

# BodyLife Past Article Archive

## Daisy Petal Christianity

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BodyLife • March 1999

*He loves me.*

*He loves me not.*

*He loves me.*

*He loves me not.*

It is a game little girls play hoping to find out if the boy of their desires also desires them. As the daisy petals are torn from the flower one by one, the chant continues. The tension builds until the last petal tells all. Are they loved in return or not? Even if you're watching them from far away, their squeals of delight or groans of sorrow will tell you how it turned out.

Of course no one takes it seriously. When they don't get the answer they want, many will take another daisy and start the process again. It doesn't take long even for children to realize that flowers just weren't designed to tell romantic fortunes. Why should they link their heart's desires to the fickleness of chance?

Why indeed!

It seems to be a lesson far easier learned in romance than in our relationship with God. Perhaps because he has eyes we cannot look into and a voice that our ears often cannot hear, we look to our circumstances for clues as to how God feels toward us on any given day.

Is he delighted with me, or disappointed? Am I in a place to receive his blessing, or have I messed up enough to warrant his anger? Can I feel safe with him today, or should I shy away in fear? It's a game too many of us play.

I got a raise at work. *He loves me.*

I lost my job. *He loves me not.*

I got something meaningful out of the Bible today. *He loves me.*

My child is seriously ill. *He loves me not.*

I gave money to someone in need. *He loves me.*

I let my anger get the best of me. *He loves me not.*

Something I prayed for actually happened. *He loves me.*

I fudged on the truth to get me out of a tight spot. *He loves me not.*

Have you ever felt like that? Tossed back and forth, you sort through ever circumstance just like you used to pluck daisy petals--hoping to find some clear evidence of God's disposition toward you. Does he love me?

## **What God Is This?**

It is a perilous tight-rope. You have heard that God loves you and in your better moments you believe it easily.

But what do you do when circumstances turn hurtful? For you have also have heard that he is a God of vengeance, demanding your obedience to his will. If he rewards those who follow him, are your difficulties confirmation that you're not on his good side?

Here is the problem isn't it? Scripture paints two seemingly contradictory portraits of him. As the holy God he is shown to be unapproachable in his purity, willing to met out unspeakable torment on his Son, and ready to consign the unrepentant to eternal agony in hell. He is also portrayed as a tender Father, so loving that the most wayward sinner could run to his side in absolute safety and find forgiveness and mercy.

If you are not able to resolve these images into a coherent view of God, you will end up playing the he-loves-me-he-loves-me-not game. Like the schizophrenic child of an abusive father, you'll never be certain what God you'll meet on a given day--the one who wants to scoop you up in his arms with laughter, or the one who ignores or punishes you for reasons you don't understand.

Vacillating between loving him and fearing him will keep you from learning to trust him. For you know intuitively that you cannot love what you fear; and you will not fear what you love. Here is why so few believers ever discover the depths of friendship God has offered to them. They see God's holiness as a contradiction to his tenderness. Unable to reconcile the two, fear wins out and intimacy with him is forfeit.

## **Fear Him or Love Him?**

Fear and love cannot exist side by side in the human heart. Though the Psalmist tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom--it is only the beginning. We need to learn that love is the fulfillment of it, and that's why John said that perfect love will cast out all fear. The upshot is this: if you don't love

God, you would be well-served to fear him. Once, however, you learn what it really is to love him, you will never need to fear him again.

Only by experiencing this depth of love can you come to know God as he really is and how secure you are in him. Discover that out and your calamities will never again drive you to question God's love nor whether you've done enough to merit his affection. Instead of fearing he has turned his back on you, you will be able to rest in his love at the moments you need it most.

This has been God's desire for you since the first day of creation--to invite you past your fear of him, to discover what it means to love him. He offers you an intimate friendship with him that will transform you as he alone becomes the all-consuming passion of your life. He will be the voice that steers you through every situation, the peace that sets your heart at rest in trouble and the power that holds you up in the storm. He wants to be closer than your dearest friend and more faithful than you've ever known in any human being.

I know it sounds too good to be true. How can mere humans enjoy such a friendship with the Almighty God who created with a word all that we see? Do I dare think that he would know and care about the details of my life? Isn't it presumptuous to even imagine that this God would take delight in me, even though I still struggle with the failures of flesh?

It would be if this were not his idea before it was ever yours. He's the one that offered to be your loving Father--sharing life with you in ways no earthly father ever could. He's the one that loves you more than you have ever been loved, and he knows that when you discover that, all of your fears, including your fear of him, will be destroyed.

## **Where Is This Love?**

There's only one place you can go to find a love so powerful--the cross on Golgotha. Here the Father and Son unveil a plan so incredible that it opens the door for you to have an eternity-long, love-relationship with the Lord of glory.

For most of my life in the faith I have seen the cross only as the substitutionary sacrifice that allowed Jesus to pay the price for my sins. It is only in the last few years that I have discovered it is so much more. The cross not only qualified us for salvation, but also provided the basis for our confidence in his love. Turn your eyes again to his cross, and see what transpired between a Father and a Son that forever secures our place in his love. He was not just punished for our sin, but he took sin into himself, so he might destroy it there for all who want to come to him.

That is the love God invites us to live in every day. Fear paralyzes, but love will free you to come to him, even in the midst of your worst failures, knowing that he loves you enough to change you. Fear makes you

work harder to prove your worth to him; love teaches you to trust his work in you.

For too long organized religion has sought to teach us that fear and shame will make us better Christians, but it is not so. Insecurity about your place in him will do far more to separate you from your loving Father than to ever draw you to him. Jesus knew that. He taught people how to live securely in God's love every moment of every day so that he could transform them in ways they never could on their own.

For those that think grace offers us the luxury of throwing token acknowledgment to God while we continue to live to our own desires, you greatly misunderstand it. Grace frees us to live in relationship with God while he teaches us how to live in his desires. When you learn to live in Father's love, you will discover how to love him with all your heart. And I dare you to do that, and not be transformed into an authentic reflection of his glory.

Drink deeply of his love every day. Engage him daily in conversation. Ask him to reveal himself and his love to you and watch him do so in the most unlikely places.

He wants you to walk with him that way every day, for the rest of your life--never fearing him again.

*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear,  
because fear has to do with punishment.*

*The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

*1 John 4:18*

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