

God Has a BIG Lap!

Anyone who knows me (poor souls!) knows how much I LOVE dogs, all dogs, but especially our two dogs, Rocky and Maggie, and super-especially my bestest buddy, Rocky. He is a people dog, almost too much at times, and even at 90 lbs. considers himself a lap dog. I always wanted a lap dog, but never thought it would be a 90 lb. lap dog! A few days ago, Rocky was lying on his couch, relaxed and happy, so I joined him to give him a belly rub. He put his head in my lap, utterly trusting and content.

I thought about how wonderful it feels to experience such affection. Needless to say, a dog like Rocky is easy to love; nevertheless there are parallels between our love for our dogs and God's love for us. I see the dogs' vulnerability, their devotion and affection, their eagerness to please, and it creates in me a fierce love for



them, and a determination to take care of them and protect them. They return my love and desire to protect in full measure.

Do we not think that God looks at us that way, even as we are so much harder to love? We are not the innocent, lovable creatures that dogs are, but even so, God's love for us is like our love for the dogs, or for our children, with a love so much higher and greater that we can't even imagine it! God has a B-I-I-I-G lap for us to sit on!

If you are at all like me, you have trouble imagining God loving you or approving of you. I realize, as I think about it, that my image of God is that of a Father who is stern, demanding, critical of me, and usually angry or irritated at me for the many dumb or bad things I do and think. I feel pressure to do better, to straighten up my act, to please Him and thus gain His approval.

Here's one way to test yourself and your image of how God views you: tell yourself (or someone else) that

God **LIKES** you. Does that shock you? It shocks me when I think of it that way. I say to God, "How can you like me, when I don't even like me??" We hear the phrase "God loves you" so often that we don't give it much thought. It becomes wallpaper. Yeah, sure, God loves me. We all know that. We've been told that forever. But God "likes" me or you? Whoa! That's different. That means that God may feel affection and warmth toward me, and even approve of me. Really??? Wow!!

We need to realize that these erroneous images and thoughts about God's disapproval and constant anger are planted in our minds and circulated widely among us humans by God's Enemy, Satan. He has successfully created this image of a God who is distant, angry or at least irritated, and interested only in blind obedience and in taking all of the fun out of life. Even we who read the Bible regularly inject this image into whatever scripture we are reading. We see God through the lens of the Satanic distortion.

We do NOT need to scurry around like rats, finding the darkest corner in which to hide in fear of the coming wrath of God. We do NOT need to work harder, smarter, and faster in order for God to approve of us. Neither should we take His love for granted, figuring that we are free to do anything we want to do, because He will still luvvvv us regardless.

He does make some demands on those of us who choose to receive His love. He wants 100% of our lives committed to Him. He



His Spirit-glasses. We will long to be back with Him and look forward to the day when we no longer have to put up with the frustration and pain of what we experience and see in this broken earthly life.

A few days ago, I was reading Proverbs 8, in which "Wisdom" (probably the Holy Spirit) is speaking of God's creation of the world. This little excerpt amazed me as I read it again, for the first time: when he [God] marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.

Wow! I saw God as a smiling Creator, pleased with His work, even "delighting in the children of man"! How often do we think of God smiling or laughing, or exhibiting a sense of humor? Where do we think we got those attributes?

One of my favorite psalms is Psalm 103 which I think of when I feel down or guilty or alienated from God. When you have a chance, read the entire Psalm, but my favorite part is this:

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

So lift up your hearts, give your entire self, self-will, possessions, activities – your very lives – to Him and just wallow in His caring about you, caring for you, and yes, even liking you!

Linda Gammel

wants us to follow His lead in our lives and to be filled with His Spirit. He wants us to grow in His Spirit so that we grow in our ability to see the world through

THE MAN AND THE BIRDS

By Paul Harvey.

The man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a scrooge, he was a kind decent, mostly good man. Generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn't believe all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmas Time. It just didn't make sense and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn't swallow the Jesus Story, about God coming to Earth as a man.

"I'm truly sorry to distress you," he told his wife, "but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve." He said he'd feel like a hypocrite. That he'd much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. And so he stayed and they went to the midnight service.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound... Then another, and then another. Sort of a thump or a thud... At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window.

Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it.

Quickly he put on a coat, galoshes, tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in. So he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs, sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted wide open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued

to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them... He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms... Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn.

And then, he realized that they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me... That I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how? Because any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.

"If only I could be a bird," he thought to himself, "and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to safe, warm... to the safe warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see, and hear and understand."

At that moment the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he stood there listening to the bells – Adeste Fidelis – listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas.

And he sank to his knees in the snow.



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