



# **OUT OF THE CROWD**



**David W. Jones**

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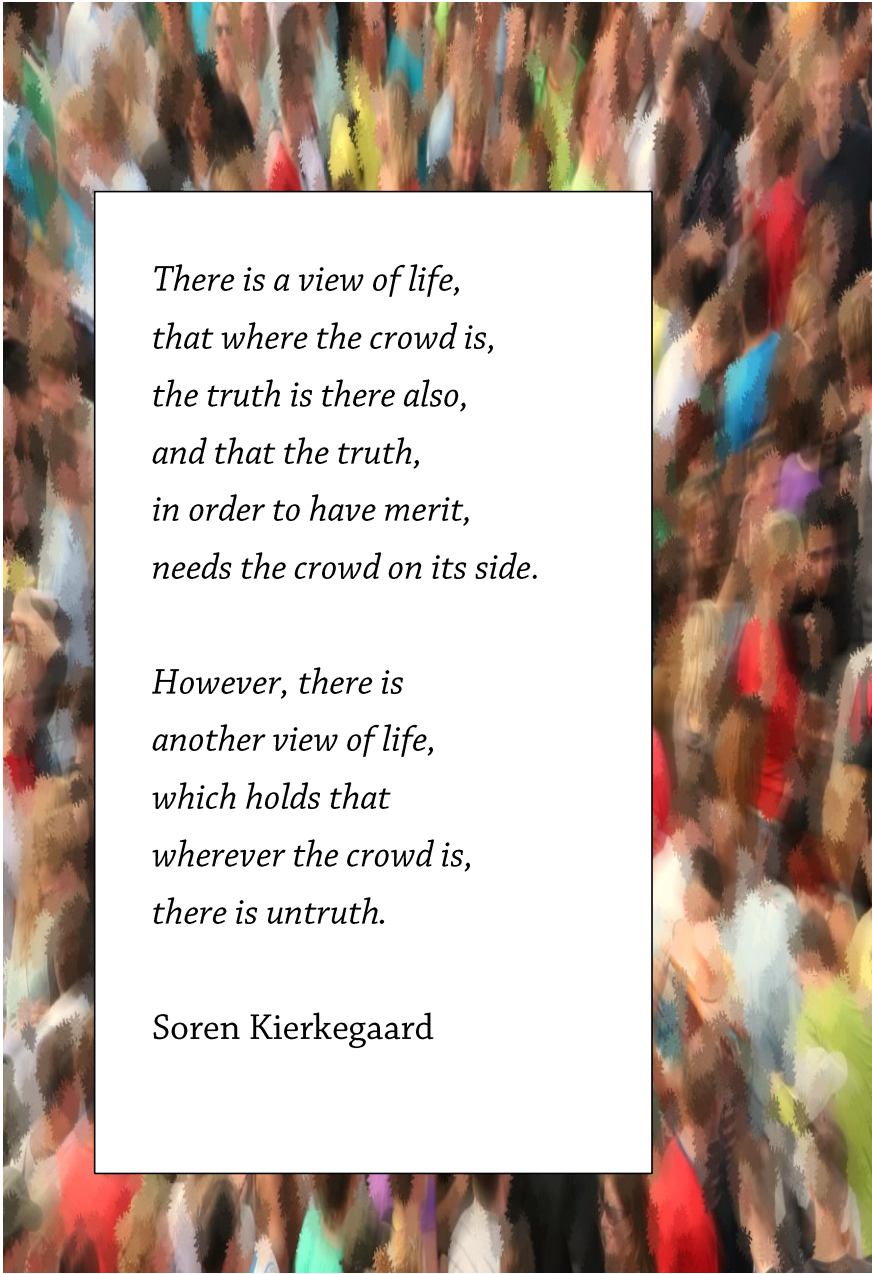
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*For Etta and Bob  
Carrie, Cayla, Abbie, and Nathan.*



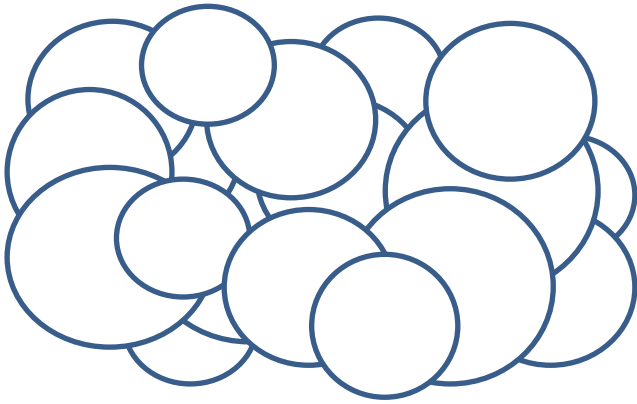
*There is a view of life,  
that where the crowd is,  
the truth is there also,  
and that the truth,  
in order to have merit,  
needs the crowd on its side.*

*However, there is  
another view of life,  
which holds that  
wherever the crowd is,  
there is untruth.*

