



Between Eeyore and Pollyanna

One of the chapters in my latest book is titled, “Ain’t Nothin’ Gonna’ Work Out Right”—which is more true than most of us would like to admit. What I teach in my book is certainly better than what most Christians have been doing, how we’ve been acting and what we’ve been saying.

Hardly anything is fair, hardly anything works the way we want it to work and nothing is perfect. The late Paul Harvey used to say they called off Christmas because nothing could possibly live up to those expectations. What Paul Harvey said about Christmas and high expectations can certainly be said about life.

In 1 Peter 4:12-13, Peter wrote about this very thing to those who expected Christ’s imminent return and hoped that the kingdom Jesus was establishing would be fully realized with Christ’s enemies finally defeated. Instead, the Christians faced horrible persecution and shattered hopes.

He wrote, *“Beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”*

If he were to write a letter specifically to us today, Peter would tell us not to be surprised when everything didn’t work out the way we expected. But then Peter wrote something quite surprising: *“But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad...”*

What—suffering AND joy?! Peter must have been a masochist. No, he wasn’t. Peter wrote about the joy we find in unfulfilled and unrealized hopes because he had a secret that all Christians share. He knew how the movie was going to end. He knew the director and, because he did, the plot had meaning. That meaning gave Peter joy.

There are two dangers in writing about unrealistic expectations: the danger of Eeyore and the danger of Pollyanna. The trick is to maintain a kind of balance between the two. One Christmas a dear friend and staff member gave me a gift I treasure—a stuffed Eeyore. If you don’t already know, Eeyore is the donkey

in the Winnie-the-Pooh stories who is loyal but walks under a dark cloud all the time.

Frankly, with my deep voice I sound like Eeyore and do a tolerable imitation of him. Not only that, there are elements of Eeyore in my personality. Contrary to Eeyore, there are many Pollyanna Christians who deny the unfulfilled expectations. So how do we stand somewhere between Eeyore and Pollyanna?

It’s important that healthy Christians be aware of the cliff but never jump. Paul wrote, *“The whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved...”* (Romans 8:22-24).

In other words, we should not ignore the groaning, but at the same time we should never forget the redemption. Eeyore sees only the groaning and Pollyanna sees only the redemption. The balance comes from what Jesus said in John 16:33, *“In this world you will have tribulation [groaning]. But take heart; I have overcome the world [redemption].”*

Now a confession: I’m kind of like Eeyore and mostly a “glass half-empty” kind of guy. I don’t teach the biblical message of radical grace because it’s a nice message. I teach it because it’s all Eeyore has. Eeyore says, “Ain’t nothin’ gonna’ work out right. The culture is going to hell in a handbasket.”

But a wise Pollyanna says, “Of course, what did you expect? But try to remember the ‘overcoming the world’ part and quit whining, okay?” Then Eeyore says, “Death scares the spit out of me. All the health foods I eat, vitamins I take and exercise I do won’t change that fact. I feel depressed and hopeless—it’s a dark, dark world.”

Pollyanna says, “You may feel hopeless, but you aren’t without hope. It may be a dark world, but look over there and see the Light!”

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown