

## REFLECTIONS

By Phil Casey



## Loved Like I Love My Kids

**H**ow great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1).\*

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:15-17).*

### Learning Greater Truths

I think God made families to teach us about himself as our Father. Although it's hard to see the resemblance in those who are abusers, deserters, or couch potatoes—and even the best of earthly fathers is but a pale reflection of our heavenly Father—still some parallels give us a good idea of who He is. Strong provider. Giver of life. Protector, hero, guide. I'm thinking specifically of what my kids have taught me about the relationship between God and His children.

I have four children, and I love each of them so much it hurts. I'm proud of them, and not for their accomplishments, but for our relationship. They bring me a joy no money can buy nor any foe take away. I am my kids' dad, and it makes me smile.

My oldest is now a missionary in Italy, but when he was small, he taught me something about praising God. I remember hearing little Jason playing in his room, singing, with total abandon, a tune he made up on the spot, "My Daddy is so big, my Daddy is so strong, my Daddy is the best Daddy in the whole wide world." Unsolicited, joyful praise to the father he knew and admired. And I think, *Father, help me to be like a little child, giving You unadulterated, pure praise from the depth of my heart.*

My second boy, now a surgical technician, loved to play soccer during his teen years. Few things give me more joy than watching one of my boys play soccer. It was my birthday, a beautiful fall day, and

my boy was on the field. At one point, he took the ball and began advancing it down the field by himself—a breakout. He took it all the way down the side of the field, zig-zagging around opponents. I remember as if it were yesterday. He crossed to the center and shot, scoring a beautiful goal.

But the best part—the part that to this day still brings tears to my eyes and a lump to my throat—was when he turned from the goal and started running back upfield. His eyes swept the sidelines until they locked on mine, and both arms swung round to point at me, as if to say, "That was for you, Dad. Happy birthday!"

Dare we put ourselves in that spot? Can we imagine ourselves as a kid on our Father's field, doing our best to make Him proud?

My third boy taught me the importance of relying totally on the Father when you're afraid. One beautiful spring day when he was 6 or 7, we were kicking the

soccer ball at the park on the edge of town. We were advancing the ball down the field together, passing it to each other. At one point, Tim was going for the ball and about to kick it when he saw it—a snake, about five feet long, that was only two inches from the ball!

Somehow he turned in midstride, sprinted to where I was, and literally climbed me like a tree! Not just to my arms—he kept climbing until he was perched on my shoulders!

"When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" (Psalm 56:3, 4). How great to run instinctively, intuitively, in a split second, to the One who can save us from any and all scares, frights, and the many terrible things that come our way.

### A Special Lesson

My fourth child, our only daughter, now 15, has taught me how much God loves even the least and the lowliest. Emilee was born with a developmental delay, and from early on was diagnosed as mildly

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mentally handicapped. There has never been an official explanation for why she is the way she is, just a continual confirmation every day at her special ed class at school that she is not like “normal” kids.

Emilee can spell forward and backward. She loves to read anything she gets her hands on. After meeting you once, she will remember your name and give you a hug the next time she sees you. But when it comes to math, problem-solving, or reasoning skills, she’s back there with the first-graders. There are certain areas of her brain function that just don’t work.

The world might stamp **MENTALLY DEFICIENT** on her school records or on her forehead, but there’s nothing deficient about her love for her dad. She’s always drawing me pictures and writing on them, “To Dad. Love, your daughter Emilee.” With her head on my shoulder and our fingers intertwined, she’ll say, “You love your daughter, don’t you, Dad?” And I point to the “Princess” necklace I gave her, and say, “You bet I do!”

Like Emilee, I am deficient when measured against the standard of Jesus’ perfect life! I get it wrong and stumble along like a spiritual first-grader many times. Like Paul in Romans 7, I don’t do the things I know I should, and I find myself doing the things I shouldn’t. Yet my Father loves me in spite of my deficiencies, and is helping me to become more and more like His Son.

Could the love I feel for my daughter be the kind of love that God has for me? Dare I think it? “You really love me, don’t you, Lord?” And He will intertwine His Spirit with mine, point to the cross, and say, “You bet I do!”

In all my education, through Bible college, seminary, the mission field, and in Christian ministry for 31 years, the most precious lessons I’ve learned have not been from an erudite professor or in some library research project. They’ve come from my kids, in the give-and-take of life. It is as I have learned to love my children and to receive their love in return, as my heart has hurt with them, as I’ve shed tears with them, as I’ve embraced them in celebration, as I’ve prayed with them and for them, that I clearly begin to know what it means that God loves me. That is what brings tears to my eyes, gratitude to my heart, and motivation to my feet.

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*\*Scripture quotes are from the New International Version.*

**Phil Casey** is executive director for Literature And Teaching Ministries (LATM) in Joplin, Missouri.