

God's Perfect Love

Whack! Miss Mazy's yardstick slammed down on a classmate's desk in front of me. "No homework?" she queried. He responded with a whimper.

As Miss Mazy resumed collecting our homework, we opened our religion books. "God's Love—1 John 4" was the heading on the page she commanded me to read. I choked on the words "Perfect love drives out fear" (v. 18, NIV). I wondered why it didn't drive away my fear of Miss Mazy.

Someone poked me. I looked back at Tammy, who snorted a laugh. Miss Mazy ordered Tammy out of the room and moved toward me. "You," she began. Coffee breath pelted my nose. "You sponge!"

I recoiled. Remembering the description of sponges from our science class, I realized that Miss Mazy had just called me a motionless, spineless filter feeder. Unfortunately, Miss Mazy's accusation was accurate. Rarely asking or answering questions during class and never socializing, I remained a sponge through eighth grade.

Later, upon transferring to a public high school, I tried to overcome my insecurities with partying, drinking and drugs. My marriage at 19—the result of an unplanned pregnancy—ended after the birth of my second child.

On weekends when my children were away with my ex-husband, I would host all-night parties, barhop or seek out men for one-night stands. When the kids were home, I pretended to be self-disciplined and strong.

Occasionally, my neighbor would take my kids to church. One day I came along to hear them sing in the children's choir. As the children sang "Jesus Loves Me," I mused whether or not He loved filter-feeding sponges.

The pastor began his sermon with the words, "In the fourth chapter of First John, God's love..."

"Oh no," I groaned, flashing back to Miss Mazy and her religion class. But this was different. God was definitely speaking through the pastor, reminding me that He sent His only Son because He loved me.

I accepted the Lord's invitation to be washed clean by His blood that evening, turning my back on sponginess and looking into the solid face of Jesus. Now when I'm spineless, He's strong. When empty pleasures tempt me, He offers me the bread of life. And there is nothing spongy about that.