

## Rescue

It was the beginning of January, and I was hiking through the woods a couple hours from home. The temperature was in the single digits outside, with a wind chill of below zero. Don't ask me why I decided to go hiking in that kind of weather, but I was enjoying myself nonetheless. I was only out for an hour or so, and when I came back to my car, there was a few-weeks-old yellow lab under the front of my car, trying to stay warm with what little heat was left in my engine. I love dogs even more than I love hiking in the freezing cold, and so I began to rescue this frightened little puppy that had been abandoned in the woods by her master.

The puppy went to live with some friends of mine and proceeded to destroy nearly all of their furniture, and now, almost eight years later, I'm taken back to that moment when I found her, except that one thing has changed. Now I'm the puppy, and God is the one doing the rescuing. God is standing there with His hand outstretched, calling to me, but I am too afraid to come close to Him.

You see, I've been pouring out and pouring out lately, and I know that if I go to God, He's going to ask even more of me, and I just don't have anything left to give. Though I really want to be rescued, and though I really want to be loved and comforted and taken care of, I'm afraid of what that hand holds for me—or rather what it may take from me or do to me.

Yet God starts to lower Himself to the ground, calling me gently to come to Him. "It's OK. I won't hurt you. C'mon." And I step slightly closer, curious by His soft tone, but I'm still too afraid to let myself come much closer. And so He continues to lower Himself and lower Himself until He's practically lying on the ground, hand still outstretched, calling me to come.

By now, I'm quite curious, if nothing else, by His persistence and His apparent gentleness and good intention. But I've been wrong about these things before, and I've been hurt so many times by the people I thought were the safest and most loving people I knew. Still, His gesture to me seems so genuine, and so I inch closer and closer to His hand, wanting to see what was inside.

And then He does something I completely don't expect. The God of the universe, the Almighty, the Creator of all things, the Beginning and the End, rolls over on His back, hand still outstretched, making Himself completely vulnerable to me. In that position, I could hurt Him if want to, and I could have a chance to escape if anything happens, before He can get up and come after me. It's such a humble position— He's giving me the upper hand. I just don't understand. But now it seems safe. Now I can draw near.

I come close to Him and look in His hand, still afraid of what it might ask of me, but the closer I look, the more I find that it is not a taking hand at all, but a giving one. In it is life. In it is protection. In it is good food and warmth and love and provision. How could I have been so afraid? But what startles me even more is still the fact that He made Himself so vulnerable to me.

Before I can think of it too much, and forgetting all about how afraid I was, God looks to me and says, "Matthew, I want to show you something."

"Look here at the cross," He says. "See? I made myself vulnerable to you once before in order that you would come near to me."

And suddenly, all the tears I've been holding back start flowing out of me. I don't have to be strong anymore. I don't have to make it on my own anymore. I have been rescued. I have a friend.