Soren Kierkegaard

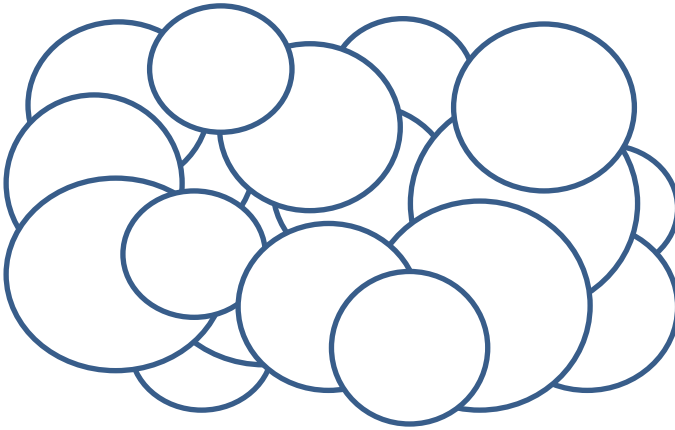
# Introduction

This is a crowd.



Look at it again.

Which circle in the crowd is you?

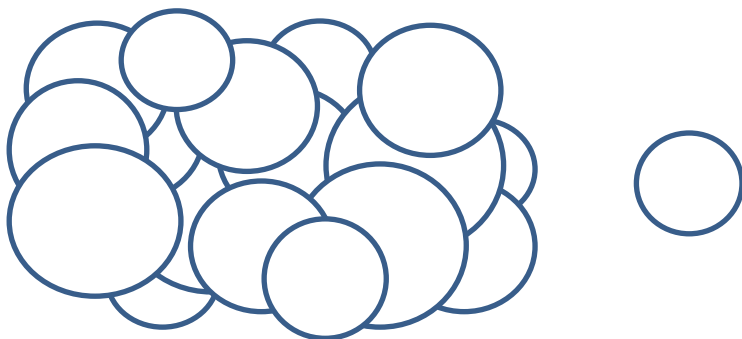


Can't find yourself?

Of course not. It's just a bunch of circles. None of them look like you. Even if you had a circle that was you, or represented you, because they are bunched together and look alike, you'd have a hard time picking your circle from the rest. That's the nature of a crowd. As an individual in a crowd, you blend in, you become indistinguishable from the group.

This book is about coming out of the crowd.

Coming out of the crowd looks something like this.



Seems simple enough.

Actually, it is quite hard. Crowds are everywhere and can potentially permeate all our groups. A crowd can be as large as a nation of millions or as small as you and one or two others. Your school can be a crowd; the people you work with can be a crowd; your neighborhood can be a crowd; your family can be a crowd; the family you left decades ago can be a crowd. Any group you're connected to can be a crowd. You may even have a crowd inside your head. The crowd is any group where the emotional lines of connection overlap like the image above.

Deciding to live differentiated from your crowds, to be a single one in relation to the numerous, to have an "I" in the midst of the many, will be both a challenge and a choice you have to make over and over again to come out of the crowd.

Separating from your crowds will take more than changing your address, your membership, or your mindset, and if you can differentiate yourself from your crowds, they may or may

not let you go without a struggle. Maybe they will. Maybe they will just send you on your merry way and not think of you again, filling your vacancy with someone else or just merging the group to cover whatever holes you leave. However, they may do more than notice, more than comment, more than express their displeasure; they may come after you. They may come after you physically or simply emotionally as they resist any effort you make to set yourself apart from the group. Though it likely will be very intense, it is actually not personal. It is just what crowds do.

Even though it is risky and may introduce you to pain in a way you have not felt before, and even though it may seem at the beginning like you are in an isolated desert of loneliness, it will all be worth it. For yourself, for those you care about, and for all the others who've lost themselves in the crowd, all the effort will be worthwhile.

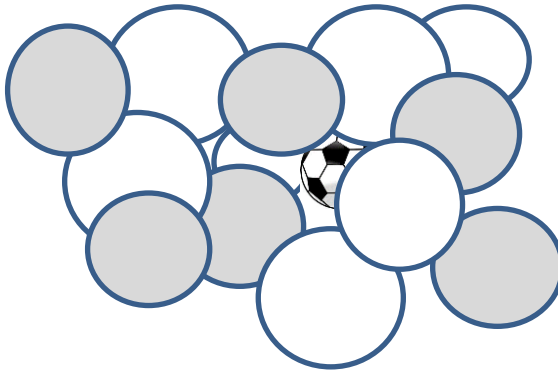


## A Simple Crowd

You and I are different. The people in your life are different from the people in my life. As I am different from you, so is each person in your life different from you, too. That's why they are called 'others.' It may seem odd to point that out, but crowds encourage the denial of our otherness. In a crowd we can forget just how particular each of us is.

Even though you and I are different from all others, crowds, however, are not so different. Philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and sociologists have talked about crowds for thousands of years. They have used different terms like: *collective*, *system*, *herd*, *mass*, *mob*, *enmeshed system*, *fused emotional group*, and *the world*. I'm going to use *crowd* as did the writers of The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as well as philosophers like Tacitus, Epicurus, and Kierkegaard, along with Sociologist Gustave LeBon, and Poet Ralph Waldo Emerson. Each of them had their crowds, as you have yours and I have mine. Though we live in different parts of the earth and different eras, the crowds that affected them had some of the same characteristics as our crowds, as all crowds, herds, mobs, and collectives do.

