

茶莊

The  
TEA SHOP



KARL FOREHAND

*Author of Apparent Faith*

Praise for  
The TEA SHOP

“Karl Forehand is a storyteller and theologian. In this remarkable book, he weaves together theological insights, personal experiences, and great wisdom for living life well. *The Tea Shop* takes readers on a journey of discovery that makes a difference!”

THOMAS JAY OORD, AUTHOR OF *GOD  
CAN'T AND THE UNCONTROLLING LOVE OF GOD*

“Karl Forehand has done it again! This time by sharing an intimate portrait of what he learned about the power of listening to wisdom from unexpected sources. Take some time to visit the Tea Shop with Karl and you'll be surprised at just how much you can learn from his mistakes and how much genuine wisdom can be acquired by admitting we don't know everything.”

KEITH GILES, AUTHOR OF *JESUS UNDEFEATED*

“Karl’s story is an insightful travelog of his soul’s adventure as much as his Tea Shop experience in Taiwan. We think we would like to have an adventure, but then carefully plan it to maintain control. Real adventures only begin when the unexpected happens—whether that is a crash on a scooter, a last minute question about buying a tea pot, or a shaman-like owner of a Tea Shop where Karl discovered that ‘love looked like a man with no name sharing his tofu with me.’

His spiritual adventure began much earlier with the crashing of the logical assumptions about where and how and through whom God would show up. Fortunately, he had eyes to see what Paula D’Arcy says so well: ‘God comes to you disguised as your life.’ May we all welcome the awareness of the unexpected presence of God in our everyday adventure.”

DR. PAUL FITZGERALD, SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR AND  
FOUNDER OF HEART CONNEXION MINISTRIES

“In this beautiful book, Karl helps us come into the now, the present moment—to slow down, to experience the experience we find ourselves in, and to somehow connect with the Divine in the midst of it all. We live in a fast-paced world where our desire to be in and out and on to the next thing can cause us to miss out on the beauty of the present moment; and in his book, Karl presents example after example of how to tap into the power of the mystics and just ... be.”

DR. GLENN SIEPERT, HOST OF THE  
"WHAT IF PROJECT" PODCAST

“With the heart of a father, the mind of a mystic, and the soul of a pastor, Karl Forehand takes us on an extraordinary trip to Taiwan and to a Tea Shop with no name to remind and encourage us to be present in every moment of our lives. I loved every page of this book!”

TODD R. VICK, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR  
OF *THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND*

“The wondering and wandering of Karl’s journey is delightful. He takes a beginner’s mind and shares how he sees the world. The questions and wisdom that follow are wonderful places to jump off into your own adventure. Thanks for sharing your story, Karl.”

RACHEL KECK, SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR AND COACH

“As a Spiritual Director and fellow Souljourner with Karl, I deeply resonate with his honest, tender, and self-reflective story. Could real wisdom be the humility to always wonder if you’re right? If so, Karl Forehand is a wise guide inviting us, through this book, to grow by allowing ‘real intimacy and true healing’ while humbly embracing mystery. These and more lessons from *The Tea Shop* are beautiful and timely for us all.”

KATHY LEACH, SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR,  
CONTEMPLATIVE COMPANION, TEACHER/STUDENT  
OF LEARNING HOW TO SEE, AND NANA OF 12

“Karl Forehand is one of my favorite humans. His authenticity and transparency immediately welcomed me into his ‘inner circle’ of friends at a time when I needed community most. The grace that marks Karl’s life is deeply rooted in a mystical encounter with the radical hospitality and wholehearted acceptance of God that Karl experienced in a Tea Shop on the other side of the world. This book tells the fascinating story of what happened that day and how the ripples of that encounter have affected every day of Karl’s life ever since. If you’re longing to encounter that kind of divine embrace for yourself, set aside your preconceived notions of God and follow Karl into *The Tea Shop*. There is hope for every single one of us in these pages.”

JASON ELAM, AUTHOR AND HOST OF THE  
"MESSY SPIRITUALITY" PODCAST

“One thing about an adventure is that you can plan out ahead of time what you want to experience, but sometimes adventure has its own plans for you. An adventure can be life transforming whether it’s two months or two weeks, or even two hours as it was with Karl. Join Karl on his epic journey in this engaging account of unexpectedly coming face-to-face with God in a most unlikely place and in a very surprising way.”

JULIE MCVEY, M.S. FAMILY & CONSUMER  
SCIENCES, AUTHOR OF *WHY I LEFT CHURCH  
TO FIND JESUS: A PERSONAL ODYSSEY*

“When Dr. Seuss wrote, ‘Oh, the places you will go...’, he wasn’t kidding! I have read many spiritual/theological books that reward me intellectually but this is a book that took me somewhere emotionally and spiritually.

