

Disarming One of the Enemy's Deadliest Traps

I was on the floor during a worship service years ago, touched by the Spirit and weeping in His presence. I had been hungry for Him and searching for answers. I struggled with condemnation, aware of my failings and imperfect behavior. Each time I sinned by having a wrong attitude or not demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit affirmed my sense of condemnation and my belief that, although God was love, He was probably loving me only because He had to. I assumed God was constantly disappointed in and frustrated with me. As I lay there crying, I turned my head and opened my eyes and had a vision of Jesus' face. He didn't look disappointed at all. His eyes were full of joy and love, so affectionate and soft. It was as if He were head over heels in love with me. It was overwhelming. What I saw was the opposite of what I believed to be true. God was looking at me with tender affection and without any sense of disapproval.

I had not experienced His kindness so clearly before. I had been trying hard to please Him but could not believe He would ever fully approve of me. That's one of the enemy's most deadly traps: no matter how hard you try, it's never enough. But the eyes of Jesus, so soft and full of love, changed my perception. God wasn't down on me for failing; He was deeply in love with me. He wanted me to see myself as He sees me so I could enjoy being with Him.

One of the Holy Spirit's greatest blessings is revealing the gaze of the Father and the Son to us. Not only does He reveal to us our acceptance in the family of God and invite us into fellowship, but He also helps us understand our identity in God. In that place of absolute joy in His presence we begin to see God's goodness, not as a theological belief about God but as certain knowledge in the depths of our hearts. When that

gaze becomes real to us, we begin to know who He is and what He thinks about us, and we begin to understand who we are. Our identity comes from Him.

Too many people try to define themselves by their perceptions of themselves or by the opinions of others. That's why there are so many who are addicted to affirmation and spend their lives trying to measure up to what other people think. When the Spirit opens our eyes to how God really sees us, we realize we don't have to try to measure up anymore. Jesus has already measured up for us. His blood has already taken care of every way in which we've fallen short, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to live from His holiness. All the striving is out of the way, and God sees us as His beloved sons and daughters, the apples of His eye. We find ourselves in Him.

This is why I speak so often about the apostolic prayers. For example, Paul's great prayer for the Ephesians and for us was that we would have eyes to see who God is in order to understand who we are as people made in His image (Eph. 1:15–21). He prayed we would know the hope of our calling, understand that we are God's invaluable inheritance on earth, and understand the greatness of the power we have available to us. Ephesians 3 relates to God's desire for us to really know that Christ now lives in us and His longing that we would ask the Spirit for help in grasping the fullness of every dimension of His love so that we can be continually overflowing with all the fullness of who He is. {eoa}

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Spirit.