continued from front

former - but if I'm being honest, I intellectually know that God is a loving father but I can typically feel like he's the second guy - not totally pleased with me, intending to withhold good things, and typically bent on teaching me something the hard way.

Sounds like an appealing God to follow, right? Now where did this warped and twisted thinking come from, you ask? Is it the result of a relationship in my life? Or the culture I grew up in? Is it from my intense perfectionism? Or a weird interaction I had as a kid? Maybe. But I don't think so. The best I can tell - it is a lie as old as time and it started many, many years ago in the Garden of Eden.

When that snake (ahem, Satan) tempted Eve in the Garden, he convinced her to eat from the tree God banned by convincing her that God was holding out on her, that he wasn't fully letting her in, that he didn't like or love her enough to give her everything in the garden. Now, was that true? Of course not! God was protecting Eve. He was trying to keep her safe from sin and shame and keep her completely and utterly close to him. But she believed the lie. She believed that God was holding back on her and it changed our connection to Him forever.

Isn't that the same lie that you and I can believe at times? That God is holding back on us? That he doesn't like us enough to give us what we so desperately want? That maybe, just maybe he doesn't love us completely?

As I talked with my parents about some of these things, it became obvious that I needed a perspective overhaul and a reminder of who God really and truly is. It was time to stop exclusively meditating on the "what" of my Christianity and start focusing on the "who". Since that conversation, I've started studying out Jesus' character (I highly recommend the book Jesus the Same — amazing!!) and remembering God's love for me everyday in my prayers. I keep reading and rereading Romans 8:31-39, willing myself to remember that God's love for me does not vary with my performance, my behavior, or my effectiveness as a disciple. Nothing can separate me from God's love! My dad has also taken it upon himself to send me different verses everyday about God's love and mercy - it's the sweetest thing in the world and my favorite use of iMessage ever:)

All at once, I'm remembering that God's love is the ultimate reason and motivation for becoming and staying a Christian; it's the answer to our hurting world. Now don't get me wrong - I still whole-heartedly believe that God cares about our actions and our repentance. In fact, I'm convinced of that now more than ever! But I'm also realizing that his love grants you and I the freedom to try to please him all the more - without the fear of failure or the risk of loss. A complete, unshakeable, and unending love like this can provide us with a God-given confidence to face our weaknesses head on, give our hearts to others more fully, and step out on faith like never before. His love can propel us towards righteousness and growth more than duty or obligation ever will!

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Denver, CO, USA
September 26-28, 2014

South American Conference
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2014 Biblical Study Tour
Rome, Italy
October 25-31, 2014

ICOC Delegates Meeting
Montego Bay, Jamaica
October 13-16, 2015

Steps of Jesus & the Apostles
Israel, Greece, Turkey, Italy
October 17-31, 2015

North American Discipleship Summit
St. Louis, Missouri, USA
July 7-10, 2016

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Experiencing God's Love — Where I Got God All Wrong

Written by Alexandra Ghoman, Boston, Massachusetts

"Growing spiritually" can sound a little generic, Christian-y, and virtually meaningless in our modern religious world, can't it? It can be easy to talk the talk of faith and devotion but much harder to sit down and actaully meditate on our connection with the Maker. But there's something about the changing of the seasons that helps me to stop and consider these deeper subjects. As I've been doing that, I've had some realizations that have awed and unnerved me all at once. Maybe they'll encourage you as much as they've been changing me.



While Jesse and I were in Florida last month, we spent a lot of time talking with my parents about everything from marriage, to our cities, and to our lives in the ministry. During our last dinner (dad's famous steak, of course), we started discussing me and my guilt-ridden self. To be perfectly honest, Jesse MADE me talk to my parents about it...I pretended to be annoyed but I was actually incredibly relieved to talk with them - J knows best:) As it happens, my dad happens to be a recovering guilty-soul himself so he had a lot of insights to share.

As we talked about what I was feeling, it was clear that my understanding of God and his character had gotten very....off. At some point over my 12 years as a disciple, I started believing that the Father we serve looks at me with ambivalence or worse, displeasure. And that he feels this way all or most of the time! This one lie, this one thought, had started to define and corrupt our relationship. And the more I've opened up about my adherence to this lie - the more I've started realizing that I'm not the only one who believes it.

When I sit down to study the Bible with people for the first time and talk about Christianity, I love turning to Matthew 7:7-11. I love this passage because it offers a guarantee of sorts - if we ask something of God - he's going to respond with kindness and grace. But this passage also forces us to consider how we view and look at God - do we view him as a loving father who wants to give us what seek? Or as a rude being who desires to give us a snake and "teach us a lesson"? Of course, I want my answer to be the

continued on back