For an orientation, here is a simple, easily observable, well-known crowd. Can you recognize it by this image?

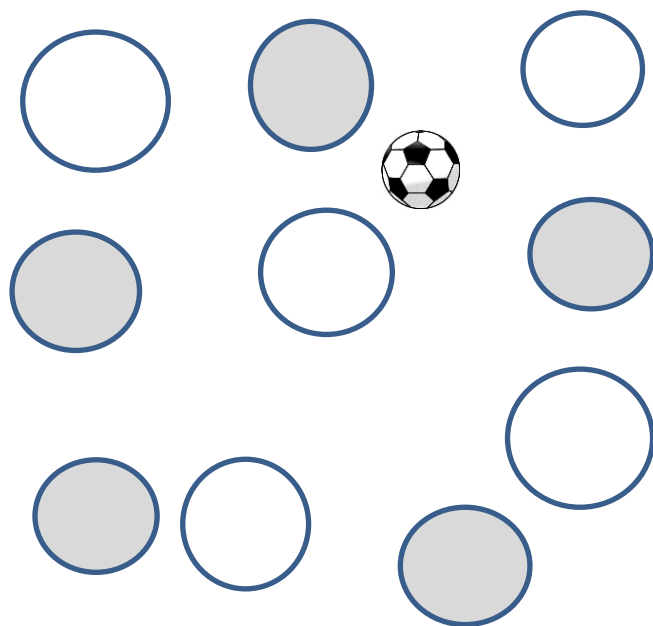


Know what it is?

I'll give you a hint, they gather regularly in streets, yards, and fields across the world. They can organize themselves or be in a community structured league. This crowd is a frenzied pair of five year old children's soccer teams (to use the U.S. term for the game).

Perhaps you are familiar with beginners playing soccer and their tendency to swarm around the ball, chasing it around the field, merging into an active, passionate, emotional herd. If not, I hope you can imagine it for those herds show many of the characteristics that crowds exhibit.

Here is another image. These two groups aren't crowds at all. These are older, more experienced, more mature players who have a better understanding of the game, how it is played, and their personal roles on their teams.



If you look at the two diagrams, you can see the difference between the five year olds in their herd and the mature players in their teams.

The most obvious difference between the two is spacing. The more mature players understand that space between them is important. Space between players in soccer is as important as space between musical notes in a song. If there is no space between notes in music, there is no distinguishable rhythm, tempo, or song, only a long blurry noise. In the younger, less mature groups, there is a lot of rampant activity, a lot of bumping, and kicking, but little soccer actually happens because they have not yet learned the importance of roles and spacing required in order to function as a team.

So, too, is it in your life. If you are going to live out your particular calling, your particular self, your particular identity, you need emotional, intellectual, and social space between your self and others. Without healthy spacing and clear

boundaries distinguishing you from others, your music, your song, your life, your role will be smothered, absorbed, blended into the greater group, the crowd.

Here is a helpful question you may have seen long ago.

*Why fit in when you were born to stand out?*

That question came from the wise soul of Dr. Seuss who also offered this advice,



*Today you are You,  
that is truer than true.  
There is no one alive who is  
Youer than You.*

Your friends, family, groups, clubs, congregations, nations, if they are healthy, will give you the space, the nurture, the encouragement to differentiate yourself, to grow, learn, mature, risk, reach, question, try. If they don't, if they encourage you to fit in at the expense of your soul, or lose the you that is you for the sake of the group, then they are just crowds.

Before we go on, think about your groups and consider the previous two images of the soccer teams I showed you. Do your relationships feel more like the reactive image of the young five-year-old players or the more mature response-able older players?

## Jesus and Crowds

Jesus didn't like crowds.

In the Gospel of Mark, the oldest of the New Testament gospels, Jesus was constantly on the move. Mark often wrote, "Immediately..." Jesus taught, healed, prayed, and then "immediately" left for some other destination. Why was he moving so often? The crowds.

If you map Jesus' travels, his journeying seems erratic, sometimes wandering from one place to another and back. Why did Jesus seldom choose direct routes? The crowds.

When Jesus healed someone, he consistently instructed, "Don't tell anyone." Or if proclaimed, "The Messiah," he instructed the spirits or people to keep quiet. Why keep his identity a secret? The crowds.

As Jesus travelled throughout Israel and the surrounding territories, the crowd seemed to have been chasing him, forming and reforming from the beginning, Mark 1,

*That evening, around sunset, when it was getting dark, people were bringing so many to him who were sick that the whole city was crowded outside the door.*

*In the morning, before sunrise, Jesus got up and went to an isolated place to be by himself and pray. When the crowd formed, looking for Jesus, Simon and the other disciples got nervous, so they went and found Jesus where he was praying.*

*"Everyone is searching for you," Simon told him.*

*"Let's go somewhere else, so that I may proclaim the gospel there, also. That is why I came." And they left.*

Jesus took time away from everyone, to be with God. While he was away, the crowd reformed and looked for him. Simon (later called Peter) and the other new disciples of Jesus got nervous. The crowd wanted to know where Jesus was, and they expected these new followers to produce him. The rookie disciples reacted to the desire and demand of the crowd while Jesus did not. Instead, Jesus moved on away from them.

