Does God Like You?

Have You Ever Wondered If God Liked You?

Years ago when I was in elementary school, I told one of my best friends that I liked a girl in our class named Kim. He promised he would keep it a secret but the next day I went to school, everyone in my class knew I liked Kim. Needless to say I never again told Dan any of my secrets, but I also wondered if he was really my friend. If he was, why would he make a promise to me and then so quickly break it? Many have felt like God has treated them badly and wonder if He is their friend. It is not unusual for high school students to not believe God likes them because they feel let down by Him. They failed a test, didn't get accepted into the school they wanted, liked someone who didn't have interest in them. I wonder how many adults question the friendship of God because they got into a terrible car accident, lost their job, had their marriage fall apart, or fell into a great depression. Many as they get older feel lonely and wonder why God doesn't give them someone to love them, they suffer a stroke and it leaves them unable to do normal chores, they lose their job because the company that they have faithfully worked for chooses to go with a younger workforce. It is not unusual for us to wonder if God really does like us, if He cares about the troubles we face. Our big idea is a big one. God likes you.

I realize that asking this question, "Does God like you" may sound preposterous because the Bible makes it clear that God loves us. But if we are honest, it can be accepted that God loves us but sometimes, and for some, many times it is tough to believe He likes us. Consider the child who tells her mom that of course she loves her, she has to because she is a mom, but it sure doesn't seem like she likes her. John 11 relays the spectacular miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. That is of course the most crucial detail of the historical account but there is one pertinent detail found in it that has often puzzled me and perhaps it has you too. Before He raised Lazarus from the dead, the Bible says that Jesus wept. This of course is famously the shortest verse in the Bible, but it is packed with insight into the personality of God. Why would Jesus weep? We can see why Lazarus's two sisters Mary and Martha wept and why their friends who were with them cried. But why Jesus? He had already stated to His disciples, albeit in language that was a bit cloaked, that although Lazarus was dead, He was going to bring him back to life. And He told Martha when she approached Him, that her brother would rise again. And then Jesus reminded her that He was the resurrection and the life. That was who He was and Is. **Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies…** (John 11: 25 NIV) It is hard to fathom why, if Jesus already knew He was going to bring Lazarus back to life, He would weep.

Keep in mind that the Greek word used to describe Jesus' response as He stood among the group of people mourning the death of Lazarus is different than what Mary and Martha and the others were doing. They were wailing and crying loudly. Jesus was quietly shedding tears. The Bible does not tell us why, but there are some explanations we can eliminate. He wasn't crying because Lazarus would stay dead and he was gone. He wasn't crying because He believed death was final and inescapable. He was not crying because Mary and Martha lost their brother for that was not going to last long. I believe it was much deeper and more comprehensive than that. Jesus felt the sadness of those He loved as they suffered. All of them. Not just Mary and Martha but every one of us who suffers. For some, like for Mary and Martha, the suffering may last for moments or days…for others, like for David's daughter Tamar, who was raped by her half-brother Amnon, it continues a lifetime. Jesus cried, because sorrow is found in all of us at different times and our sorrows are at times unbearable. There is a comment made by the prophet Isaiah about Jesus that deserves far more consideration than it generally receives. **Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...** (Isaiah 53: 4a NIV) Take a moment to ponder that. Jesus has carried your sorrows and perhaps still carries them. Do you think He has ever cried with you? I wonder, if at that moment when Jesus cried, He was crying for you too and what you have faced, or what you will face.

Jesus made a rather stunning declaration for those who think God is uncaring or calculating. He stated, **"I no longer call you servants…Instead, I have called you friends.."** (John 15: 15a NIV) Jesus has decided you are His friend. That is an astounding revelation, one which it may take all your life to grasp. Now this is what the Bible says about friends. **A friend loves at all times…** (Proverbs 17:17a NIV) If that is the case, then the truth is we probably don't have many friends and perhaps we haven't been a friend either to many people. We have lots and lots of acquaintances but how many friends? Jesus says He is your friend. His love for you never fails. Not when you fail, when you are spiteful and unforgiving or a time waster or irascible or stubborn or frustrating. He is your friend even then. Since love is the chief characteristic of friendship, then here is how friendship is on God's end. **Love is patient,**

love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 NIV)

Friendship, like love, has been so diminished in practice that it is barely recognizable anymore. You can say you are someone's friend and yet never show any of the qualities of love mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13. We use terms that no longer mean anything like fatherhood. I saw where a young NBA player was raised by his mom and taught by her the basketball skills he developed because his father, who was a star NBA player, had nothing to do with him as a child and teen. But now that former NBA star brags about the young man and calls him his son but was or is he really his father if you exclude the link of DNA between them? Terms like friendship lose their punch when it takes so little to be called a friend in our time. Consider this when it comes to God's love for you and friendship. The Bible says His relationship with you extends back to before you were born. **For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.** (Psalm 139: 13 NIV) God Himself is the one who puts you together at conception and you are His friend then. The Bible has more to say about His relationship to you and to all of us. **"This is what the Lord says — your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who has made all things…"**(Isaiah 44: 24 NIV) The One who died to give you eternal life is the same friend who put you together in the womb. His love for you is not an accident; it is a firm decision of His to in love make you the way you are. You are the very handiwork of God and the friend He loves.

A friend who lovingly forms you into the base design He wants you to be because He knows it is good is quite a friend. But not only that, He removes from you all the flaws you have brought on yourself by your bad behavior. A man who was crippled was brought by his friends to Jesus. Before healing Him, Jesus dealt with the worst parts of the man. He forgave his sins. **When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."** (Luke 5: 20 NIV) There is a type of friend who is a great friend. It is one who overlooks your flaws. But what kind of friend do you have who rather than ignoring your flaws, takes them out of you? That is the sort of friend to cherish and keep and it is Jesus. One thing I appreciate about some of my closest friends is that they are kind. The account of Zacchaeus has been discussed in countless numbers of sermons but there is a detail in it that still leaves me with a touch of wonder. Zacchaeus was despised, probably even hated by nearly everyone. He was a tax collector who cheated people without conscience. Yet when Jesus approached him, perched in a tree, our God invited Himself to the man's house to eat with him. Jesus didn't just love him because Zacchaeus was a human being and God loves the whole world. Jesus liked him and wanted to be with him. Jesus was the most famous celebrity in Judea and Galilee at that time and of all the other good and normal people in the village, Jesus chose this odd, corrupt and despised Zacchaeus to spend the rest of the day getting to know. Perhaps no one else in the world liked that selfish tax collector, but Jesus did. And Jesus likes you. That is the big idea. Jesus likes you. He is not turned off by your flaws, your quirkiness or your personality. Jesus likes you and wants to be with you. Take a moment to let that sink in today. There is not a person in the world who does not need to hear this. The widow who lives alone, the child who is bullied at school, the mom or dad who finds parenting a thankless job, the teacher who feels unappreciated, the student who has lost her way. God likes you and wants to be with you.