

The Child Heart of God

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If you want proof that God is a child at heart, look at a spring peeper. Only God could make one, but only a kid would dream one up.

One spring night when the air was mild and the sky dusted with stars, I drove out to Lake Michigan. Parking my car by the lakeshore road, I took a walk on a bike path and soon found myself on a boardwalk overlooking a wetland preserve. There I stopped, enchanted. A host of spring peepers filled the night with a magical chorus, like countless elves tapping on crystal glasses with silver spoons. Such marvelous, other-worldly music, drifting through the pale mist under the starlight!

“Thank you, Father!” I said. “Only you could do this!”

Only God.

Who but he could wrap such shimmering nocturnes in so incongruous a package? Who else would *think* of it: a tiny frog with bulging eyes and a solemn expression, looking as if he takes himself and all of life quite seriously . . . until his throat swells suddenly, startlingly, and out comes that crystalline call. The image is so absurd that you’d have to laugh. And I’ll bet that’s exactly what God did when he first made a spring peeper.

He must have taken thorough joy in making it—like a boy assembling a prized model car, paying careful attention to detail, making sure everything is just right. What fun! And of course, like the car, this model would in some way reflect the character of its Creator. Inventive? What do *you* think? Humorous? Colorful? Wonderfully so. And with one added dimension beyond the ability of the smartest boy, the brightest girl, the most brilliant adult on earth to impart. For this little work of art would *live*. This splendid, tiny, intricately fashioned sculpture, laughingly and tenderly crafted by the hands of the Master Artist, would breathe, would hop, would sing—would be given, in short, a nature and life all its own. And in its own small way, it would declare the glory of God as only a spring peeper can.

We speak of God’s transcendence, his omnipotence, his omniscience, his holiness—of qualities that set him apart as God, high, lofty, worthy of our adoration. And we are right. He is resplendent, indescribably powerful, wise, and other than us. But in our zeal to give him homage, I wonder what simpler, more accessible adjectives we overlook that also describe him? Words like *artless* and *innocent*. Naïve, never—but touchingly, almost heartbreakingly *childlike*. The truth is, within our heavenly Father dwells an incredibly tender, precious heart.

Could it be that in a strange way, God is vulnerable? I wonder. Though it scarce seems possible, it appears as if he has somehow willfully made himself so through the very act of creation. For what can be more risky and self-revealing than offering something you’ve conceived in your own heart and carefully fashioned with your own hands as a gift to someone you love?

Will the value of your gift be understood?

Will your loved one see through to the love behind it?

Will your gift be cherished so much the more because it comes from you?

Will it—will *you*—be accepted?

That act of inconceivable power and understanding whereby our Father formed the cosmos—was it but the prelude to an even more staggering act of humility and love? Is it possible that he created not just spring peepers, but trees, and horses, and milky blue mountain rivers, and the scent of evening flowers, and, indeed, all of nature—the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown, the close-at-hand and the light-years-distant—with the intent of presenting it all, in some wild, magnificent way, as his gift . . . to *us*? And in his extravagant giving, did he gladly assume the risk that many of us would fail to see the magnitude of his heart, of a love which by its own lavish nature finds its greatest joy in being received as freely as it is given?

The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that our Lord “upholds all things by the word of his power.” The very atoms dance at his command, choreographed and energized by his voice. The cosmos is filled with his speech, “the heavens declare the glory of God,” and each tiny, hidden rootlet and scarlet autumn leaf is an expression of his heart. Pause over a single wildflower, listen but an instant, and you can hear your Father speak. “Do you like it, child?” he asks, eagerly. “Here, in this moment, I make it my gift to you. Out of all my children, you will smell this blossom and see my handiwork in its petals.

“Come, roam the fields with me for but an hour, and I will show you other flowers, and birds, and dragonflies, and the slant of the sun on the hillsides, and I will open your ears to my love song of the wind in the maples. And your thoughts of me in these moments will become the gift I long for from you in return, worship at its simplest and purest.”

Who but a child would say such things? Who but someone unsophisticated and young at heart would come knocking at the door of our jaded, preoccupied adulthood, and through things that are simple, free, and beautiful, invite the boy or girl within us to come out and play?

