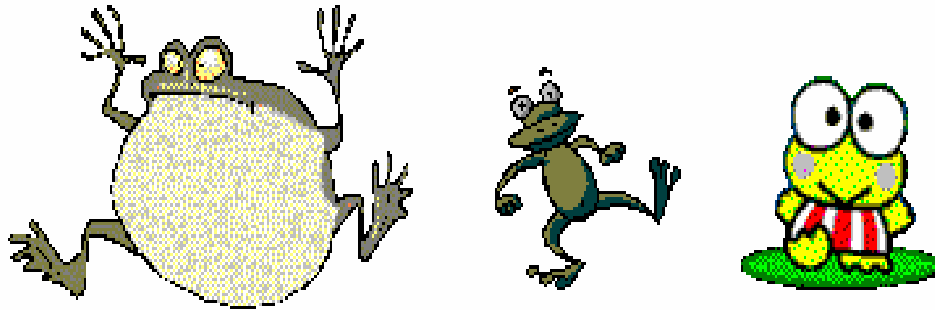


Chapter 5: OUT OF THE GRAVE, INTO THE LIGHT



Three Little Frogs

I was sitting alone in a restaurant the other day, people watching... just observing. I saw so many different personalities, but they all seemed to have one thing in common as I glanced from one table to the next. Most every table had groups of 3 or 4, and it was interesting to watch reactions on their faces as the others in their group talked. Not privy to any conversations, I watched their body language as they spoke.

I don't normally do this sort of thing, but a few weeks prior to this day, I asked the Lord about the scripture in Revelation which is really a strong rebuke from the Lord. It says in Chapter 3:14: ***"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold or hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot or cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth!"***

In my observations around the room as I pondered over my coffee, the Lord told me a story, which I write for you now. Funny at times, but sadly true... and it put a few things I hadn't given much thought, into perspective. As if He was sitting across the table from me, the Lord began to share His thoughts to my mind....

Once upon a time, there were 3 little frogs sitting in a pond. To make it "real", we'll call them ***"Vanity"***, ***"Pleaser"***, and ***"Fool"***.

Vanity was always right, never wrong; always successful, a very hard worker... never wanting for material things. Always ambitious, never sloughful; always busy... never had time. Always a realist, quite the pragmatic... never giving thought to foolishness that might waste

precious little time. He was all about order, and position. Always clever, and beheld an incomparable street-savvy wit... a magnet of sorts. **Vanity** never lacked ingenuity to pry himself from undesirable situations and unfavorable circumstance. **Vanity** was slick. He was boisterous, his personality, looks and position won him auspicious reputability. Everybody looked up to **Vanity**.

Pleaser certainly lived up to his name. Couldn't bare the thought of conflict. Hated confrontation, in fact, he avoided it like the plague. Always happy, never sad. Always kind, never cruel. Always complacent and agreeable. The perfect companion. **Pleaser** had the ability to be loved by just about anyone. He had an answer for everything, with the uncanny ability to see each circumstance from both sides of the coin, so to speak. **Pleaser** was a giver, but needed the accolades of men. **Pleaser** was a true friend who would follow you to the ends of the earth... giving up his lily pad to a fellow frog in need. As long as life stayed on an even keel, and all was well with the world... he was happy and content. And when you were with **Pleaser**, you felt unconditional love. He would never judge you, he would accept you for what you were.... because he needed that kind of love in return, in order for him to survive. But he had another side. **Pleaser** was a master conciliator, a natural psychologist... satisfying his aggressors by concessions... usually at the sacrifice of his own principles. Manipulation was paramount to his persona, and while he was oblivious to it, that was the foundation of his unconditional love. Great at evading responsibility, thereby limiting his own accountability, he was a great listener. And since, by nature, others like to talk about themselves... **Pleaser** was the best friend a frog could have.

Fool, on the other hand, was the underdog of the crew. Constantly the brunt of jokes because of his namesake, having developed a hard shell on the outside, while remaining soft and tender-hearted on the inside. **Fool** was easily crushed, although he'd become a master at the art of burying his true feelings. He'd done an excellent job of growing thick skin over the years, and one would never guess, with his joyful stride, that it had become a shroud he felt suffocated in. Like a mummy in a sarcophagus. No one was the wiser... except his Creator. He had countless opportunities to harbor bitterness, but tried very hard to live inside forgiveness. When confronted with his own agonies, **Fool** would rebel for awhile, then become resolute to

see the “good”... and that made him resilient.

