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Pandy

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PANDY

Other dolls came and went.

Pandy was family: Love Barbie, love her rag doll.

It was a package deal.

John Orterg wrote a wonderful book called *Love Beyond Reason: Moving God's Love From Your Head to Your Heart*. In it, John tells the story of a much-loved doll by the name of Pandy that belonged to his sister, Barbie. John's story is hard to improve on, so since it is his story, I will just let him tell it exactly as he wrote it:

Pandy had lost a good deal of her hair, one of her arms was missing, and, generally speaking, she'd had the stuffing knocked out of her. . . .

She hadn't always looked like this. She had been a personally selected Christmas gift by a cherished aunt who had traveled to a great department store in faraway Chicago to find her. Her face and hands were made of some kind of rubber or plastic so that they looked real, but her body was stuffed with rags to feel soft and squeezable, like a real baby.

When my aunt looked in the display window at Marshall Fields and found Pandy, she knew she had found something very good.

When Pandy was young and a looker, Barbie loved her. She loved her with a love that was too strong for Pandy's own good. When Barbie went to bed at night, Pandy lay next to her. When Barbie had lunch, Pandy ate beside her at the table. When Barbie could get away with it, Pandy took a bath with her. Barbie's love for that doll was, from Pandy's point of view, pretty nearly a fatal attraction.

By the time I knew Pandy, she was not a particularly attractive doll. In fact, to tell the truth, she was a mess. She was no longer a very valuable

* "*Transforming Love*" appeared in the *Quiet Hour Echoes for May 2002*. Used with permission.

doll; I'm not sure we could have given her away.

But for reasons that no one could ever quite figure out, in the way that kids sometimes do, my sister Barbie loved that little rag doll still. She loved her as strongly in the days of Pandy's raggedness as she ever had in her days of great beauty.

Other dolls came and went. Pandy was family: Love Barbie, love her rag doll. It was a package deal.

Once we took a vacation from our home in Rockford, Illinois, to Canada. We had returned almost all the way home when we realized at the Illinois border that Pandy had not come back with us. She had remained behind at the hotel in Canada.

No other option was thinkable. My father turned the car around and we drove from Illinois all the way back to Canada. We were a devoted family. Not a particularly bright family, perhaps, but devoted.

We rushed into the hotel and checked with the desk clerk in the lobby—no Pandy. We ran back up to our room—no Pandy. We ran downstairs and found the laundry room—Pandy was there, wrapped up in the sheets, about to be washed to death.

The measure of my sister's love for that doll was that our family would travel all the way to a distant country to save her.

The years passed, and my sister

grew up. She outgrew Pandy. She traded her in for a boyfriend named Andy (who, oddly enough, was even less attractive than the doll Pandy).

Pandy had not been much of a bargain for a long while, and by now the only logical thing left to do was to toss her out. But this my mother could not bring herself to do. She held Pandy one last time, wrapped her with exquisite care in some tissue paper, placed her in a box, and stored her in the attic for 20 years. . . .

The nature of my sister's love is what made Pandy so valuable. Barbie loved that little doll with the kind of love that made the doll precious to anyone who loved Barbie. All those tears and hugs and secrets got mixed in with the rags somehow. If you loved Barbie, you just naturally loved Pandy, too.

More years passed. My sister got married (not to Andy) and moved far away. She had three children, the last of whom was a little girl named Courtney, who soon reached the age where she wanted a doll.

No other option was thinkable. Barbie went back to Rockford, back to the attic, and dragged Pandy out of the box. By this time, though, Pandy was more rag than doll.

So my sister took her to a doll hospital in California (there really is such a place) and had her go through reconstructive surgery. Pandy was given a facelift or liposuction or whatever it is that they do for

dolls, until after many years Pandy became once again as beautiful on the outside as she had always been in the eyes of the one who loved her. I'm not sure she looked any better to Barbie, but now it was possible for others to view what Barbie had always seen in her.

When Pandy was young, Barbie loved her. She celebrated her beauty. When Pandy was old and ragged, Barbie loved her still. Now she did not simply love Pandy because Pandy was beautiful, she loved her with a kind of love that *made* Pandy beautiful.

Rag Dolls

Now, you may wonder why I am telling you this. Because I am Pandy. You are, too. We are all rag dolls, flawed and wounded, broken and bent. All of us are a pretty sorry excuse for something that was supposedly made in the image of God. We've let too many people down. We have too many skeletons in our closet, blots on our record, failures and betrayals in our past, and our halo is more than a bit frayed around the edges. We are all ragamuffins. But we are *God's ragamuffins!* God loves us anyway. He loves us in all our brokenness just because he *is* love. For some time now he has been doing reconstructive surgery on those who are his. And because he loves us, we are free to love others. The love that transforms our lives flows through us

to others, and transforms them too.

