

Teddy Bear's Picnic

August 11, 2019

Introduction

For generations children have held the soft, cuddly teddy bear close to their hearts. Its comforting presence has been with them throughout many childhood events, both happy and sad. Its smiling face has offered unconditional love and acceptance, a faithful and trusted companion always willing to listen and be there for them.

Today we'll explore these qualities that have made the teddy bear such a success for well over a hundred years.

History of the teddy bear

The teddy bear got its name from U.S. President Theodore ("Teddy") Roosevelt. In 1902, Roosevelt was in a hunting party in Mississippi where he refused to shoot a wounded black bear, saying it was "unsportsmanlike" to do so. As the president who put the National Park Act through Congress, Roosevelt was concerned about conservation and taking care of the environment. This hunting incident made the national news as a political cartoon in the *Washington Post*.

In 1903 Brooklyn, NY toymaker Morris Michtom and his wife Rose designed a stuffed bear toy based on the cartoon image. He even wrote the president and got Roosevelt's permission to name the toy after him. By 1906 there were many teddy bear companies in the U.S. producing a wide variety of practical and novelty teddy bears. It was fashionable for children to have their photo taken with their teddy bears. Even Roosevelt himself used one as a mascot in his bid for re-election.

Early teddy bears were made to look like real bears. Today's bears are more attractive due to their cuteness and cuddliness.

As Christians we need to be attractive because the same qualities that make teddy bears special should also make us special.

1) Unconditional love

Commentary

God loves us fully, freely and without conditions. That should fill us with joy to know God is always with us whether we're having a good day or a bad one. A parent's love towards a child is similar, whether the youngster is helpful and happy or grumpy and grouchy.

No wonder that a teddy bear represents this quality to a little boy or girl: always ready to receive a hug, always smiling, always there for the child to love unconditionally.

Story

Just Another Day

As Charlotte Volnek opened her eyes, she looked out of her window to see the beauty of the summer earth just coming alive: white clouds floating in a blue sky, birds singing on the back

fence, flowers turning their faces towards the light in joyful thanks. “God must really love our world,” she thought.

Her daughter came into the room with a card she’d just made. It was a drawing with the words, “I love you, Mommy” written on the bottom. What a joy to feel the love of a child so early in the morning!

At breakfast her son showed his report from school. He certainly got high marks in every subject, what with his curiosity and excitement for so many things. What a love of learning he has, and a desire to share it with his parent.

On their way to school, Charlotte noticed a child in a special walker trying to get over the curb. A well-meaning teacher offered to help, but the child brushed her away. With determination, he conquered the curb, and went over to play with his friends. She smiled as she watched the children totally accepting their classmate for who he was, not judging him for what he lacked.

How thankful we should be that God treats everyone like that. No matter how many or how few gifts or talents or skills or abilities we have, God loves us all unconditionally, and smiles on each one like a new day just beginning.

2) Comforting presence

Commentary

When children are faced with life’s challenges, there often needs to be something that is constant, remaining the same despite the changes all around them. A teddy bear can serve this purpose. For that reason, police departments and medical emergency personnel often have one on hand at the scene of an accident or illness. The comforting presence of a soft, cuddly teddy bear may be just what a child needs to calm fears and give the reassurance that everything will be okay.

Story

Jack Wilkins in Hospital

When Barbara’s brother Jack was seven years old his coat got caught in the power take-off of the tractor. The result was two broken legs, a punctured lung and a broken arm. He was rushed to Victoria General Hospital in London, ON miles away from family and friends. His mother stayed with him during the day, but in the evening, she went to where she was staying with relatives. Jack found the nights quite lonely and frightening after all he was only seven years old. When his Aunt Lou heard about this, she knitted him a teddy bear. This made a great difference for Jack because the teddy bear was a constant companion and connection with the family when no one was around.

When Aunt Lou saw that it made a big difference to her nephew during his time in hospital, she began a teddy bear ministry that continued for 40 years, making and distributing knitted teddy bears to children in area hospitals. Hundreds of children received help this way during the difficult days following surgery or illness.