So, **Vanity**, **Pleaser** and **Fool** were sitting in a pond of water one day, just shooting the breeze. They were discussing the meaning of life as they saw it, and their purpose for being.

Vanity was sure he had figured it all out. “Work hard to be the best you can be... to live life to the fullest... to experience all life has to offer... damn the consequences!” “Take care of yourself first”, was **Vanity’s** life motto.

Pleaser agreed, (of course!). But he added that “as long as *what* you did, didn’t hurt anybody” and that “as long as it made everybody happy all of the time, or at least *some* of the time... eventually whatever you chose to do would work for the greater good”. **Pleaser** reasoned that indeed, it was smart to “take care of yourself first”, because that would allow you to be more effective with others. To follow whichever route caused the least trouble, and promoted the most peace. “Peace at all cost” was **Pleaser’s** life motto.

Fool had other ideas. Fool was a romantic at heart. Always managed to see the good in people. He gave until it hurt, even to his own demise.... and most saw that as a weakness, instead of a strength... your classic doormat. **Fool** constantly found himself in situations that he regretted, (at times in hindsight), but knew inherently, that the experience -- no matter how painful -- helped him to grow in character and resolve. **Fool** was determined, if he was nothing else. Anytime anyone would tell him “it’s impossible”... **Fool** would find a way to make it possible. But he lacked what he wanted so badly... to possess the strength of character and fortitude he saw in **Vanity** while maintaining the even-keel complicity of **Pleaser**. **Fool**, however, could never measure up, when compared to the other two. He felt like a failure.

The subject of God came up. **Vanity** was convinced that he had trickled down the evolutionary ladder from his ancestors, the prestigious line of bull-frogs. He admitted there could be a “higher power” in the order of life, but he needed scientific proof. His conservatism left little room for what he saw as speculative theories on the subject.

Pleaser’s ancestors were tiny tree-frogs. Tree-frogs have the

amazing ability to change the color of their skin, like a chameleon. From a long line of "Peace Keepers"... **Pleaser** was one who was given to expedient changes in ideas... always subject to quick and frequent changes in his appearance... especially when confronted with potential enemies. And **Pleaser** considered his enemies to be anyone that would be disagreeable with another. Those who were judgmental or opinionated without good reason... that is, having an opinion stemming from a "gut feeling"... was unacceptable behavior to him. **Pleaser** was the master of disguise. With the slightest hint of conflict, (which to him, was right up there with death), he would freeze in the place where he stood, and blend into his environment, hiding in plain sight... thereby successfully avoiding confrontation. **Pleaser** agreed that scientific proof would be prudent, but inwardly, he believed in a Creator. Afraid to confront **Vanity**, he quietly turned to **Fool** for support.

Fool came from a long line of common toads. His legs were markedly shorter than his friends, so his stride naturally always fell short of theirs. **Fool** was slower than most, but constantly confident, if only in his convictions. He was certain of one thing... he was definitely created by A Creator. **Fool** was not afraid to voice his opinions. **Vanity** laughed profusely, thought the notion was ridiculous. "Why would a "creator" make something so bumpy, fat and ugly, lacking in not only diminished physical stamina, but the most common of senses?", he bellowed.

Pleaser laughed because **Vanity** laughed. But then when he saw the depth of pain in **Fool's** eyes, and the look of sheer sadness on his face, **Pleaser** became indifferent, even apologetic... and turned from red to white, with a cowardly yellow stripe down his back... reasoning that the two of them should find "common ground". That everyone was "entitled to his own opinion".

Fool knew, deep down inside, that although he'd been bruised and battered, scarred and callosed by bumps on his back over the years, that his innate desire to leap (short leaps as they were, they were done in faith) from one circumstance to the next -- even though they seemed catastrophic -- there had to be some perfect design to it.... some plan he hadn't yet discovered. The romantic in him just couldn't see it any other way.

He reasoned to the other two, that like them, he had the ability to change his color when confronted with danger, but his abilities to transform were more versatile. Because of the texture of his scarred little back, and the thick skin he'd developed over the years, his "experiences" gave him certain other advantages to the other two. He could blend into tree bark, for example, by just standing still during danger, and know that his God would make him invisible to his adversary *as long as he clung to the tree having the Strongest Foundation*, instead of any little twig that would sway side to side with the slightest breeze. He knew, hiding within the stability of that Strength, he could, by faith in His Creator, become completely camouflaged... even though he was hiding in plain sight. He described it to **Vanity** and **Pleaser** the only way he knew how... like and invisible Shield of Faith.

