

The cheerful girl with bouncy golden curls was almost five. Waiting with her mother at the checkout stand, she saw them: a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box.

"Oh please, Mommy. Can I have them? Please, Mommy, please?"

Quickly the mother checked the back of the little foil box and then looked back into the pleading blue eyes of her little girl's upturned face.

"A dollar ninety-five. That's almost \$2.00. If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you, and in no time you can save enough money to buy them for yourself. Your birthday's only a week away and you might get another crisp dollar bill from Grandma."

As soon as Jenny got home, she emptied her penny bank and counted out 17 pennies. After dinner, she did more than her share of chores and she went to the neighbor and asked Mrs. James if she could pick dandelions for ten cents. On her birthday Grandma did give her another new dollar bill, and at last, she had enough money to buy the necklace.

Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel dressed up and grown up. She wore them everywhere...Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or had a bubble bath. Mother said if they got wet, they might turn her neck green.

Jenny had a very loving daddy and every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story. One night when he finished the story, he asked Jenny, "Do you love me?"

"Oh yes, Daddy. You know that I love you."

"Then give me your pearls."

"Oh, Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have Princess, the white horse, from my collection. ..the one with the pink tail. Remember Daddy? The one you gave me. She's my favorite."

"That's okay, Honey. Daddy loves you. Good night." And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.

About a week later, after the story time, Jenny's daddy asked again, "Do you love me?"

"Daddy, you know I love you."

"Then give me your pearls."

"Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful and you can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper."

"That's okay. Sleep well. God bless you, little one. Daddy loves you."

And as always, he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed Indian-style. As he came close, he noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek.

"What is it, Jenny? What's the matter?"

Jenny didn't say anything, but lifted her little hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, "Here, Daddy. It's for you."

With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny's kind daddy reached out with one hand to take the dime-store necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of genuine pearls and gave them to Jenny. He

had them all the time. He was just waiting for her to give up the dime-store stuff so he could give her genuine treasure.¹

Do we love Jesus the Christ?

Do we love the Lord?

Do we love Him?

If we love the Lord, then we would have to be willing to give up our most precious treasures, wouldn't we? We would have to want to give up everything to follow the Lord. We might need to willingly give up our worldliness so that we can feed all people – feed them with life-giving food – feed them literally and figuratively. The world is so hungry – hungry for good food – but also for the Word of God.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Do you love me more than the other disciples? Can we love Jesus more than anyone and anything in our lives? Can we? Can we love him that much? More than chocolate? More than a good medium rare Alberta beef steak? More than a fully restored 1957 Chevy Belair? More than our luggage? More than a vacation in Hawaii? Can we love Jesus more than our children? More than our home? More than the church? Must we love our Lord more than these to be able to feed his lambs, to tend his sheep, to feed his sheep?

Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. Was this meant to redeem Peter's three denials? I wonder. Can our love for the Lord overcome the times when we too turned away from the Lord?

May we learn to love the Lord more than anything or anyone. May we be true to our commitments to follow the Lord. May we feed his sheep.

Lord, may it be so. Amen.

¹ "The Pearls" by Alice Grey, from *Free to Serve God: 7 Principles Every Believer Should Know*, by James O. Jones, Jr. (Light of Life Ministry, revised printing 2009).