

## Ways to Deal with Life's Problems

and the night and the dark/and the hopes and the dreams  
as we all play our parts/while ignoring the screams  
so we lie to ourselves/and we just carry on  
never stop, never turn/don't admit what is...  
gone into this twisted story/all these things so clear before me  
every path we've ever taken/can't admit we were mistaken  
in this night/of my devising  
never live/and never dying  
each escape/I've never taken  
never dream/and never waken...  
-"Epiphany" from CD set *Night Castle* by Trans Siberian Orchestra  
written by Paul O'Neill and Jon Oliva

In one of the last books C.S. Lewis wrote, *A Grief Observed*, we see the beloved apologist having his own faith put to the test. Lewis had just lost his wife, one of the few people in the world whose intellect was on par with his. He decided to set aside a few papers to record his thoughts and experiences in dealing with this grief, diary style. He first speaks of how perfect she was, questions his own philosophies on God, and laments how unfair it was for her to have to leave him. Then he wonders what tortures she must be going through in Purgatory, and if it is really fair for her to have to bear such horrors. At last, he begins to question if God is really a surgeon with our best interests in mind or a sadistic vivisectionist. Lewis even goes so far as to suppose it would be better for God to be a vivisectionist, as a sadist might be moved to pity or at least grow bored and/or weary and take a respite. But a surgeon, Lewis reasons, will see the painful operation through to the end, driven by a deep passion to get the job done.

Lewis then tells us that, shortly after the last of the allotted papers were filled up, his beloved wife appeared to him in a dream. While her responses to his questions were cryptic, he felt a peace from the encounter. He went back to his makeshift diary, and noted that he had placed his own selfish wants first, his wife's comfort second, and considered God's plans last. While the pain of this loss haunted Lewis for the rest of his life, we see a clear turning point in his outlook when he concludes that he had prioritized these three things in exactly the opposite order as they should have been.

If I may be so bold as to build on this brutally honest and intimate revelation of a man who proved his greatness by having the courage to share his wretchedness with us, I would like to make the following proposal. There are essentially two ways to look at any grievance one may have in life: the Emotional Way and the Christian way.

The Emotional Way is to seek one's own comfort first, the comfort of others second and then blame some obscure and ill-defined group (or even Jehovah) for all the ills. The Christian way is to seek Jehovah's advice first, tend to the needs of others second and then to examine oneself for one's own inadvertent participation in causing the problems.

It should be obvious why the Emotional way is self-destructive, but all too often the obvious hides in plain sight. Emotions are real, but they are unique to ourselves. Emotional responses are therefore selfish responses. Even if we find others with similar emotions (which is quite often), the bonding that occurs is one that is designed to justify our own emotions, not to elevate each other to a

higher state. Emotions are also temporary, which is a major reason why we do seek others with similar pains: to help keep the emotion alive (it can be quite addicting). Emotions ground us in the present, and therefore cloud our Reason. A particular casualty of clouded Reason is Prudence: the ability to plan for the future. Another notable casualty of clouded Reason is Temperance, the ability to ensure the correct measure is given to the particular problem. And with Prudence and Temperance compromised, the other two Cardinal Virtues (Justice and Fortitude) become corrupted as well. Our sense of Justice (to ensure others are treated fairly) has no foundation because we don't know what "fair" is. Our sense of Fortitude (firmness in difficulties) is wasted in vain and often destructive efforts.

And this has a domino effect. There are over 7 billion people on this planet. Someone, somewhere will be suffering some type of injustice at any given time. Jesus really knew what He meant when he said: The poor you will always have with you; but you will not always have me. (Matthew 26:11, and echoed in Mark 14:7). If we place the needs of any who are suffering before loving our enemies or even before loving Jehovah, we will never get to the point of loving them. And finally, because we have such a distorted outlook on life from ignoring the God of Truth, we are easy prey to those who would use us for their own evil purposes.

In short, the Emotional Way is the pagan way. We seek a sacrifice to cure our perceived ills and make everything right again. And, just like for the pagans of old, the sacrifice never really solves anything because there are always problems. But Jesus taught us something different about the sacrifice. It was a very subtle change in perspective yet is perhaps the most radical of all the teachings He ever made. We are no longer to focus on the woes of those *performing* the sacrifice, we are to look at the woes *of* the sacrifice. We are not to perform sacrifices to fix the world's problems, we are to become the sacrifice. This is the Christian way, and it is very rational.

Jehovah's advice can be found in the Seven Virtues. They are divided into the three Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity) and the four Cardinal Virtues mentioned earlier. We must have Faith (also known as Trust) that Jehovah has a plan to make things right in order to truly put this world's problems in perspective. We must Hope for eternal salvation to successfully act Prudently and Fortuitously during even the worst of times. And we must practice Charity (loving the unlovable) in order to be Temperate and Just.

If we can successfully understand what it is Jehovah wants us to do, then we can successfully tend to the needs of others while ensuring we are not making the situation worse by our own actions. Unfortunately, whenever words like this are said, way too many people tend to say "Yes, if only the others would listen." I can think of no sadder a response. I have heard it said that guilt is the thing felt most strongly in those who deserve it least and most weakly in those who deserve it most. If one does not feel some sense to question things one has done after reading this, then one probably needs to start.

Raymond Mulholland  
Original Publication Date: 15 April 2021