

Daring to Laugh: When Celebration And Sadness Join Hands

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George MacDonald, the British theologian of the late nineteenth century, wrote about the struggle when faced with the perplexing combination of grief and gladness. In his sermon "Take No Thought," he states: "You have a disagreeable duty to do at twelve o'clock. Do not blacken nine and ten and eleven, and all between with the color of twelve. Do the work of each, and reap your reward in peace. So when the dreaded moment in the future becomes the present, you shall meet it walking in the light, and that light will overcome its darkness."

Life sometimes brings us foreknowledge of an unpleasant thing waiting for us down the road. This could range from simple weekly cleaning chores to a prognosis of a loved ones' imminent death. Whatever the "dreaded moment in the future" is, MacDonald echoes the example of Jesus to fully live in the present. To do this, both our thoughts and actions need to be submitted to Him. However, if we are facing something that could be particularly fearful, grievous, or painful, the temptation could be to entertain thoughts of hopelessness; i.e. "what's the use? Nothing matters anymore because of such and such." These thoughts then affect our behaviors. We may find ourselves doing something or not doing something that further brings us or those we live with, hurt, depression and despair.

This unpleasant thing in our lives could also be our own failings, shortcomings and sins. When we fail or sin, suddenly our human efforts to order our lives, become successful, or simply to persevere through everyday life become more difficult. What previously brought us, perhaps, feelings of prideful human satisfaction, now bring us pain. However this process of sinfulness moving into repentance, can birth in us a poverty of spirit.

Personally, God is gently and patiently proving to me that this process of moving from sinfulness into repentance and thus experiencing a poverty of spirit, is one of His most precious gifts. In His wisdom He is showing me that, as in the paradox of celebration and sadness, poverty of spirit brings an amazing wealth of His life-giving richness. Brennan Manning, in his book [The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus](#) states that this poverty of spirit leads us to "a gut level experience of our profound spiritual emptiness." It is this profound spiritual emptiness, states Manning, that finally enables us to experience the sovereignty of God. We at last encounter the living God! "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3). This verse shows us how the process of spiritual rags to riches, is not without the profound compassion of Jesus. Even in the spiritual rags to riches process, you may as I have,

experience failings and setbacks. Even so, His compassions will be new to us every morning. His faithfulness is indeed very great! (Lamentations 3:23).

The paradox of celebration and sadness can also move us to have a heart like Jesus. In the weeks before Jesus faced death on the cross, the knowledge His own dreaded future event was coupled with ministry, fellowship, and connection with the brokenness of others. He raised Lazarus from the dead, He allowed Mary to anoint His feet with oil, and He taught, ate and prayed with His disciples. Our brokenness can also allow us to seek, feel, and become involved in ministry to others, and particularly in the brokenness of others. Our embracing of our own and others' brokenness allows for the essence and hope of Christ to have more power in our lives, than an upcoming trial or our sinfulness and failings.

“So it is with you: you are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy, joy no one shall take from you.” (Jn. 16:16-22). Sadness, from whatever source it comes from, can threaten to rob us of the tangible joy of present day life. However, this sadness or poverty of spirit is often what Jesus uses to bring us a joy in Him that is beautiful beyond description.

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