

**Spirituality for Today**  
**“God Loves You”**

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How amazing is this? God loves you!

The unity between the New and Old Testaments of the Bible on this single idea is mind-boggling. Let's go back 2700 years or so. I want you to meet the prophet Zephaniah. He lived around 650 B.C. In his day the people worshiped inanimate objects, the stars, the moon and the sun, but Zephaniah came along and had the gall to denounce their pagan practices. He preached a series of ideas held sacred by the Jews. These ideas formed the basis of the Judeo-Christian tradition; namely, that there is only one God, and He is essentially a God of Love.

To the ears of most, who were living at the time, this was preposterous! But to those who embraced this personal understanding of God, Zephaniah promised the fullness of joy. He ended his book with a hymn of joy, which was sung jubilantly for centuries by faithful Jews all over the world. The passage I like best from Zephaniah's work is found in Chapter 3:17. It speaks poetically about God's love: "God will exult with joy over you...he will renew you by his love. He will dance with shouts of joy over you, as on a day of festival," (Cf. the Jerusalem Bible).

One of the first signs of God's love is his very desire to be loved by His people. He wants them to love Him back. He promotes public worship. He inspired the psalmist to pray, "My soul longs for you O God," (Psalm 42:2).

Pope Benedict XVI wrote about the mystery of Divine Love, "I want my first Encyclical- "God Is Love"- to speak of the love God lavishes upon us." The pope almost writes it as a romance where God tries to woo us into leaving behind everything that is counterproductive to our union with him. His strategy is very subtle. He never tampers with our freedom. Love is a free gift and He wants us to love him with our free will. He gives us the power to please Him.

God could have easily overpowered us with His divine attributes, but that would have put us in a kind of bondage to Him. We would all end up as His love-slaves. No, He wants us to give ourselves freely. Pope Benedict made the connection between an egotistical life; one that is self-absorbed, and a life that is centered in God. "Authentic self-discovery...is a journey, and an ongoing exodus out of the closed, inward looking self". He then draws an interesting conclusion:

“Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, will preserve it," (Luke 17:33).

The message is clear: only those who live by faith, can learn to be dependent on the Lord and thereby grow in union with Him. "God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten Son so that everyone who believes in him...may have eternal life"(John 3:16).

Cast off any doubts you may have about your chances of winning God's love. He loved you long before you were born. He has given you the gift of life because He has a deep and abiding love for you.