In *The Tea Shop*, Karl Forehand takes us into one of the forgotten and oft-maligned aspects of Christianity: The Mystic. Mystical Christianity moves us from a mere religious experience to actually experiencing God. Karl also gives us some amazing insights based on his own spiritual journey and all he has gleaned from the spiritual journeys of others. Your cup of tea has been lovingly and patiently prepared and is eagerly awaiting you. Drink up!”

DERRICK DAY, SPEAKER AND AUTHOR  
OF *DECONSTRUCTING RELIGION*

“Ever since I read the Tea Shop chapter in *Apparent Faith*, I’ve longed to know more about the Shop—to visit it, to smell the aroma, and to talk with the shop owner. Now I get to! In *Apparent Faith*, Karl took us through his journey of discovering a new perspective of God through parenting. In *The Tea Shop*, Karl takes us back to the Tea Shop to discuss how his changed perspective of God impacted his faith and to challenge us. How does a change in perspective about God’s nature and character affect our every-day lives? Our faith practice? Our relationships? Our communities? Sit back, brew a cup of tea, and enjoy this vacation to the Tea Shop.”

BEAU HOFFMAN, ESQ., CULTIVATOR OF  
LOVE, FATHER, AND HUSBAND

“My current ‘favorite’ word is Curious. I am living in a place of exploring everything that is curious to me. One of those things, is exactly what I felt like Karl experienced in *The Tea Shop*. I love that Karl allowed himself to be curious to the experience, and then take it to the next level by actually allowing the experience to change him... to allow himself to evolve even more. I want to be the man with no name from the tea shop... I want everyone to be curious and look for the man with no name. Everyone deserves the chance to be changed by a simple act of love.”

CHRISTINA JONAS, EXPLORER

“In an easy and short read, *The Tea Shop* is the story of a man’s awakening to the realities that life is far more nuanced and complicated than we’ve been told, and that there is truth and love to be found in the most random, unexpected places.”

DALLAS VERITY, PODCASTER

“So much about spirituality is simply learning to pay attention and see what’s going on beneath the surface. Karl does this beautifully as he works through his pivotal experience in *The Tea Shop*. This book will inspire you to pay more attention in your own life and see the subtle but profound ways God is speaking to all of us.”

BEN DELONG, AUTHOR OF *THERE’S  
A GOD IN MY CLOSET*

“Just as we can extract vital nutrients from tea leaves and thoroughly enjoy the satisfaction of a soothing cup of tea, Karl reveals spiritual, emotional, and relational wisdom from everyday experiences that provide sustenance to the soul. *The Tea Shop* is an enjoyable example of his skill and a delightful read indeed!”

MARK KARRIS, AUTHOR OF *RELIGIOUS  
REFUGEES: (DE)CONSTRUCTING TOWARD  
SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALING*

“Change is difficult for many of us. Karl shows that he’s not afraid to change as he takes time to appreciate and understand new things. There is so much to learn, discover and explore. *The Tea Shop* is an amazing experience and journey told through the eyes and understanding of a contemplative.”

KYLE BUTLER, INSPIRATIONAL MOTIVATOR



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KARL FOREHAND

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# 前言

Preface

"Every day God invites us on the same kind of adventure. It's not a trip where He sends us a rigid itinerary, He simply invites us. God asks what it is He's made us to love, what it is that captures our attention, what feeds that deep indescribable need of our souls to experience the richness of the world He made. And then, leaning over us, He whispers, 'Let's go do that together.'"

BOB GOFF

## THE PART THAT I PLANNED

This past summer, we went to visit my son in Taiwan where he teaches English. This was my second trip and this time we scheduled some time to go to the Southern section of the island. It is less densely populated and offered us the promise of an adventure. I was hungry for getting off the main path and experiencing the beauty of Taiwan. Possibly, I was trying to learn to express this part of my inner child. I wanted to have fun—I wanted to celebrate—I wanted adventure.

We had just participated in an intensive weekend where I discovered that I am at heart playful and adventurous. I thought, *Good, we are going to Taiwan and we can have some adventures there.* I imagined all the different things we might do even though I had very little knowledge of the South side of the island. On my first journey to Taiwan, I spent time with my son and our friends in Zhongli, then I went to visit a missionary in Taipei. I remember a lot of walking and eating. I tasted a lot of interesting food and met some really nice people. I got a foot massage (which was amazing) and did some pottery—mostly civilized “city” stuff. But this time I wanted to do something daring while spending time with my son and beautiful wife. Thoughts of

getting lost on a mountain, finding a new experience away from the tourist maps or becoming immersed in the beautiful nature all around us intrigued me.

