

When You Seem Lost From God's Love

In a world where a woman's acceptance so often seems contingent on her looks, behavior or talents, does anyone love her simply for who she is? Debora M. Coty answers that question with a resounding "yes" in her new book, *Too Loved to Be Lost: Discovering God's Intentional, Unconditional, Without-Limits Love*.

Q: The subtitle of *Too Loved to Be Lost* is "discovering God's intentional, unconditional, without-limits love." Why did you want to bring a message about God's love to women?

I believe women today spend a lot of time feeling taken advantage of, judged unfairly and accepted only within certain boundaries. The love we receive often seems conditional—based on our looks, behavior, talents or achievements—rather than who we are inside our skin. With the threat of losing acceptance breathing down our necks, our sense of security crashes and burns as our looks fade, we experience failure, our talents become rusty or ineffective, our achievements wane due to constant stress, the aging process or some other factor beyond our control. We need to know—really KNOW—there is One who doesn't condemn or critique us, but instead loves, forgives and accepts us—quirks, meltdowns, zits and all.

Q: You say many of the women you've met view God as a "stern entity with a huge frown and a big stick." Why do you think they see God in that way?

The perspective of an impersonal, judgmental god standing by to smite us to smithereens when we mess up is often based on harsh childhood experience we've had with an angry father, relentless coach or strict teacher. I think society at large tends to reinforce that way of thinking by expounding the

philosophy that “the good go to heaven (get rewarded) and the bad go to hell (get punished).” Unfortunately, many people buy into this behavior-based theology and completely eliminate the crucial faith elements of Papa God’s grace and forgiveness.

Sure, our heavenly Father is holy and just. He’s righteous and wants us to be too. But that doesn’t make Him a mean ole hulking principal stalking the halls with a big paddle. That is so *not* our loving Papa God.

Q: In *Too Loved to Be Lost*, you use a travel theme to illustrate life’s journey. Why did you choose that thread to weave through this book?

The first and most obvious reason is the word “lost” in the title. I’m directionally challenged in the worst way to the point where Olivia (my Aussie-voiced GPS) keeps her metallic panties in a wad. She has taken to adding, “What in the WORLD were you thinking?” after the third “Recalculating.” I once thought I heard her mutter, “Crimey. Just go home!”

The second reason is I believe most women experience the hopeless, helpless feeling of lostness at some point in their lives, perhaps after a devastating loss, severe disappointment or disillusionment with life. They lose their heart-compass and find themselves wandering in the spiritual desert without purpose or direction, or they may feel they’re drowning in the relentless everyday stress-pool of life and can’t locate the ladder.

I wrote *Too Loved to be Lost* to help support and encourage my girlfriends through those lost times with simple, easy-to-follow steps for joining hands and hearts and, with a little help from heaven, to recalculate their route to a lush, peaceful place where they can feel, enjoy and revel in Papa God’s unending love.

Q: Have you ever had a moment where you felt completely lost? How did God come through for you?

Absolutely. More than once. Even on a single day.

Then there were several lost times that swallowed months and even years before I found my true heart-path again. One of these that I've spoken of in several of my books was the deep depression that followed six heart-wrenching miscarriages. My wounds were so painful and raw that I distanced myself from the Lord and my faith for two long desert years, during which I felt completely alone and utterly lost. At my lowest point, He reached down to me with His customized tender mercies and gently began chipping away at the rock that was my heart until it was finally replaced with a feeling heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26). I believe Papa God allows detours to happen in our faith journeys to show us deeper and higher facets of his limitless love.

Q: Women have a tendency to try to do it all and can be susceptible to burnout. What are some ways women can counteract the effects of burnout?

1. Remember you're truly appreciated. You may never receive sufficient thanks from others, but know Papa God sees and values every single thing you do. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight" (Heb. 4:13, NIV).
2. Simplify. Determine the top three priorities Papa has assigned to you at this particular season of your life; ruthlessly slash everything from your schedule not related to these three priorities. Woman up and resolve not to be swayed by guilt. "Our purpose is to please God, not people" (1 Thess. 2:4, NLT).
3. Get physical. Move, stretch, spin, run! Get that blood pumping to refresh and rejuvenate. Our bodies were not meant to be stagnant lumps. Studies show that physical activity actually increases energy levels and decreases depression often brought on by burnout.

4. Look for Papa God's fingerprints every day—proof He's there, He's aware and He cares.
5. Tap into a greater strength than your own: Jesus joy, the awesome supernatural joy not based on external circumstances but on internal heart-stances. "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10, NIV).

Q: You say you can see God's fingerprints throughout your day. Can you share an example from your own life?

I call Papa God's fingerprints on our lives "grace notes." I borrowed the musical term from my 20 years as a piano teacher because those teensy notes beside the regular musical notes—called grace notes—aren't essential to the melody, but they add incredible depth and breadth and beauty to the music. That's what Papa God's grace notes do in our lives. His everyday touches of grace—His grace notes—prove to us over and over that even the tiniest details of our lives are important to Him and He always has our backs.

Too Loved to be Lost is full of grace notes from my life and the lives of others I know.

Whether it's miraculously blocking your smoke allergy while you're sitting next to an unsaved smoker in church, uplifting your rotten mood by the backlit shaft of a sunbeam reaching down to you like Papa God's fingers from heaven or hearing that special song on the radio at the exact moment you need it, you know without a doubt your heavenly Father cares intimately about you. Grace notes are supernatural touches of grace that can't be explained logically. I think of them as butterfly kisses from Papa.

