

# OUR DETERMINED & RELENTLESS GOD

by Jan Johnson

**The mighty Ruler of the universe vigorously pursues your affection.**

**S**anta Claus . . . a detached Father Time . . . Mother Nature . . . a Cosmic Security Guard, watching our every move . . . the Good Witch of the North from *The Wizard of Oz*. These are some of the answers I got when I asked a group of high school students to describe their mental pictures of God!

Sadly, even Christians often do not have a clear picture of God's involvement in their lives. Some have reduced Him to a warehouse clerk filling their mail-order prayer requests. Others perceive Him as a fair-weather friend who abandons them when illness or trouble darkens their

lives. Even those of us who view Him as a powerful, caring Creator can easily underestimate the strength of His unswerving love. But an enlightened Andrew Greeley described God's passion for us in this way:

Our God is not patiently standing by and waiting for us to offer love; he is actively and vigorously pursuing us. . . . Old Yahweh wheeling and dealing in the desert, the father running down the trail to embrace the prodigal son even before he can speak his act of contrition, the mad farmer showering a full day's wage on men who hadn't even worked, Jesus forgiving the sinful woman even before she spoke her sorrow, . . . these are all symbols of a God whose love for us is so strong that, by human standards at least, he would be said to be mad.<sup>1</sup>

## GOD'S TENACIOUS SPIRIT

Our Father is like the persistent owner of the vineyard in Jesus' parable. Nothing deterred him—not the beating and killing of servant after servant, not even the death of his son (Mt. 21:33-41). Despite our response, He never wavers in calling us to Himself.

The servants in this parable represent the Old Testament prophets who warned Israel against idol worship. God used them as His feet to run after His people Israel, persuading them to return to Him.

God used one such prophet to graphically demonstrate His stubborn love for idolatrous Israel. He commanded Hosea, a godly man, to marry Gomer, a prostitute. As she continued her flagrant adultery, Hosea built a hedge around Gomer



so that she could not find her lovers (Hos. 2:6,7). When she refused to acknowledge Hosea as the source of her blessings, he withdrew them (Hos. 2:9-13). In the same way, God sometimes puts barriers in our paths and withholds blessings to draw our attention back to Him.

Even though Gomer rejected Hosea and fled, God told him to go after her—just as He goes after us, even when we are rebellious. Hosea even bought Gomer out of apparent slavery, as God bought us with the price of His Son (Hos. 3:1,2).

The message in Hosea is clear: God's love for us is persistent beyond human reason. He spares no expense to bring people to salvation. He is like the shepherd in the parable of the lost sheep who risks everything to find that one lost lamb (Lk. 15:3-7). Just a percentage will not do—He enables every person to come to Him.

God does not just prefer that we will choose to follow Him. He "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). He accomplished His plan of reconciliation even though it meant using rebellious Israel to bless all nations of the earth through Jesus (Gen. 12:3, Gal. 3:8).

In his poem "The Hound of Heaven," Francis Thompson captured God's quiet determination:

From those strong Feet that followed,  
followed after,  
But with unhurrying chase,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat—and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet—  
'All things betray thee, who betrayest  
Me.'<sup>2</sup>

God diligently trails after us without hurrying us. His voice speaks to us in the shadows of our minds, letting us know that apart from Him we will never be complete. Once we commit ourselves to Him, He keeps after us to obey. He is a "go-getter" sort of Deity. He does not just say, "I love you," He constantly shows us how much.

#### MIRRORING GOD'S LOVE

Why don't most people see God in this way? Perhaps they judge the intensity of His love by the lethargic love they see in Christians. We need to copy His "madness," His drive, His enthusiasm. The word *enthusiasm* is derived from the two Greek words meaning "in God" (*en theos*) and thus describes this determination.

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Consider the impact we would have on our world if we would pursue God with the same intensity with which God pursues us! Whenever we were convicted or inspired by a devotional reading, we would take steps to let it change our lives. As we heard sermons, we would note the points that convicted us, pray about them regularly, and plan to walk through the doors of obedience He opened. We would ask Him to show us how to apply what we have heard, and set a specific time to call that new Christian or mow that widow's lawn. As we began to experience the fullness of God's unwavering love, we would strive to be more like Him by setting spiritual goals and building strategies for greater effectiveness.

#### GOD'S HELP IN OBEDIENCE

To further prove His commitment to us, God gives us the tools to obey. Shortly after I asked God to help me witness more effectively, I began to chat with a dry-cleaning clerk as I was running errands. He told me how much he loved living in our home state. "I'm not leaving here until I die," he quipped. "Then I don't know where I'm going."

My mouth dropped open. God was answering my prayer before I was ready. He expected me to obey Him—so soon!

"Uh, I know where I'm going when I die," I fumbled. After the clerk looked at me quizzically, I explained God's promise of Heaven to those who accept Him. My confidence grew as I spoke, for I knew that I was "in God's" plan and timing.

God is like a teacher who makes stiff demands of His students and then helps them complete their assignments. He first influenced me to share my faith, then created a situation in which I could easily obey. He demands our righteousness, then He facilitates it.

#### GOD'S OVERWHELMING LOVE

In spite of God's tenacious thirst for us, He draws us tenderly. Even when He spoke of rebellious Israel, God said: "Therefore I am now going to allure her . . . and speak tenderly to her. . . . I will betroth you to me forever . . . I will

betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD." (Hos. 2:14-20).

God's love for us is not bland or watered-down. Like the prodigal son's father, who must have been watching diligently to have seen his son a long way off, God searches us out. Like that father, He fully blesses us when we come to Him (Lk. 15:20,22).

No wonder Greeley says that God seems to be mad. While our natural inclination is to hurt or injure someone who betrays us, God approached Israel with compassion! He saw Israel not just as friends or children, but as His betrothed ones forever (Hos. 2:19,20). Unlike Santa Claus, who brings presents only to the well-behaved, God loves us unconditionally.

I remember the hot flush on my cheeks when my Bible professor asked me, "If you had been the only person who had ever sinned, do you think Jesus would still have died for you?" Although I knew the answer was "yes," I could not believe that God still loved me, since I had committed what I felt was an unpardonable sin. As the months passed, whenever I thought about my sin, I imagined Jesus on the Cross saying to me, "This is why I died." His incredible love not only helped me forgive myself, but also drew me closer to Him.

In the age of the cool, detached demeanor, we do not readily envision God as Charles Wesley did, the "Lover of our souls." In those dark times when no one else loves us, God does. And in the better moments no one, no matter how close, will ever understand or care for us the way He does. His powerful love surrounds us every minute; guiding our lives, telling us we are deeply loved, and stirring our hearts to serve Him.

As we become conformed to His image, we can copy His overwhelming love. We need to call on Him to help us love those for whom we only care half-heartedly. He can help us to forgive our offenders and show compassion for the needy. As we begin to comprehend and appreciate God's determined, relentless love, we can begin to pursue this dynamic Deity and His will as energetically as He pursues us.

#### Notes

1. Andrew M. Greeley, *Sexual Intimacy* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), p. 29.
2. Francis Thompson, "The Hound of Heaven," *A Concise Treasury of Great Poems* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942), v. 1, lines 9-15.

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