Part of that journey involved renting scooters to explore the stunning view of nature around Taroko Gorge National Park. As we were getting comfortable with our scooters to go to the Gorge, I suddenly found myself airborne. Instead of stopping smoothly at a stoplight, I was headed for the pavement just beyond the front of my rented scooter. I still have the scars from the places that contacted the Taiwan street. I'm sure Matt Damon or Jason Statham would have executed a slick roll maneuver and come away unscathed, but I gave up my precision stunt man moves in my 30's. I wasn't badly injured; however, it threw us for a loop that day. We had to re-plan our trip and I was convinced I had ruined the whole adventure.

Wave after wave of shame and disappointment washed over me; in addition to the pain and inconvenience of having to dress wounds for the rest of the trip and the inconvenience of paying for a broken scooter, I felt kind of foolish for wanting to have an adventure. Why couldn't I have just admitted that I'm a little old to be running around on scooters and looking for adventure when we could have just as easily been sitting on a beach watching the waves roll in? Those are the kinds of thoughts you think when you are sitting in a Taiwan clinic in pain from an accident and the immediate future is in question.

In that moment of my uncertainty, my son became like a father to me. He is a strong, capable man. When I was injured, he successfully found us a clinic on the South end of the island to

get me some very capable, inexpensive treatment for my wounds. He communicated with the Mandarin speaking Taiwanese doctors and nurses where I had no idea what to say and even comforted me in my distress. He played the part of the father for me when I felt helpless—the son fathering his father—wasn't this supposed to happen late in life? The part that I orchestrated left me feeling like a child. So, I am grateful for my son—my best friend, who in my vulnerability, was strong for me.



## THE PART I DIDN'T PLAN

My accident caused us to have a couple of extra days in the more populated Northern region. One night, as our host Tanya was dropping us off at the hotel after supper, Laura decided to ask, “Where can we pick up a teapot?” We were looking for a souvenir to bring back to our daughters to commemorate the visit but had been unable to take the time to do so yet. I had been a little too busy trying to turn this vacation around after I lost control of the itinerary.

Tanya told us to jump in her vehicle and we headed off into the night.

The streets normally were crowded full of scooters and pedestrians during the day. The scooters were like a swarm of bees that surrounded the never-ending stream of cars. People trudged along the busy sidewalks and carefully navigated the narrow and awkward terrain. But at night, everything was a bit slower and much less chaotic. As we stepped back into Tanya’s suburban, it was almost like slowly being able to breathe again. By now, we trusted her to get us there safely and there were way less obstacles at night.

“This is it,” she said.

We pulled up in front of what looked to me like a normal shop from the outside, approximately 12 feet deep and fifty feet long, this was not where I expected to find the teapot to take home to my daughters commemorating our trip. As with most of the time so far—this was not what I had imagined.

As Laura and I walked through the front door of the Tea Shop, I went into consumer mode. Being slightly uncomfortable, I zeroed in on our mission: the teapots. I remember a thick large slice of a tree as the focal point to the room—this tea table was common to many shops in the area. The table was heavily varnished but mostly covered with various trinkets and random items with barely enough room to place the tea pots. The shelves were packed with ordinary and exotic tea pots adorned with Chinese characters. There were also religious figurines and antiques and incense holders. It was almost like a second-hand store, but I got the impression that every article was important somehow. Outside the reach of my control and carefully constructed plans, I was about to experience something unforgettable. As Brené Brown says in her book *Daring Greatly*, “perfectionism is not the path that leads us to our gifts and our sense of purpose; it’s the hazardous detours.”<sup>1</sup>

It soon became apparent that the owner of this eclectic shop was the center of attention, several locals were gathered around and focused on him. He wore very modern clothes—a pair of slacks and a pullover shirt and a comfortable pair of shoes that

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1 <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/6467312-in-fact-what-i-ve-heard-over-and-over-throughout-the>

made a full day of standing tolerable. Though his weathered face showed some signs of his actual age, his body was like that of a young man. He moved with ease and later demonstrated just how agile and flexible he was. Tonya told us about his life which began as an orphan. His story was inspiring, although he did not seem to be living in the past.

Tanya introduced us and told those in the shop that we were looking for a teapot—At least that's what I think she told him. I actually don't know what was said because they were speaking Mandarin, probably in the Taiwanese dialect. I had tried to learn some of the language, but I failed miserably. To my delight, most of the locals wanted to practice their English with me anyways.

We were busily looking for a teapot and my eyes quickly were glazing over from the sheer amount of merchandise in the tiny space. The shop owner and the locals got a feel for what we were interested in and found several others that matched what we picked out. After we settled on a couple of teapots we were interested in, the man behind the table invited us to have tea with him. Even having given up caffeine a couple of years ago, I sensed this was going to be an experience—so, I agreed. Laura and I sat down with our son, Jordan, and our host Tanya to have a cup of tea.

The last time I had tea in a shop, I ordered from a cashier in a green apron who asked if I wanted sweetener and whether I wanted it cold or hot. After placing my order, I waited impatiently for two-and-a-half minutes while my drink was made to order. Taiwan is a little different. I sat directly across from

the unnamed man in the mysterious Tea Shop. Having tea for some cultures is more of a ceremony or a process than just preparing a drink for a guest. He had a specific ritual that seemed to be a combination of precision and artistic flow. I would later discover this was his manner in most things that he did. Once the process begins, I discovered it just continues until something else happens to shift the focus. He would heat the water in some sort of modern contraption and then pour it over tea leaves in the tiny decorated pot. The individual teas seemed to have significance and required some approval and feedback. I was out of my element, so I generally just nodded and looked to Tanya for help.

I always describe the smell of Taiwan as unique, sort of like walking into my grandma's house when I hadn't been there in a while. It's not a good or bad smell—it's just the Taiwan scent. Yet, when in the Tea Shop, the tea seemed to overcome all other aromas and it made us feel something slightly different. I felt a peace and tranquility, which made me only a little bit uneasy.

Along with the constant supply of tea, the man began to share his practice. Tanya told us that he was telling us about his specific yoga practice that he learned from someone else. He demonstrated it by standing on a stool and showing us how flexible and agile he was. He felt it contributed to his youth and flexibility. It seemed to require an "ooh" and an "ahh" from me, so I obliged.

He was 60 years old but seemed to have the dexterity of a much younger man. As my envy grew, I desperately wanted him

KARL FOREHAND

to give me a book or DVD about this practice. I was searching for things that would make my life work better. I didn't know all that I would take home from this shop, but I was sensing it was something good!

## THE PART THAT GOT BETTER

Several years previous, Laura and I had begun a journey of eating plant-based foods. What initially was motivated by health became motivated by values and ethics. When my son and Tanya told the man that we were plant-based, he promptly invited us to share his supper with him. I thought, *Ha! This is what usually happens when I go to the store—we watch a guy tell stories and then eat dinner with him!* Briefly, I wondered if this would be the part of the story where the Americans were all poisoned and the Taiwanese lived happily ever after. But I trusted Tanya and we agreed even though it was late, and we had already eaten, we would continue with our engaging host (the tofu was delicious and just another eclectic part of this experience).

As we finished dinner, Tanya helped negotiate a price for the teapots. She assured us it was a bargain. After that, without announcement, he immediately began to macramé a little twine rope braid onto the teapots. It was a connector from the handle to the lid to keep it from getting lost. As he did this, he would occasionally spring up, then dart to some area of the shop and

return with something in his hand. He moved effortlessly like a teenager full of life and excitement and it made us feel special.

Though we were already full from supper, our generous host brought us peanuts and sunflower seeds. I was starting to feel a sense of connection with him and a satisfaction with making the decision to venture out into the night. This was an adventure I was going to be glad that I embarked upon.

Next, he arrived with a bottle. Something that the shop owner's friend said made me think this was a special deal. The enthusiastic tone of his voice seemed to exclaim, "That's a new bottle!" Tanya quickly explained that this was alcohol not usually given to foreigners. The label was colorful with Chinese characters, the liquid clear. It certainly seemed unmenacing on the surface. The thought quickly raced through my mind about dying right there in the Tea Shop from alcohol poisoning. My God, what would Laura tell the police? "Officer! My husband was poisoned by an uncommonly flexible yogi with no name who makes tea curated from the fountain of youth!"

The bottle looked like it held grain alcohol. If you have ever had moonshine—that's about the size of it. *Holy rice wine Batman!!!* That was strong stuff! Someone mentioned something about taste, but I couldn't feel anything in my mouth. I noticed he was beginning to fiddle with something else. This time it was his characters. Characters are how Taiwanese communicate visually. They are complex and usually depict a word or phrase instead of just one letter.

He gave us some business cards, then a sheet of graph paper with some characters he had written. Even Tonya was not much

help understanding this writing. Although she is very wise and culturally literate, she said something like “I understand it, but it’s very hard to explain.” When he saw that we appreciated the characters, he began writing something for me. By this time, I was simply just feeling very touched. He seemed compelled to make me happy—whatever it took. This was beyond customer service—I think he genuinely wanted to make people feel joy. I don’t know if he was focusing his attention on me, but it felt like it.



## THE PART I WILL NEVER FORGET

The shop owner was one of those people that others are attracted to, but I experienced him as one of the most genuine people I have encountered in a long time. He had time for me, he was interested in me and he took the time to make me happy! Sure, the cynical consumer in me wanted to imagine that he was trying to take advantage of us. But he already had our money, and there was a delight in his eyes that could not be ignored. A sincerity if you will.

This book is a compilation of what I learned from this man I will never forget. Stunned, I walked out of the Tea Shop saying to Laura, *What just happened?* I have been thinking about our experience at the Tea Shop ever since. I was hoping for an adventure and astonished that I found it in a tiny little Tea Shop and in an unassuming man that couldn't even speak my language.

I hope that I can learn to slow down and be the kind of person that I witnessed that night. To be present with people and share my food with them, to take time to love people instead of

## The TEA SHOP

just serving myself. Maybe I will remember to say something kind to the people I interact with when I buy and sell things.

I imagine Jesus to be a lot like the man with no name. Even though this gentleman probably wasn't a Christian, I was able to see Christ in Him. I cannot wait to go back to Taiwan and visit the nameless man in the Tea Shop. In the meantime, I'm hoping to bring the teashop to you in this book. This is his story as much as mine.



# 癒見茶莊

Unexpected Lessons  
from the Tea Shop

## INTO THE MYSTIC

*“In the days ahead, you will either be a mystic or nothing at all.”*

KARL RAHNER

I think everyone has a basket where the words we don't quite understand all get discarded to. I had put words like magical, mystical, and paradox into the basket of unacceptable uncertainty. They were considered a waste of time because they ate away at my assurance that I was right and comfortable with my beliefs. Walking into the Tea Shop challenged me to reconsider my basket of unacceptable words. In Taiwan there were unknown religious symbols, unfamiliar dialects and customs, and traditions I had never experienced before. All of this seemed magical and mysterious and maybe even mystical—whatever that was. For once, I didn't try to understand it before I experienced it! I just walked in and left my basket on the sidewalk outside.

Recently, I have discovered the music of Van Morrison. *Where have you been all my life?* Most people my age that like Morrison probably discovered him decades ago, but I like to think he came along just at the right time for me. I love his song

titled “Into the Mystic.” I have learned with most music not to spend too much time trying to interpret every song. Most artists leave some type of mystery to their art and that is what makes it intriguing and interesting and worth the time to contemplate. “Into the Mystic” just sends my mind off away from the temporal and causes me to think a little more deeply.

The Evangelical tradition I was once a part of didn’t talk much about the mystical even though the simplest definition of mysticism could be “Experiencing God” (there’s even a book by that title!). I once heard it said that the author was a bit of a mystic, ironic given the context at the time. But what does *mystic* really mean? Some of this is a little confusing for someone with my background. Sure, I’d like to go deeper—I’ve personally instituted some practices like centering prayer, yoga and meditation. But what is this mysticism that people talk about?

I had the privilege to listen to Dr. Glenn Young, from Rockhurst University speak about this topic. I’ve come to realize that I know only a little about a lot of things. Dr. Young has spent his career primarily studying Mystical Spirituality. He spoke for 3 hours without notes. I am only all the more engaged when I feel someone’s passion as they speak. I find that when people can study something their whole adult life, they tend to be less argumentative, more open and more excited about conversation. My hope for the world is to have more conversations about the things that matter. Possibly, we need more mystics.

Dr. Young confirmed the basic premise of mysticism—that it is a direct encounter with God. In contrast to our usual fascination with doctrinal logic, mysticism is experiencing directly

the presence of God. During the Reformation, there seemed to be those that discouraged basing anything on experience. As a result, many of us have opted for an intellectual reading of Scripture and a dogged commitment to the written Word while we diminish any experiential interaction that cannot be verified in writing. Inversely, there are times where the pendulum has gone the other way and we are irresponsible with our experiences. I see people who are driven by past trauma that interpret through their reaction to the pain they feel inside. They are usually experiencing and responding to past trauma instead of current encounters with God.

Why then do we have these experiences? Maybe an important distinction to make is that experience is more than just feeling something—it's not just an emotion—it is an encounter. Also, mysticism is not just something that happens. We do not generally just stumble into it. It is a part of a spiritual practice. Dr. Young defines mysticism in this way:

“Mysticism is that part of Christian belief and practice that concerns preparation for, consciousness of, and effects from the direct presence of God.”

