

## SIX WORDS YOU SHOULD HEAR TODAY

“God Loves to See You Play!”

From a blog by Rachel Held Evans

A couple of years ago, I came across this thought-provoking article in a blog composed by Rachel Held Evans, New York Times best-selling author and popular blogger. As someone who is always juggling daily tasks, I find it almost impossible to just do something for myself without feeling like my head is going to explode from guilt! But after reading this article, I can honestly say it has changed my way of looking at, responding to, and balancing my life.

Her article highlights an eye-opening and life-altering accounting given by Rachel Mary Stafford, author and motivational speaker, who proclaimed that the words, *“I love to see you play,”* totally changed the way she related to her children.

One day out of the blue, it occurred to her that critiquing – and even praising – her children’s endeavors at swim meets, recitals, soccer games – was counter-productive – so she took a different approach instead – pulling them close to her and just whispering...

*“I love to watch you swim.”*

*“I love to hear you sing.”*

*“I love to hear you read,”* or,

*“I love to watch you play.”*

Her children's reactions to hearing those words was startlingly revealing. Their faces lit up with glorious smiles – the kind of glorious smile that scrunches up the eyes so they become little slices of joy. And then the unexpected happened – her daughter threw herself against her mother – wrapped her arms tightly around her neck and whispered, *“Thank you, Mommy!”* And at that very moment...Rachel swears she could almost read her daughter's mind hearing her thinking *“Yay!!! The pressure is off. She loves to see me play – that's all.”*

We all have roles in the relationships we share — mother, father, sister, brother, husband, wife, grandmother, grandfather, friend — our words and actions, or lack thereof, can leave scars that last a lifetime. Everyone needs positive, constructive validation! What a relief to be able to live your life without constantly having to please everyone. Without always wondering if you're doing right.

I can see the undeniable wisdom in Rachel opting for her newfound approach. And, as I pondered this mother's words, it occurred to me how very much we all need to hear those very words also – especially now in such stressful and uncertain times – and perhaps most especially from the God who identifies as our Father, and who is also often compared to a nurturing Mother. What a relief it is to know the pressure is off! What a relief it is to have the weight of the world and all that silly guilt lifted off me! Think about that for a minute – absorb it – God truly delights in our living and breathing and working and praying and that delight is **NOT** something we have to **EARN** by doing **RIGHT!** ***GOD JUST LOVES TO SEE US PLAY!***

By the 27<sup>th</sup> verse in Genesis, God has created the world and everything in it – and then he created humankind — Adam and Eve — who were blessed to enjoy and relish in all the good things God had made. Surely all their days were filled with endless joy. Surely God delighted in their joy.

Webster’s dictionary defines “joy” as “a feeling of great happiness” or “success in doing, finding, or getting something.” In a spiritual sense, we seek joy in the people God created (our family, friends, some co-workers and even kind strangers), as well as the things He created (a beautiful sunset, a perfect rose, a majestic mountain range, the colors of autumn, or freshly fallen snow). Although suffering and sadness are a part of the human condition, God wants us to be joyful and to find happiness. Laughter is closely tied to joy because the feeling of joy can promote laughter.

It is often said that, “Laughter is the best medicine,” and it’s true! Laughter relieves stress, improves your mind, boosts immunity and can even relieve pain. The Bible has much to say about joy and laughter.

My Sunday school class is wrapping up our study of the book, *The Shack*, a Christian novel by Canadian author **William P. Young**. If you haven’t read it, I recommend you do. The novel was self-published, but became a USA Today bestseller. The title of the book is a metaphor for “the house you build out of your own pain,” and for the places you get stuck, you get hurt, you get damaged...the thing where shame or hurt is centered.”

The main character, Mack, is wallowing in what he calls “*The Great Sadness*” after his 6-yr-old daughter is murdered by a serial killer. After receiving a note signed “Papa,” which is how his wife addresses God, asking him to meet Him in the shack where evidence

of his daughter's murder had been found, Mack's curiosity gets the best of him so he makes the trip back to the shack where he encounters very human manifestations of the three persons of the Trinity. God the Father takes the form of an African American woman; Jesus is a Middle-Eastern carpenter; and the Holy Spirit physically manifests as a wispy Asian woman named Sarayu, which means "wind."

The bulk of the book narrates Mack's conversations with the three as he comes to terms with Missy's death and his relationship with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. During his weekend at the shack, Mack experiences the humanness of the three...and even walks on water with Jesus which in the movie, Jesus laughingly turns into a race across the lake. The story exudes joy and love. If nothing else, it will make you think and it will give you hope.

There are some churches that view God as a performance-based patriarch standing over our lives – His arms crossed with a disapproving scowl on His face applauding **ONLY** when we get everything just right and rendering harsh judgment on everything we do wrong. And there are even some pastors who thrive in lording this disapproving God over their parishioners.

For many Christians, God's unmerited favor is a one-time gift that applies exclusively to eternal security. God's favor has to be earned! And it can only be gained with one flawless perfect performance after another. This type of "Family of God" is a competitive, disciplined, performance-based family that runs on the economy of gold stars, trophies, rules and shame.

God is rendered into the visage of that classic stereotypical nightmare "sports parent" whose favor has to be earned, and who is always, always, always, disappointed in us.

But this is **NOT** the God we encounter in Scripture or in Jesus Christ. The God we find there is the God in whom we live and move and have our being – the God who rejoices in His children – the God who spreads Her wings over Her children like a mother hen over her chicks – the God who loved the world enough to experience all of its pain right alongside us – the God who, as Nadia Bolz-Weber, founding pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, Colorado, bestselling New York Times author and former standup comedian, puts it, “would rather die than be in the sin-accounting business anymore – *the God who loves to see us play!*”

God doesn't love us because we've earned it. God loves us because we are God's children! God created this world and everything in it – don't you think God delights in it? Don't you think God gushes with joy over it? Don't you think God loves us at least as much as a good parent who delights in the activities of their children regardless of whether or not they got everything right?

Our relationship with our Father is **NOT** a performance-based relationship – it is a relationship based on unconditional love and endless delight in us – His beloved children. We can all breathe a deep sigh of relief – right now – literally – take a deep breath – go ahead, do it – because now you can rest assured **the pressure is off!** We are not here to impress or perform – we are here to revel in God's delight.

**So hear these six words from God today –**

I love to see you play. Or perhaps...

I love to watch you draw.

I love to watch you cook.

I love to watch you build.

I love to see you laugh.

I love to watch you seek the truth even when it's hard.

I love to watch you in church together – even if it's not entirely perfect.

I love to watch you love one another even when it seems impossible.

I love to watch you eat and drink and dance and explore and worship and pray and get out of your car to move that poor little turtle out of the middle of the road...not because you do any of these things perfectly, but because you do them as my children.

Now...sink into that deep sigh of relief you took a few minutes ago and believe this today and always:

**The pressure is OFF!**

Repeat this to yourselves every day...

*"God loves to see me play"...*

***THAT'S ALL!!!***