

A Lesson About God's Love From a Child

Two years ago, my children and I attended a birthday party for one of Kenny's friends. At the time, Ellie was 4, Kenny was 2, and Lindsey was 1. Ellie was excited about going to the party, but not just because it was a birthday party. Ellie knew the birthday boy's older sister, Stephanie, would be there, and Ellie considered Stephanie her best friend.

Stephanie was several years older than Ellie—an older girl but not yet a tween. Usually when our families were together, Stephanie was interested in playing with Ellie. Other times, she not only seemed disinterested but ignored Ellie. Because of her age, I would have expected her not always to be interested in playing with a 4-year-old. But at her age, I also felt she should have known how to politely respond when Ellie spoke to her, rather than simply ignoring her.

Due to special circumstances, and because Ellie idolized Stephanie, I sometimes allowed the two girls to play together and then dealt with issues as they arose. And Ellie never seemed to mind that they often did. Though she would sometimes feel hurt or bewildered by Stephanie's words or actions, she never stopped loving Stephanie, and she never stopped being overwhelmed with excitement when she saw her or had the opportunity to play with her.

That's what happened at the party. Ellie had brought some glow sticks—those tiny tubes you can make glow in the dark and then form necklaces or bracelets with—that she wanted to share with Stephanie. We arrived at the party, and we didn't see Stephanie at first. But soon, Stephanie appeared from her room and headed toward the kitchen, where the snacks were set out.

"Stephanie!" Ellie squealed excitedly, and started toward her.

Stephanie grabbed a handful of pretzels and started toward the back patio doors.

“Stephanie, I have a glow stick for you!” Ellie said proudly, holding out the treasure she’d kept safe all the way to the party.

Stephanie didn’t even look at her.

“Stephanie!” Ellie called. “Stephanie!”

Stephanie opened the patio doors, stepped through and shut them again.

Ellie came to a stop, a bewildered look on her face. She stood for a moment, staring after her friend, then turned back to me. Silently, she returned to sit beside me, her head down. My heart ached for her, and I wondered for the thousandth time how Stephanie could so completely fail to realize that she shouldn’t act like that, and why.

Oh, but precious sister in Christ, isn’t that the way we act toward God sometimes? Don’t we ignore His love, freely poured out to us who don’t deserve it? Aren’t we sometimes rude to Him? Don’t we take for granted the fact that He loves us with all the passion in His heart?

Sure we do, and then we only pay attention to Him when we’re interested. When we want some comfort or some amusement, we turn to Him. Otherwise, we head right out the patio doors.

Ellie was hurt and bewildered at Stephanie’s response—or lack thereof. God is never bewildered, but His heart is wounded when we fail to respond to Him in love.

Friend, do you treat God the same way Stephanie treated Ellie? Imagine how He feels when you do that. Or imagine how God the Father feels watching us treat His child the way Stephanie treated my child. Probably similar to the way I felt, or the way you would have felt in my situation.

The most remarkable thing about the relationship between Stephanie and Ellie is this: Ellie continues to love despite

the many offenses Stephanie has committed against her.

The most remarkable thing about our relationship with God is that He continues to love us despite the many offenses we have committed against Him, too, and despite the fact that He knows there will come a next time where we hurt Him.

There came a point where Stephanie's verbal offenses became too numerous and too hurtful for me to allow her and Ellie's relationship to continue, except within the boundaries of strict limitations. Aren't you glad that God the Father doesn't limit our relationship with His Son when we have racked up too many sins?

Yes, our sin separates us from God and creates distance between us, similar to the limitations I had to impose on Stephanie and Ellie's relationship. But aren't you glad that those limitations can be removed anytime we're ready to repent and return to Him? Don't you rejoice that there is never a "point of no return"?

Despite the imperfect way we love Him, God never stops loving us. He never stops being willing to have a relationship with us. He keeps on loving us despite the times we hurt Him or ignore Him or sin against Him in some other way.

So, as incredible as it is that Ellie still loves Stephanie, isn't it vastly more incredible that God still loves us? Praise Him for His perfect, everlasting love. Repent of any sins you have committed against Him. Then ask Him to help you love Him with all your heart.

Don't ignore the relationship with Him that He's offering you. Don't just head out the patio door. Turn to Him in awe and gratitude that He wants to relate to you, a human being, at all. Go to Him, and spend the rest of your life loving Him. Not just sometimes, but always.

Deuteronomy 6:5—Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

*Adapted from **Megan Breedlove's** blog, *Manna for Moms*. Megan is the author of *Well Done, Good and Faithful Mommy* and *Manna for Moms: God's Provision for Your Hair-Raising, Miracle-Filled Mothering Adventure* (Regal Books.) She is also a blogger and a stay-at-home mom with five children.*