

## Keeping God at arm's length

My wife and I own a cat who whines to be petted but won't come closer than just beyond arm's reach. She doesn't make it easy for us to pet her. So, we move closer, but not too close, in order to satisfy her need to be petted. We speculate that some sort of survival mechanism is at play. The cat doesn't want to be in a vulnerable position. She wants to be petted, but at a subconscious primal level she doesn't want to expose herself to potential danger. She has been our pet for many years, and we have never threatened or harmed her in any way, yet for the most part she continues to keep us at arm's length.

Dogs, on the other hand, behave very differently. You can't keep them away. They constantly crave affection and won't leave you alone. They are all over you. Nothing but love, snuggles and very sloppy kisses. It has been said that the word "dog" is God, spelled backwards.

Another way to spell God is l-o-v-e. Love is the essence of God's being. The Bible teaches us that God is love. The most common metaphor that Jesus used to describe God was that of a loving Father. He said that to enter the Kingdom we need to become like children. When you put those two metaphors together, you see a very powerful expression of what our relationship with God should be like. The child is full of love and trust towards the father, and the father is full of unconditional love and compassion for the child. When they come together after being apart, even for a day, they meet each other with love, hugs and kisses. The longer the absence, the more intense and passionate the embrace.

There is much truth to that, but like cats, most of us tend to keep God at arm's length. For many, the reason is biblical literalism and the resulting bad theology. The Bible was not directly written by the hand of God, with indelible ink. The descriptions of God in the Bible, especially the anthropomorphisms in the Old Testament, changed over time. They were written from man's point of view, and over the centuries man's view of God changed, culminating in the teachings of Jesus Christ, God living Word. The true Word of God is not the Bible. It is Jesus Christ Himself. The words of man in the Bible need to be evaluated in their proper historical context and interpreted through the lens of what Christ taught us about God's true nature. In the Bible we see a progression of thought. I cannot tell you why God withheld from mankind, for so long a time, complete and accurate information about His true essence and character. I can only tell you that this is what happened. His character never changed, only our view of it. Don't ask me why.

Some writers of the Bible pictured God as full of vengeance and wrath, even some of the New Testament writers. Other writers emphasized God's mercy and forgiveness. Others tried to put the two together. Most attached many preconditions that a person needs to meet in order to receive God's mercy. In the end, Jesus Christ put the whole matter to rest. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, the perfect physical representation of what God is like, demonstrated on the Cross of Calvary, for all to see, the true nature of God and God's unconditional and sacrificial love for all mankind.

I do believe that God would have us become more like puppies, and less like cats.