Here is a brief summary of the progressing conflict Jesus had with the crowds in the book of Mark. In Mark 2, the crowd was so large it kept some from bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus. In Mark 4, the crowd was so large that Jesus had to get into a boat to give himself enough space to be seen and heard by the people on the shore. In Mark 5, the crowd “pressed” in on Jesus so much he had a hard time moving. In Mark 7, Jesus pulled people out of the crowds before healing them. In Mark 10, the crowd tried to prevent a blind man from being healed. In Mark 11, the crowd shouted praises as Jesus came into Jerusalem, but their adoration for him turned nasty by Mark 14 as the crowd came with Judas to arrest Jesus. In Mark 15, the intensity increased as Jesus was held before Pilate and the crowd shouted, “Crucify him!” Pilate was pressured by the crowd and turned Jesus over to be killed. The crowd jeered at Jesus as he died on the cross.

Sociologist Gustave LeBon described the power of the crowd over individuals, “An individual in a crowd is a grain of sand, which the wind stirs up at will.” Throughout the gospels, crowds blow through towns and cities like Nazareth and Jerusalem, through holy spaces like Synagogues and The Temple, through the power structures including political leaders like Herod and Pilate, and through the religious leaders like the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Crowds even transform Jesus’ family into a barrier he has to overcome.

Jesus faced every crowd, from the family circle to the malicious mob as the unwavering “I am.” In the gospels, no one stands in relationship to people in their often-storming crowds and maintains his or her individuality, integrity, and identity like Jesus. Jesus achieved “The Greatest Human Accomplishment” as described by Ralph Waldo Emerson,

*To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.*

Jesus didn’t like crowds, and after they got to know him for who he was, they rejected him as the unwavering “I” as Barbara Brown Taylor relates,

*Jesus died because he would not stop being who he was and who he was was very upsetting. He turned everything upside down. He allied himself with the wrong people and insulted the right ones. He disobeyed the law. He challenged the authorities who warned him to stop. The government officials warned him to stop. The religious leaders warned him to stop. And when he would not stop, they had him killed, because he would not stop being who he was.*

*At any point along the way, he could have avoided the cross... He could have stopped being who he was, but he did not. When the soldiers showed up in the garden to arrest him, he did not disappear into the dark. He stepped into the light of their torches and asked them whom they were looking for. “Jesus of Nazareth,” they answered him, and he said, “I am he.”*

Only those overly familiar with Jesus can ignore him or make him into an endorser and champion for our crowds

dressing him up in the costumes we've adorned for ourselves. To face one who stands out while we take our place in line and chase the latest fad stirs us in unsettling ways when we are comfortable being settled. If we can attend to his presence, to who he is and how he is, we can't help but feel afraid for he is like no other.

Far more frightening than a preacher by the river shouting hellfire and damnation is one who on a cross says, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing." Far more frightening than a teacher who knows all the answers before you can even ask the questions is a teacher who questions the answers you've centered your world upon. Far more frightening than a politician who seeks your money is one who says your greatest treasure has little lasting value. Far more frightening than a king who comes to take over a city on a warhorse leading soldiers in a parade is one who comes on a donkey preceded by children. Far more frightening than a general who calls for weapons is one who commands they be put away. More frightening than a warrior who cannot be killed is one who can die so easily – then will not stay dead!

We may try to cage him in a creed, an ideology, a worship format, a Sunday time slot, in history long ago, in a stone covered grave, or on a throne high above us in a heavenly realm, but he keeps coming to us repeatedly, daring us to do far more than believe, challenging us to become.

According to an ancient fable, we are like orphaned tiger cubs who have been adopted by goats. We live day to day, along with the herd. We learn the language of the goats, eat what they eat, run when they run, bleat loudly when they are upset. As far as we know, we are goats, yet, somehow we feel we are not near what we were created to become.





One day, a tiger comes out of the forest and the goats scatter, leaving us alone to fend for ourselves. We freeze, too frightened to run, certain we are about to die. We stare at the tiger. He roars. Our bodies shake. We tremble and bleat out for mercy hoping he will just go away.

The tiger speaks, and to our surprise, we understand him. He asks, "Why are you cubs acting like goats?"

Not one of us responds. Why wouldn't we act like goats?

The king tiger opens his mouth, but instead of devouring us, he grabs us by the scruff of our necks and carries us to the river. We look at our reflection and at him. Is he who we are? Is he who we might become?

Building off this image, Frederick Buechner wrote,

*(A) Christian is one who has seen the tiger. "In the juvenescence of the year," T. S. Eliot wrote, "comes Christ the Tiger," and it is a wonderful image because it cuts through so much rubbish. Not the soulful-eyed, sugar-sweet, brilliantined Christ of the terrible pictures that one can buy. But this explosion of a man, this explosion of Life itself into life.*

*We look at him. We glance up from our grazing for a moment, and there he stands, and suddenly we see what a tiger looks like, what a human being really looks like, and if we thought that our goathood was a problem before, our own half-baked, cockeyed humanity, we reach the point here, if we look hard, where the contrast becomes so painful that one or the other of us simply has to go. Either we crucify the tiger just to escape his terrible gaze, or we at least risk the crucifixion of our own goathood, which must go if it is to be replaced by tigerhood. In either case, our first cry when we see him is a cry of woe: if this is what it really is to be human, then what am I? If this is true life, then what is this that I am living?*

## A Better Love

We like crowds. We like the attention of crowds. We use the ability of drawing a crowd as a measure of success. Churches seek big crowds at worship. Singers want big crowds at concerts. Retailers hope for big crowds at their stores. For many, churches included, crowds are money. P.T. Barnum noted, “Every crowd has a silver lining.”



