

Title: Two Lives Show the Way
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Subject: Believers shouldn't use feelings as their basis for life
Scripture: Job 1 & 2; 2 Corinthians 4 & 5

The base commander entered the barracks and the order was given to snap to attention. All complied except one private who continued to lay in his cot. The officer noticed and approached the soldier. "Didn't you hear the order? Why are you still laying there?" "Not feeling it today, sir. Feeling like I would rather stay in bed. Think I'll roll over and catch some more Z's. You go on and fight the good fight without me." When a person is in the military they don't have the option of telling a commanding officer that they're not feeling the whole battle scene at the moment. Oh, sure, some do, but they face significant consequences.

There's a sizable segment of Christ followers who negotiate their journey through life, spiritual and otherwise, according to the way they feel. If they feel like being kind, then they'll try to be nice. If they don't feel like praying, they won't. If they feel the heavens are brass and prayers merely bounce off, stop praying. If feel that God isn't there, or if he is there, he doesn't care, then don't care either. If they feel like going to church, they will. If things are pleasant, feel life is worth living but not worth living if things aren't pleasant.

I started wondering what would have happened if Biblical people had operated by feelings. We would have missed a lot. Might as well start with the biggest scenario. Suppose Jesus had operated according to feelings. While on the cross, if he had said, "I'm not feeling it today." And decided to press a galactic pause button. Would everything just have stopped, with everyone frozen in time until he felt like it? Would he ever feel like it? Would he have merely vanished, leaving people looking around trying to figure out why the middle cross was suddenly empty? Yes, it's speculation, but it's intriguing to think about.

Let's try a character from the Old Testament. I'm drawn to Job and his absorbing story, one that covers 42 chapters. The only New Testament reference points to his legendary perseverance.

Suppose Job had operated by feelings instead. It would have been easy to do so. He was incredibly wealthy and referred to as "the greatest man among all the people of the East" (Job 1:3). He had a terrific home composed of 7 sons and 3 daughters. They got along and enjoyed each other's company.

It all changed one day, one horrible, no good, very bad, exceptionally rotten day. I could tell you the story, but let's read it so you hear it and see it for yourselves. READ Job 1:13-19.

In one day, his sizable wealth vaporized, his family wiped off the planet, his dreams shattered, his expectations of the future crumbled. How did Job respond? READ Job 1:20-22.

First, note what he didn't do. He didn't accuse God with being the cause of evil. He didn't complain.

What did he do? Job worshipped. Do you honestly think he felt like it? "Oh, yippee. Today is a delightful day to worship." Or was he driven more by the need to do it? Notice that some time elapsed before the worship. He got up and tore his clothes. That could be done quickly. But then he shaved his head. He had to go into the house, get the equipment. All the while the horrors of the day ran through his mind.

The content of his worship is instructive. He placed his trust in God. He admits that he entered the world with nothing and would leave it the same way. The Lord is in control. He gives and he takes. Blessed be the name of the Lord. He was grateful and thankful for what he had while he had it and recognized that the Lord is sovereign and had the right to do or allow as he willed.

Francis Schaeffer was one of the foremost evangelical thinkers of the modern era. He suggested that the first argument of the gospel is not what we often think. It isn't "Jesus died for our sins" or "God loves us, and has a wonderful plan for our lives." Schaeffer says the first argument of the gospel is, "God is there." There is a God, and he's in control of life.

The testing wasn't over. Satan told the Lord that Job was merely selfish. As long as the suffering didn't directly affect his immediate being, he would continue to fake uprightness. Satan suggested the Lord inflict Job's physical being. He was trying to get the Lord to do evil. The Lord allowed the Devil to inflict the suffering but there was a limitation. He couldn't kill Job. READ Job 2:7, 8.

There's all sorts of speculation as to the disease described as "sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head." Oozing, festering sores. Job tried to find relief by scraping them. It didn't work. He felt horrible physically.

There's more. His wife had some advice. READ Job 2:9. She also had been subjected to the loss of riches and family. She witnessed her husband go through incredible physical suffering and it may have become too much for her. It's quite possible she may have counseled Job numerous times, progressively getting more pointed. "Sorry you're going through this." "Honey, this is hard. Do you ever wish that you had died instead of the kids?" "I don't like watching what's happening. It's getting harder. Maybe if you died you'd find relief." "Hey you stupid man. If God really loved you...Maybe you should just curse God and die already!"

That kind of "counsel" could really get to a guy. The person who loved him the most advocated that he curse the Lord in order to force the Lord to strike him dead. So Job did exactly that and the Lord struck him dead. End of the book of Job. Next up Psalms.

That's not what happened but could have if Job had been operating by his feelings....Job maintains his trust in God. "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

And then the next wave hit. Job's three friends. They intended to sympathize with him and comfort him (Job 2:11). They wept with Job, tore their robes, sprinkled dust on their heads and sat with Job for 7 days and 7 nights without saying a word. Job was the first to speak. Then the three opened their mouths. They accused Job of sinning...a lot, of every crime in the book. They unwittingly allied themselves with the devil. They compounded Job's suffering and created more disheartening feelings. They blurred Job's perception of God and himself.

It's like if you and a friend were in the mountains. Your friend has been using a pair of binoculars to find a giant bull elk. One is spotted near a massive lone pine. The binoculars are given to you and you point them in that direction and all you see is a fuzzy picture. You can continue looking that way or you can adjust the eyepiece to focus it to your eyes. When that's done, the bull is easily spotted.

