

Title: The Love of God
Text: Isaiah 44:21-22

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When parents teach their baby to take the first steps, they usually kneel or squat a short distance away. They stretch out their arms and say, "Come to me. I will catch you. Come to Mommy or Daddy." That is what loving parents do. No loving parent would turn away and say, "Stand up and walk to me on your own. Then I will love you."

Love comes first. Parents do not wait for their baby to walk before they love the baby. Before the baby can even stand, the parents are already reaching out their loving arms. They are ready to catch, help, and hold their child.

God's love is like that. He reaches out to us first, without conditions. Wherever we are, He reaches out His hands to catch us, help us stand, and lead us one step at a time. **That is the loving God we have.**

Henry Nouwen, in his book *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying*, tells the story of a trapeze artist he once met. A trapeze performance is amazing. The artists fly through the air and catch one another with perfect timing. It looks almost magical. But the person who makes this possible is the **catcher**. The catcher waits for the flyer and catches him at exactly the right moment.

The biggest mistake the flyer can make is trying to catch the catcher. If he becomes afraid and tries to grab the catcher, he may hurt himself or the catcher. The flyer's job is simple: let go, stretch out his arms, and trust the catcher. He must relax and believe that the catcher will be there to catch him. That trust makes the beautiful performance possible.

God is like that catcher. Just as parents reach out their arms to their baby, God reaches out to us. He is ready to hold us when we are weak and afraid. So, trust Him. Let go of your worries and fears. Reach out your arms of faith toward God. We do not have to hold ourselves up by our own strength. God is faithful. He will catch us and hold us safely.

God is not standing with His arms folded, saying, "Come to Me on your own. Then I will love you." He knows our weakness and our limitations. That is why He loved us first. He has already reached out His hands to us. So trust this loving God. Depend on Him. And every day, let us live by faith, knowing that we are safely held in the loving hands of God.

The book of Isaiah has 66 chapters. It can be divided into two main sections: chapters 1–39 and chapters 40–66. Scholars often refer to these two major sections as *First Isaiah* and *Second Isaiah*. The first 39 chapters come before the fall of Judah in 587 BC. During that time, the prophet warned God’s people that judgment was coming. He called them to turn from their sins. He warned them, “If you do not repent, your nation will be destroyed.” But they refused to listen. The prophet warned that destruction was coming.

Beginning with chapter 40, the message changes. God’s people are now in exile in Babylon. They will live there for about seventy years. Now Isaiah brings a message of comfort, hope, healing, and salvation. He tells them that God will restore His people.

For example, Isaiah 40:1–2 begins this way. Let me read from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson: “Comfort, oh comfort my people,” says your God. “Speak softly and tenderly to Jerusalem, but also make it very clear that she has served her sentence, that her sin is taken care of—forgiven!”

From this point on, Isaiah speaks again and again about God’s comfort, restoration, salvation, and healing. One of the best-known passages is Isaiah 53. It points to God’s great plan of salvation. Listen to verses 5–6: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Finally, God sent Jesus Christ, our Savior and Healer, into the world. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was nailed to the cross and carried our sins. Through His death, He gives us forgiveness, healing, restoration, and peace as a free gift.

This is the larger message of Isaiah. And in this context, we come to today’s Scripture, Isaiah 44:21–22. Let us read it together: “Remember these things, Jacob, for you, Israel, are my servant. I have made you, you are my servant; Israel, I will not forget you. I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

Here, “Jacob” and “Israel” are names for God’s people. As Christians, we can also hear these words as God’s promise to everyone who belongs to Christ. God is speaking to you and me. He says, “I made you. You are my servant. I will not

forget you.” And He tells us, “Remember this. Never forget it.”

We belong to God. He created us and called us to serve Him. He promises never to forget us. No matter what we face, no matter how weak we are, and no matter how many mistakes we have made, God will not abandon us. He will hold us in His hands.

Look again at verse 22. God says, **“I have swept away your offenses.”** He does not say, “I will sweep them away someday.” He says, **“I have swept them away.”** Our sins are like the morning mist. They are gone. Then He says, **“Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”** Again, He does not say, “I will redeem you someday.” He says, **“I have redeemed you.”** God acts first. He has already removed our sins. He has already made our salvation possible.

God is not waiting to see whether we can become good enough before He loves or forgives us. Forgiveness and salvation are His gifts. They are not something we earn. They come by His grace. Our sins are not forgiven because of our good works. We are not saved because we have earned it. God gives us forgiveness and salvation freely.

Think again about the baby learning to walk. Parents do not stand far away and say, “Walk to me first, and then I will help you.” No. They stay close and reach out their hands. **Their love comes before the baby’s ability.** That is how God loves us. Before we could reach Him, **He reached out to us.** He has already forgiven us. He has already made a way for our salvation. He holds us securely in His hands. **That is the amazing grace of God.**

Let me close by sharing a personal story about a difficult time in my life. Military service is mandatory for South Korean men. In my time, men had to serve about 30 months. Because I attended college and graduate school, I was able to postpone my service for six years. At that time, for a brief period of three or four years, there was a government exam. Those who passed could serve only six months as military officers. I took the exam but failed. So, I entered the army much later than most men. When I arrived at basic training camp, most recruits were only 19 or 20 years old. Even my company commander was younger than me.

After basic training, I was assigned to a very demanding combat unit. South Korea was, and still is, under the threat of North Korea. Most South Korean military units train for defense. But our unit was an offensive strike unit, so our training was

especially hard. One winter exercise was extremely difficult. We marched about 125 miles with full combat gear. We did it for three days and two nights, sleeping only about three hours in the snow.

During another similar exercise, I fell behind. My boots did not fit well, and my feet were covered with painful blisters. I could not take another step. My fellow soldiers carried my equipment and helped me reach the next checkpoint. When they took off my boots, my feet were bleeding. My platoon leader told me, "Tomorrow morning, you will return to the base on the medical truck." But I felt ashamed and afraid. In the military, dropping out was a great humiliation. Some higher-ranking soldiers pressured me not to quit. They even said, "If you go back, you're dead." They did not mean it literally, but I was terrified.

That night, alone in my tent, I felt completely hopeless. I even became angry with God. I said, "There is no God. If there is a God, where is He?" I was bitter and cried out in despair. Then something unexpected happened. It was Wednesday evening. A small church nearby was having its Wednesday night service. From a distance, I heard hymns coming from the church speakers to remind the neighbors about the Wednesday night service. The hymn was "*Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling*." As soon as I heard the hymn, tears began to flow. I cried, "God, I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

The next morning, I returned to the base on the medical truck. But that was not the end of my story. God gave me strength to finish my military service. During my last eight months, I served as a military chaplain's assistant. By God's grace, I completed my service with peace and gratitude.

Brothers and sisters, God knows when we are hurting. Even before we know what we need, God is already reaching out to us and preparing the way for us. **Jehovah Jireh—the Lord who provides—is always ahead of us.** When we are weak, He gives us strength. When we fall, He lifts us up. When we cannot walk, He carries us.

May the grace and love of our wonderful God be with you and your families today and always. Amen.