When Barbara left Ontario in 1999 to begin her ministry in Saskatchewan, Aunt Lou made her a “Patches” doll to be her constant companion as she settled in the West.

3) Caring companion

Commentary

We’ve all seen the character of Linus in the *Peanuts* cartoon strip. He always had a blanket with him wherever he went. It was his constant companion. Teddy bears have also served that purpose for thousands of children, whether at play outside in the yard or beside them in bed at night. It’s nice to know there’s ‘someone’ there at all times, regardless of what’s going on or what you’re doing.

God says the same thing, that he will be a constant companion throughout life’s ups and downs - guaranteed. We know how much God loves us and cares about us, so it isn’t hard to understand why he wants to be at our side whatever is happening.

Story

A Bear and a Rock

It was a shock to everyone when the news that the mother of a Grade 4 student, Whitney Colton, had died suddenly of a heart attack the night before. That left teacher Sharon Wilson with the thought of what she could give the little nine-year-old girl that would be meaningful and helpful. She looked around her classroom and chose the Freedom Bear, a well-worn teddy bear that had seen its share of washings and sewing of holes to keep it soft and cuddly. Whitney had hugged the bear in an earlier, more pleasant time; now, her teacher would offer the bear to her in this difficult time.

Sharon knew what it was like to be sad and fearful, as she was a cancer survivor herself. She often kept a small smooth rock in her pocket. It was solid and immovable, just like God upon whom her life depended. So she found a similar rock for Whitney, and went over to visit the little girl.

“You brought the Freedom Bear!” exclaimed Whitney.

“Yes, I did. I hope you snuggle with it, especially when you go to bed. All the other kids in your class have had it over to their place this year, so you can keep it as long as you want. And here’s something else.”

Sharon placed the rock in Whitney’s hand and wrapped her fingers tightly around it. “Feel how solid it is. This is for you to keep with you as a reminder of God’s strength and his promise to never leave us. We’re never alone.”

As the weeks passed Sharon wondered if the Freedom Bear and rock were still providing comfort to the little girl. One day she felt a tap on her shoulder. It was Whitney standing there with a smile on her face. Slowly she pulled an object from her pants pocket and opened her hand to show the rock. “I carry it with me every day and I cuddle up to Freedom Bear every night when I go to sleep,” she whispered before turning around and walking back to her seat.

4) Faithful and trusted listener

Commentary

One of the nice things about a teddy bear is that it always listens attentively to whatever a child is telling it. When it hears secrets entrusted only to its ears, everyone knows that any information is safe and secure. A teddy bear can be trusted never to gossip or spread personal details about its owner. It's never judgmental or interrupts a child's tears.

Isn't it also nice to know that the teddy bear shares these wonderful qualities of a faithful listener with God who is always open to our prayers. There's never a time when we don't have God's undivided attention to our concerns.

Story

Special Children: Mine and God's

It took Nancy Sullivan's daughter Sarah, who has Down's Syndrome, to teach her that God speaks amid life's challenges, but we have to listen.

The little girl was preparing for Vacation Bible School and proudly showed off to her mother how she'd gotten ready all by herself: all dressed and with her backpack ready to go. Her clothes, however, were all backwards and mismatched, and her backpack contained five Lego blocks, a box of unopened paper clips, three jigsaw puzzle pieces and a sheet from the linen closet. It took controlled effort on Nancy's part to say, "You look beautiful!" and let Sarah take her package of strange objects to class.

Nancy arrived a few minutes early at the church and quietly went to the chapel door where the children were sitting in a circle listening intently to a Bible story. Sarah was there in rapt attention, her clothes still on backwards, her fingers around the straps of her backpack. "I sure do love her," Nancy thought. It was then that she felt as if God was speaking to her, so she closed her eyes and listened, "That's the way I feel about *you*. It doesn't matter if your life is on backwards and mismatched, or your backpack is full of useless items like anxiety, doubt and fear. What's important is that you trust me to provide all your needs at the right time."

When was the last time we closed our eyes and listened to God's reassuring voice, "You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you." (Isa.43:4b)