***He puts a smile on my face***

What brings a smile to your face? The giggle of a baby? The cuteness of a puppy? The comforting smell of a loaf of bread almost ready in the oven? The tender look of a loved one? We all need to smile more often. If we’re not intentional, the constant bombardment of challenges and trials – which are part of life- may deplete us from wanting to smile…

For many years growing up, my smile became less and less frequent. Grief and loss marked my childhood. A sense of responsibility kept me functioning to please others through my teenage years, putting my ‘self’ and any sign of joy farther and farther behind stage. The outcome was a ‘mature’ young adult with a bitter spirit. Then at the age of 23, I met Jesus, and everything changed. For the first time in my life, I was able to freely smile; to open my mouth in laughter and sing out of joy; to sense streams of living water flowing from within; to have hope in life and look forward to a future full of possibilities. I learned not to ‘stuff in’ my pain as I had done while living on survival mode, but to be in touch with my feelings in a healthy manner, trusting God.

Acknowledging how we feel helps us to identify the root of our pain or concern so we can move forward. But our moving forward comes from our knowledge of who God is through Christ in us and the certainty of His restorative company each day. Let’s face it, there are days when we feel down and defeated. There are days when we are tired, not only feeling physically exhausted in need rest, but feeling impotent, yearning for a sense of relief and peace. Then the Holy Spirit intervenes and affirms things will be ok, despite our feelings. It is in those moments I echo the words of the psalmist:

***“Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul? Why are you crying the blues? Fix my eyes on God – soon I’ll be praising again. He puts a smile on my face. He’s my God.” Psalm 42:5 (MSG)***

The psalms have that soothing-to-the-soul effect as we read the pendulum of feelings and emotions we experience as humans – from anger to peace, from sorrow to praise, from mourning to joy- in relation to God’s power, consistent presence and faithful intervention. The psalmist is affirming his faith. He pours out his agony, but remembers how God is near him, quenching the thirst of his soul like streams of water and sweeping away the blues like strong waterfalls. We are to do the same.

The word of God helps us to overcome trials with praise. It allows us to face life’s moments of pain and sorrow – that are real- with hope that comes from who He is, knowing that we are never alone.

Elijah felt down and depressed under the broom tree wanting to die. He was exhausted and felt abandoned, but God was there. The angel of the Lord provided food and water, in a time of drought, so Elijah could restore strength and focus. God knew the circumstances that led Elijah feeling depleted and thirsty for God’s restorative presence. God revealed himself to Elijah not in the strong wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but in a gentle whisper. Why? So Elijah could understand HOW CLOSE GOD REALLY WAS. He is reminding us today how close He still is.

Are you feeling down? Can you hear God’s gentle whisper of love to you? Don’t rely on the genuine smile of others – they may not come as they too are dealing with their challenges... Instead, take a deep breath. Shhh, breathe in the presence of God. Turn your eyes to Golgotha and see Jesus, deeply looking into your heart. He knows… Then see how He points you to the empty tomb and whispers – because He’s so close to you- “It is finished! This too shall pass.”

In our times of distress, we must look at Jesus to remember that He has conquered it all on our behalf. Like Job, we need to remember and declare that we know our Redeemer lives and, in the end He will stand upon the earth (19:25). That certainty lifts our spirits, brings a comforting smile to our face and opens our lips with shouts of joy (8:21).

We don’t have to stay ‘in the dumps, crying the blues’. We may have setbacks on our spiritual journey, but God is right next to us ready to whisper what we need to hear. His tender smile will surely put a smile on your face too. Take heart! He is your God!

Questions for individual reflection or group discussion:

\*What does the psalmist advise we do when we are downcast?

\*Read Psalm 42. How does remembering God’s faithfulness and power manifested in the past, encourage us in our present circumstances?

\*Meditate on the images below the psalmist uses to signify the consistent presence of God. Reflect on what they mean to you/your current situation:

-Streams of water when we’re thirsty

-Waterfall whose waves and breakers sweep over us

-Love guide at day/song at night

-My rock

\*Consider the experiences of Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-13) and Job mentioned here to further reflect on God’s restorative company and provision when we are down or suffering.

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