

Childlike or Childish

"I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" Malachi 1.2a

One of the greatest times parents experience is when their children mature to a level when they know - really, and personally know - how much you have sacrificed to make things better for them.

There are those wonderful times as your child grows up when she begins to amaze you with her perceptions - when she first looks up and recognizes your face, you pick her up and she nestles into your shoulder. That is the childlike nature that causes her to feel safe and secure - she falls asleep without caring where she is, where she is going or how long she will be gone. Her only concern is that her head is resting on Daddy's shoulder and she is supported by his arms. In that moment, daughter and Daddy experience a silent but memorable moment of love and trust.

As age begins to creep on and she becomes a toddler, she begins to explore the world. She wants to be free from her Daddy's hand so she may roam unencumbered by his grip; however, whenever startled or unsettled she will flee back to the safety of his side. As she clamps a firm grip on Daddy's leg, she looks up into his eyes - he can see her adoration and confirmation of his love in her countenance. In that moment, daughter and Daddy experience a silent but memorable moment of love and trust.

She is now old enough to move out of the house during the day and attend kindergarten. While Daddy tries to keep back the tears as his baby is spreading her wings, she steps out of the car and takes hold of the hand that will teach and protect her during her learning experience. Daddy says a quiet prayer for his little girl as she turns his way for one final look of assurance before committing herself to the strange building filled with unknown people. In that glance, daughter and Daddy experience a silent but memorable moment of love and trust.

Relationships grow throughout the school years - girlfriends and boyfriends (sometimes friend-boys if nothing is official), teammates and coaches, upperclassmen and lowerclassmen - all of the varied experiences are necessary to growth and maturity. Much of this is vital to the ultimate severing of the cords that unleashes this precious baby into the real world - so much Daddy must teach - so many things Daddy must endure through the maturation process of his baby. With these experiences, daughter and Daddy begin a more mature relationship that takes more than a simple look or a hug - this must involve understanding, and the understanding affords the needed love and trust.

She begins to look more to her friends and counselors for input and begins to widen her circle of relationships - all the while Daddy is still paying the bills and providing a comfortable home for the family.

Never before had she noticed that the boy down the street lived in a fancier house and the girl across town rode in a more expensive car - until now. Never before had she questioned bedtime or curfew requirements. It seems, that overnight the precious little darling has turned into a suspicious alien you have never met. Not only does she question the rules but also questions your motives. As you begin to explain your concerns and that you are acting out of love, she shoots back with, "How have you loved me? You don't trust me, or you would let me go!"

The more you try to explain, the worse the situation becomes. Your love, as seen by your child, is now restrictive rather than protective. Your arms are no longer a safe haven, but talons with which to ensnare her and tear away her liberty. As you explain all the things you have done, all the stuff you have purchased, all the time you have spent on her, and all the miles you have driven on her behalf she turns a deaf ear as if none of that expressed any type of parental love.

At what point may we conclude that the childlike faith and love of this precious creature has turned into childishness? It occurs at about the same time Christians begin to lose sight of all the benefits our Savior offers to each of us freely. It begins when we lose sight of our utter dependence upon Him for our satisfaction and fulfillment - when we become deluded into believing we can somehow manufacture peace and contentment without His help.

When we take for granted all the wonders of our Savior's love, we may be inclined to react in a childish manner and say, "Wherein have you loved me?" When we consider all the blessings God has given to us, we will be inclined to react in a childlike manner and say, "Look at all the marvelous ways God has shown His love to me!"

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