Jesus' vision was different, which is why Jesus did not set catering to crowds as his goal. Instead, he saw the mob and the mob mentality as a barrier. He had another way of measuring success, a different way of relating, one that is still foreign to us today. As Barbara Penwarden observed,

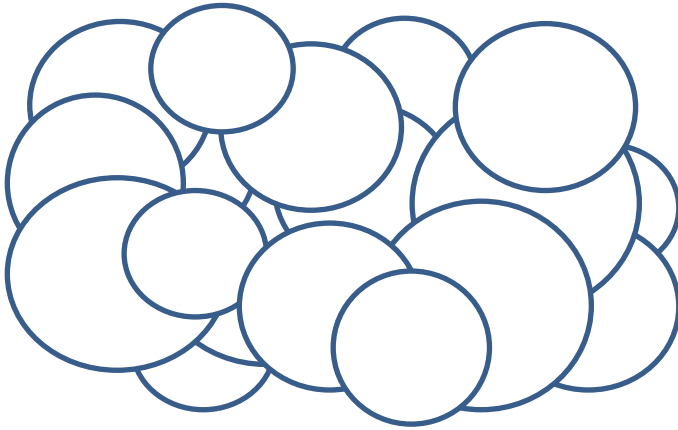
*Should a stable manger cradle  
the world's hopes in so fragile a form?*

*Should a maker of worlds become  
a carpenter's apprentice?*

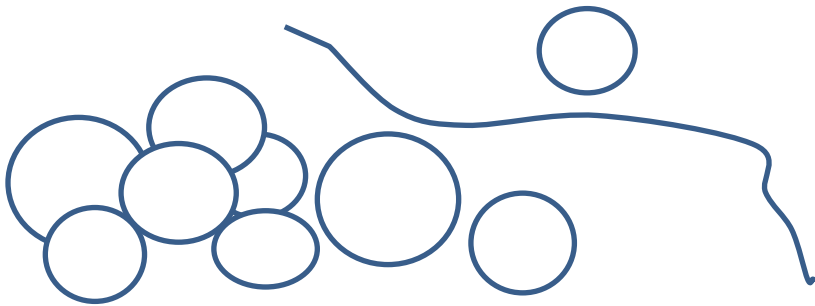
*Should a king become  
a servant to the least of society?*

*The humility of God Incarnate  
was no disguise of a majesty  
that was too great for us to bear,  
but rather the revelation of a majesty  
too unlike us to be recognized.*

So, just what was Jesus' way and what did it look like? It's easier to diagram what Jesus' way wasn't. It didn't look like this:



Nor did it look like this...



Look closely at the circle off to the right. Do you know who that is? He lived in Jesus' day, ate bugs and honey, dressed in a camel hair coat, and baptized by the Jordan River. Right, John the Baptist. (The squiggly line is the river.) John separated from the crowd by distancing himself. He lived apart from others out in the desert. People came to him, and John preached at them. John saw people as groups, and labeled

them, “Sinners,” or worse, “A Brood of Vipers.” John lived apart and developed a lifestyle that would keep people away, after all, who wants to live in the desert, wear camels’ hair, and eat locusts even if there is honey to go with them? That’s not coming out of the crowd. That’s just coming away from the crowd. Ralph Waldo Emerson described the difference,

*It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinions; it is easy in solitude to live after your own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.*

Jesus did not come out of the crowds by separating like John the Baptist. Jesus didn’t have to isolate from people to keep his integrity. Instead he lived as a mind awake in a typically mindless mass. He was in the world but not of the world, in the crowd but not consumed by it. Jesus didn’t even let John address him in a group but came to John as a person. While John branded groups, Jesus spoke to particular persons which leads us to the central characteristic of Jesus’ way in the world. While John labeled, Jesus loved, but with a different type of love than John or the crowds understood.

## **Two Forms of Love**

In the crowd and in Jesus we see two distinctly different forms of love. Both can be wonderful, joyful, and exciting. Both can also be puzzling, overwhelming, and painful. Both can give life meaning and can make any particular day a memorable day. However, one form of love will pull you into crowd after crowd, losing your soul hoping for validation and approval. The other, the one we see in Jesus, can set you free from your crowds and help you liberate others.

