

“Steve Case gives us the timeless steps to knowing Jesus in the warm, honest language of a coach dedicated to our good. *Connection* is the book I’ll be giving to all the teens and young adults I care about.”—Bill Knott, editor, *Adventist Review*

“Steve Case provides an outstanding spiritual feast in an easy, conversational style that makes God approachable, friendly, and desirable, without losing one bit of the power, justice, or expectations of the Creator’s majesty and message!”—James Cress, secretary, Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

“Steve has done a remarkable job of making a connection to God seem not only doable, but highly desirable.”—Jerry D. Thomas, author of *Messiah* and *Blessings*

“Steve Case knows just how to seed a devotional environment for maximum connection to God and maximum growth.”—Rick Lawrence, editor, *Group* magazine

“My friend Steve Case aims for the heart and hits the target. Discover how you can develop, maintain, and share a powerful and fulfilling connection with a loving God.”—Doug Batchelor, speaker and director, Amazing Facts

“Nothing can compare to being in touch with the Divine. *Connection* is ideal for putting youth and young adults into this reality.”—James Black, director, Youth and Young Adults, the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

“It is my hope that through this book, tons of folks will come to connect with Jesus . . . and have their lives forever ruined by God. To love God and to love people . . . nothing else matters.”—Shane Claiborne, *The Simple Way*.

“Dr. Steve Case captures the essence of *Steps to Christ* in his important new book, and helps us all know God better in the process.”—Cindy Tutsch, associate director, Ellen G. White Estate

“My friend Steve Case has ‘translated’ an old classic into a very fresh message. The book and the message saved my life. And I believe it can do the same for you.”—Dwight Nelson, pastor, Pioneer Memorial Church

“In *Connection* you’ll find the God who is real, down-to-earth, and friendly. But you’ll also discover the almighty, transcendent, and universal Entity who is truly supernatural.”—Fred Kinsey, speaker and director of the Voice of Prophecy

“Easy to read but not simplistic, powerful but not overwhelming, dangerous but still delightful, *Connection* is a must-have for everyone serious about being a lifelong disciple of Jesus.”—A. Allan Martin, GODencounters cofounder and seminary professor

“At a time when so many college and university students are giving up on faith, this book has never been more essential.”—Roy Ice, chaplain, Pacific Union College

“Some hope for a God who is warm and friendly, and others press for a transcendent God of power. In this book, you’ll find both, together in a miraculous blend.”—Don Noble, president, Maranatha Volunteers International

“Read and get ‘connected’ in a deeper, more profound way with God and His beloved people!”—Hyveth Williams, pastor, Campus Hill Church

“Steve Case has provided compelling connectors in *Connection*. Some are simple, most are challenging, but all are practical and possible when it comes to God being real and you being real with Him.”—Allan Walshe, director of the MA in Youth Ministry at Andrews University

“Open this book and find a simple and compelling invitation to get serious about your connection with God.”—Sam Leonor, chaplain, La Sierra University

“Steve Case has taken Ellen White’s book and made it meaningful in today’s language, enabling today’s postmodern people to make the connection!”—Reinder Bruinsma, author, theologian, and church administrator

“We all have our favorite elements when it comes to Christianity, while ignoring or deferring those things we don’t like so much. Here’s the full collection, and it actually does connect you to God!”—Japhet De Oliveira, director, Center for Youth Evangelism

“*Connection* will jar those in a holding pattern in their spiritual journey, and challenge those who have either avoided or simply ignored God.”—Dwain Esmond, editor, *Insight* magazine

“In *Connection*, Steve Case addresses real issues of practical Christianity in an easy, conversational style that does just what the label says.”—Paul Tompkins, youth director, Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

“I highly recommend this book as a must-read for every earnest seeker after God.”—Derek Morris, pastor, author of *The Radical Teachings of Jesus*

