



Let It Go to Your Head

I made the horrible mistake of listening to what others said about my new Owner. They gave me a very long list of things I had to do if I wanted to be acceptable to him.

I remember the first church I ever served. It was a small church on Cape Cod, and my mentor in those days was Dr. John Stanton, a retired Presbyterian minister. I went to Dr. Stanton's house after the worship service of my first Sunday as the pastor of that church.

"Dr. Stanton," I said. "I'm worried." "What's worrying you?" he asked, setting aside what he was doing—as he always did—to talk to me. "If it's the sermon, I thought it was really good."

"I thought so, too," I responded. "What worries me is what I'm going to do next Sunday. I told them everything I knew this morning, and I have to do it again next week. That is frightening enough, but I have to do it every Sunday for the rest of my life. Frankly, I don't know that much."

I remember Dr. Stanton's laugh. He took me back to a large storage room behind his study where there were trunks and trunks stacked one on the other. He opened the one nearest to him. It was filled with sermon manuscripts.

"Son," he said. "All those trunks are filled with sermon manuscripts...some good, some bad and some not half bad. When I was your age and had preached my first sermon, I thought I had told them all I knew, too. I suspect God will give you something to say next Sunday."

Paul has an interesting statement in the introduction of his letter to the Ephesians. He writes, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." According to the *small* amount he has to give? According to the *little bit* he is willing to pass on to us? No. No. No.

The verse continues, "in accordance with the *riches* of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7, emphasis mine).

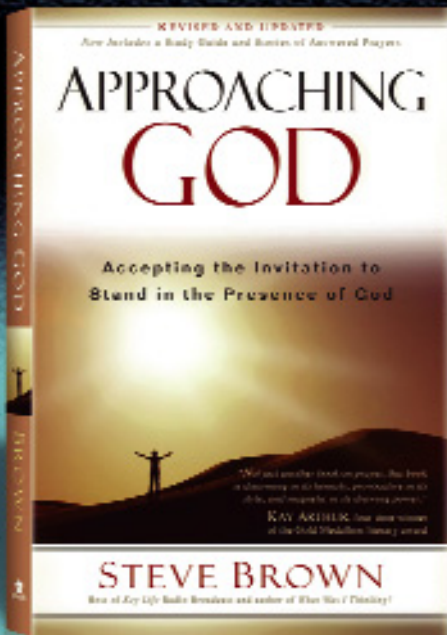
Peter says that we ought to cast all our care on God, because he cares about us (1 Peter 5:7). Jesus told us that we ought not worry because God takes care of everything else, and he will take care of us, too (Matthew 6:30). Paul wrote, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

One of the great mistakes we make is to assume that we must garner as much as we can from God's unwilling heart. It starts with a realization of our sin and unworthiness (which, of course, is true), the fact that God owes us nothing (which he doesn't) and a recognition of our helplessness (which, again, is a fact). Then we start to beg for his forgiveness, for his provision and for his blessing, feeling that if he answers only one tenth of our prayers we should feel privileged and grateful (which, I suppose, we should).

But don't you see? We've gotten it wrong. We've gotten it wrong because we've gotten him wrong. And because we've gotten him wrong, we have failed to live from the overflow of his love and grace.

Our little dog, "Annie the Orphan," showed up in the woods near our house, having been cast out by her previous owners who had horribly abused her. Sometimes Annie will jump in my arms when I come home in the evening and wag—not just her tail, but all of Annie—as if to say, "Aren't you glad I'm a part of your family, and don't you think I'm cute?"

Annie still deals with her past. I've never hit her, yelled at her or in any way been harsh with her, but she still goes out with me sometimes in the morning to get the paper, and when I pick it up from our driveway, she



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he asked me to remind you

winces as if I'm going to hit her. I say, "Annie, have I ever hit you?"

"Well, no," she says, "but you might."

"What makes you think so? If I haven't hit you for some of the dumb things you've done, I won't ever."

One of the great mistakes we make is to assume that we must garner as much as we can from God's unwilling heart.... But don't you see? We've gotten it wrong. We've gotten it wrong because we've gotten him wrong.

"Yes, but my previous owner hit me a lot."

"I'm not your previous owner, Annie. Try to remember that."

God reminds me that I'm like Annie. My first owner was Satan. I was abused by him and told I was worthless—worthy of condemnation. I was lonely and without any

hope. Then someone told me about Jesus. "Mercy came running" the day I turned to him. I was forgiven and promised eternal life.

But I made the horrible mistake of listening to what others said about my new Owner. They gave me a very long list of things I had

to do if I wanted to be acceptable to him. They told me to obey the rules or he wouldn't listen to my prayers. They told me I would bring shame on him if I didn't get better. They told me he was a hard Owner who would require stuff from me that I found extremely difficult, if not impossible, to give.

One day I wined in God's presence. "Child," he said, "have I ever hit you, been harsh with you or abused you?"

"Well, no," I said, "but they say you will."

"Why don't you listen to me instead of what others say about me? I'm quite fond of you, and that will never change. I will never condemn you, and that will never change. Because of the gift of my Son to you, I'm on your side and always will be. Will you try and remember that?"

"Yes, Sir."

I saw a bumper sticker that read: "God loves you, but don't let it go to your head."

But God told me that wasn't true. Instead he said, "I love you. Go ahead and let it go to your head." It's called living from the overflow of his love.

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown