

## **“Way Too Seriously”** By Paul R. Blake

“A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance” (Ecc. 3:4).

I recently read an article by Irishman and golf commentator David Feherty. Three years ago, he traveled with the USO in the Middle East to entertain the troops. He came away changed by the experience and began an organization for disabled vets called the Troops First Foundation. Feherty also has a quirky sense of humor. He tells the following story:

“You see, when a soldier gives a limb in the service of his or her country, it’s not just an arm or a leg that is lost. More important is the dignity. So when Green Beret Major Kent Solheim gave his leg away in March, after two years and umpteen surgeries in an attempt to keep it, I traveled to Walter Reed for his amputation. It’s not a spectator sport, but when Kent came out of the ether, the first thing I asked him was what they’d done with his old leg. When he asked me why, I told him that while normally I was just an arms dealer, in this ... economy I’d try to sell anything. A couple of nurses were momentarily horrified, but when Kent ... (laughed - prb) and called me sick, everyone felt better. That’s my trooper, I thought. By making fun of him in the time of his greatest sadness, I had offered him a chance, by his reaction, to regain some of his dignity.” (Feherty, David (2010-03-31). *The Power of Positive Idiocy*. Anchor. Kindle Edition)

You see, what the author instinctively or perhaps unwittingly stumbled upon is the formula for recovering from hardship and loss. He helped the fallen warrior to put his loss in perspective. This does not minimize the soldier’s terrible experiences or loss of limb. He did battle for his country, he was seriously wounded, and he then fought for two years to recover, only to have his leg removed.

But Kent still kept the things that were more important than his leg. By permitting himself to laugh at David’s juvenile joke at his expense, he proved that he had the power of self-determination over his life. Laughing at himself restored his dignity to him. If he had become angry at the joke, he would have verified to himself and others that he was ashamed of his condition and of his future as a disabled person. He would have shown himself weak and vulnerable to real or perceived insults from others. If he had cried over the joke or closed his heart to his friend, he would be surrendering his independence and asking to be considered an object of pity. But no; this soldier laughed at humor that highlighted his loss, and in doing so proved that he was strong enough to keep the amputation in perspective. He was reminded that day that he was still in charge of his life and that he could choose how he would face it.

We have a tendency to take some things “way too seriously.” I am not brushing aside the trauma, sorrow, or pain that the human predicament imposes on us. I am not trying to belittle persons who become angry or fretful or tearful over the injustices of life under the sun. I have often felt those things myself over the unfairness and randomness of existence in this world that is neither Eden nor Paradise. How do we handle these occurrences in a healthy manner?

Spending our days mourning over what we lost, dwelling on what might have been, remaining angry at persons or events that precipitated the loss, reliving the matter over and over in our minds, endlessly talking or writing or daydreaming about it are unproductive and harmful ways of dealing with it. These responses diminish our power to adapt to the loss and rob us of dignity as self-determining persons. God created us to be malleable, flexible enough not to break in crisis and adjustable in order to adapt to the change. The Adversary wants us to use the above non-coping methods, because they keep us focused on the loss and make us feel helpless to proceed.

God said through Solomon that there is ... “A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance” (Ecc. 3:4). Weep over the loss and then find a reason to laugh. Mourn the suffering and pain and then find a cause to jump for joy. We may not have control

over the circumstances and seasons, but we have power over how we deal with them. And that power to choose a healthy response to loss restores to us our dignity.

David sorrowed over his sickly child, fasting and lying in on the ground. Yet when the child passed from life, David got up from the ground, washed himself, changed his clothes, worshiped God, and ate his dinner. Instead of yielding to the temptation to prolong his sorrow and pain, he declared: "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon" (2Sam. 12:22-24). David got up and got on with his life.

When you are beset with sadness over a burden, look around for something amusing in the situation and let loose with a laugh. You will find it uplifting; it will remind you that you still have power and dignity to choose how to answer pain. Some will react to this advice with morbid pronouncements such as: "There's nothing funny about pain or loss." These are the persons for whom I have pity; not only when bad things happen to them will they have no healthy means of overcoming them, they also will be unable to help others who are suffering. It may seem counter-intuitive to laugh at loss or sorrow or pain, but we admire the brave who "laugh in the face of death." Why not laugh in the face of life, specifically, in the face of living with hardship?

### **A Moments Wisdom**

- There are two things a person should never be angry at, what they can help, and what they cannot.
- If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. Don't complain.
- It is under the greatest adversity that there exists the greatest potential for doing good, both for oneself and others.
- We can throw stones, complain about them, stumble on them, climb over them, or build with them.
- The less you open your heart to others, the more your heart suffers.
- Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.
- It always seems impossible until it's done.