



The Key Is in the Tears

I've asked God to give me tears before anything else. I want to see things through the eyes of Jesus, to love the way he loved and to show compassion the way he showed compassion.

I just finished reading Wendell Berry's novel, *Jayber Crow*. It's the story told by an old man as he looks back on his life. When he was a young man, Jayber had studied for the ministry but gave it up because of his doubts. However, looking back on his life, God is very much a part of his memories, and Jayber often says that it feels like he was "led."

The great thing about Jayber is that he is just a normal guy who lives in the small Kentucky town of Port William. He writes his memories after he has retired to a small house on the river where he can fish and think. For thirty years, Jayber has been the town barber. He bought the small, one-chair barber shop in the town with a room upstairs where he lived. In order to make some extra money, Jayber becomes the janitor at the small Methodist church, as well as the town grave-digger.

I loved this novel. Reading it was like going to a quiet place. Throughout the book, Jayber's insights are profound. Barbers, church janitors and grave-diggers, I suppose, have a unique place from which to observe life.

One of the most moving memories in the book is one evening when Jayber is cleaning the church. He was tired and, as he often did, Jayber laid down on one of the pews and took a nap. On this occasion, he has a dream (or maybe a vision) where *everybody* in the town comes into the small church—the good and the bad, the kind folks and the mean ones, the cheaters and the faithful, the liars and the church folks.

When Jayber wakes up, to his surprise, he finds himself weeping.

That reminded me of Jesus.

Do you remember when Jesus came to Jerusalem to die? Luke says, "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it...." (Luke 19:41).

I'm sort of political. In fact, I'm really political. The problem with being political is one of divided loyalties. It's this dual citizenship that can drive one nuts. I'm a United States citizen, and I love my country. I'm also a citizen of the Kingdom, and I love that country too.

I'm torn between my love for (and particular views on) America and my love for (and Jesus' views on) the Kingdom. Where do I draw the line between being an "in-your-face" angry patriot and being a weenie? How do I deal with my growing weariness of and anger with racial "victim-hood" and my awareness of real racism? What's the difference between creating (perhaps out of compassion) a permanent underclass in America, thus destroying the fabric of society, and my call to love and have compassion on the poor? How is one to love gays and lesbians without giving approval to a lifestyle that is clearly not approved by God?

It goes on and on, as you can imagine. I have particular views on all of those and many similar issues. But I'm talking about the attitude of a Christian (regardless of political persuasion) to the dual citizenship that we all have.

I think I've found the key. *The key is in the tears.*

Jesus never compromised. He clearly spoke harsh truth and even rose up with righteous indignation at the con artists in the temple. You will note in the passage in Luke that I mentioned earlier, immediately after the weeping over Jerusalem, Jesus spoke harsh truth about the destruction of Jerusalem and then went to the temple to kick posteriors.

The key is in the tears.

Jesus spoke harsh truth—harsher than anything we will ever speak. He granted grace to the most sinful, angry sinners. He then gave himself in ways that we will never give ourselves.



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he asked me

When we speak truth without tears, it's just condemnation and judgment. When we grant grace and mercy without tears, it's just self-righteousness. When we give compassion without tears, it's just moralistic "do-goodism."

Tony Campolo and I are friends. Tony is liberal and I'm conservative. We agree on very little politically...but are in total agreement about Jesus and our love for each other. It's been said that Tony has affirmed gay marriage. In fact, that spurious bit of information was reported in *The New York Times*. Not only that, *World* magazine reported (later printing a retraction) that, because of his views, Tony received a standing ovation at a major gathering of gays and lesbians.

Let me tell you the rest of the story. First, Tony has always been opposed to homosexual marriage and has repeatedly made that clear. Secondly, while he did receive a standing ovation from the gay and lesbian gathering, it wasn't for what you think. In the speech Tony gave, he said quietly that he couldn't affirm the lifestyles of the very people to whom he spoke. Tony said that God said it was wrong and even destructive.

That's when Tony began to weep. And that's when he got the standing ovation.

The key is in the tears.

So I've asked God to give me tears before anything else. I want to see things through the eyes of Jesus, to love the way he loved and to show compassion the way he showed compassion. I also want to be clear where he was clear and to never back off from the truth he has asked me to speak. But it's the attitude that is important...the sorrow seen in the tears.

And one other thing. Jesus wept for us from a position of purity, holiness and righteousness. Our tears can never be like that. We are too sinful, too confused and too needy ourselves. Our tears are for them...and for ourselves.

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown