

DIGGING DEEPER INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

Does God Have Favorites?

Have you ever read Bible stories like those of Joseph and wondered if God has favorites? Does He choose a few people in each generation to speak to and bless? Jacob favored his son Joseph; perhaps God has some favorite children too. Although people such as Abraham, Joseph, and Mary the mother of Jesus received promises and God's special blessing, maybe not everyone has the opportunity to get close to God.

I've wondered, *Is it a waste of time to pursue obedience, faith, and forgiveness if I'm not part of God's elite special forces? God used Joseph to save a nation; I doubt He would have something like that in mind for me.* As these thoughts have rolled over in my mind, God has shed His light of truth on these misguided ideas. God tells us plainly in His Word that He doesn't play favorites. Romans 2:11 sums it up very succinctly: "For God does not show favoritism." We see this truth reiterated throughout the Scriptures.

- **In the Old Testament we see God's love for those outside the people of Israel, such as Ruth the Moabite and Rahab the Canaanite. While He chose and loved the people of Israel, He also loved the world and anyone willing to believe and trust in Him.**
- **God takes no pleasure in the death of even wicked people. "Do you think that I like to see wicked people die? says the Sovereign LORD. Of course not! I want them to turn from their wicked ways and live" (Ezekiel 18:23).**
- **Peter had a vision of unclean food coming down on a sheet, and he came to understand how the Gentiles are included in God's redemptive plan. He says in Acts 10:34, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism."**
- **John 3:16 tells us that God sent His Son for the whole world: "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."**
- **God tells us that He wants all people to be saved: "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent" (2 Peter 3:9).**

God truly doesn't play favorites in the sense of preferring some over others, but He does have a closer or deeper relationship with those who seek and believe Him with hearts that are fully committed to Him. Just as a parent loves a child even when that child makes bad decisions or even runs away as a prodigal, God loves all of His children. When a child disobeys a parent, the love isn't lost; but the relationship is greatly affected. God sends His rain on the wicked and the good. He loves every person on this planet. However, when we don't live according to His instructions and pursue sin instead of right living, it puts distance in our relationship with Him. Sin separates us from God because He is holy and perfect.

If God seems to have favorites, it may be because those who believe His promises receive the blessings of obedience. Second Chronicles 16:9 tells us, "The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him." He loves everyone, but He can't have a close

relationship with us when we are half-hearted. God isn't looking for perfection from us, but He searches the earth looking for those who, like Joseph, have a tender heart toward Him and His ways.

Although the biblical heroes sometimes made terrible mistakes, they had one thing in common: faith. They believed the promises of God. Abraham, Joseph, Mary the mother of Jesus, and many others throughout the pages of the Bible overcame difficult circumstances through their faith. Their lives were not easy. I'm sure Joseph didn't feel like one of God's favorites when he was crying out from the bottom of a pit or was thrown in prison after being falsely accused. Many others did not even receive God's promises of blessing within their lifetimes but instead looked forward to a future fulfillment.

If you want to be one of God's "favorites," know that you already are! He is the kind of God who does things such as these:

- **Collects all your tears in a bottle (Psalm 56:8).**
- **Knows the number of hairs on your head (Luke 12:7).**
- **Provides for you so that you don't have to worry about clothes and food (Matthew 6:25-30).**
- **Loves you so much that He sent His only Son to die for you (John 3:16).**

Our Father longs for a close relationship with us, but He won't force us. Instead He pursues and invites us to draw near. James 4:8 tells us, "Come close to God, and God will come close to you." He wants to be near us, love us, and use us. When we draw near to God, it will seem as if we are His favorites because of the mighty things He will do in and through us. The writer of James continues with instructions about how we can draw close to God: "Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world" (4:8).

You see, what God wants from us is an undivided heart. We are already His favorites because He created us and is crazy about us. However, to be used of Him as Joseph was, we must cooperate with His plan. Although Joseph was human and underwent much mistreatment and injustice, it almost seems that he made superhuman heart choices to go God's way of forgiveness. Actually, he simply chose to believe in the dreams God gave him even when they seemed impossible. Talk about faith: Joseph believed he would rule over his brothers even while stuck in a prison on foreign soil.

God can use people of faith—people bold enough to do things such as:

- **Build a boat before the deluge began. (Noah)**
- **Lay a son on an altar when God said to. (Abraham)**
- **Hold a staff over the water when God said He would part the Red Sea. (Moses)**
- **Lead an army to march around stone walls and blow trumpets, expecting the walls to fall. (Joshua)**
- **Praise God for the opportunity to have His Son, knowing the law required stoning for unwed mothers. (Mary)**

So many others in Scripture who seem like God's favorites were really just men and women who believed God. They line the hall of faith in Hebrews 11.

If you are wondering if you can be used like Joseph, the answer is you can! God may not call you to organize a food program or be second in command of a country, but He has good plans for you. As you draw near to Him with undivided loyalty, you will be amazed at the things He might call you to initiate. Whether He calls you to speak His messages, forgive someone who hurt you, or do something that seems impossible from a human perspective, He will give you the words and the grace to see it through for His glory. After all, you are one of His favorites—we all are!

