

Romans 8:38-39. For I'm convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Master of the Sneaky Hug by Bonnie Grove

I'm the mother of a two year old boy. He's energetic, curious, and very busy. He has no time for long Mommy hugs. Sometimes, I get down on the floor and wrestle with him. He thinks I'm wrestling; but I'm actually hugging him.

Moms are masters of the sneaky hug.

Whenever I tie my son's shoes I sit him on my lap. It's harder to get his shoes done up when we sit this way, but it's a good excuse to put my arms around him. Every night before bed I read my son a book. Ben makes horsy noises and points to objects on the page: a ball, a kitty, a barn. I thrill to his progress and encourage him with each page, but it is the closeness of this child that makes me dizzy with joy.

It's this joy that sustains me in the worst of days.

After a particularly taxing day of parenting my two year old son and four week old daughter, I turned my attention to getting my son to bed. He yelled in his incomprehensible two year old language and fought my every effort to get him changed into his pajamas. The term "terrible twos" seemed like too polite a phrase for what we were experiencing. The moment I got Ben into his bed, my baby, Heather, who, up until that moment, had been swinging in her baby swing in another room, began to howl.

Now 'headache; could be added to the long list of painful things I had to deal with. I retrieved Heather from her swing and carried her into Ben's room. Still

holding the baby, I sat on Ben's bed and surveyed this tiny duo. They gazed back at me.

In the blissful silence Ben sat up and reached out his arms toward his sister. He wanted to hold her. I held her head, but otherwise let big brother hold his tiny sister. He chanted, "Hi! Hello!" clearly expecting a response. He got one. Heather, new and trusting gazed up at her brother, enchanted. Watching them, I experienced a feeling of love so poignant it was physically painful. It seemed possible to die from love. In that moment I knew - truly knew - I'd love them unendingly. Even if cost me a great deal, even if they didn't return my love in equal measure.

I thought about my relationship with God and realized I'm much like my son: eager, exploring, demanding, and too busy for such trivial things as hugs. I run from one thing to another taking for granted that God is right there with me. And He's proven, time and again, that He is.

If I, a sinful human, am capable of such devastating love for my children, why should I be surprised to find God loving me so totally? In the many years I've been a Christian, I've gone through periods of defiance - testing the boundaries of self and faith - while God stood firm in His standards and His love. When I reached the end of my child-like insolence, I found that God was there to hold me while I cried. When I was lost - a dazed child battered by a life too large to comprehend - God pulled me to Him with a comfort so deep it shook my soul. When I demanded something, God was there to help me deal with the consequences of my choices. When I acted out in such a way as to cause God to want to tear His metaphorical hair out, He responded,

instead, with the same grace that had saved me in the first place. And it's only as a new parent, that I've been able to understand even the smallest portion of it.

As I watched my young son hold my infant daughter, God opened my eyes to the parallel between the overwhelming need my children have for me, and my overwhelming need for His grace. I need to be able to take God's presence for granted right now. The same way my children take mine for granted. If I went down on my knees and closed my eyes for more than four and a half seconds, I'd be asleep. God knows that. He understands. And He accepts what I have to give Him: a "Thank you, Jesus" when I lay my precious daughter down in her crib and stumble back to my own bed. A cry of "Help me, Lord!" when I feel frustration, like a fist in my chest, as my son screams to get his own way. I may not be able to spend long hours in prayer right now, but I'm still connected to God.

I'm a busy Mom with no time for God's long hugs. But God was hugging me when I thought we were wrestling. I'm the child He longs to hold; the object of His sneaky hugs.