## Value Recognizing Love

Value recognizing love is a beautiful type of love. When we ‘fall in love,’ we are experiencing value recognizing love. We love what we see in another. This love marks, observes, notes, appreciates, and celebrates value. As the saying goes, “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.” This love appreciates what it beholds as worthwhile and valuable. To someone you love, you may say, “You are so beautiful.” “You are so strong.” “You are so smart.” In doing so, we show our appreciation for the person’s beauty, strength, and intelligence. We say words that all of us want to hear, “I find value in you!” “I love you because of who you are.” “I love being with you.” When it is mutual, the other person becomes a mirror for you to see yourself in a positive light. “I love you,” means, “I love the value I see in you”

Sports fans show value recognizing love. When a football team wins, people show up at the airport to welcome them home. “You are so amazing!” “You’re the greatest!” “We love you!” “Yeah!”



Winning feels great for players and fans alike. However, when the football team loses, and loses repeatedly, the fans don’t come. They don’t see value. No one shows up at the airport and says, “You are so average!” “You are actually less than par!” “We love you!” When a team loses, there is no love because there is no achievement therefore no value to be recognized. In value recognizing love, perceived value leads to appreciation while

lack of value produces no appreciation. No value = no feelings or bad feelings.

Lives lived in search of value recognizing love alone are tragic. Elizabeth KublerRoss summed up life lived under value recognizing love,

*Most of us have been raised as prostitutes. I will love you "if." And this word "if" has ruined or destroyed more lives than anything else on this planet earth. It prostitutes us; it makes us feel that we can buy love with good behavior, or good grades.*

Regardless of our crowd, in a value recognizing approach to love we hope that through enough fame, fortune, achievement, success, or just all around being 'good', some group will affirm, appreciate, and love us as valuable. But no crowd will. Crowds are incapable. Crowds do not see individuals apart from the roles they play in the group. They see only images, pseudo representations of persons. They cannot value what they cannot perceive. As a result, value-recognizing love will always be ultimately disappointing. Fortunately, there is another type of love, a love the crowd does not comprehend.

## Value Giving Love

William Sloan Coffin attributed God's love as a value giving love,

*Of God's love we can say two things: it is poured out universally for everyone from the Pope to the loneliest wino on the planet; and secondly, God's love doesn't seek value, it creates value. It is not because we have value that we are loved, but because we are loved that we have value. Our value is a gift, not an achievement.*



Value giving love doesn't recognize value, it gives value. It doesn't require; it offers. It doesn't demand; it empowers. Value giving love is the type of love Jesus saw from God and tried to show and teach to others.

In 1615, Galileo Galilei offered the church a gift which the church refused to open. Galileo used a telescope to explore the theory of Copernicus that the earth wasn't the center of the universe but instead rotated around the sun. The church told him to hush and stop promoting such blasphemous ideas. They told all others to abandon his teachings. The religious leaders feared, if the earth wasn't the center of the universe, then how could God love people?





Their question was asked by the author of Psalm 8 a thousand years earlier in a prayer,

*Gazing at the skies, the works of your hands,  
the moon and the stars with all you've created  
I wonder, "Who are we that you are mindful of us?  
Mortals that You care for us at all?"*

Perhaps a little more attention to Galileo could have helped the church lighten up and not take itself so seriously and then the rest of us might do the same. It certainly may have helped John the Baptist and other value recognizing lovers. Before John encountered Jesus, he preached about his coming this way in Matthew 3,

*"There is someone coming after me who is far superior to me. I am not even worthy to serve as his servant carrying his sandals. While I baptize you with water for repentance, he will baptize you with fire and the Holy Spirit. He will judge us all as worthy or unworthy, separating us as at harvest, taking the wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will throw into the fire!"*

Then when Jesus' arrived at the River Jordan and wanted John to baptize him, John refused.

*I'm not worthy to baptize you. You should baptize me.*

John thought of people in terms of a rising scale based on worthiness. At the top was Jesus, and then downward to include everyone else at the bottom. In John's hierarchy, because of who Jesus' was, John didn't see himself as worthy to carry his dirty, desert dusty sandals.

Value recognizing love requires some sort of recognizable worth to be love worthy. For you to be valuable, some peopled universe must revolve around you for you prove your specialness.

For Jesus, it wasn't a question of whether or not he was worthier than John or some were worthier than others, personal worth or value were irrelevant in the love that he was bringing. Value recognizing love centers on the loved. Value giving love centers on the lover. If God is mindful of humanity at all, it has little to do with who we are, and much more to do with who and how God is.

Jesus was able to be so wonderfully human because he had nothing to prove. He didn't need John's reference on his resume'. He didn't need certification from The Temple or citizen ship from Rome. God was his resume, certifier, and validator, from the beginning. He was beloved, so he could go into the world loved, loveable, and loving, free from having to justify his value. After his baptism, Jesus went into the desert where the devil challenged him, "If you are God's child," or, "If you are beloved, then prove it." Jesus refused. Apparently, he had better things to do than try to convince the devil or anyone else of anything.



Jesus taught in Matthew 7,

*Don't judge or you'll just judge yourself.*

When we rate others on worthiness, we only show the scale that we ourselves live under. When we judge others on their value, we show that we only understand a love that recognizes value. For Jesus, worthiness was irrelevant. If God only loves based on a scale of belief, righteousness, or purity, then how is God different from the rest of us? If God is just a supreme rater of value, who cannot love without first recognizing some distinguishing specialness in a group of people based on birth, belief, or ability, then how is God different? If God loves with a value recognizing love, then not only is the life and teaching of Jesus not Good News, it is not even news at all for it is far from new.