Gary Smalley and John Trent, in their book *The Blessing*, tell of watching the transforming love of God flow through a godly speech teacher. It happened on the first day of class. The teacher asked the students to introduce themselves by responding to the questions: "What do I like about myself?" and "What don't I like about myself?" One by one, the student bared their souls to the class.

But when they came to Dorothy, there as a long silence. Dorothy sat in the back of the room. You almost couldn't see her behind her long red hair hanging down around her face. The teacher thought perhaps she hadn't heard, so he moved his chair over near hers and gently repeated the question. Still, Dorothy was silent.

Finally Dorothy uttered a deep sigh. She sat up in her chair and pulled back her hair, revealing a large, irregularly shaped birthmark, nearly as red as her hair, that covered most of one side of her face. "That," she said, "should show you what I *don't* like about myself."

The professor, moved to compassion, leaned over and gave her a hug. Then he kissed her on her cheek where the birthmark was and said, "That's OK, Honey, God and I still think you're beautiful."

Dorothy burst into tears. The class gathered around her, reaching out to

We are all like Dorothy. We are moral lepers, marred and defiled by evil, birth marked with the curse of sin. But God not only loves us, he long to touch us and make us whole. He offers the kiss of life, which will unleash the wellsprings of love within us so that it can overflow through us to others.

her. Twenty minutes later, when she was finally able to talk, as she dabbed the tears from her eyes she said to the professor. "I've wanted so much for someone to hug me and say what you said. My mother won't even touch my face."

We are all like Dorothy. We are moral lepers, marred and defiled by evil, birth marked with the curse of sin. But God not only loves us, he long to touch us and make us whole. He offers the kiss of life, which will unleash the wellsprings of love within us so that it can overflow through us to others.

Let me share one more story. Author and speaker Brennan Manning recalls a student he once taught at a university. Larry was short, very fat, and dealing with a severe case of acne. He was wearing an unwashed T-shirt over blue jeans with a patch on the backside. His rock-bottom self-esteem walked around on two bare feet.

During the holidays, Larry went home "smelling like a Billy-goat." When the visit was over, Larry

announced that he had to leave at 6:00 the next morning to go back to school. So his dad said, "Well, I'll ride down in the bus with you."

The next morning, father and son rode the bus in silence down to a certain corner, where they waited for a second bus that would take Larry to the airport. Across the street were a bunch of men who worked in the same factory as Larry's father. When they saw Larry, they began making loud and degrading remarks.

"Look at that fat pig over there."

"I tell you, if that was my kid, I'd hide him in the basement, I'd be so embarrassed."

"Not me. If that was my kid, he'd be out the door so quick he wouldn't know if he was on foot or on horseback."

"Hey, pig—give us an oink!"

As these brutal insults continued, the father did something he'd never done before. He reached out, embraced his son, kissed him on both cheeks, and said, "Larry, if your mother and I live to be 150 years old, that won't be long enough to thank

God for the gift he gave us in you. I'm so proud you're my son!"

Brennan Manning says, "I have no words to describe the change, the complete transformation, that took place in Larry. He returned to the university, cleaned up his act, and eventually became student president."

You see, his father healed him! He saw the good that Larry couldn't see in himself, affirmed that good with a

loving touch, and changed the whole direction of his life.

Friend, God loves you and has blessed you with life. I encourage you today to give him your life, and you will discover what it feels like to be his treasure. Let his redeeming love transform you into a channel of love to others. And then that love can bless others when people tell your story! □

DOCTRINE

Doctrine has value only as it reveals the character of God. To preach doctrine apart from God is to do despite to both—to doctrine, because it is robbed of its purpose; to God, because he is robbed of a dimension of his character that doctrine was given to illuminate. Indeed, it becomes less doctrine than philosophy; less philosophy than simple surmise. "Just preach Christ"? Who is he? A man? A God? He became one of us? How? For how long? Why? To punish us? To save us? How? Without doctrine, we cannot view the advent, mission, death, resurrection, ascension, current ministry, and second advent of our Lord. Nor can we properly position our Lord at the head of heaven's armies in the cosmic conflict that has engulfed the universe. What's it all about? Why the conflict between Lucifer and God? Both seek our worship. Which deserves it? Why? The questions can be multiplied. They should not be ignored. To denigrate doctrine is to do so.—R.R.H.