

1 John 5:1-6

⁵Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, ⁴for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁶This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

John 15:9-17

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ¹²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Why Mothers Don't Count

Without a doubt, being a mother is the most demanding, frustrating, least-appreciated, lowest paid job on the planet. I can't figure out why so many women want the job. I made my mom put in a lot of overtime, and I hardly compensated her for it. At times I pushed her so hard I figured she would quit, but I guess she was just a glutton for punishment. I think a lot of mothers are that way. What's wrong with you all??

Alright, you know I'm joking. I understand that there are rewards to being a mother, but what I've learned about mothers, and by *mother* I mean any person who voluntarily takes on the responsibilities of mothering, is that *mothers don't keep score*, and so they never see their vocation in terms of costs or rewards. Hyesun was a professional dancer and choreographer in South Korea, and when she learned that she was going to be a mother she *did* weigh the cost and benefits of being such. There were times when she felt that the cost was too high, but in time she settled into the role as mother, and guess what? She became a great mother. She stopped weighing the cost of her decision. She no longer thinks in terms of sacrifice, and I think that is the most beautiful thing about mothers and it's why one truly can say that a mother's love is most like God's love.

Because in order to really get a handle on God's love, you must see that it doesn't keep score either. From the very beginning, humanity rebelled against God's authority like so many children rebelling against their parents' authority. Humans broke rules, and lied about it. We put our

fingers in our ears and refused to listen to God, we threw tantrums, and we repeatedly got ourselves into big messes – I speak in the past tense, but you and I know that I could just as easily speak in the present tense. Yes, we live in a troubled world, and if we're honest with ourselves we have to admit that we are part of the problem, because we keep score. When I was a child my two favorite games were Risk and Monopoly, both games where the objective is to take control of the board, to conquer the world or to own the bank. We pride ourselves in strategizing ways to accomplish those ends. We weigh the pros and cons of our decisions based on what we gain and what we lose and determine if something is worth it for ourselves. We conduct cost-benefit analyses on our relationships, determining when it serves our best interest to keep a relationship going. We even arrange *prenuptial agreements!* Think about that for a minute; we make this sacred vow – “for better, for worse, in sickness and in health” – and we state exceptions before we start. We say, “I want to marry you, but not really.” It de-sanctifies the marriage, and so technically it no longer is a marriage. And if we count the cost of marriage you can bet that we count the cost of every other relationship we have. That's the wonderful thing about God; he doesn't count the cost. If he did, he would have made the determination a long time ago that we weren't worth the time and energy he would have to invest in us, and we'd have been gone a long time ago.

Jesus exhibits the same disregard for cost. He obeys the will of the Father and offers himself completely to us despite the suffering that he knows he will endure. This passage from John that we just read, where Jesus tells us how he wants our joy to be complete, he says this on the same night that he is arrested and carried away to be tried, convicted, mocked, tortured and killed. But we never hear Jesus say, “Look at how much I'm doing for you guys! You better worship me for this.” Instead he tells us, “Do not be afraid. It's going to be all right. You'll see me again soon.” He never counts the personal cost of his actions. That's just the way love is.

Instead what the Bible tells us is that we are God's children. I've noticed this much more as I've read it. I used to think the Bible as a kind of “How To” book – how to be a Christian, how to gain eternal life and joy and peace and happiness. I realize now that it's more a book about who we are already. A verse like the first epistle verse we read today, **“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child,”** should not be read like an imperative command – notice that speaks of the believer in the present perfect tense = we *have been* born of God. It's not saying, “You better believe in Jesus Christ if you want to be born of God.” It's telling us that we already *are* born of God because we believe in Christ.” And the reason we believe in Christ is not because we are counting costs but because we have been so moved by the fact that God *doesn't!* We get everything backwards if we go out and tell people “You better believe this or else you will perish.” That wreaks of cost-benefit analysis, and it drive you crazy as long as you think in those terms – “Well I better love God with all my heart and all my strength or else I may end up in hell;” the problem is that as long as you are thinking in terms of your personal benefit you're not loving God with all your heart and all your strength and all your soul. You're not loving the way God loves, or to use our best terrestrial example, you're not loving like a mother loves. You're not laying your life down for your children, or your friends, and least of all your enemies. Only when you begin to grasp the kind of love that God has for us will you come to appreciate that kind of love, and the more you appreciate that love, the more apt you are to love God in the same way, like a child who sees the distance a mother will go to protect him or her. When you see that, and you grasp that, your

heart will respond in kind. You'll find yourself going the distance for your mother and never weighing the cost.

Or at the very least you will have a profound and humbling appreciation for that quality of love, and that truly is our salvation. Jesus says to his disciples, "Abide in me as I abide in you." He's already abiding in them. Why? Because that's the nature of his love. It's not conditional upon their ability to love Jesus in such a perfect way. It's Jesus' desire for them to abide in him the same way that he abides in them for no other reason than to have a loving relationship. Now my mother is not perfect, and my love for her is far from perfect, but I have experienced enough of her love to know that she's not counting, that her love when it's at its best is authentic, and I respond to that love not by feeling some obligation to buy her a present but with a desire to please her. God's will for us is to know his love, that we may love him in return.