

The Surest Way to Overcome Life's Harsh Disappointments

Disappointment often stems from failure to realize who and what we really are in the Lord. Failing to comprehend this leads in turn to loss of a sense of purpose. Closely related to hope, purpose gives us a reason for pressing forward in life. How many of us would go to work every day if there were no hope of receiving a paycheck? What would be the purpose?

Self-focus can never provide a sense of purpose or fulfillment sufficient to sustain a life. Yet, conditioned by the surrounding culture, this is where huge numbers of us have been stuck without realizing it.

For more than 40 years, the body of Christ has been too influenced by self-serving teachings that promised to chart a course to personal prosperity, personal blessing, experience of the supernatural and healing for the pain our self-orientation inevitably creates. The teachings produced best-selling books, built megachurches and launched popular Christian TV programs.

As this wave of self-focused material washed over us, how many of us missed the central truth of the gospel—that Jesus didn't die on the cross and rise again to make us rich or grant us an easy life, but to transform the nature of who and what we are for eternity. He came to reveal the nature and character of His Father (See John 14:9).

He also came to impart that same nature and character into us. We have been called to the life of the cross in oneness with Jesus. In Him we come to understand who and what we truly are.

We mean well when we say, "I want to be invisible so that Jesus can shine." But we're making a statement at odds with what Jesus actually taught. Jesus meant something more like,

“I want you to be very visible so that I can shine in and through the wonder of what you’ve become in Me.”

The world can’t see Jesus. They see you and me. And it’s you and me the Lord uses. He longs to exalt us and reveal us to the world so the nations can admire His handiwork in us and therefore witness how great He is.

Jesus stated the purpose for not obscuring the light, “That they may see your good works.” How do we define the good works?

The “works” Jesus referred to can be seen in a teenager who came to us as an abuser of his siblings, a high school dropout known by every detention center in town, and a drug user stoned on something every day. Today he’s a leader, he’s proclaiming the gospel and leading others to Jesus, and he’s earning a college degree—all because believers let their light shine in such a way that it melted his heart. Condemnation couldn’t do that. It never will be able to.

The Father’s heart through Jesus did that as believers let their light shine in love upon her. The world can see the light emanating from a life like that, and it can only be attributed to our Father. This redeemed and restored woman didn’t have to perform for God or white-knuckle her recovery. As we who are the light of the world obediently gave the love God showed us, she received it from a Father who loves her.

Let it shine! There’s hope in the world!

Our light shines in the joy and security you see in the children of a solid home where the parents know the Lord, as opposed to the confusion and chaos in the world around them. Something shining from that family makes a statement to a dying world and gives hope to those who’ve lost it.

The culture around us has shifted from covenant, commitment and sacrifice for the sake of others to a focus on self that

says, "If you don't make me happy, then I'm taking a hike." Misery, loneliness, and hurt remain.

By contrast, when our marriages stand out healthy and strong, it's a "work" that shines before the world and makes a declaration of the glory of our God. My wife and I have been married 41 years (since 1972) at this writing, and people look at us and say, "You give us hope." People whose lives have been a train wreck come to me personally to express what an inspiration my marriage and my family are to them.

They say, "How did you do that?" That is the lamp in the dark place. It is an example of the good works Jesus spoke of, not performed legalistically, but simply lived out in the wholeness Jesus has given for all to see. {eoa}

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