Fortunately, Jesus was not only Galilean, he was Galilean. You nor I have to be the center of any universe for God to love us. God loves like the sun shines as described in this poem by Hafiz,

*Even after all this time  
the sun never says to the earth,  
"You owe me."*

*Look what happens  
with a love like that.  
It lights the whole sky.*



Not everybody believes in God, in love, or even the sun, I suppose. I don't want to convince you otherwise, but Jesus pointed to the warmth of a different center of our personal

universes than one which had to rotate around him or any of us. Consider these two parables from Jesus' teachings collected in the gospel of Matthew chapter 13,

*Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like this. There was a treasure hidden in a field which someone discovered and hid, until he could go and sell everything he had and come back to purchase the whole field.*

*"The kingdom of heaven is also like a merchant who searched tirelessly for fine pearls, and finding one of great value, he sold all he had and bought it."*

A common approach to interpreting the Bible is to assume you are the primary character then your challenge is to find the hidden kingdom of heaven, the true treasure, and then sell all you have for



it. With this interpretation, you set yourself apart as one who seeks value, finds value, and buys it acquiring the Kingdom of God. Since God is usually the primary character in Jesus' parables, perhaps a better interpretation is seeing God as the one who finds the hidden treasure, the one who uncovers the hidden pearl, and that is you. You are the treasure, lost in the earth, in the crowd of the sea, and at great cost, God seeks to pull you out of the crowd.

I cannot offer you value giving love in a book; I can only point to it. I believe that only God has the power and the maturity to give it to us consistently which is why Jesus constantly took time away from his family, his followers, and especially crowds to pray and reorient himself to the higher

love he perceived from God. That's not just Jesus' story. It is your story. God has called you, "Beloved." The crowd will tell you otherwise, claiming to speak for God, claiming the ability to offer a valuation on people and groups like on a company in the stock market or cattle in an auction. The question for you is, whom will you believe: the crowd, or God?

Coming out of the crowd will be impossible for you if you are constantly looking to your crowds for validation, for affirmation, for appreciation, for approval, or for love. If you hope you can just be good enough, helpful enough, talented enough, powerful enough, forceful enough, attractive enough, or wealthy enough so that sooner or later people will accept you, value you, respect you, love you, then you will always be dependent on the crowd, lost in the herd, misplaced in the mass, and miss the treasure that you are. You will live looking for love in all the wrong places. You will always be longing for, hoping for, praying for some validation when, even if it comes, it won't last and will fall short of value giving love.

Yet, if you can open yourself to the voice of God, the blessing of God, the anointing of God, you can find a love that comes giving you what you tried to earn on your own. You will sense peace. And then, over time, learn to love in value giving ways that can celebrate the beauty in others because you see the beauty in yourself, the way God sees you. God becomes your mirror. When you look to God to see who you are, why would you need another source?



## Living Loved

To step out of your crowd, to claim your place as beloved and valuable, takes tremendous courage. Here are two examples of such courage – a woman who found value giving love by reaching out and touching Jesus and a girl who claimed value-giving love by reciting *The Declaration of Independence*. In this first story, pay attention to the woman, the crowd, and Jesus. Where do you see value recognizing and value giving love? The passage is from Mark chapter 5,

*A large crowd was following Jesus, pressing in on him. In the midst of this mass was a woman who had been suffering from a bleeding disorder for a dozen years. She had endured the diagnosis of many physicians, spent all her money and resources on their cures, but had not gotten any better.*

*She had heard about Jesus and all he was doing in other places, so when he came near she tried to get to him, but the crowd was in her way. After great effort, risking injury to herself, she got through the mob, and reached out and touched Jesus' coat.*

*Jesus stopped and asked, "Who touched me?"*

*The disciples, as on so many other occasions, couldn't understand Jesus' question. "What do you mean, who touched you?"*

*Jesus ignored them and looked around to see who had reached out to him. The woman was afraid of how he might react, but she also knew she was well. She fell down before him and told him everything.*

*Jesus spoke to her. He called her, "Daughter." He said, "Your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Be free from your disease."*

Notice here, as in other places, the crowd seems to have a life of its own. The crowd is given a verb, they ‘press’ in on Jesus. If you feel like the group or groups you are part of are ‘pressing’ in on you, then you understand. This pressing may be physical, emotional, or mental.

Concerning the woman, the crowd does not notice her, but if it did, it would have not considered her worth their attention. By the laws of the day, she is substandard, unclean, a second-class status and a second-class gender. She is no person at all in the crowd because the crowd does not have persons but categories which take away the identity of the individual. As Kierkegaard pointed out, “When you label me, you negate me.” In the crowd she is essential invisible, even to Jesus’ followers.