Yes, El Shaddai, the High and Lofty One, is a child at heart. A child who steps outside the universe and, from a vantage point of incalculable greatness, looks upon it like a boy looks upon an exquisite, handcrafted model. A child who infiltrates the space within spaces, where electrons loom like planets and a single atom is as a solar system. An infinitely wise child who dwells in and reigns as king over the highest realm, the realm of spirit, where size, time, and location mean nothing—a realm that cannot be grasped or seen, of which this material world ultimately consists.

And the child is Emmanuel, God with us. God who knows and cares about what we think and how we feel, and about the circumstances of our day and of our life. God who is constantly speaking, revealing the beauty of who he is through the million-tongued creation that surrounds us. God who made all things for no reason other than that he chose to. God who created exotic orchids cradled in the branches of rain forest trees . . . giant worms living by geothermal vents at the ocean's floor . . . craggy mountains bathed in alpenglow . . . spring peepers chorusing in the night . . . things that

are good, and worthy, and that need no justification for their existence other than that God simply wanted to make them.

Son of God, daughter of the Most High, what does this say about *you*? For you, above all, are his reflection. All other things proclaim, in some way, the glory of Jehovah. But you, as his begotten child, participate in the very nature of your Creator Father. Need you any other reason, then, for taking joy in the things you love and love to do, other than joy itself? For what can be purer than reflecting, in ways that are true to your unique design, the delight with which God himself made all things?

Have you believed the lie of our utilitarian culture, rampant throughout western Christendom, that the worth of a thing is determined by its function? Have you denied any valid expression of the person God made you to be, not because the sacrifice was truly necessary, but because some tight, legalistic voice within you said, "What good is it?"

Or have you learned the truth, that grace is God's ability to weave *all* of your life—your passions, your pursuits, your interests, your sleeping and waking hours, your simplest actions, every aspect of the way you are wired—into a tapestry of redemption more breathtaking and powerful than anything you could ever contrive by attempting to be other (and less) than who you really are?

What is your passion? Bird watching? Basketball? Canoeing? Playing a musical instrument? Basket weaving? Bass fishing? Astronomy? Collecting porcelain pigs? Solving mathematical problems? Whatever it is, do it with all your might! For unless it's clearly immoral, it's not only permissible, it's good—because it's a part of *you*, and *you are in Christ and he is in you*. And because of that, the simple things that give you pleasure are as pleasing to your Father as if Jesus himself were doing them. Which, in a very real way, he is—through you!

Certainly any good thing can be abused, and we need to hold all that we are given loosely before God. His lordship in our lives demands no less of us. But remember who God is—the One who "gives us all things richly to enjoy." Think about that the next time you feel a twinge of guilt because you chose to play golf rather than attend the church Bible study. Of *course* studying the Bible is important. But it could be just as important for you to let Jesus walk the fairways for a few hours with people who might never set foot in a church. Your fun is his opportunity. Embracing that truth could rock your preconceptions about what Jesus wants from you and where he will lead you—and that in turn could cost you some fine-looking, legalistic baggage. But the trade-off is beyond worthwhile. You'll find yourself rediscovering and reclaiming the sense of wonder that only a child possesses. Your boundaries will broaden. The possibilities of your life will expand. Through new eyes, you'll see the incredible significance and kingdom potential of things you once had deemed of little worth. And you'll reflect with increasing faithfulness and true zeal the nature of your heavenly Father, who made the sky blue, and butterflies bright, and all things as they are simply because he liked the idea.

Dare to be a child. Dare to value what a child would value who has not yet learned the measure of a dollar and who treasures a chunk of quartz as if it were the Hope Diamond. Play like that child. Run your races, win and lose your tennis games, sing your songs, watch your sunsets, dance with abandon, and lose yourself as if for the first time in a bejeweled night sky. For God is in these things, and for you to take pleasure in them

gives him pleasure and affirms what he affirms. No other reason need be given. For in humbling yourself as a child to delight in your Father's fascinating, many-faceted world, you become more like him. And in creating what it is in your heart to create, whether a well-tuned engine or an intricate quiltwork, you partake of the nature of the Child who made all of creation and called it good.

Good.

That's Love, giving its verdict of clouds, and sandhill cranes, and the color orange on the artist's palette, and the legs of the linebacker, and the hands of the surgeon, and sound waves coalescing into a jazz solo in the bell of a horn, and trumpeting elephants, and ratcheting cicadas, and tumbling surf, and knobby old oak trees.

And, let us not forget, spring peepers.