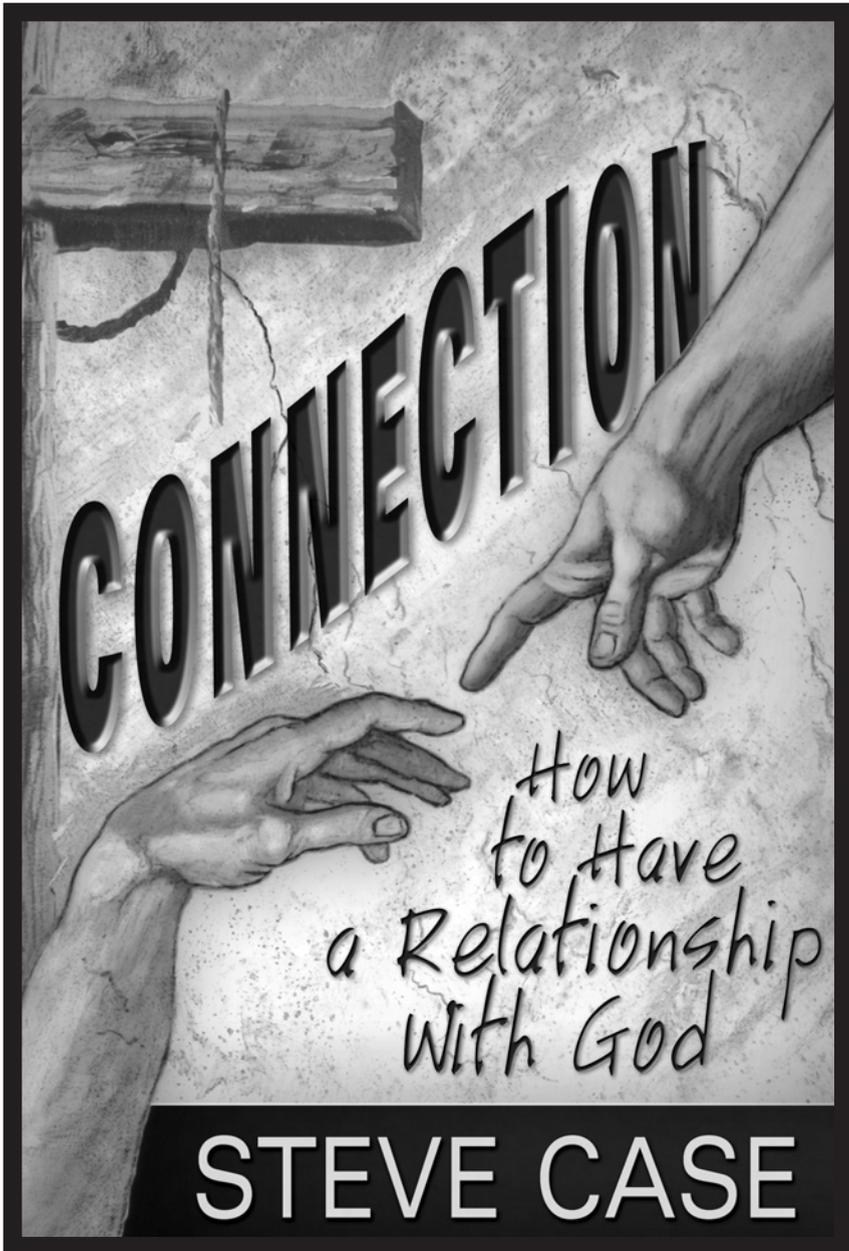
“Steve Case provides a personal, fresh vehicle for the ultimate adventure in the here and now. Enjoy the trip.”—Chris Blake, author of *Searching for a God to Love* and *Swimming Against the Current*

“Steve Case’s passion for ministry has convicted him of how crucial an actual connection with God is. In *Connection*, Steve delivers on his convictions in a way that can change lives.”—Jon Dybdahl, pastor, missionary, seminary professor, author

“Steve Case has succeeded in gathering the core questions of belief and faith into a very personal and readable account of one’s coming to faith in God.”—Skip Bell, director, Doctor of Ministry Program, Andrews University

“Steve Case captures what is essential to experiencing a real, life-giving relationship with God.”—Troy Fitzgerald, youth pastor, Walla Walla University Church