Job adjusts life's binoculars. Throughout the rest of the book Job struggles to keep his focus on the Lord to maintain his faith even though he doesn't feel like he's close. He eventually comes through with both faith and sanity intact if not strengthened. He didn't just grit his teeth and hang on for dear life. The key was that he did so because he was looking beyond the suffering. This is more than not focusing on the suffering. He was looking beyond it in faith to God. That's why he's a model of perseverance and endurance. Something we totally would have missed if he had given into his feelings.

A New Testament version of Job could be Paul who personified not living by feelings. 2 Corinthians 4 & 5. A few chapters later Paul highlights some of what he endured for the cause of Christ (2 Corinthians 11).

In chapter Paul talks about being handed over to death in verses 11 & 12. In the middle of verse 16 he says, "outwardly we are wasting away." The condition of all humanity – physically wasting away. We're all too familiar with the fragility of our bodies and minds, how they deteriorate. The same is true of humanity ethically and morally. If people were to operate by feelings, appearances and experiences, they wouldn't have much hope.

I cherry picked the middle of verse 16. If that was all we had, we'd probably feel pretty bad. We need to see the entire verse to get an accurate perspective. READ 2 Corinthians 4:16. The "factuality" is that inwardly we are being renewed day by day and therefore we don't lose heart in spite of what appears to be happening and what things feel like. Keep being renewed in mind and soul and heart and spirit by presenting ourselves to God and exposing ourselves to his Word.

There's even more to this outlook. READ 2 Corinthians 4:17. Knowing what we do about Paul's unprecedented sufferings, some might conclude Paul had been in a Whack-a-Mole game and he was the mole who had gotten hit in the head too many times. Not true. He's attuned to the divine design.

The apostle points out the monumental disparity of present experience and suffering with the future. There's a difference in weightiness. The things down here are light as opposed to being heavy. Nature. Troubles here as opposed to glory there. Time frame. Momentary versus eternal.

Paul continues drawing conclusions. READ 2 Corinthians 4:18. He doubles down about this present life, the things we see and experience, the circumstances, and the ways all of it makes us feel as being temporary. I appreciate the phrasing from a note in the NIV Study Bible. "The experiences and circumstances of this present life, often painful and perplexing, are what is visible to the Christian, but these are merely phenomena in the passing parade of our fallen age and are therefore temporary and fleeting. To fix our eyes on these visible things would cause us to lose heart. By contrast the unseen realities, which are no less real for being invisible, are eternal and imperishable. Accordingly, we look up and away from the impermanent appearances of this present world scene" (NIV Study Bible note on 2 Corinthians 4:18).

Back up to see what the sufferings did to him. READ 2 Corinthians 4:8, 9.

Other versions. "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken. We are perplexed, but we don't give up and quit. We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going" (New Living). "We are sore pressed at every point, but not hemmed in; we are at our wit's end, but never at our hope's end; we are persecuted by men, but never abandoned by God; we are knocked down, but not knocked out" (William Barclay).

Paul wrote in his first letter to Corinth "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). People were unable to understand the wisdom of God in sending Jesus Christ to earth and what it entailed including "for our glory." There's a future element of the inability to comprehend what the Lord has in store. No one, not Bill Gates, not Einstein, not Tolkien or Lewis, not Galileo, not Billy Graham, not even Paul could conceive of what the Lord has in mind for us in heaven. Doesn't that just blow your mind?

Charles Spurgeon, "In our Christian pilgrimage, it is good to be looking forward. Whether it be for hope or joy, for consolation or for the inspiring of our love, the future must, after all, be the grand object of the eye of faith. Looking into the future, we see sin cast out, the body of sin and death destroyed, the soul made perfect and fit to be a partaker of the saints in light. Looking further yet, the believer's enlightened eye can see death's river passed and the celestial city standing ahead. He sees himself enter the gates, hailed as more than conqueror, embraced in the arms of Jesus, glorified, and made to sit together with him. The thought of this future may well relieve the darkness of the past and the gloom of the present. The joys of heaven will surely compensate for the sorrows of earth" (Closer Walk, 4/22/88).

The context of 2 Corinthians 4 is Paul's longing to be in heaven, a subject he develops more in chapter 5. Right in the middle he gives an extremely powerful seven word conclusion on how to approach life. READ 2 Corinthians 5:7. We don't trust our feelings, our experiences, appearances, just keep walking by faith which is based on evidence. Keep praying. Keep enduring. Keep persevering. Take the next step. It doesn't matter how big it is whether it's a giant leap, a normal stride or one inch. Just keep walking one step at a time.

Toby Mac has a song "Keep Walkin'." No, I'm not going to do my impersonation of him. I forgot my hat and my moves. The song begins by saying that God feels far away and detailing some of life's difficulties. "I know your heart been broke again. I know your prayers ain't been answered yet. I know you're feeling like you got nothing left. Well, lift your head, it ain't over yet, ain't over yet so Move, keep walkin' soldier, keep movin' on. Move, keep walkin' until the mornin' comes. Move, keep walkin' soldier keep movin' on. And lift your head, it ain't over yet, ain't over yet... Hold on, hold on. The Lord ain't finished yet. Hold on, hold on. He'll get you through this. Hold on, hold on. These are the promises I never will forget. I never will forget."

Our viewpoint makes a tremendous difference. A worship leader told a story about an event where he was to sing at a high school. His four-year-old daughter asked, "Daddy, where are you going?" He replied, "I'm going to go sing for the kids." She asked if she could go along. When they got to the meeting, he was surrounded by high school students. His little girl looked up at him and said, "Daddy, where are all the kids?" He said, "Well, there they are, out there." She looked at him and said, "Daddy, those aren't kids -- those are baby sitters!"

Where are we looking and what or whom do we see when we're looking?