

Transformed

Coming Alongside – In Joy and In Sorrow

*“Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.
As far as it depends on you, live peaceably with everyone.
Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.”
-Romans 12:15-16, ESV*

Transformed. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as “a thorough or dramatic change in the form, appearance, or character of.” There’s a lot to take in about living a transformed life for Christ – a life of dramatically changed character – in these two short verses.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice” – this part sounds easy, but is it? I mean, if I’m honest, I don’t always do so well embracing other people in their joy. Things like self-pity, envy, and unhealthy comparisons get in the way. Sometimes it would be easier to just forget to acknowledge them. But as believers we are a body, and Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12:26 that *“if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”* Coming alongside others in joy and in sorrow nurtures empathy, and empathy nurtures the community which God intended, both for our comfort and for our growth.

What I find, without fail, is that rejoicing in another person’s good or success actually builds us both up, like Paul says. Joy is infectious, it tends to expand and multiply, and unselfishly celebrating others builds community, brings glory to God, and benefits us all.

“Weep with those who weep”. I understand the value of this action in a way that I wish I didn’t. You see, I have lost a child. My daughter, Thizbe, a vibrant first-year vet student with her whole life of animal care and missions ahead of her, died of a sudden cardiac arrest. It was April of 2020. One minute she was her joyful, athletic self, out for a run before settling in to study for finals, and the next minute she was on life support in the ICU.

It’s impossible to describe the shock, the depths of darkness and pain which followed. In the weeks and months after we lost Thizbe, there were very few things people said that brought actual comfort. It was sort of like living underwater. Most dialogue was inaudible to my grieving mind and heart. It was muffled, garbled, bubbling noise.

But once in a while, someone would break through – with a call, a visit, a message. Not to remind my family to be grateful for all we still have, or to attempt to cheer us out of our grief, or to ponder the possible reasons why God took our girl to heaven early, but to simply cry with us – sharing in our sorrow, vulnerable to our pain. That’s when I felt Jesus’ presence. That’s when I sensed the comfort of His words from Matthew 11:28, *“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden. And I will give you rest.”* And that’s when I caught glimpses that maybe, just maybe, we could survive this.

It really shouldn’t surprise me. I mean, coming alongside is what Jesus himself did at Lazarus’ grave in John 11:33-35. Deeply moved by the sorrow of Mary and others, He entered into the community of grief. Jesus wept. He knew Lazarus would be raised, but in that moment He

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mourned (see Bibleref.com). He didn't try to fix their feelings, rather He offered comfort through his empathy. I want to be that kind of friend.

“As far as it depends on you, live peaceably with everyone. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.” Since Thizbe died, I can say I have a new awareness that relationships are precious, and time is short. I knew the words before, but now they're real. Unforgiveness, pride, blame, judgement – these only steal our peace and hurt our testimony. James 3:17 reminds us *“...the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.”*

Among the most beautiful things about my daughter's life is the impact she had on others. She was by no means perfect, but Thizbe lived in joy and peace in her relationships. And, she actively looked for ways to share God's kingdom with friends and strangers, here and now. She sought out the nervous new student, the one without a lab partner, the person alone at the party, the elderly relative, the less confident professor. She *“associated with the lowly”* – anyone who needed building up – and then did that. I believe this to be her lasting ministry, communicating more about the Jesus she loved and served than any lecture on theology could.

Each of us is a work in progress. And none of us knows how long we have to live the life we are called to live for Christ. May we use today to nurture empathy, to live peaceably, to build others up – our testimony and our life being ever transformed for the glory of God.

- 1. What gets in the way of you being able to rejoice with those who rejoice?**
- 2. How have you experienced community in times of your own pain and sorrow? Who needs you to come alongside them in their pain now?**
- 3. What do *living peaceably with everyone* and *associating with the lowly* look like in your life?**



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