That statement, they both said, was the reason he was named a fool... but in his hurt, **Fool** used those arrows of insult to make him more resilient. He became increasingly unpopular... rejected by his peers, so he leaped to another pad a few feet away, searching his heart in solitude.... crying little toad tears.

Just then, a predator came, that none of them anticipated. It was one who was stronger, wiser, and he came equipped with the worst weapon of all.... a net.

It was a boy, about 8, in search of a biology experiment. His mission? To capture a bull-frog, a tree-frog, and a common toad. The experiment entailed the 3 frogs and a pot of water, administered under a controlled environment at increasing temperatures. The goal? To see which of the 3 would jump out of the pot first; the bull-frog, the tree-frog, or the common toad.

The boy readied his experiment by placing the large pot of water on his mother's stove. He had collected pond water, and a few lily pads, to create an atmosphere that resembled "home" by the frogs sense of touch, smell and "natural" habitat. The only exception of course, being confined to a pot, and subjected to gradual, but steadily increasing temperatures.

The boy drew a graph of cold, cool, warm, warmer, hot, hotter, and

boiling; and charted his 3 specimens accordingly. Temperatures were increased every 5 minutes.

At first, the 2 frogs and the toad seemed unaffected. When the boy left the room, after carefully documenting his initial results.. the 3 had a conversation.

The bull-frog was ticked. **Vanity** was not used to being confined, by *any* standard. He came and went when he pleased. He felt hemmed in on all sides, and this made him very uncomfortable. He *reasoned* that the pot was too high, and the sides were too slippery. He *reasoned* that there was really no way of escape. He became angry, frustrated and complained constantly. That it was everybody else's fault for getting caught... they wouldn't get out of his way so he could escape. That **Pleaser** stuck by his side like glue trying to be a helper, but instead landed them both in captivity. And as for **Fool**, **Vanity** ignored him completely.

Pleaser, inwardly just as upset as **Vanity**, and with him for his selfishness, decided that since **Vanity** was bigger, had more knowledge of difficult circumstance, and always seemed to find his way out, that he'd better keep his mouth shut, and be nice to him. Afterall, **Fool** was no help to anyone in this situation. He was just a fool at heart... wasting his time... thinking and praying to his God. **Pleaser** grew increasingly more angry, because he couldn't find anything positive about the situation. He froze under pressure, but that didn't seem to help, so after a time, he spent his time by stroking **Vanity's** ego.

Soon, all three had become still, hardly breathing a breath... for the boy had returned. This time, he brought food, a welcomed relief to **Vanity** and **Pleaser**, because they hadn't had a chance to catch a meal that day. **Fool** lost his appetite. He was hungry, but refused to eat whatever the boy brought, because he thought it was poisoness. **Vanity** and **Pleaser** wasted little time in gobbling up **Fool's** share.

Little did they realize that while the boy placed deliciously delectable grubs in the pot with the one hand.... he cranked up the heat with the other. But **Fool** saw the boy, and the boy noticed **Fool**, as he remained ever so still on his lilly pad.

The water became gradually warmer and warmer, and while **Vanity**

and **Pleaser** noticed marked changes in their skin tone, they were being catered to hand-to-webbed foot. They had all their earthly needs met. They had water, a lilly pad on which to rest, and the finest of delicacies that they didn't even have to hunt for. **Vanity** and **Pleaser** became comfortable, they grew fat and lazy gorging themselves on their own lust. **Vanity** with his desire for everything material, and **Pleaser**, with his neurotic need for acceptance at any cost. But **Fool** sensed eminent danger.

Time after time, over the course of an hour, he'd felt the heat intensify in the pot. Unusually hot, and permeating even the thickest parts of his skin. The bumps on his back felt sore, even blistery, and he was weakened because he had refused to eat.

But in his "fasting" of food, he prayed that his God would intervene. He looked aghast in horror as he noticed the skin on the others' backs. Blackened by the temperatures, they took on another appearance entirely. Even their demeanor changed.... for the worse. **Fool** tried to reason with them, but to no avail. They saw **Fool** as the fool that he was; ignorant for not enjoying a life of luxury, but choosing to remain impoverished of the wealth they enjoyed from their new master, the boy.

