

Two Sides of Pity

By Suzan Myhre, M.S.S.W.

There are many angles at which to look at pity. In God's word the word pity is used many times, especially in regard to God's attitude of pity toward His people. In this context, pity is defined as regard for, to have compassion on, to be merciful, gracious, and good toward. It can even refer to a tender love a lover has for a damsel in distress. God showed immeasurable amounts of pity for His children on many occasions in the Old and New Testaments. The pity God shows is based on the truth that God has created His children with all they need to get through the trials and tribulations of life. He does not see his children in an "unable" or "incapable" light. As His word says, " My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." It is His power and presence that helps us transcend the circumstances we find ourselves in. This is why God does not "feel sorry for us" but He will feel sorry with, and have compassion on us as we invite Him into our pain and suffering.

There is however, another kind of pity that is practiced by God's people. This pity is grounded in the belief that we are on our own, that we do not have access to everything we need, that we are many times unable and incapable of handling our painful circumstances. As a result, this belief promotes self-pity and the desire for others to feel sorry for the hurting individual. The thoughts or statements that go along with this stance are things like:

"You poor thing." "Poor baby.. ." "You don't deserve this" "She's such a witch (bully)" "He's such a jerk" "I feel so sorry for her. . ." "Why does bad stuff always happen to me?" "Why do I always have to do all the work around here? " "Why doesn't anybody ever listen to me?"

In the above examples, pity begins with a stance of victimization and ends with a stance of victimization. The pain of one's circumstance feels intolerable. The repeated nature of the problem or difficulty seems like others' faults and not as a result of one's own repeated beliefs or actions. Thoughts and statements like the above feed one's sense of victimization. They do not point to God: our help in times of need. They do not tell us the truth about ourselves: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"(Phil. 4:13). They do not promote responsibility for the repeated problems. This type of pity deems one a loser and strips one of the power for living-- Jesus Christ. In addition, it can also feed a sense of moral superiority (I am the most beaten up person in the world and secretly proud of it-it makes me a saint).

Some families have come to define this leech-like pity as love. In many families, one is allowed to show love only when or primarily when someone is in a beaten up spot. Then, the "you poor thing" statements can occur, and people can finally express some verbal care and affirmation to one another. Unfortunately, the affirmation has a double message-in order to feel loved by me, you must be in tremendous pain and tough

circumstances. Otherwise, I may not see you, care for you, or express my fondness for you.

So what does God-ordained pity look and sound like? When we are crying and hurting and feeling desperate because some circumstance has knocked us off balance, we have a choice. Where we turn really matters to God. God waits to be wanted (Tozer). He wants to come in and comfort and care for us. He knows the extent of the pain better than we know, and He also sees the bigger picture (everything that went into that tough moment-including everyone's specific role). I can imagine Him saying something like-"I know this is hard for you. I hear your cries. I see your tears, here let me wipe them dry. Come and sit in my lap so you know you are not alone, so you can feel me rock you, and you can know that this will pass. You will feel better. You will see things more clearly as you and I talk and you receive wise counsel over the next few days. The confusion and anger will pass. All is well. I care about you."

I need God's tender mercy. I need His voice. I need His calm presence. I need His reassurance. I need His arms of love about my frame. I need to remember who I am and how much He loves me. I need His wise counsel. I need His correction. Without these things, I become so lost. If you struggle with pity, talk to God about it. Seek wise counsel. God wants to set us free from snares like this.

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