

The Puddle and the Quicksand

Tough times can be an emotional roller coaster. One day we're feeling up, declaring God's promises over our life; the next we're down in the dumps. The problem for many of us is that we don't know how to handle those down times. We'll sit in silence and process our feelings, trying to make sense of it all or attempting to talk ourselves out of being sad.

The truth is, there is a time for tears, whether they roll down our cheeks or stay in the inner recesses of our heart (Eccl. 3:4). Some things are just sad. Some things are just hard. We often fight hard to get out of that place of sadness. We want to rush back to vapid feelings of happiness because happy feels better—plain and simple. We fear that the sadness won't end but will keep us captive in a perpetual rainstorm of emotions.

I call times like these the *puddle*, meaning I don't mind stepping in it; I just don't want to get stuck! The truth is, in sadness we can still trust our Father. It's during these times that we learn some of life's greatest lessons as the Lord ministers to us in His tender mercy. He is our safety net when we walk the tightrope of uncertainty. He doesn't promise happiness, but He does tell us that we can be content.

I recall a particular time when my family and our ministry were under attack. We were being persecuted in the worst way, and I was completely distraught. Our kids were toddlers then, and I remember watching them playing and laughing, totally oblivious to what we were dealing with. They didn't have a care in the world—why should they? Anytime they needed something, we came running. If they cried in the middle of the night, we were there to comfort them. If they fell down, we rushed to them to make it all better. If they were tired, they climbed up on our laps and were gently rocked to sleep in our loving arms. They knew that Daddy and Mommy would be there and

take care of everything, so why worry?

We weren't built to bear our own burdens; we were only told to bear the burdens of one another (Gal. 6:2). When we face tough times, the Bible tells us what we should do: "Casting the whole of your care [all your anxieties, all your worries, all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares for you affectionately and cares about you watchfully" (1 Pet. 5:7, AMP). Likewise, Psalm 55:22 says, "Cast your burden on the Lord [releasing the weight of it] and He will sustain you; He will never allow the [consistently] righteous to be moved (made to slip, fall, or fail)."

We can't always sort out our feelings, and maybe we don't have to. Our Father has His arms open and ready to take it all. And He *will* make it all better.

But what can we do when it doesn't end there? What happens when *life* happens—when we depend on circumstances to turn out our way and they don't? What do we do when we're handed the unexpected, unpredictable and unwanted?

This is what I call the *quicksand*. You don't get stuck in the quicksand; you just keep going down, down, down until it suffocates you. As graphic as that sounds, unfortunately this is how it feels for many of us. The emotional siege we face nearly takes our breath away, and we consider giving up.

But sheer willpower is a fascinating thing. People climb Mt. Kilimanjaro as an act of sheer will. Women go through childbirth with complete and utter determination. People push their minds and bodies to extremes for one reason: There is always a payoff. Whether it's an award, accolade, promotion or degree, there's always the motivation of a payoff. For a woman in the throes of childbirth, the motivation is the birth of her baby. And the payoff is worth the pain.

So what's your motivation when life doesn't go your way, when it seems ready to suffocate you? What's your payoff then?

I've felt myself sinking into this quicksand. But at that point, I can hear words that unfurl like a banner of hope: "I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber" (Ps. 121:1-3, NIV).

I may not always be able to find my motivation, but I can always find Him! Verse 8 says: "The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." He knows every minute of every day, and He is keeping us all the while. With His protection and provision comes His peace—aha, the payoff! That payoff is like no other. The world didn't give it, and the world can't take it away. And when we have it, that's when we can breathe again.

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