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Changed Focus = Changed Feelings

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One dreary winter night I was obsessing over a negative thought . . . a thought so common I thought it part of my identity.

Wet, Cloudy, Miserable

You see, I used to obsess over how much I detested the wet, miserable, cloudy, Oregon winters. Did I say wet? Did I say cloudy? Did I say miserable? For years I had a vehement dislike for the dark, depressing winters because I grew up in the bright, happy, sunny states of New Mexico and Texas. In the Southwest the sky is big 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 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 those dark, dreary, miserable, wet-winter days.

Night Walks With Shasta

Anyway, one night as I reflected on the dismal 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 former home.

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. In the distance city-lights twinkle through low lying clouds.

The scene is spectacular. 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 now been working for several years. Just ask me about Oregon winters. While nothing in the weather has changed, I have.

I've been reading through the Gospels every month for years. 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.

Since that realignment of thinking I now experience, in a fresh way, the power of Christ to root out unhealthy attitudes and replace them with healthy ones. I now celebrate Oregon winters.

Give It a Try

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 his. 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 Jesus Experiment and experience Jesus in a life-changing way.

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