The crowd is a physical and emotional barrier she must choose to face if she’s going to get to Jesus. Oscar Wilde talked about the choice and the risk that goes with facing a crowd,

*I won't tell you that the world (or the crowd) matters nothing, or the world's voice, or the voice of society. They matter a good deal. They matter far too much. But there are moments when one has to choose between living one's own life, fully, entirely, completely—or dragging out some false, shallow, degrading existence that the world in its hypocrisy demands. You have that moment now. Choose!”*

She chooses. She steps out. She risks. She moves through the mob the way a swimmer struggles in a stormy sea. She is determined and doesn’t give up. She wants to get to Jesus. The contrast is vivid. The crowd is pressing and bumping, the woman is reaching and touching. The passage shows the connection of one person to another, a relating so powerful



that even in the midst of a mob, both Jesus and the woman feel it.

“Who touched me?” Jesus asks. The disciples are unable to see a person in the mob. They ask, “How can you wonder who touched you? With the crowd packed so tightly together, how can you tell when one person ends and another begins?” (The disciples often thought in cliché’.)



Even in the mass of people, Jesus is aware of a particular person, sensing her great need even in the midst of the mob's great passion. Jesus speaks to her. Addresses her. Jesus values her, esteems her, calls her, “Daughter.”

Jesus understood he had a God-given value that was greater than any pseudo worth the crowd could try and give or deny, she sensed it. She wanted to be more than the crowd, the doctors, the synagogue, the religious, and likely her own family told her she could be. She wanted to be well, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

She and Jesus exemplified love as individuals in the crowd, God's love embodied, giving and receiving, reaching out and being touched, blessing and being blessed. She is daughter of God as Jesus is Son. She is Beloved as Jesus is Beloved. This type of love does not come without risk, but the return is worth risking all.

Notice also that she finds peace. This is a different peace than we see later as sought by the crowd. It is not a pseudo peace. It is not calming of a crowd-felt anxiety. She is content. She connects. She has value that doesn't come from the

approval of a crowd, but from the love of God which Jesus shows to her by seeing her and connecting with her.

Here is another example of value giving love. This one is from Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. The crowd is a planet called Camazotz.

*The houses in the outskirts were all exactly alike, small square boxes painted gray. Each had a small rectangular plot of lawn in front, with a straight line of dull-looking flowers edging the path to the door. Meg had a feeling that if she could count the flowers, there would be exactly the same number for each house. In front of all the houses, children were playing. Some were skipping rope, some were bouncing balls. Meg felt vaguely that something was wrong with their play...*



*This was so. As the skipping rope hit the pavement, so did the ball. As the rope curved over the head of the jumping child, the child with the ball caught the ball. Down came the ropes. Down came the balls. Over and over again. Up. Down. All in rhythm. All identical. Like the houses. Like the paths. Like the flowers.*

The brain of the town, the central consciousness of the planet, was in the *CENTRAL Central Intelligence Building*, and the brain, devoid of personality, was called IT. And IT

monitored all the planet for any distinctiveness among the people.

Meg resisted the uniformity of Camazotz. Later in the book, Meg faced IT to rescue her brother from the control of the oversized brain who spoke to her through her brother. She decided to confront IT. For encouragement, she recited *The Declaration of Independence*,

*"We hold these truths to be self-evident!" she shouted, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."*

*As she cried out the words, she felt a mind moving in on her own, felt IT seizing, squeezing her brain. Then she realized that Charles Wallace was speaking, or being spoken through by IT.*

*"But that's exactly what we have on Camazots. Complete equality. Everybody exactly alike."*

*For a moment her brain reeled with confusion. Then came a moment of blazing truth. "No!" she cried triumphantly. "Like and equal are not the same thing at all!"*

Meg struggled with how to defeat IT. Besides her distinctiveness, she decided that what separated her from IT was her ability to love. Love against the IT was her weapon. She wondered if loving IT would make a difference.

*If she could give love to IT perhaps it would shrivel up and die, for she was sure that IT could not withstand love. But she, in all her weakness and foolishness and baseness and nothingness, was incapable of loving IT. Perhaps it was not too much to ask of her, but she could not do it.*

*But she could love Charles Wallace (her brother).*

Meg couldn't love the whole IT, the crowd, or the planet of uniformed people, but she could love her brother, and she did. In loving her brother, she brought him out of the conformity of Camazotz, and without total uniformity, the system was required to change. The world transformed by default.

Jesus' model was similar to Meg's. Like Meg, Jesus found little use in loving the IT, the crowd, the collective, the fused system, the herd, or empire. Jesus did share his love with individuals, one by one, few by few, and even group by group, addressing crowds but not conforming to them, all in order to liberate persons and transform a planet through the process.

Read the Rest of *Out of The Crowd*

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## About the Author

David Jones is a Pastor and author of the following:

*The Psychology of Jesus:  
Practical Help for Living in Relationship*

*Jesus Zens You*  
(Formerly published as  
*The Enlightenment of Jesus:  
Practical Steps to Life Awake*)

*Enough!*  
*And Other Magic Words to Transform Your Life*

*Moses and Mickey Mouse:  
How to Find Holy Ground in the  
Magic Kingdom and Other  
Unusual Places*

*For the Love of Sophia*  
*Wisdom Stories from Around the World  
And Across the Ages*

*Prayer Primer*

*Going Nuts! (Fiction)*

For more information on these books,  
go to: [www.davidjonespub.com](http://www.davidjonespub.com)

All responses appreciated.  
Contact David at: davidjonespub@outlook.com.