



Singing Over Me

Author Richard Foster shares a story about one of his friends who went on a shopping trip with his three-year-old son. It was supposed to be fun. His friend envisioned a day worthy of thematic music as father and son meandered through bustling outdoor markets, stopping occasionally to share a hotdog or laugh at birds flying overhead.

But this day was not full of movie-worthy moments. It was one of those days when nothing goes right. Zachary was fussing, fuming and whining, and nothing Dad did would help. Dad tried to discipline him, tried to bribe him with candy and tried to disregard the judgmental stares from passer-bys.

Eventually, Daddy reached the breaking point, and just when he started wondering if anyone would notice if he shoved Zachary into his largest shopping bag, he was hit with special inspiration. On a whim he scooped up his little one, held him close to his chest and began to croon a love song. Not just any love song. An original. The words didn't rhyme, and it was terribly off key, but it was a song full of true, everlasting love.

"I love you, Zach. I like to play ball with you. It's fun to see you smile. I'm so glad that I'm your daddy, you are my precious one." Just like that Zachary began to calm down. He rested his head on Daddy's shoulder, and a smile began to play on the corners of his lips. They went from place to place in this fashion, Dad singing and Zach resting in his arms listening to this strange, exotic song. Finally, when Dad had finished his errands and was leaning over to buckle Zachary into his car seat, Zach lifted his eyes to Daddy's face and with delight whispered, "Sing it to me again, Daddy. Sing it to me again."

When I first heard this story, I put myself in the shoes of the overwhelmed, embarrassed parent at the store. But then God held up a mirror, and I got a glimpse of myself in the sandals of three-year-old Zachary. Finding myself in the store when I'd rather be

home taking a nap. In the store, but stuck in a long, slow line. The emotions seemed so familiar. Zachary could have been me thirty years ago—or yesterday. The only difference is that when I threw a tantrum as a kid, I was more likely to get a swat than a song. The "sing-a-love-song" technique was never in any of my parents' child-rearing books, and I suspect this dad's sudden inspiration wasn't either. I suspect divine intervention. After all, God knows a lot about love songs.

When God's special people, the children of Israel, were having not just a bad shopping day but a couple of bad generations, he still exulted over them with a song. Zephaniah 3 tells the story of a people who refused to listen to the voice of Lord. "No one can tell [them] anything; [they] refuse all correction" (Zephaniah 3:2, NLT). Like the Daddy in the story, God tried everything to stop the tantrum. He lived with his children in their city and made his justice evident. He wiped out opposing nations in the hope that his people would find reverence, honor and appreciation for him. But it all failed. They kept rebelling, fussing, fuming, sinning and rejecting him.

If I was God, I don't think I would have been singing a love song. I would be opting for a really long time-out. Yet at the end of this story that details all the rebellious things his children had been doing, this promise remains: "With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will exult over you by singing a happy song" (verse 17). Our God delights in us, even in our moments of defiance.

If you're at a place in life where you're not where you want to be, and you're throwing a tantrum, take a breath and listen. God's right there, ready to scoop you up and sing you a love song. He will keep singing for as long as you're cranky and crying. I know, because there are many days in which I lift my tear-stained eyes to his face, clasp my arms around his neck and say along with Zachary, "Sing it again, Daddy. Sing it again." □

—Susan Reedy

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