

THE HIDDEN BLESSING OF SORROW

Ecclesiastes, 7:3 ... "Sorrow is better than laughter. For by a sad countenance the heart is made better."

No one enjoys being sad. Most of us will run from situations that cause sadness, fear and grief. We cannot always avoid grief because people in our lives depart from us whether we like it or not. Death is the most obvious cause of sorrow, but sorrow can also capture your emotions when a spouse abandons you, when a close friend moves far away, or when you must say goodbye to classmates upon graduating from school or college.

King Solomon is presumed to be the author of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, and he certainly had much experience with sorrow. Although he was considered the wisest man who ever lived, as well as the wealthiest, his wisdom failed him greatly when he married many women of other cultures, tolerated their worship of pagan gods, and even built shrines to those gods for his wives. So, we believe today's verse is part of Solomon's personal testimony, where he tells us that sorrow is better than laughter. It may have been laughter, wine, women and song that led to his downfall. But he tells us from his grave that sorrow is best when it produces repentance and healing. If you do something that disappoints God, the sorrow you feel from that mistake is equivalent to remorse and regret, which is meant to motivate you to repent and be reconciled to God. That is the blessing of sorrow; that it drives you back to God.

But, of course, not all sorrow is the result of sin. We are often the victims of circumstances beyond our control, such as the loss of a parent, child or close friend. We are expected to experience grief and sorrow in such instances. If you have failed an important exam or lost your favorite pet, your sorrow is understood. During these temporary and unavoidable times of sorrow God mercifully offers you comfort and you can still appreciate the joy of a loving relationship with Jesus. Happiness may be put on hold, but the joy of the Lord is sustained for those who love and follow Christ.

Joy is God's gift to you from the Lord who will not abandon you when you remain obedient and resist temptation. Happiness, however, is the result of your decision to be satisfied with the love and blessings of the Lord, and to look at your future with optimism. It is the lack of optimism and satisfaction with God's provision that most often produces unhappiness in people. It is possible to have the joy of the Lord, but lack happiness. You will be more content when you submit to God and obtain his joy, PLUS when you are grateful for his love and provision, which produces happiness.

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