

Life Publication Article for January
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I Love You Just the Way You Are

From every direction we hear the words “You are not good enough, you are not smart enough, you are not successful enough, and you are not thin enough...” Enough for what? Enough to be liked, to be popular, to be worthy, to be valuable, to be loved? And so we resolve to change. And what better time to change than when the calendar changes to a new year? The problem with New Year’s resolutions is not simply that we can’t keep them. The real problem is that our failure is just one more example of why we are not worthy of being accepted, of being loved for who we truly are. So we start another year with our deepest fears realized-“Who would love you? You can’t even change!”

What most of us really need to change are our attitudes about ourselves. We are simply too hard on ourselves. We are our own worst critics. Each and every day we beat ourselves up by repeating what the voices on the outside are saying “You need to change!” I have tried to change the way I think about myself for years. I have tried to accept that I am vertically challenged. I have tried to accept that despite daily exercise I am still shaped like a couch potato. I have tried to accept the fact that my faith isn’t as strong as it could be, that I can be very self-centered, and that I really do like junk food. I try and try and try to say, “Hey buddy. You are OK!” but I don’t believe it.

And that is exactly at the point where grace steps in. Grace is the voice from God saying to each one of us what we don’t hear anywhere else but we must hear or nothing will ever change. I know you will think of Billy Joel (or some former big haired lover) as you read these lyrics, but please imagine God singing them instead:

*Don't go changing, to try and please me
You never let me down before
Don't imagine you're too familiar
And I don't see you anymore
I wouldn't leave you in times of trouble
We never could have come this far
I took the good times, I'll take the bad times
I'll take you just the way you are*

God wants us to be able to change. He knows we could use some improvement. But God knows we cannot change for the better until we are accepted for our worst. We need to have the confidence that we are acceptable to someone (Him) no matter how many times we try and fail. People of doubt think that God will only love us when we change. People of faith believe that it is only God’s love for us that will allow us to change. He believes in us so that we can believe in ourselves.

I think that the fundamental anxiety of life is wondering “Am I loved?” If that question is answered, “You are loved just the way you are,” I believe each new year and new beginning is full of promise and hope. Again hear God singing these words to you and take them to heart:

*I said I love you and that's forever
And this I promise from the heart
I could not love you any better
I love you just the way you are.*