



The Shape of His Love

Susan Meissner, **She Reads** Author

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law." Romans 13:8 (NIV)

Our guest writer today is Susan Meissner, award-winning novelist, mom of four, and pastor's wife. Her book The Shape of Mercy was chosen as a P31 "She Reads" fall selection. We asked Susan to share a devotion with us that touches on one of the themes of her novel.

Have you ever let fear influence your perspective? My husband still teases me about a time that I did.

When our family lived in Minnesota we experienced what we called "bat season." It was a time of the year when bats regularly got into our home and needed help finding their way out. The usual mode of encouragement was a bucket and a tennis racket. A calm bat could be gently coaxed into a bucket with the racket, and then released outdoors. I wasn't overly afraid of them but I didn't want them near me and their flapping wings were a bit more than I cared to bear.

One night during bat season, I awoke to the sound of those wings. I looked up into the darkness and there on the ceiling was the chevron shape; its wings spread like the Caped Crusader. I had a sleeping husband next to me and no tennis racket.

I jostled Bob awake and rasped out the frightening news.

"Bob! There's a bat above us!"

He jolted upright and I hushed him quickly. "Where?" he whispered.

"Right there!" I pointed to the ceiling. "See?! What are we going to do?"

He looked beside the bed for a shoe, a magazine, anything. "I don't know," he said. "I think I am going to have to turn on the light."

"No! He'll start flying around!" I squeaked.

"I need a racket."

I was practically hyperventilating as Bob reached over to his bedside table and turned on the lamp. We braced ourselves for chaos. Light replaced darkness, revealing not a bat but our adjustable ceiling lights, shaped like a V because I had put them that way nine years earlier.

I had let fear convince me something was true when it wasn't. Not only did I rush to judgment, but I used my fear to convince someone else that what I believed was true.

Too often we pass judgment on people and situations we know little about. History has shown us that when we judge in ignorance we can make terrible mistakes. When we allow our view of someone or something to be swayed by suspicions or what the crowd says, we can make a tragic error of assuming something is true when it isn't. Fear tutors us to think that way. It warps our vision.

Jesus said He had two primary expectations of us: Love God, and love others—including those whose ways we don't understand, who behave differently than we do, and who "flap their wings" when we'd rather they didn't. When we love God completely, we find the grace, mercy and wisdom to love the rest of the world. Plus, we are told in 1 John 4:18 that there is no fear in love.

When we make love our highest and best pursuit, fear and judgment dissolve as quickly as the shadows in my bedroom when I turn on the light. I am learning to let His light show me the shape of His love.

Dear Lord, You are the essence of love itself. We know that the more we love, the more we bear Your image to a world that so desperately needs to see it. Help us love more and judge less. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Related Resources:

The Shape of Mercy, an award-winning novel by Susan Meissner, is a fall pick for P31's new fiction division **She Reads**. Order your copy from Proverbs 31 today.

Want a chance to win a free copy of Susan's novel? Ten winners will be chosen, with the grand winner also receiving a beautiful leather journal and pen set. Hurry over to P31's **new site for fiction fans** and enter the drawing.

Moving from Fear to Freedom: A Woman's Guide to Peace in Every Situation by Grace Fox

Application Steps:

Choose an organization in your hometown that ministers to the homeless and spend a couple hours offering compassion, hospitality and service. Check and discard any preconceived notions you may have about the homeless, letting God replace these impressions with His love.

Reflections:

Have you ever been judged by others or had presuppositions placed upon you? How did it make you feel?

Look at Romans 8:14-16. What does the apostle Paul say here about fear?

Reread our key verse—have you left the debt of love outstanding?

Power Verses:

Colossians 3:13-14, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (NIV)

Matthew 7:1-3, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (NIV)