The boy became a god to them. He met all their material needs. He entertained their senses with the finest of delicacies; he sheltered them from "worldly" harm because of their captivity.... and both **Vanity** and **Pleaser** began to succumb to their inevitable fate. **Vanity** was no longer bitter, because this was, in his estimation, a frog-fantasy come true. And **Pleaser** ?... Well, he had it all. A friend by his side, enjoying his reward for a peace-keepers faithfulness. The only problem was, it was getting increasingly difficult for **Pleaser** to breathe.

Fool saw **Pleaser's** distress and tried to intervene, but **Pleaser** pushed him away, ignoring his repeated attempts to offer aid. **Vanity** was adrift in temporal bliss, dozing off occasionally into apnea, not realizing his own diminished capacity. They both were being lulled to sleep by the heat of the steam now rising to the top of the stove.

Fool panicked. Within minutes, he saw his friends withering away in a wastful, inevitable, and painfully slow death. Finally, **Vanity** and

Pleaser croaked for the last time, and **Fool** was left alone. **Fool** was perplexed and troubled, weak and weary from the heat, and watching his own skin discolor and fall off in certain places. He knew that if his Creator didn't intervene, he would suffer the same, inevitable death as the others. He began to have thoughts of doubt and unbelief about the God he so reverently worshipped all his life. **Fool** was hurt and tried to rebel in anger at his Creator, but found little comfort in that thought. He knew he needed to conserve his energy, should the God of all Creation come to his rescue. Still, he continued to doubt, wondering why he felt so compelled to keep himself from the food his body craved... why he was so obstinate in his resolve. Reasoning that, if he were going to die anyway, perhaps **Vanity** and **Pleaser** were right. He was just a fool, and he would die a fool.

Drawing his last breath, **Fool** prayed to his God, submitting himself, even unto death. Drifting into unconsciousness, he heard his Master's voice:

*"Greater love has no man than this: to lay down his life for his friend. You, my dear sweet **Fool**, had every opportunity to leap out of this pot, but chose, (even though your choice stemmed from fear), you drew from My Mercy and stayed by their side. Though they were cruel and unjust, you encouraged them, you counseled them, and you tried to save them from impending demise. But they would not listen. You have learned through your many trials and tribulations, to continually place your trust in me. I **have** given you an invisible shield of faith, and because you chose to pick it up, I made your body strong. Over the years, I allowed the scars and the bumps, to remind you of My mark of ownership... and because you allowed me to use you, those very scars and bumps have served you well. They have given you great advantage over your enemies, even those within your own camp. Because of the thickness of your skin, you were able to endure the same heat as your peers, but because of the tenderness of your heart, you have succeeded in saving your own life."*

"I have never left you, for I have created you. I formed you. Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

Comforted by those words from God, **Fool** was at peace. Just then, the boy's mother ran into the kitchen. Screaming at her son in horror, (which awoke **Fool** from his near comatose stupor), she frantically raced to remove the pot from the flame. Angry, but in love, she explained to her boy the cruelty of his little experiment. Seeing two of the frogs afloat on their backs, **Fool** struggled to get noticed. Barely alive, and badly burned, he was taken up to safety, spared with a spoon from a mother's loving hand.

Fool heard the voice of his Master at that moment saying: "*Fear not, dear **Fool**, for it is by My Grace and My Mercy, through your leap of faith, that you are saved. Remember that in the last days, there will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God -- having a form of godliness, but denying it's power. Have nothing to do with them. Pride will always come before a fall, and more often than not, I will choose the foolish things of the world, to confound the wisdom of the wise. Now, my beautiful creation... now that you know the truth of My Words, let your heart be filled with joy, go with confidence that I love you, and have a plan and a purpose for your life. I am with you always... take a leap of faith for the truth has set you free!*"

With that, **Fool** surged in an overdose of adrenalin. Taking a deep breath, he said the Lord's Prayer, and jumped off the spoon. Drawing strength in gratitude with every leap, he found a narrow path through the kitchen that led him to his freedom!

