

Embracing the Intimacy and Ministry of Sadness

I. Rejecting Sadness

A. If you were to ask your friend or loved one, “How are you today?”, and they answered you by saying, “I am sad”, what would your natural response be? Most of us would quickly throw it into “fix it” mode immediately, finding out the cause of their sadness and setting ourselves to helping them stop being sad. After all, sadness is not an acceptable mode of operation in our culture, especially in our Christian culture.

1. Our natural and cultural mindset concerning those who are weeping is that most of the time it is an unacceptable emotion, especially for men, and we respond with concern to end the sadness. If someone has experienced something deeply traumatic like a death, it is acceptable for a time but if they are still sad after a few weeks, we begin to be concerned.

On average, employers give workers four days off following the death of a spouse or child; three days for a domestic partner, foster child, grandchild, parent, sibling or grandparent, and one or two days for extended family members of a spouse's relative, according to a nationwide Workplace Survey done in 2016.

2. It is absolutely true and biblical that we are to have a continual joy and peace in our identity in Jesus, as well as in our current and future life and relationship in God through Jesus. However, this does not mean that if we embrace weeping or sadness, we have lost all our joy in Jesus. (Rom. 14:17, 15:13; Gal. 5:22)
3. What we see when we examine the scriptures is that weeping and sadness are not to be resisted to the level in which we naturally and culturally resist it. There is a God-designed healthy weeping and sadness we are to embrace as a good and even a needful thing. (Ecc. 7:1-4)

I. Embracing Sadness

A. A full reading and understanding of the subject of feeling sad and weeping in the bible not only gives us permission to weep in a healthy way, but actually calls us to carry a constant weight of mourning and sadness because we are Christians, as a sign and fruit of our healthy walk with God. (Mt. 22:37 “Love God with all your soul <mind will and emotions>”)

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B. There are multiple aspects or arenas of our life and relationship with God in which we are called to embrace sadness and even necessitate weeping.

1. Mourning for the Kingdom - (Mt. 5:4, 9:14-15; Jam. 4:7-10)
2. Weeping for the Lost - (Lk 19:41-44; Phil. 3:17-19)
3. Sharing in the sorrows of Jesus - (Mt. 26:36-38)
4. Weeping with those who Weep - (Jn 11:32-25; Rom. 12:15)
5. Mourning over the devastations of Sin - (Ps. 119:136; Joel 2:12-13, 17)
6. Mourning over Loss - (Acts 8:4; 1 Thess. 4:13)
7. Mourning over lack of understanding - (Dan. 10:2,11)
8. Weeping under the burden of God - (Jer. 9:1; Eze. 9:4)

C. Sadness VS Depression - Whereas the biblical expressions of sadness are healthy and bring life to the heart, depression kills the heart and brings death.

1. Biblical Sadness is rooted in hope - The sadness that we are to embrace is always connected to feeling sad because we are confident in the goodness and joy to come.
2. Biblical Sadness flows from and maintains a vibrant heart and is mixed with joy, peace, and hope - Biblical sadness happens because someone is very connected to their emotions and in touch with the realities of that sadness. Whereas depression is a lack of emotion and a dullness of mind and emotion.
3. Biblical Sadness is right to the soul and rooted in truth - Many describe depression as an overwhelming sadness that they don't understand or don't quite know why they are sad. Depression feels like an uninvited guest who refuses to leave. Biblical sadness is always connected to a truth that demands sadness and is invited, accepted, and justified by the mind, will, and emotions of the weeping.

II. Intimacy with God in Weeping

A. The greatest travesty of a Christian culture that rejects sadness is the loss of relational love and nearness to Jesus. All would agree that vulnerability in truth separates superficial relationships from deep friendships. I believe that the initiation into the depths of God's heart is available to all, but only a few say yes to the invitation. (Ps. 34:18; 51:17; 147:3)

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- B. Just as Jesus desires to invite His closest friends into His sadness, He deeply desires to be invited into ours. Once again, I feel that this is countercultural and most feel that somehow it's wrong to feel sad and commune with Jesus over their sadness. Once again, this does not line up with what we see in the scriptures.
1. Invitation - There are multiple times in the scriptures where Jesus either asks to be invited into other's sadness, or invited His friends into His. It is of note that these invitations were rarely accepted to the level that He was looking for. (Mt. 26:46; Lk. 4:18, 6:36-50; Jn. 4:13-20)
 2. Wiping Away our Tears - There is a great promise that in the age to come Jesus will wipe away all our tears. The original language is quite clear that Jesus will intentionally heal every tear that was shed in death, sorrow, and crying. In other words, He will take each individual time of you feeling sorrow unto tears and heal it, not erase it from your memory, but heal it. (Is. 25:8; Rev. 7:17, 21:4)

III. Ministry to the Weeping

The heart posture of the Christian in ministry to those who are experiencing sadness is not to set themselves to immediately "fix it" and try to get them to stop being sad. The Holy Spirit through Paul counsels us to feel and embrace a person's sadness and to be sad with them. This is the Godly and loving response.

1. Ministry of Healing - As we looked at earlier in this session, there are seasons and even certain aspects of constant sadness and mourning that are Godly and healthy. If we walk in the cultural obsession with happiness we are very likely to end up working against God rather than with Him when it comes to ministry to the sad. There may be many times where God is calling us to, "weep with them", rather than, "cast out all weeping".
2. Mourning over one another's Sin - Another aspect of ministry to the weeping we are biblically called to is to mourn with those who are struggling in sin and to restore them. This particular aspect of Christianity is almost non-existent in the church; we almost never, "confess our sins to one another". It is even more rare to see the follow up, "so that you may be healed". The mandate to confess our sins or to expose someone's

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willful sins within the confines and safety of a loving church family is so they will be healed and restored, not rejected. (Gal. 6:1-2; Jam. 5:1)