

THE HUMANITY OF GOD

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A few years ago a friend told me she was thinking about writing a book called, “What Drives God Crazy?” That’s kind of clever and funny, but it does give us an inaccurate picture of a God who gets frustrated and annoyed, growls a lot, and needs to go talk to his therapist or unload on friends.

So although we can look at our own human emotions and know that God feels emotion, too – we were, after all, created in God’s image and that has nothing to do with eye color or the shape of our chin – a question that makes better sense to me is, “What Grieves God’s Heart?”

As a pastor, I talk to many parents who deal with the long-term, frustrating, and very sad problem of an adult child who continues to cause trouble in the family. It could be addiction, or criminal behavior, or even just that sense of entitlement that actually does drive us all crazy – the “I don’t have to get a job, no one can tell me what to do, give me money, rescue me repeatedly” – frame of mind that can just about tear a family apart. Many parents eventually have no choice but to learn what the phrase “tough love” means: the necessity of saying no, of stepping back and letting the child handle the consequences for his or her own actions. This is hard for parents, usually very painful. But sometimes, it turns out, the most loving thing a parent can do is to say, “No.”

In the Old Testament we see God continuously reaching out to his people, imploring, warning, even threatening them to repent of their sin, quit worshipping idols, quit defrauding each other, and return fully to him. When his pleas continue to be ignored, he does eventually step back and let Israel pay the consequences for their sinful behavior – much as any parent does when tough love is called for. Does this drive God crazy? On the contrary, I believe that although God does express anger toward the determined sinfulness of his children, he is, above anything else, a grieving parent. Because of Jesus Christ, when God looks at us and at the world, he sees through eyes of compassion, not anger.

The father of the Prodigal in Luke 15 is a wonderful picture of God as our Heavenly Father: waiting and watching for his son to come home, not to punish him, but to welcome him and love him and help him start over. This father did not become angry. He stood back, let his son pay the consequences of his sinfulness, and let his own heart be broken until his son learned his lesson, repented, and came home to his father.

The humanity of God means he grieves over a lost child as any parent would. The divinity of God is in his amazing grace, love, acceptance, power, and forgiveness.

If you feel separated from God right now, because of sin or neglect or a heart that’s grown cold and closed over time, it might be good to remember that he watches and waits for you at this very moment. He’s not angry; he grieves. And if you turn on to the path that leads toward home, you won’t be returning to a Father who’s waiting to punish you or reject you. You’re returning to a Father who loves you, forgives you, and wants to help you begin again. You will not receive his anger; you’ll receive amazing grace and profound love. What are you waiting for?