Q: Women often feel unaccepted by a group or individual. What advice would you give for these times when we feel rejected and unloved?

When we're thrust into a Have vs. Have-Not situation and find ourselves on the "Not" side of that invisible acceptance

barrier, it's time to change perspective. We can't force others to like us, but we can transform ourselves from a humiliated Have-Not to a happy Have-Not. How? When we're feeling unloved and unlovable, we need to CUDDLE:

C: Climb up into Papa God's lap. Just like when you needed reassurance as a little girl, climb into the warm, soft embrace of the One who loves you. Papa's enveloping arms are always ready to welcome you. Press your head to His chest. Feel His heartbeat. Know you are cherished.

U: Unload. Drop that heavy load you're lugging around. Feelings of low self-worth are exacerbated by fatigue. Give your constipated calendar an activity enema. Take control of your energy-sapping schedule before it controls you.

D: Daydream. Yep, you have permission to fly away mentally. Now that you've physically unloaded, emotionally unplug. Dare to imagine. Open up a window of happiness.

D: Dance to the music deep in your soul. Laugh as you twirl in the rain. Play. Frolic. Get back in touch with the freedom of pure joy.

L: Let go of your imagined unworthiness. It's an ugly lie. You are heard, understood and treasured by the only One who really matters. Reject rejection. Know this: Jesus will *never, ever* reject you. He thinks you're to-die-for.

E: Evolve into a higher being. Stop being so hard on yourself. Resolve to treat yourself as your own best friend. When others see how much you respect yourself, they'll respect you too.

Q: You share openly in *Too Loved to Be Lost* about what you consider to be your greatest parenting mistake. What was it, and what can it teach us about God and trust?

Although it happened nearly 20 years ago and I've long since been forgiven, it's still painful to think about the harm I

inadvertently caused my own child. I was a young mother of two very active children, feeling stressed out and desperate for a break. In my selfishness, I had become all about me. My 7-year-old daughter had always had issues with separation anxiety but had been exceptionally clingy during our beach vacation with my extended family. I explain more detail in *Too Loved to be Lost*, but, in essence, I abandoned my child. No explanation. No good-byes. No closure. I simply disappeared and didn't come back. She placed her trust in me, but I lost sight of what a privilege it is to be trusted completely by another living soul and callously betrayed that innocent trust. I disregarded her needs and thought only of my own, resulting in a damaged relationship.

Sadly, it took a very long time to regain her trust.

As hideous as it was, this experience enabled me to grasp fully that we have a heavenly parent who will never betray us or forsake our trust. Fallible humans will always let us down, but our Papa God won't. "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Heb. 13:5, NIV).

Q: Why are strong friendships with other women so important? How can lonely women find more personal connection in our digital world?

Women are wired emotionally to *need* girlfriends. We *need* occasional silliness, moments of reckless feminine abandon, a safe place to stash our secrets where they won't leak.

Girlfriends are the way we learn how to love unconditionally, just as our Godfriend loves us. "A friend loves at all times" (Proverbs 17:17, NIV). We learn to overlook zits, burps and hideous hair days and honestly believe that this special person who hears the song down deep in our hearts is the most beautiful creature on earth.

The very same way Papa views us.

Through loving on our girlfriends, we learn forgiveness, compassion, mercy and grace: character traits straight from the heart of God. To me, one of the most important things I gain from time with my besties is laughter—pure, soul-freeing, stress-dissolving belly laughter. I believe laughter is the catalyst that releases the joy of the Lord in our souls, and nothing bubbles up joy like the hilarity of girlfriend giggles.

The way to find girlfriends of like minds and hearts is by proactively seeking them. Don't wait for them to fall into your lap. You might be 93 by the time that happens. Search for them through women's Bible studies, prayer groups, special interest groups and community functions. Connecting online is great, but it's important that your cyber relationship morph into a face-to-face girlfriend relationship too at some point. Sharing special moments of our day online is icing on the cake, but hey, we need the cake! The actual physical relationship is important. Coloring your hair purple together or laughing until the Coke spurts out your nose just doesn't happen online.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "It is one of the blessings of old friends that you can afford to be stupid with them." Amen!

Q: Where does your passion to minister to women come from?

I would have given anything as a young woman desiring to grow in my faith to have a like-hearted girlfriend come alongside me to help encourage and equip me for my life journey. I would have wanted her to speak truth frankly and without reservation, but laced with lots of humor, grace and Godiva.

So that's what I'm trying to accomplish with my "Take on Life Series," which includes not only *Too Loved to be Lost*, but its predecessors *Fear, Faith, and a Fistful of Chocolate*, *More Beauty, Less Beast* and *Too Blessed to be Stressed*. Each book addresses heart needs of women and offers true laugh-out-loud

stories, applicable scriptures and girlfriend-to-girlfriend chic chats to promote healing, refreshment and transformation.

Q: What is the single most important takeaway from *Too Loved to Be Lost*?

Papa God's love is never too lost or too late. For once we fall in love—into Papa's love—we can never fall back out of it. It's secure, safe, forever. We can't do anything so vile we lose it. We can't forget about it so long it fades away. It'll never rust, corrode or mildew. No one can break it, ruin it or rip it away from us.

The truth is that Papa God loves each of us from the bottom of His heart, and His heart is bottomless.

*Learn more about **Debora M. Coty** and *Too Loved to Be Lost* at , on Facebook or Twitter (@deboracoty) or by watching the book trailer.*

Join Debora M. Coty for a live Facebook party on October 28 at 8:00 PM EDT. Click here for more details!