“*Connection* is a step-by-step guide into an adventure of spirituality and growth.”—Sergio Torres, Youth and Young Adult Ministries associate director, Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists



Pacific Press® Publishing Association
Nampa, Idaho
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada
www.pacificpress.com

Cover design by Steve Lanto
Cover illustration by Lars Justinen
Inside design by Aaron Troia
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You can obtain additional copies of this book by calling toll-free 1-800-765-6955 or by visiting www.adventistbookcenter.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Case, Steve, 1957-

Connection : how to have a relationship with God / Steve Case.

p. cm.

ISBN 13: 978-0-8163-2367-8 (paperback)

ISBN 10: 0-8163-2367-4 (paperback)

1. Spiritual life—Seventh-day Adventists. I. Title.

BV4501.3.C268 2009

248.4'86732—dc22

2009036933

Dedication

Dedicated to my daughter, Katie.
I pray that your connection with God will be
strong, personal, vibrant, and growing.

Table of Contents

Preface	9
Chapter 1: Starting Point	11
Chapter 2: You Need Help	29
Chapter 3: I'm Sorry (and It Shows)	47
Chapter 4: Going Public	71
Chapter 5: Focus	83
Chapter 6: It Is So!	97
Chapter 7: Proof	113
Chapter 8: Now What?	131
Chapter 9: Love in Action	147
Chapter 10: Discovering God	161
Chapter 11: Talking (and Listening) to God	177
Chapter 12: Faith Includes Doubt	193
Chapter 13: Really Optimistic or Optimistically Real?	209
Acknowledgments	226
Notes	228

Preface

For thousands of years, human beings have sought to connect to the divine. How can the natural touch the supernatural? Or should the question go the opposite way—how can God connect to us? This book proposes that it can happen and that it actually does continue to happen.

When I was a young person, there came a time when I had to choose for myself whether or not God would be my God. People have had to make that choice throughout the history of this world. Even those who grow up in a godly environment have to decide at some point whether they'll consider God personal or merely cultural, true or a hoax.

Just as new wine needs new wineskins, each person and every generation must discover God afresh. And when God becomes real, life changes, at least in some respects. It seems as though the epiphany marks the boundary into uncharted territory. We often need new terms, new tunes, and new texts for the new time.

After attempting to re-invent the wheel, wise people look to those who have gone before them. While not everything from the past proves worthwhile in the present, we can benefit tremendously by gleaning from real, historical people who have also sought connection with God.

When I was still a youth, I found a book in the Christian tradition that proved to be pivotal in my own connection with God. This tested primer, *Steps to Christ*, which has been translated into more than one hundred languages, provided timely guidance for me. Written by Ellen

Connection

White more than one hundred years ago, it continues to challenge me to this day. Yet I find that few people and especially very few young people turn to it. Perhaps they are still inventing the wheel, or maybe the older style of writing doesn't resonate with them.

Concerned that the latter might be the case and wanting to share the book's classic principles for connecting with God, I took its structure and then rewrote it as if I were sharing it in a one-on-one conversation with someone today. To call the result a paraphrase would stretch the term, since my own background, experiences, and training got mixed in as well. But to fail to mention the original book would be some type of plagiarism.

You can read *Connection* straight through a chapter at a time, or you can read the bite-size, two-page segments individually. Jot some thoughts in the Think About It boxes and date them for future reference—or just skip them. Use the Pray About It boxes to launch your own conversations with God.

While God has never been limited to Christianity, the reader will quickly see that I equate Jesus Christ with God and say that connecting with Jesus connects one with God. This book relies solely on the Bible as its Source of authority, though I don't attempt to prove the Bible's validity. I've quoted from the Bible numerous times and referred to other biblical statements and stories. You'll find chapter and verse in the notes at the end of this book, listed under the chapter and page number where they appear in this book. I have used English translations and paraphrases freely—the same God who inspired the writers of the Bible continues to be active when a person reads not just the Hebrew and Greek texts but also the translators' attempts to communicate God in English.

