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God and Feelings

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God and Feelings

Many people, when they relate personal experiences which they identify as direct contacts with God, say that they had some feelings of peace, confidence, or awe; heightened awareness of beauty and of a loving presence. When we have positive feelings and deeply satisfying experiences, we respond favorably, and open ourselves to more of the same. If someone is especially kind to us, and apparently trustworthy, we are quite likely to continue to relate with them. If friends invite us to get involved in some activity, even hard and challenging work, we are inclined to join them. Positive feelings engender continued contact with the sources of those feelings.

When affection is involved, it is easy to act; but if someone arrogantly commands us, we find even simple tasks difficult of completion. When we have experiences of God, we find encouragement for doing what we believe will be for our own good and that of others, and pleasing to God. If we experience feelings of confirmation and affirmation, we will want to continue in the directions associated with those feelings. Parents teach children by rewarding appropriate behavior. God is good, and often touches us with positive feelings. But God is not the feelings, no matter how excellent our felt responses to God's initiatives.

God is Love. And love is shown in deeds, which might or might not always evoke feelings that we welcome. As we act out of love for one another, we do not always do so by "being nice" or ensuring that others will experience pleasant feelings. If someone is hurting, no matter how much we care, we might not be able to make him or her feel joy or happiness. Our love is real and effective, but we do not control how others feel in response to our words and actions. When we exercise "tough love" for others, they cannot see or recognize our actions as being motivated by sincere concern for them. The first response of those who are confronted with evidence of their self-destructive addictions is seldom gratitude. Love is not a feeling, though we are familiar with deep satisfaction when we give and receive love. God is not a feeling, though we know of nothing better on this earth than felt closeness to God, who is Love.

We humans are not merely a bundle of feelings. We are persons whose calling and main purpose in life is to love. God loves us and is certain about what is and is not in our best interests or according to our calling and purpose in life. When we do not receive positive feelings for every good thing that we do, God is not distant from us. Just as we

are present to others when they are asleep, or in pain, or focused entirely on themselves, God is present to us at all times. When we have direct experiences that evoke notable feelings of consolation, contentment, and well-being, we recognize them as special. On an every-day basis, most of us only recognize an abiding feeling of peace from our connection with God, when we reflect, quietly.

Habitual peace is a clear sign of God's affirmation, but it is God we love, not the feeling of peace.