

Living on the Right Side of 'However'

I am discovering the power of one little word. It's a conjunction, and if, like me, you were raised on a steady diet of *Schoolhouse Rock*, you will now have that song stuck in your head indefinitely. Sorry about that. But you'll also remember that a conjunction is the little word that connects two phrases or thoughts and makes them one.

However is a unique word, in that it usually joins two opposing ideas. When we see *however* in a sentence—and certainly when I see it in my life—it signals a change or a turn. Is the change good or bad? I think that depends on which side of the conjunction we choose to set up camp.

It may seem odd, but so much of my peace, joy and sanity in life right now hinges on how I view the *howevers* I face. Last week's vacation is a great example.

Consider this sentence: *We were able to get away to our favorite spot on the Oregon coast; however, the wheelchair van broke down on the way home.*

True story. Accurate sentence. But what actually happened is that it broke down just two miles out of town so we could go back easily. My brother-in-law was able to come with a trailer and pick it up. We had enough room in our other vehicles to get everyone home that day. The delay enabled us to spend a sweet afternoon with my sister, Lila, which also enabled Steve to rest before tackling the rest of the trip home. The *however* wasn't a good one, and I'm not pretending I'm glad for a car repair, but many good things found their way into the equation, and all of us felt it. We felt grace on that whole *however* situation.

So, the sentence is better written (and better lived): *Our*

wheelchair van broke down on the way back from vacation; however, all the details worked out, and we made it home just fine.

Here are others:

Our family had to deal with the reality of Steve's condition while we were away; however, we made the most beautiful memories, and we all became stronger and grew closer through it.

It is very difficult navigating a wheelchair on a sandy beach; however, it was the most we've laughed in a long, long time.

For so many years, I lived on the wrong side of the *however* word. I squashed every happy with a sad. Eventually, that evolved into including even the possibility of sad: *My schedule is good today; however, something will probably go wrong at work.* This constant slant toward the negative produces anxiety, frustration and, if left unchecked, bitterness. So much changed for me when I began to let Jesus steer me toward a new perspective.

This may sound like a fancy way of saying "Look on the bright side," but it's bigger than that. Though both sides of each situation are true, one side is the *stronger* truth because it's redemptive truth.

My flesh and my heart may fail; however, God is the strength of my life and my portion forever.

They took Him down and buried Him in a tomb; however, God raised Jesus from the dead.

Do you see how redemption follows and swallows the despair in those sentences? Both sides are true, but they are not equal truth because—and this is the kicker—the despair is temporary and the rescue is permanent. Isn't that the coolest thing? It is. Because sometimes in the darkest nights of life, finding

the upside can feel like looking for the *Mona Lisa* at a garage sale. But when we can't see a single speck of redemption, salvation enables us to push our vision out beyond the horizon of our timeline and peer into the promises of a world with no *however*s.

My husband has ALS; however, his life is hidden with Christ, who stole death's sting, bought Steve's freedom and dries every tear.

That's the right side of *however* for me. I'm trying to learn to live there.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of *Beautiful Battliefields* (NavPress). She knows the most beautiful things can come out of the hardest times. Her Goliath came in the form of her husband's terminal illness, a battle they are still fighting with the help of their four children, a veritable army of friends, and our extraordinary God. Bo is a teaching pastor at Westside Church in Bend, Oregon.