ESSAY · JUNE 20, 2012

Can You Do This? Got the Guts to Try?

Written by Bill Perkins

I was thinking a negative thought the other night. It was the kind of negative thought I frequently had. In fact, it was so common I believed it was me--part of my identity.

Wet, Cloudy, Miserable

I was thinking about winters in Oregon. Since I moved here in 82' I've enjoyed reminding myself how much I detest the wet, cloudy, miserable winters. Did I say wet? Did I say cloudy? Did I say miserable? I have a special dislike for dark, depressing winters because I grew up in the bright, happy, sunny states of New Mexico and Texas. In the Southwest the sky is large and blue and bright and sunny. In New Mexico and Texas sunny days fall into one another like an endless line of toppling dominos.

I lived in the sun until I was 33. In January of 82' I moved to the winter-wet Pacific Northwest. Did you know in Oregon in the winter moss grows on decks and roofs and sidewalks and just about anything else that's left outside? It's not surprising that many people get depressed during the dark winter days.

Night Walks With Shasta

Anyway, the other night I was thinking about last winter. As I reflected on the miserable weather I recalled something else. Almost every winter night I would take my Goldendoodle, Shasta, for a walk. We walked along the street that runs from east to west in front of our house.

Across the street, to the south, a dance troupe of firs, pines and cedar trees cover the face of a steep hill. As I walk to the west those towering trees stand to my left. To my right runs a twenty food wide grassy area which drops steeply into a tree covered ravine.

A soft mist falls from ash grey clouds behind which a milky winter moon hides, like a child peeking through a silk curtain. Shasta sniffs the air and ground and dances around, hoping I'll throw the ball. Ahead of us, and to the left, a street light illumines the lacework branches of a cedar tree. I glance up and feel the light touch of mist on my face. In the arc of the streetlight I see countless tiny droplets float softly to the ground. I throw the tennis ball into the air and Shasta sprints after it.

It hits the deserted street and bounces five or six feet into the air. Running full speed Shasta leaps into the air and snaps her jaws in an attempt to catch the ball. She misses and quickly chases it further up the street. I thank God for the beauty of the moon, the mist, the trees, the sound and feel of the wind. I celebrate the wonder of a God who would create such beauty. I thank him for giving me eyes, ears, a nose and skin to enjoy his gift. I celebrate the joy of a dog chasing a ball.

Nothing Changed but Me

As I recalled this thought I realized I could replace my negative thoughts, and the emotions that attach to them, with the one I just described. And it's working. Just ask me about Oregon winters. While nothing in the weather has changed, I have.

The Jesus Experiment

This transformation is one of the ways living *the Jesus Experiment* is changing my life. Living the *JE* means I'm continually monitoring my feelings, thoughts, words and deeds and comparing them with the feelings, thoughts, words and deeds of Jesus in a similar situation. I then pray God will bring me into alignment with Christ. I've gotten in the habit of not letting a negative emotion slip by without examining it to discover the thought that triggered it.

I've been reading through the Gospels every month so I can know Jesus better. So far I haven't found an instance where Jesus complained about the weather. Or, let it affect his emotions. I also recall the Apostle Paul, a devoted follower of Jesus, urging his friends to rejoice in every situation (1 Thessalonians 5:18). I determined, by God's grace, to replace the negative thoughts and feelings about winter with the memory of my night walks with Shasta.

I'm discovering in a fresh way, almost daily, the power of Christ to root out bad attitudes and replace them with positive, healthy ones. Give it a try. Nab a negative emotion and identify the thought that triggered it. Ask what Jesus would feel in a similar situation. And then ask God to bring your thoughts and feelings into alignment with Jesus. I guarantee you, as God's Spirit aligns your feelings and thoughts with Jesus, your words and deeds will follow him too. So go ahead ... live the experiment and experience Jesus in a life-changing way.