

When It Hurts

By Bob Hartig

I wrote the following as a MySpace blog on October 7, 2007. Nearly three years have passed between then and today, August 23, 2010, when I'm posting the piece here on Stormhorn.com. I could say that it seems like only yesterday when I wrote it, but I'd be lying. It seems like a long time ago, certainly every bit of three years. Yet the wisdom is as fresh to me as if someone else had written these words and I were reading them for the first time, and I am refreshed, strange to say, by my own honesty. I hope that in another three years, or five, or perhaps more, I will rediscover this post again, as I have today, and find encouragement in the faith of a younger me. I hope I will remember and cherish the circumstances that inspired my writing, and the loved one who remains in my prayers till this day; and that I will feel gratitude toward the Lord who entrusted me with such an experience. And I hope that he, in turn, will be pleased with the fruit it bore in me.

There are places in our souls that none can see but Jesus, and things about us that he alone understands and values. He is a jealous Lord because he is a jealous lover, and he reserves the deepest provinces of our hearts for himself. In places no one else can touch, in times when others can neither see nor speak into the inner chambers of our brokenness, we must listen, listen in hope, for the applause of the only One whose approval means everything.

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Last night I received some news that sucked the wind out of my sails. It was difficult news; it was wonderful news. It was the kind of news that, if you can understand this, brings a painful joy—joy on behalf of a loved one's blessing; pain over the circumstances that required me to learn of it belatedly, secondhand.

I was sharing with a close friend an intensely personal letter I had completed and mailed several days ago. Turns out my friend knew something I didn't know about the recipient of my letter. I had no idea my friend possessed such information. What she shared floored me. An event I had only anticipated as a future likelihood was already a done deal, and evidently it had been for a while. So my letter was already late, but its content was absolutely spot on. I had the sense, while writing, that my words were guided by the Holy Spirit. Now I'm certain of it, and I'd like to think my timing in sending the letter was directed by him as well. "Late" can prove to be right on time when God is wearing the wristwatch.

Anyway, today I am processing mixed emotions: sadness, gladness, hurt, blessing, release, relief, feelings of having been betrayed by God, feelings of having been deeply honored by God...conflicted feelings, all tumbling around inside me, a real mixed bag. Thankfully, I'm pretty sure this is the final bit of processing I will need to do over the matter, and while it is a large piece to chew on, it is not shattering the way the circumstances were that first set things in motion over a year ago. That was one of the worst times in my life. Today, I stand at the other end of an emotionally grueling passage, and, hard as it has been, I wouldn't change the outcome of it for anything. It is the answer to many a prayer I prayed for someone who once was very close to me, and that person's blessing and joy are easily worth the cost of a few tears on my part. I hope, and believe, that my letter came as a source of grace to her.

Why am I splashing all this down here for anyone and everyone to read? Because struggle is a part of life, and I choose to live my life wide open. Obviously, I'm not sharing all the details of a sensitive issue that involves another very good person. Such stuff is reserved for the ears of close friends. But I don't need to get explicit in order to open up my heart and let you get a good look at what's going on inside it right now. While personal catharsis is no doubt part of my motive, my reason for sharing goes much deeper than that. You see, what I go through is, in one way or another, what you go through as well. So why hide the tough stuff? I believe honesty and transparency are redemptive. When I let you look into who and how I am, I create a safe place for you to show yourself for who you really are. And that is very, very freeing for both of us. Because this business of following Jesus is not squeaky-clean. It is messy, because life is messy, and I am messy, and so are you. So when our hearts are hurting and confused, it's just as important to talk about that as it is to share when we're riding high on the world. That's what moves faith from the ivory tower to an honest, gut-level, holy connection between you and me.

Let me be clear: either this faith God has put in me has what it takes to stand up to life in its entirety and allow me to be totally honest about every last ounce of how things really are with me--the good, the bad, and the mix thereof--or else it's not worth talking about. It had better pack the kind of shoe leather it takes to walk where I really live. It—no, make that he, Jesus—had better be able to carry me through places of loss, and sorrow, and tragedy, and disillusionment, and all the shadowy valleys of life's perpetually changing landscape--because, to be perfectly honest, there are times when I just can't carry myself.

Moreover, if Jesus is true to his character, then he should be able to transform even the most grueling passages into blessings that leave me a better man for having tasted "the fellowship of his suffering." I may not see how he can possibly make that happen. I may

not grasp how any of what I'm experiencing makes sense. But my limitations shouldn't stop Jesus from being who he says he is: my savior, the one I'm doing my darndest to entrust my life to.

Here is what I know: my feelings change, but God stays the same.

My emotions rise and fall like a thermometer in response to how I interpret my changing circumstances. But God remains stable, and his perspective is different. He sees a much bigger picture than I can ever begin to see, particularly considering how the way I see is clouded by my own self-interest.

Whether I feel it or not, my Father's love remains constant and intense, deep as rolling waters, and I am forever buoyed up by a great and fathomless grace.

Life is sometimes brutal, relationships can be very hard, the best of people are unpredictable, and I have found that even my own heart is capable of betraying me. Ultimately, there's just one thing I can count on. But on it, I can count with every fibre of my being--and the good thing is, it's simple: "Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so."

We are loved with a deep and trustworthy love.

We are held by a mighty hand.

We are his, and he is ours...and he is good.

And sometimes, when I know nothing else, just knowing that is enough.