



Getting Better in Spite of Myself

I noticed the other day that I was getting better...not a lot better, but better. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not becoming a "saint" or anything. Those who know me know that isn't going to happen anytime soon. Those who don't know me need to know that one of the reasons I do what I do is because God told me—within reasonable and proper boundaries, and the practical necessities of maintaining a means of making a living—to be honest as possible about my own struggles.

Now let me confess something: Not only am I getting better, I'm not altogether happy about it. I didn't choose to get better. Frankly, I like to sin.

You do too.

We don't sin because sinning is so unattractive or because sinning lacks certain short-term gratifications. Are you crazy? We sin because we like to sin, because sinning is attractive and because sinning is...well...uh...sort of fun. We Christians don't like to admit that we like to sin. It is far more spiritual to be horrified by sin and to condemn it with our nose turned up and our peacock, self-righteous feathers flying in the breeze. But if sin were not attractive and didn't have its compensations, nobody would sin.

The truth is that if we got our "pay-back" at the point of the deed, nobody would ever sin and everybody would be righteous. There are exceptions to that, I suppose, but mostly we sin because we like to sin...and you know it's true.

I Just Can't Help It

As I was saying, I'm getting better and, believe it or not, I can't help it. The whole "getting better" thing sort of snuck up on me. I was doing something else and, all of a sudden, I realized that I was loving people I didn't want to

love, being obedient in places where I didn't want to be obedient and showing compassion for people when I didn't have time to show compassion.

I have decided to make a New Year's resolution. I resolve to be worse! I'm going to sin more next year. I'm going to be more selfish, more ego-centered and more disobedient.

Now, that's a different New Year's resolution.

Tell your pastor and all your friends about how you have resolved to be worse this year than last and watch their faces. Announce to your Bible study that you're tired of this obedience thing and have decided to just not do it anymore...and they'll treat you like a "wet shaggy dog shaking himself at a Miss America pageant."

Just kidding...sort of.

But let me tell you something important: Even if I made that kind of resolution, I couldn't keep it. (Of course I'm not. I haven't totally lost my senses!) Not only that. If I really, really tried, I couldn't do it.

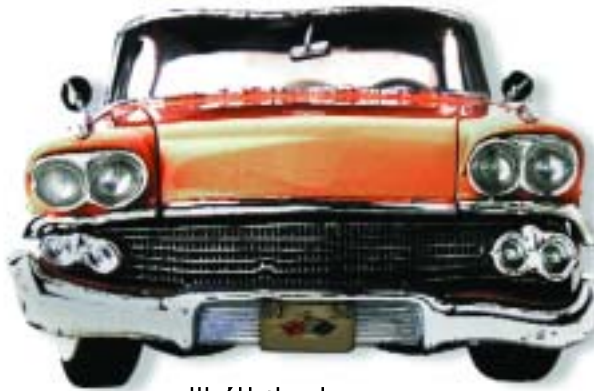
Do you know why? Because of Jesus. It's Jesus! It's all his fault! I can't be as bad as I want to be because of him.

How Jesus Messed Up My Job

When I was a young pastor, I loved what I did. I may have been saved, but I didn't know Jesus. In fact, when I first became a pastor I thought I had died and gone to heaven. It was a small church down on Cape Cod, and it certainly wasn't labor intensive. I could make a couple of hospital visits each week, visit one nursing home and smile a lot. I, of course, had to do the sermon thing on Sunday, but I have this glib tongue and could always talk and say nothing so that people thought I had said something. Other than that, I could spend my time fish-

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he asked me

ing and playing golf. I remember thinking, *Is this a great job or what?*

That's when Jesus came and messed up the perfect job. I began to realize that the people in the church were his people, and I had been called to be a shepherd and not a butcher. I slowly began to realize that God had called me to care, to be faithful and to teach the truth...the truth I was, at that time, gradually discovering for myself.

All of a sudden, I found myself staying awake at night thinking about the people God had given me, and spending a whole lot of time binding up broken hearts and hugging people while they wept.

I don't know if I've ever completely forgiven Jesus for messing up that job. And, I suppose, that was why I was so relieved when I was no longer a pastor.

The problem is that I can't resign from life...and Jesus is doing it again.

He keeps forgiving me when I really make a mess of it. He keeps loving me when I'm quite unlovely. He keeps hugging me when I'm angry. He keeps blessing me when he really shouldn't. He told me that if I never got any better, he would love me just the same.

He is so fond of me (and you) that sometimes it's embarrassing.

Then I looked and found, to my surprise, that I was becoming more like him. Paul's comment that we are crucified with Christ and that we still live with Christ living in us (Galatians 2:19-20) is quite true ...and it's true even if we don't like it.

I didn't make any big commitments. I didn't read and memorize the Bible more or pray more. I didn't work at being more religious.

It may be age, but I really don't think so. I think it's that I've been hanging out with Jesus and it just happened. I couldn't help it.

After all, our lives are all about what he does and not what we resolve.

He asked me to remind you. ☐

—Steve Brown

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