I wrote this book to establish and build your connection with God. To the extent that happens, I say, "Praise God!" and "Good for you!" To the extent that it doesn't happen, I say, "I'm sorry," and "Keep searching." After all, God continues to seek a connection with you!

Chapter 1

Starting Point

When I was a high school sophomore, I took one class with the freshmen. I enjoyed scanning the classroom, checking out the girls at the start of the school year. And because I was a full year ahead of the freshmen boys, I had an advantage that increased my chances of catching the attention of one of the girls.

Let's just say that God really blessed that freshman class. One girl in particular caught my eye. God is good! It turned out she was a twin, and her sister was in the same room. A double blessing!

But my insecurity prevented me from doing anything beyond gawking. A story about twins who pulled a switching stunt halfway through a date left me wanting a date with one of the freshman twins but too fearful to even give it a try. Not knowing if she—or the other she—would do a trick like that, I kept my distance. I would have liked to have taken the initiative, but I was too scared. I didn't want to be made a fool before the entire school.

When a Sadie Hawkins event was announced (a reverse weekend, where the girls asked the guys for a date), I didn't suspect that she—or she—would ask me out. When she did, I found myself overcome with surprise. I blurted, "Yes!" and then I added, "Which one are you?"

I had thought my attraction to the girl would be what produced a date. Little did I realize that I wouldn't be the starting point; she would.

God's Love Is Natural

God loves you.

Whether you love God, hate Him, or ignore Him doesn't change the fact: God loves you!

Do those three words—*God loves you*—seem to you to be a pathetic, worn-out, crusty cliché or an overwhelming, transforming, vital truth? Instead of considering the statement only from your experience so far, look beyond yourself to the wider world around you. Evidence abounds. Life and wisdom and joy all come from God. If you're looking for proof, try nature and the Bible.

In the world of nature, life produces life. Biologists aren't the only ones wowed by this fact. Beauty, adaptation, survival, simplicity, reproduction, and consistency demonstrate God's existence and His love for

Look beyond
yourself to the
wider world
around you.

the world He created. Artists try to capture on canvas an image of the original. But what was the source of the original? And what sparks the artist to continue to create?

Consider the diversity and complexity in nature throughout the world. It seems that the more we human beings study, the more there is to discover. We don't know it all—and never will. Books explaining nature must be revised, and new theories replace inadequate ones. How accurately can we even predict the weather? Clearly, something bigger than even our greatest achievements exists.

Why aren't rainbows limited to black and white? Why doesn't every kind of food taste like all the rest? Who is the architect of the mystery called romance? Who first imagined frolicking puppies at play? Who linked music to emotions? The answer is God—and He did it for us. How awesome is that?!

And when it comes to taking care of nature, once again, it's God doing what would be impossible for us to do. Here's how the Bible says it: "All eyes are on you, expectant; you give them their meals on time. Generous to a fault, you lavish your favor on all creatures. Everything

Starting Point

God does is right—the trademark on all his works is love.”

think about it

What have you seen in nature that provides evidence of the supernatural?

pray about it

“Backpackers, nature photographers, and farmers might see You in nature. But what about someone skeptical like me? I might need more evidence or a new perspective.”

What Happened?

When God created the earth, everything was perfect. People were honest, unselfish, pure, kind, and the result was happiness and joy. They experienced a consistent connection with God. And the rest of creation showed no signs of the upheaval, distress, decay, and decimation we see today.

Why the change?

The core problem started when people departed from God's ideal for them. Adam and Eve made that fateful decision, and the results speak for themselves—deterioration and destruction piling up until eventually death swallows life. You can see it in people; you can see it in animals and even in plants—you can see it in all of creation.

Talk about dire consequences! God told Adam, “Because of what you have done, the ground will be under a curse. You will have to work hard all your life to make it produce enough food for you. It will produce weeds and thorns, and you will have to eat wild plants.” Anyone

who has planted even the simplest of gardens has to fight against this result.

