



Living “As If”

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Razor backs. They had been carefully explained to me, yet in my vain desire to be as competent as “the boys” I lost my sense of lucid propriety. Gunning the engine of the four-wheeler, squeezing the seat between my legs, I followed “the boys” over the top of the sandy dune.

Like a slow motion scene in an action comedy, my body flew over the top of the handlebars. The bike dropped straight down beneath me. I hit the ground first, and the bike landed squarely on my left shoulder. It was both broken and dislocated.

I passed out twice on the way to the hospital. The pain was worse than both birth experiences I have since endured. My words were fouler than I even knew possible. My world shrunk down to a small point—the red fire of pain. I had forgotten life before the pain. I had no hope for a life beyond the pain. The pain was all that existed and all that could ever be imagined.

When I awoke from the anesthesia and took in my surroundings, the nurse hovering over me placing “Great job!” and “You did it!” stickers on my sling, jumped back a good twelve feet. A tentative, fearful look flashed across his face. I smiled sheepishly and promised that I wasn’t really the person he had perceived me as in the last six hours. He returned the smile, but kept his distance.

As I laid there, pain free and still slightly groggy, I tried to recreate the pain. I knew in my head that it had been terrible, unbearable, unimaginable. But it was gone, and I couldn’t find it. My world had grown back to the right size, and I could see the sun out the window and imagine the wind lifting the hair off my forehead. I thought about the taste of fresh lemonade with mint and what it was like to laugh so hard with my friends that tears squeezed out of our eyes. And I thought about heaven. About a place where God would wipe away all tears. A place where, “God himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows,

crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever” (see Revelation 21:3-4).

And I thought, “What if I could live in that reality? I know and I believe that the kingdom of heaven is my ultimate truth—my true home. So, how can I live this life from that vantage point?”

I don’t believe we can avoid experiencing pain in this life by having a positive mental outlook. Pain, both physical and emotional, is real and deserves gentle attention, compassion and tender care.

However, I realized at that moment that when our life perspective shrinks due to the impact of pain, we begin to live differently than the way we were created to live. Sometimes that way is bitter, small and harsh, and we were made for more than a shrunken life. We were created to experience a full life outside of the red-hot focal point of pain.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says that God has “...set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (3:11). It’s so true. I have eternity in my heart. The reality of a lifetime in the presence of God burning inside of me. Yet the pain of life poses a definite constriction on living in that eternal reality. It did in the hospital. It does in my daily life. Who I am, and who I was made to be, can be shoved down by hardship and suffering.

My growing place is to live more often in an attitude of accepting the pain of this life and then slowly opening up my perspective to include the world outside of what threatens to claim all my anguished attention. As I step back from the fire and walk in the “as if,” trials still hurt, but they don’t consume. Pain threatens, but it doesn’t dominate. I remember Psalm 30:5: “...weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes with the morning.”

I want to walk in the dawn of his promises, even during the darkness of the night. Will you walk there with me? □

—Susan Reedy