I think you get the moral of the story. I laughed as I finished the last sentence over my fifth cup of coffee. I must've looked pretty foolish, smiling to myself, writing in a blank book, right there in the restaurant... but it didn't matter. See, I am most definitely like **Fool**. But before I was saved, I was very much like **Vanity**. I tried to be **Pleaser** for awhile, but one day, I listened to a Fool, just as I was about to gasp my last breath. From that point forward, I learned that I could just be myself, and it no longer really mattered what others thought of me. I was at peace with myself. Man.... I was *exhausted*

with myself, was more like it! And *disgusted!* And one day, I just gave *IN*, instead of always trying to give up. And I realized that the story of *The Three Little Frogs* is ALL of us, at different points in our spiritual maturity. Sometimes it helps to remember where you've been, in order to survive life... even if it's just one day at a time. It helps us to see how far we've come, in what is sometimes a relatively short period of time. God continued His careful watch on me, the minute I became **fool**-like. Real, I mean. Without the facade. But, instead of just "watching" and "waiting" for me... He *led* me, He *walked* with me... even *talked* with me.

Just like he did that afternoon in the restaurant. The God of all Creation, my Heavenly Father, kept me company on what could've been a very lonely afternoon for me. He'd given me my answer from weeks earlier, about being hot, cold, and lukewarm... wrapped inside a blanket of loving admonition, that only The Father could provide. It is a strong call to all of us, that we must never allow bitterness to take root, even when the worst of the worst things happen. Because sin is sin. Rebellion to His Word leads to death, albeit, in the lap of seeming luxury.

God wants us to have everything WE desire, as long as those desires don't rob us of fellowship with Him. He delights in the prosperity of His children. He longs to grant us the desires of our hearts, (Psalm 37:4). He has plans to prosper us, and not to harm us, plans to give us a hope and a future, (Jeremiah 29).

Because one thing is very certain. ***God sees everything, and reads every heart, understanding every motive behind every thought,*** (1 Chronicles 28:9). I had received a warning in love, a story simplistic in nature, and full of wisdom... Funny, but oh so relevant. It is mixed with just the right level of fear to keep me in check. Fear of the LORD, that is.

His warning is clear for all those who say they follow Him. That at any given point, in any of our "spiritual walks", we have choices. Choices to be a mirror image of Jesus and His Character, or go back to our old lifestyles. To take responsibility for our own actions, or to blame our life's happiness, or lack thereof, on someone else. Though, since I have been saved, I have been very much a "fool", the recent past has brought back the familiarity of my "pleaser" and

“vanity” days. None of us have life figured out, but some of us would like to *think* we do. But *that attitude* is nothing more than vanity run amuck. It’s that busy, officious, (meddlesome), opinionated attitude that screams for attention in all the wrong places. I am guilty to a degree. I am busy, (sometimes too busy for the Lord): I am meddlesome, (although I see it as trying to help, and it always seems to backfire when I least expect it); and I am very opinionated, (obviously).

The key to happiness and peace is the balance between the practical pragmatism, and Godly Righteousness. God would desire us busy, (so we don’t have time to gossip); He would desire us meddlesome, (so that we will become phylanthropic and help to bear one another’s burdens); and He would desire us to be opinionated with the boldness of His Word, unafraid of what people think, as we speak truths of Him with confidence. Both pragmatism, and Righteousness need to work hand-in-hand in order to have balance. That is where I personally need work. I seem to tip the scale on one side and teeter on the other... but God loves me anyway, and works with what little He has, at times, to use me in spite of myself. I know that I have to hang around more fools to get where God needs me to be, and hopefully, I will pick up others along my way.

This is a story my children continually beg me to read to them, even they are only six and eight, and could not possibly understand all the implications that we, as adults, will realize if we just stop, look closely at our lives and current relationships, and *think* for a moment. This has nothing to do with “going to church”. Fellowship is important, yes. But what is *more* important is re-adjusting our lifestyles to manage that day-to-day, internal struggle, (the battlefield of the mind), that *none* of us is immune to.

I believe that God designed this story in such a way -- that just as my children crave the cute stuff in it -- He saw that the little girl in me needed to crave *Him*, because I was endangering myself by letting the enemy take ground in my life. And quite honestly, this little story is not *as cute* to me, because I *understand* all the implications and inuendos, and cannot plead ignorance like a child could. It is very convicting. And when you begin to see things from God’s perspective, you realize that it is sometimes a very long road Home again.

I share this story with my children whenever they ask for it, because I know that it is God's way of planting seed in their hearts, that will leave a lasting impression for years to come. I explain all the big words, and we make a game of it. Kids remember more than we sometimes give them credit for. And in following the Lord's lead, I am keeping His Command in Proverbs 22:6, ***"to train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it"***. I can only pray that the revelation sinks in long before the story manifests for *real*, in their lives.