Yet even with this terrible change of God's plan for a perfect world, His love finds ways to express itself. Yes, the world became a mess, but God invites us to help make something good out of something

We make everything different, but we can make a difference.

bad. What an opportunity! We can't make everything different, but we can make a difference. God's love invites us to get involved. In this way, we begin to see that we aren't God, but we can connect with God by joining what He is doing.

The natural world illustrates how bad things are. Hurricanes, fires, droughts, and floods devastate the land. We often seem powerless against destructive natural forces. We brace for them and plan what we'll do if they should strike us, but we still seem to be at the mercy of the natural world.

Yet every opening bud, every sunset, every tree of the forest, and every fresh snowfall continues to say that God is love. The natural world

Starting Point

still provides promise and new life. Destruction reminds us that something is wrong; but the good things of nature show that God is still present. His love for us continues as surely as the rivers continue to empty into the sea.

think about it

What examples can you think of that demonstrate that things are messed up in this world?

pray about it

“If the good things in nature show me Your goodness, what do I do with the bad things? God, are You both good and bad or is there another player in this game?”

What Is God Like?

Just about everyone has an opinion about God. Ideas about what He's like range from super cop to close friend; from powerful to non-existent; from angry enforcer to forgetful grandpa.

What does the Bible say? On Mount Sinai, Moses requested a sneak peek at God. So, "GOD passed in front of him and called out, 'GOD, GOD, a God of mercy and grace, endlessly patient—so much love, so deeply true—loyal in love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin.' " That's how God described Himself.

Hundreds of years later, a spokesperson for God provided this word-picture after God's people had rejected Him repeatedly. "There is no God like you. You forgive those who are guilty of sin; you don't look at the sins of your people who are left alive. You will not stay angry forever, because you enjoy being kind. You will have mercy on us again; you will conquer our sins. You will throw away all our sins into the deepest part of the sea."

"All that I know now is partial and incomplete."

Some consider the God of the New Testament to be loving, forgiving, full of grace, and kind. These passages—and there are many more like them—show that He was like that in Old Testament times too.

Yes, God loves you. And He continues to invest in you. He created this world in the beginning. He continues to create. The earth keeps renewing itself. The supernatural never ceases to amaze.

Human relationships at their best provide a glimpse of God's desire to be intimate with us. Companionship, sharing, discovery, support, enjoyment, understanding, forgiveness, ecstasy, hope—these are the qualities of close families and ideal friendships. They come from God, and they're one way we can experience His love for us. We may think they're the result of positive human interaction, but God provides them as a sample of His divine love. Enjoy! Celebrate! Give thanks—acknowledge the Source!

But everything we've talked about so far tells only part of the story.

Starting Point

God's love is bigger than we can understand. In the Bible's "love chapter," Paul says we won't understand it all until we see God face-to-face. "All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now."

think about it

What words would you use to describe God?

pray about it

"God, it's easy for me to notice the negative. I didn't realize how much of the positive I ignore or simply miss. Maybe I've missed a lot of You!"

Father and Son

Satan hates God. And since God loves you, Satan hates you too—and one way he hurts God is by hurting you. Another way is to tell you that God doesn't love you. Satan is the one who says God isn't interested in you or that He's angry at you, He wants to get you, He's watching you to catch you doing something wrong, He's a severe judge, a harsh creditor, and a vindictive tyrant. Satan twists our understanding of God to make Him appear unpredictable, undependable, like one of the pagan gods.

God did something
completely radical.

How has God responded to this perpetual smear campaign? Instead of getting into a shouting match or name-calling, He did something completely radical. He came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ and lived among those He created. The Bible describes this as a father-son relationship, but that doesn't mean God fathered Jesus in the same way that men father children. The Bible uses the terms *father* and *son* because people can understand the closeness of an ideal father-son relationship.

In the words of Jesus, "The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I'm not keeping it to myself; I'm ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen."

But even though people can understand the words, that doesn't mean they get it. Jesus told His own disciples, "If you had known who I am, then you would have known who my Father is." The disciple Philip responded, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied."