Our practices not only help form us, but they also lead us to the place where we can have that direct encounter with God. There is some preparation involved.

Consider the actual experience of the direct encounter with the Divine. There are several different areas where mysticism might take place, but I don't want to define those for you. My primary takeaway from these sessions was that although mysticism may involve some solitude, it is also a part of the mainstream

of our spiritual life. Dr. Young and I had an in-depth discussion about how Mary and Martha of the Bible represent contemplation and action. While we could argue that Jesus said one was more important than the other, many other passages tell us that Jesus was highly interested in His *ethos* (His practice), which involved not just going to the garden, but also coming away from there to exercise that practice.

The final part of mysticism is what Bernard McGinn simply called the “effects” of the encounter. The result of the encounter with the Divine is that we move from that sacred space and express to others what God has impressed upon us. When we experience the love and adoration of the Divine, we become different. It doesn’t just affect us, but it has an effect on others.

I lean towards the interpretation that Van Morrison’s song was a love song of sorts. He was sailing home to see his love. But isn’t that what we long for when we consider mystical things? We long to be home with the one we love. We long to feel the sweet embrace. We long to have deep conversations and savor our time together. When we imagine traveling “into the mystic,” we should not be afraid. It is somewhat like a love song, but maybe even something deeper. It is more like a face-to-face, direct encounter where all the coverings and facades are removed.

The Tea Shop was my introduction into the mystical. Not because it was mysterious, but because it was so real. I left the Tea Shop believing that I had experienced God face-to-face even though the man with no name might have believed completely different from me. The subject of our religious beliefs never came



up, even in translation, but the experience of God was as real as anything I have ever experienced.

Maybe it's because God is experienced most vividly in relationship. We were created from relationship and for relationships. Whether we are comparing a Baptist to a Methodist or a Catholic to a Buddhist, all of us draw lines of distinction where we think God cannot speak. To paraphrase Richard Rohr, truth is truth no matter where it comes from and God's love knows no boundaries and doesn't wait for us to come into agreement before He starts to work. God was, without a doubt, at work in the Tea Shop.

I describe myself as mystical, probably because I'm way more interested in those things than I used to be. Part of my journey is to put language to the things I'm discovering, but I hope the other part of my journey is mystery and paradox and the actual encounters that I sometimes can't even describe. Some of the best things about being married only get muddied when you try to define them. Love songs are really poets trying to put into words what cannot be adequately defined. So, I hope my mystical experiences have more of an outward flow that benefits me and the people I encounter. As the song alludes to and as I experienced in the Tea Shop, let us "float into the mystic."

## SELF-GIVING LOVE

*“...many of us still believe that the center and source of all existence is a self-giving, other-centered love. Here there is no hierarchy of power, no hierarchy of value and no hierarchy of respect.”<sup>1</sup>*

WM. PAUL YOUNG

All of us make assumptions. Even in stating this I'm assuming something about you, the reader. Most of these assumptions are based on our beliefs which for many are just assumptions about what is true. I was raised to assume things are a certain way and that certain rules apply. Beliefs are sometimes based on experience—if something behaved a certain way before, we assume it will behave that way in the future.

I think one of our basic assumptions is where we will find love. We assume that we will find love in places like church, that we will experience love at home, and we expect to feel love from family but certainly not from a stranger. I assume that people who are like me will love me and those that are different from me are somehow the enemy or just not that interested in me. All of

these are assumptions; judgements that we make about ourselves or others. But, what if these assumptions wrong?

Upon entering the Tea Shop, I admit I carried with me a whole list of assumptions. I could trace many of these back into my checkered past of beliefs and biases that were built from my experiences, learnings, etc. However, the Tea Shop experience shattered many of the assumptions I had and continues to challenge them even now.

First, I assumed that buying an item from a retail store was simply transactional, not relational. In stores like Wal-Mart, I learned it is possible to avoid all human contact with store employees if you can dodge the greeter at the door. There are huge signs that point to the right department, and a complex description of the products on the boxes that house the product. If that doesn't work, we can google it and find even more information about what we want to purchase, even seeing reviews from others. We take the items to purchase to the front of the store, and thanks to more advances in modern technology we can now further avoid human contact through "self-checkouts." We have developed the habit of completing the transaction and ignoring the relational part of shopping. In some ways, this appeals to the typical male—get in, find what we are looking for, pay, and get out.

