

Reflections on Our Daughter Ashley Frearson
By Paul E. Miller

Ashley was our family's Mother Teresa. When taking Ashley down to chemo, Jill was amazed to watch Ashley hand out homemade lunches to the homeless. Facebook is filled with descriptions of Ashley's hidden love. Ashley was imitating her Savior. The Bible frequently describes Jesus narrowing his love down to one person.

The person who taught Ashley compassion was her sister Kim. Kim would regularly crawl into bed with Ashley at night. Kim is why Ashley became a special education teacher. Kim's autism forced Ashley at an early age to deal with life's difficult questions. That came home to me poignantly at a family camping trip in 1990. As we were unpacking, I could see Ashley in front of our minivan, frustrated and tense. I asked her, *What's wrong?* She said, *I lost my contact.* The forest floor was covered with hundreds of crevices. I said, *Freeze. Let's pray,* but she burst into tears and said, *What good does it do? God doesn't answer my prayers for Kim to speak.* At age 14, she'd poured out her heart to God, but seemingly God hadn't heard. Her heart had shut down to God.

That same question was on Ashley's heart 28 years later when she and I were watching Jack play baseball in May. She was grappling with her cancer and the possibility of her passing. She told me, *Dad it doesn't make any sense. Why would God do this?* I told her Ashley, *I don't know what God is doing. It doesn't make any sense to me either.*

Last Saturday, when we had a few moments together, I reminded her of the contact story. In front of our mini-van, I had prayed with her, *God, help us find this contact.* Then I prayed quietly to myself as I bent down, *Lord, this would really be a good time to come through.* There on the forest floor, balancing on a leaf was her contact. I reminded Ashley that God works in stories that are just like the story of Jesus. Like Jesus we go through death and then resurrection. When you are in a death, you don't know how or when a resurrection will occur.

I reminded her how she had been an answer to her own prayer for Kim by taking Kim to speech computer camp where Kim learned to speak using her computer. God did answer Ashley's heart felt prayer for Kim. Kim speaks to us all. Resurrection came out of death. It just took time to see the story God was weaving.

I do know that God reveals himself in the wounds of his son Jesus. And now, we his followers reveal Jesus in the wounds that God permits in our lives. The beauty that all of us saw in Ashley emerged out of a strange wound that God permitted in our family. As Jesus told his disciples months before his death, "It is the seed that dies that bears much fruit." Ashley's chemo especially affected her hands and feet leaving them cracked, raw, and painful. I told her several years ago that she bore the wounds of Christ—only to discover that she'd already had that reflection.

Neither we nor Ashley know why God took her, but as you know, Ashley's faith was unshakeable that she was going to a better world. The question is, *Is that just a happy thought, disconnected from reality? Was she naïve?* There are many answers to that question, but I submit to you that her love was supernatural. Behind great love is great faith. Her love for Jesus compelled her into a life of love that stuns us all and points us to a God who is all love.