Jesus must have been frustrated that misunderstandings, dull minds, and lack of faith seemed to cloud His revealing of God. He replied to Philip, "Don't you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking to see him? Don't you believe that I am in the Fa-

Starting Point

ther and the Father is in me? The words I say are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of what you have seen me do.”

Jesus’ unique revelation of God’s love might go over some people’s heads. We might even misunderstand the metaphor of the Father-Son relationship because it’s so much better than what we experience. And while Jesus Christ was clothed in human form, we still see His divine traits. Jesus is God, not simply someone made in the image of God, as the rest of us are.

think about it

How does your relationship with your father affect the Bible’s Father-Son metaphor?

pray about it

“God, I find it easy to drift into various misrepresentations of You. I’m not sure the Father-Son metaphor even works for me. Will You show me more?”

Jesus Shows Us

Because He
was completely
approachable,
society's best
and worst
crowded
around Him.

How can we better comprehend God as pictured through Jesus? Seeing Him through His actions rather than through descriptions of Him helps some people. When Jesus announced His mission on earth, He used verbs, action words—the very ones God had used in Old Testament days. Jesus quoted Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor; he has sent me to announce that captives shall be released and the blind shall see, that the downtrodden shall be freed from their oppressors, and that God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him.”

And He did precisely those things. He served the poor, taught and healed, freed those bound by demons, and opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. He upended the *status quo* by chasing the money-hungry from the temple, by spending time with and helping all types of people, and even by playing with children. And because He was completely approachable, society's best and worst crowded around Him.

Jesus came to reveal what God is like, and He lived active love, so the conclusion is obvious—God is love, and God loves you!

Don't think of Jesus merely as a Pied Piper or a Santa Claus giving away toys. Love is more than a “feel good” emotion. Love cares, which means that it helps those who are hurt—but also that it stops those who are doing the hurting. Love includes restoration and clarification, kindness and correction. Love values people over things, relationships more than rules. Love seeks the best, which includes eliminating whatever restrains people from becoming their best.

Jesus spoke the truth, but always in love. Since truth sometimes causes pain, He communicated with tact and thoughtfulness, being sensitive to the person, the situation, and the timing. He never condemned human weakness, but He certainly did attack people's hypocrisy, unbelief, and

Starting Point

selfishness. Yet even then, His tone of voice demonstrated His hope that they would change.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem, the city He loved, because the people who lived there refused to accept Him and because by rejecting Him, they were rejecting God. With pity and tenderness, Jesus continued to reach out. He viewed every person as a child of God in need of a Savior. He came to save them.

think about it

If Jesus showed up today, how would people respond to Him?

pray about it

“Jesus seems pretty nice. God, You’re telling me that Jesus showed what You are like? That would be really nice!”

God's Love Gives Everything

God demonstrates His love in the price He paid for us. He gave His Son for us. Jesus, God's Son, gave Himself as well. Through a joint-agreement, Jesus left heaven, a place of indescribable glory where angels adored and worshiped Him, and came to the place where good and evil are slugging it out. He willingly shouldered everything evil and allowed Himself to be treated as responsible for it all. And because He did, He—the Son of God—died.

Here's how the Bible describes it: "Christ himself was like God in everything. But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit. But he gave up his place with God and made himself nothing. He was born to be a man and became like a servant. And when he was living as a man, he humbled himself and was fully obedient to God, even when that caused his death—death on a cross."

God donated divinity
to save humanity.

The contrast goes beyond our wildest imagination. From Almighty God to nondescript human criminal—all because He loves us! The Old Testament predicted it before His birth. "There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look. He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him, thought he was scum. But the fact is, it was *our* pains he carried—*our* disfigurements, all the things wrong with *us*. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—*our sins*! He took the punishment, and that made us whole."

Paradoxically, the ultimate gift shows God's love when Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" At the point of death, God the Son suffered the guilt of all of our sins. It separated Him, the Son, from the Father. Of course! Sin always separates sinners from God. And the result is death. The Crucifixion didn't

Starting Point

kill Jesus; He died because accepting the weight of all our sins crushed His heart.