Second, I assumed that shopping should be efficient. Since Henry Ford developed the assembly line in the U.S., many of us have been on a quest to become more efficient. We even tried this with our food which has led to increased heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. I love to make the processes in my

life more efficient. From walking the dog to cooking my supper, if I can save money, save time or make it better, I'm all in. As a result, I am constantly looking for ways to make things better. Efficient—*maybe*? But I'm not sure if it is good or bad. Efficiency was just one more assumption I carried with me into the Tea Shop.

Third, I assumed a whole rolodex of labels including “heathen.” My past tradition used this to define anyone that wasn't converted to believe our particular doctrines. The assumption is that those who are different from us are somehow inferior to us. Whatever I know and understand, they are “other” and so they must be a different class of human—more animal-like or savage. This process of demoting and re-classifying things other than us has gone on as long as humans have existed. We see this used everywhere from the Bible to how the U.S. described the Native Americans, we used similar language for African slaves, and now this kind of language is being used to label immigrants.

Even people in the Bible, tried to classify other nations as something other than themselves to justify wars, genocide, and the like. They even blamed it on God. Leaders like Hitler classified Jews as subhuman and convinced Catholic and Protestant believers to exterminate those other than themselves.

These classification and labeling practices continue to this day. A quick scan of the daily news shows us who to disregard, hate, or fear—all based mostly on hasty assumptions. When I entered the Tea Shop, I was growing to love the Taiwanese people, but those I did not know were still suspect. I did not want to hurt them, but I also didn't want to be caught in a dark

Tawainese alley by myself either. My cross-cultural experience in the Tea Shop revealed my prejudice about things I didn't fully understand. I didn't want to feel it—but I did!

Finally, I carried with me religious assumptions. My background taught me I had the answers and I needed to share this knowledge with others to save them. I knew that if I was a good Christian, then I should be trying to convince people that they were wrong (most religions label them as “lost”) and I am right (labeled “saved”). Every day this happens but I think if I am honest with myself, it hasn't produced a good result. “I am right” and “you are wrong” are both prideful and judgmental statements.

Some readers of this manuscript may wonder, “But if it's truth, does it really matter if we are judgmental?” My former tradition subtly encouraged me to judge others because we believed we had the truth. For me, this wall of contradiction began to crumble when I considered a thought in my previous book, *Apparent Faith*. When someone proposed the hypothesis, “None of us is right,” I began to ask the question, “What if I am wrong?” When I carry this question with me, I seem to get better results from my explorations.

My assumption was that these people could not possibly find the right path without me. I am thankful that this assumption was steadily eroding for over a year at that point in my life. My previous assumptions were starting to crumble, and this was probably the reason that my visit was so fruitful. I didn't feel the need to change the man with no name and he didn't feel the need to change me. We just kind of loved each other, which Jesus seemed to think was the most important thing to do.

For love to happen, we must switch the focus from transactional to relational. When I entered the Tea Shop, I experienced people focus their attention on me. The transaction of buying the tea pots took a couple of minutes, but the relational part of the visit took close to two hours. In Taiwan instead of greeting you with “How are You?” or “How are you doing?”, they ask “Have you eaten?” Now, I am a cook and I’ll admit that I often badger people to eat when they are at my house—it makes sense to me to meet their basic need for food by asking, “Have you eaten?” Transactional thinking leads to efficiency and serving the most customers. Relational thinking centers on love for other humans and pays a different kind of reward. I wasn’t expecting the Tea Shop owner to teach me this, but he did!

I found it’s easy to believe that God’s love is relational as I have experienced love within the body of Christ. I learned about love from the sacrifices of people I know and from those I have had the privilege to love. According to Wm. Paul Young, this type of love is defined as love that is “other-centered” and “self-giving.” I have experienced this type of love inside the church, but I have also found love’s ugly cousins hiding there as well—self-centered love, selfish love, manipulative love. Maybe these types of love are not really love at all or maybe they were just polluted. Either way, what I experienced in the Tea Shop was a love that was other-centered and self-giving—this made all the difference to me.

For the people in the Tea Shop to love me, they had to value me. They sought out ways to make me happy, they were friendly to me and gave up two hours of their time to invest in

me. They were other-centered and self-giving—they were lovers. Classifying someone as *other* only helps justify abuse of that other. Demoting other people doesn't help us to love them, it never makes the world better, and it never makes us righteous or holy or productive. The owner of the Tea Shop saw me as a fellow human being—he valued me—and, in turn, I learned to do the same.

Since I spent time in the Tea Shop on the other side of the world, I have attempted to translate these values into actions. I am trying to practice other-centered, self-giving love toward my wife and family. It is easy to assess what we can gain from relationships but much harder to imagine what we can give.

