filth and racked with the pain of multiple diseases, totter toward me. He was dead; only his boisterous spirit hadn't left his body. I wanted to look away, but couldn't. His blue eyes, watery and dulled, locked on me and wouldn't let go. [Barbara Bressi-Donahue, "Friends of the Ring," Reader's Digest, June 1999, 154.]*

Malaria. Amebic dysentery. Pellagra. Scurvy. Beriberi. Skinner's body was a dormitory for tropical diseases. He couldn't eat. He couldn't drink. He was nearly gone.

Arthur didn't know what to do or say. His five minutes were nearly up. He began to finger the heavy knot of the handkerchief tied around his neck. In it was his high-school class ring. At the risk of punishment, he'd smuggled the ring into camp. Knowing the imminence of disease and the scarcity of treatment, he had been saving it to barter for medicine or food for himself. But one look at Skinner, and he knew he couldn't save it any longer.

As he told his friend good-bye, he slipped the ring through the fence into Skinner's frail hand and told him to "wheel and deal" with it. Skinner objected, but Arthur insisted. He turned and left, not knowing if he would ever see his friend alive again.

What kind of love would do something like that? It's one thing to give a gift to the healthy. It's one thing to share a treasure with the strong. But to give your best to the weak, to entrust your treasure to the dying---that's saying something...

**It says: "I believe in you," • "Don't despair" • "Don't give up"**

**No wonder Paul included this phrase in his definition of love. "[Love] believes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7 NASB).**

**Do you know anyone who's standing on Skinner's side of the fence?**

- If your child is having trouble in school

- Spouse struggles with depression
  - Or your spouse has been laid off
  - If you have a friend with cancer
  - If the class mocks your classmate
  - If your son doesn't make the squad
  - If you know anyone who is afraid or has failed
- then you know someone who needs a ring of belief.

Love says that I'm not going to define you by your flaws. Love says I'm going to define you by the potential you have to be the person God wants you to be. **1 Cor. 13:7- Love believes all things!**

Job finds himself in the middle of this test between God and Satan, which he has no idea he's in. In the middle of this test Job loses his family, his wealth and ultimately his health. Then his friends come on the scene. Do his friends believe all things? No!

They come and say Job... what have you done?! It's obvious to us that you are some kind of wicked guy... look at all the bad stuff happening to you. Our only conclusion is that you must be a bad guy.

**Listen, love doesn't do that!  
Love does not go through life cynical and suspicious.**

**The Moffat translation: "Love is always eager to believe the best"**

Someone might say... yeah that sounds good but it's a little on the naive side of things. I mean you can't go through life just believing the best about people. Some people are pretty bad out there and you need to be careful.

Let me ask a question- was Jesus naive? Look at some of the guys he chose to be his disciples... was this naive?

- Peter- hot tempered (hoof in mouth disease)
- James & John were bigots!
- Matthew had his share of shady dealings as a tax collector

Jesus saw something different in them then they could see in themselves. Jesus believed in them.

Bill Howell- back in 1990 approached me at camp one day and said... you need to be in ministry using the gifts God has given you... Bill believed in me and saw in me the potential of things I couldn't even see in myself.

Believing the best about people is one way to bring the best out of someone.

Is it possible to get the short end of the stick in believing the best in other people? Yes! But if you're going to make a mistake when you are judging someone's character, than make your mistake on the side of love and believe the best.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again... love hangs on! Love doesn't write you off!

Arthur had this kind of love for his friend. Skinner took the ring and buried it in the barracks floor. The next day he took the biggest risk of his life. He approached the “kindest” of the guards and passed him the ring through the fence. “*Takai?*” the guard asked. “Is it valuable?” Skinner assured him that it was. The soldier smiled and slipped the ring into his pocket and left. A couple of days later he walked past Skinner and let a packet drop at his feet. Sulf-a-nil-a-mide tablets. A day later he returned with limes to combat the scurvy. Then came a new pair of pants and some canned beef. Within three weeks Skinner was on his feet. Within three months he was taken to the healthy side of the sick camp. In time he was able to work. As far as Skinner knew, he was the only American ever to leave the zero ward alive.

All because of a ring. All because someone believed in him.

Now someone might be thinking... great story about a dying man and his good friend. But how do you believe in someone who's mistreated you in some way? How do you believe in a spouse who's running around or an employee who's ripping you off? Does love ignore all things? I don't think so.

**Listen--** This passage is not a call to naiveté or blindness.

**Don't miss it now--** This passage is a call for us to give to others what God has given us.

The scripture reading this morning highlights the story of the prodigal son. What is most moving is the scene in Lk. 15:20 “*But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*”

**The most moving part of this scene is:** The father never stopped looking for that boy. The father never stopped praying for that boy. The father never stopped **hoping** for that boy.

The problem is not that there are so many hopeless people in this world... the problem is that there are so many loveless people in the world.

Now you know that the story about the prodigal son is really about us right? **Luke 15:22- Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.**

**Did you see it?** Skinner is not the only person to be given a ring. You have one on your finger as well. Your heavenly Father placed it there.

**This story convinces me that God believes in you.**

- God hasn't turned away.
- God hasn't walked out on you.
  - He could have and perhaps most others would have. But he hasn't.
- God believes in you.

**This morning I wonder, could you take some of the belief that God has in you and share it with someone else? Could you believe in someone?**

There is such power in belief. **Robert Schuller** said, “I am not who I think I am. I am not who you think I am. I am who I think you think I am.”

Or the German poet Goethe, "Treat a man as he appears to be, and you make him worse. But treat a man as if he were what he potentially could be, and you make him what he should be."

Arthur gave Skinner much more than a ring; he gave him a proclamation, a judgment that said, "You are worth this much to me! Your life is worth saving. Your life is worth living." He believed in him and, as a result, gave Skinner the means and the courage to save himself.

This morning you and I have the privilege to do for others what Arthur did for Skinner and what God does for us.

Who is God showing you today that you need to love and believe in?

### Three ways to show people that we love and believe in them?

*Show up.* Letters are nice. Phone calls are special, but being there in the flesh sends a message.

- **Do you believe in your kids? Then show up!**
- **Do you believe in your friends? Then show up!**
- **You want to bring out the best in someone's life? Then show up!**

*Listen up.* You don't have to speak to encourage. James says (Ja. 1:19) "Be quick to listen and slow to speak." There is a time to speak. But there is also a time to be quiet.

*Speak up.* You have the power to change someone's life simply by the words that you speak. **"The tongue has the power of life and death-- Prov. 18:21.**

Paul urges you and me to be careful about our speech in **Ephesians 4:29- MSG** "Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift."

Church, love believes all things-

**Do not withhold encouragement from the discouraged.**

**Do not keep affirmation from the beaten down!**

**Speak words that make people stronger.**

**Believe in people as God has believed in you.**

Who knows...you may save someone's life.

Arthur did. His friend Skinner survived. Both men returned home to Mount Carmel. One day, soon after their arrival, Skinner came over for a visit. He had a gift with him. A small box. Arthur knew immediately what it was. It was an exact copy of the high-school ring. After a lame attempt at humor--"Don't lose that; it cost me eighteen dollars"---he gave his friend a warm smile and said, "That ring, Artie . . . it saved my life."<sup>6</sup>

May someone say the same to you.

May you say the same to God.

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