A soldier might save a buddy by taking a bullet or shielding him from an explosion. That's exchanging one human being for another. But God donated divinity to save humanity. He gave everything, holding back nothing.

think about it

What has God given for you? When?

pray about it

"This is HUGE! God, You gave the gift of Jesus for me? And Jesus gave Himself for me? Thank You! Thank You!"

To the Extreme

Don't be confused. God the Father wasn't taking the easy road while Jesus suffered alone. Ask any parents if they would rather have their child suffer or take the suffering themselves. God the Father experienced anguish just as God the Son did.

God's love for us led both the Father and the Son to provide the best opportunity anyone could ever offer us. God the Son faced eternal separation from God the Father so that we don't have to. They actually continued in tandem to draw us back to Them. "For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation."

People hurt when their family breaks apart or even just fights continually. Pointing out whose fault it is—blaming—won't heal the pain. Ignoring the situation pushes away the family members rather than the problem. A standoff under the guise of "standing for what is right" ce-

ments positions. If that family is ever healed, it usually comes because of love—and with a price. But healing trumps the hurt and brings celebra-

God emptied
heaven and gave
Himself in Jesus.

tion. Neither you nor your parents, your children nor a boss, a religion nor a government, a hero nor a lucky break can do what God did. Only God can heal people. Only He can save every person who accepts His offer. And only Jesus could show us what God is really like.

People often give gifts for the wrong reasons. Some think, "I need to get her a gift because she got one for me." Another hopes, "If I give him a gift, he will owe me one." In contrast, think about what makes someone give an expensive gift—especially when there's no way you can return the favor. God's love can't be measured in a cup, a reservoir, or even all the oceans in the world. God emptied heaven and gave Himself in Jesus. He gave the greatest gift possible because nothing less would adequately express His love for us.

What is perhaps the best known verse of Scripture, John 3:16, says

Starting Point

it all: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” That’s it in a capsule.

think about it

How does what you’ve given God compare with what He’s given you?

pray about it

“God, You certainly didn’t have to; but You did! Your gargantuan gift completely covers me and everyone else who accepts it.”

Children of God

When God became a human being and used the metaphor *Son of God*, it further illustrated God's love for you. The Bible says, "See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God's children—and so, in fact, we are."

If Jesus is the Son of God and you are one of God's children, then Jesus is your Brother! The Bible says that very thing: "Jesus, who makes people holy, and those who are made holy are from the same family. So he is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters."

When Jesus first spoke the Lord's Prayer for His disciples, He began by saying, "*Our* Father . . ." And Paul tells us that we can call God what children call their father: "Daddy; Daddy!"

We can call

God "Daddy"!

The implications amaze those who think about them. God is both Daddy and Brother, powerful and intimate, wise and playful, supportive and loyal. When Jesus became human, God bound Himself to the human race with ties that will never be broken. This also means that right now you have a Brother in heaven. Are you looking forward to a family reunion? Is heaven your real home?

What is your identity—what describes you? Good looking? Intelligent? Friendly? Rich? Musical? Athletic? Nerd? Troublemaker? Loser? Lost? Jesus offers you a brand-new identity—child of God!

What is your self-worth? Positive? Negative? A combination that balances out to zero? Changeable, based on what the last person said about you? One that's influenced by how people look at you? Jerked by rumors? Inflated by brown-nosers? When you really know God's love for you, your self-worth zooms to Exalted!

If you muddle in the messiness of this world, you can spiral down into oblivion. If you anchor yourself in the assurance of God's love for you, you will live as a child of the King.

Don't deny the problems around you. Don't be naïve about your natural bent toward selfishness. Don't resist God's love for you. Don't

Starting Point

reject your need for a Savior. But none of this will make any sense unless you get the starting point correct.

What is the starting point? GOD LOVES YOU!

think about it

How strong is your belief that God loves you?

pray about it

“God, You went first. You gave everything for me. I accept Your offer for me to be Your child. Please grow Your love in me.”