I hope to take this experiment a bit further and employ what Jesus called “loving our enemies.” It is exciting when people who I didn't expect to love me show affection toward me, it teaches me something about myself and about God. But, what about the people that I know don't like me? What about the people that see me as sub-human? I hope I can fight the urge to retaliate or get them first by simply giving of myself whether it looks promising or not. Someday, maybe, I can ask the man with no name about this, but what I suspect is that this idea is one of those that will change the world. Jesus certainly seemed to think that it would.

In the Tea Shop, it was just overwhelming to literally feel the concern that these people had for us. I believe that focus and concern begin with the questions we ask. We need to ask the right questions. Do we ask what we can get from an encounter or what we can give? True giving is without expectation, less

transactional and more relational. Do we ask, “How is this person like me?” or “How is this person different than me?” Looking for common ground builds relationships while looking for differences builds division and resentment. Do we ask what can I give to this relationship or what can I get from this interaction? One of these creates an atmosphere of poverty; the other works from our abundance.

The nature of the adventure is that we often find something different than what we were looking for. My excursion into a different culture, outside of my plans, caused me to consider something else that is connected to other-centered love.

I used to watch a lot of detective shows. You know the ones—the detective paces the interrogation room to intimidate the perpetrator and finally the detective gets frustrated and pounds the table yelling, “I want answers!” I often feel like the frustrated detective as I try to be a good parent and husband, even a good Christian. The Tea Shop taught me to focus on the questions. The answers will come later.

I am becoming more comfortable with uncertainty. I am learning to find as much joy in asking the question as in finding an answer. For example, “What if I am wrong?” As I do this, I realize I can only really find answers when I keep asking questions. Some answers come quickly while other answers can take years or decades to unravel—some questions may never have answers. But, still, I’m learning to ask good questions and I’m learning to be at ease when the answers don’t come when I want them to.



Early in my life, I learned to set goals and revel in their achievement—to set expectations high and then meet them. As I achieved bigger and better goals, I applied this to my relationships and my religion. In a sense, I stopped asking questions and expected what I already knew to be realized. The Tea Shop shattered all of that—the owner didn't seem to have any expectations for me. I didn't need to help him meet some goal he had arbitrarily set. He sold me a dragon statue, but only after determining that Laura and I were born in the year of the dragon. He learned this about me and then matched an offering to me and not his desire for me. It was relational, and it made me happy.

I expect to find love in the Church and sometimes, I do. Certainly, that is where I learned about love and learned how to love, but church experiences have also hurt me as I often found something that masqueraded as love but really had the opposite effect. I learned about love from my family of origin. With all its challenges, my family growing up was a loving environment that helped shape me. The mistakes made in my family and the church were probably because we didn't know any better, so I try not to hold any grudges. My current family is where I find the most direct, Christlike love I have ever experienced. I would be devastated if I found that we no longer could love each other.

I went to Taiwan to have an adventure. I expected to find satisfaction by accomplishing my goals. Instead, I found love in a Tea Shop with a man who had no name. I wasn't even really looking for love, even though being loved/receiving love is one

KARL FOREHAND

of the root cravings of the human soul. I am glad that I saw through my assumptions, stepped into a Tea Shop in Taiwan, and met the man with no name. He showed me a literal and physical example of other-centered, self-giving love and for this I am grateful.

For more information about Karl Forehand  
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## ADVENTURES ARE UNSCRIPTED

A scooter crash, changing plans, and adjustments to the budget sounded like disaster for a careful-minded ex-pastor hoping to salvage what was left of his family's vacation. *The Tea Shop* is a travelogue of new discoveries and dashed assumptions, where a simple shop owner taught the Forehand family lessons that they were not prepared for, but somehow understood perfectly.

Circumstances and situations collide in an obscure tea house to remind us that joy is in the *discovery*—not in confirming our already established beliefs. So let us pour you a cup of tea, have a seat at the table, allow yourself to be present, and begin to see with new eyes. You are welcome here!

*“The Tea Shop takes readers on a journey of discovery that makes a difference!”*

THOMAS JAY OORD

AUTHOR OF *GOD CAN'T* AND *THE UNCONTROLLING LOVE OF GOD*



**Karl Forehand** is a former pastor and author of the award-winning book, *Apparent Faith: What Fatherhood Taught Me About the Father's Heart*. He is the founder of The Desert Sanctuary, a home for spiritual nomads seeking refuge on the journey of deconstruction. He lives in north-west Missouri with his wife, Laura, and dog, Winston.



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