

Chapter 13 – Ire-reflections Irritating

“If the circumstances of other men are (or were) like mine has been, it is not any wonder why men far more often choose to end their lives after divorce.”

What is a better time to examine one’s life than with a crisis or major transition? But this process (of examination) depends on the willingness to confront the pain of our losses and the possibility that we have had something to do with it. Glimpses or evidence of “who we are” may manifest or be more evident as the things that we hoped for – and even worshiped – are now removed or torn from our lives. It is the losses of our lives that enable us to reflect on what matters...and why it matters...and who matters of course.

To look at ourselves is more than holding up a mirror or even asking someone, “How do I look?” It is not the physical appearance or general complexion that is *on review*; but it is the soul of our selves that has to be examined in the mirror that bears-all. However long or painful the process, the bearing of our soul is important when we have long depended on others to shape and even define us. As one of many who have been discharged from parental service, I am well aware of emptiness that comes from divorce—as one more irritating consequence or circumstance. In the consequence is the breaking—and even shattering—of the concept that “who we are...” is not altogether “who we were...”; but that we have changed...and we are changing.

Around the year 2003, I embarked on a series of letters to (or about) my children. Grouped under the title, *In a Word*, these letters collectively numbered around 350. Representing a variety of experiences, interests and spontaneous thought, *In a Word* was my first effort and writing with the potential for further healing. One of the letters used a similar title, “Reflections”, and the very familiar tune of the same name by The Supremes. I wrote that the lover (or singer):

Ideally, the lover will move on and take account in the failed relationship such that mistakes of the sort will not occur again. Such lessons in life are difficult, and near impossible in life; yet, anyone who commits themselves to another, whether in marriage or other, will find that hurt and suffering are just part of the sacrifice embodied in love.

As I write this chapter (and book), the “lessons” from a post-divorce life continue; that is, the consequence or circumstance of the non-custodial continues.... Looking into the figurative mirror has the positive effect of confirming the desire to move-on, but the negative effect of discovering or revealing the hurt that still languishes. This figurative mirror is reserved or sized for only one person—personally alone to look, examine, and realize that he is neither more nor less than a father and parent, but he is becoming somewhat of an survivor.

Another song to add substance is from a young, Christian musician, Jon Foreman. In his piece, “A Mirror is harder to Hold”, he writes:

Please don't go, Please don't leave me alone
A mirror's so much harder to hold
I could try and point the finger, but the glass points in my direction
Sure, you got your sharp edges, but my wounds are from my own reflection....

And could it be; that our reflection **can** reveal the hurt (or wounds) while confirming our desire to know, to be honest...to know and live the truth?

The Christian life is an opportunity to be present in the truth and, in turn, to come to know the truth. This life is marked by the progressive realization that, in simple terms, the Believer is wholly in need of help—of salvation and redemption from corruption of the *human heart*. In this opportunity is the further revelation that there is God...and we are not God; thus leading to the understanding and surrender to God (Christ) as our supreme savior. The Believer has the benefit of discovering his dilemma and examining the *heart* (or soul) through the lens of God's Word and Spirit.

Though endowed with “an opportunity”, the Believer can be still be figuratively blind to his sin; he can be unaware—even unconcerned—about the *log in his own eye*. This *log* (or this otherwise blatant condition of the heart) is sometimes overlooked through pride (of the worst kind), or is underestimated by the natural tendency to rationalize what we do, think or say. Yet “an opportunity” remains present...and so too the accountability to continue on course for the

cross of Christ no matter what has happened or will happen in our lives. From the Bible translation; the book of 2 Corinthians, *The Message* describes the continuous change that emerges from “an opportunity”.

[There is] nothing between us and God [but] our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah; our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

The Believer should not fear looking into the figurative mirror, but with reflection, should “become like him.” As for the conditions for “an opportunity”, well, I’m just not sure that any conditions exist...other than an “understanding and surrender to God”. “An opportunity” must not be once or occasional; but it must be continuous....

I know that mirrors sometimes portray a distorted image. As one who has oversized ears, I would prefer that the mirror or glass be formed in such a way as to take the reality and reduce (or retract) these “protrusions” to something less than appendages. There was a time in college when a few affectionately called me Mr. Potato-head—but they were just jealous, of course.

Whether flaws in the glass or flaws in the heart, the figurative mirror (the reflection) can be “harder to hold” (or accept) and even harder for the change. The Believer is notably more prone to hold the mirror and to seek the change because of the fear that “anything less, would be uncivilized.” To wane from this “course for the cross” is more than the boat without a paddle—but is more like a boat adrift without any direction or purpose. And what better to cast a Christian from his moorings than a crisis that leaves him wondering who he is—or even who he was....

In his book, *Embracing Brokenness*, Alan Nelson describes several possible causes that steer us to *look into the mirror* and embrace *the reflection* (or what he calls “brokenness”). One of the four causes is circumstances that threaten to defeat us. As he explains, a crisis can *soften the heart* for growth in Christ Jesus. Pride may come in a moment of glory (or a win), but a crisis can

ultimately lead to the final glory (or victory) through the ever increasing realization of who God is—and what God has done (and is doing) to make us more than “who we were....”

The circumstances that “threaten to defeat us” are very real and very powerful; and for the Believer, these circumstances are sourced in the spiritual realm. But somewhere in the process of *going adrift*, I failed to see recognize the source and perhaps the true cause behind the circumstances of divorce. I was immersed in the shame, guilt, remorse, grief, anger and all other emotions and reactions that can possibly occur in or during a crisis. My moorings had been loosed and my life set adrift—searching for the moment of glory rather than final glory.

One problem with a pursuit of “the moment” is that it only last a moment; then, the process or pursuit begins again...and again! One apparent victory or score is never enough to last but, as pride would have it, leads us back to another crisis or fall. This pursuit may pass by the figurative mirror more than once but, with no more than a glance of the flaws, we may continue on in the mistake that God does not care (or is long gone) and in the misery that we are beyond grace.

Grace (or Christ) is the cornerstone of the Christian faith; and the mercy of God is the source of this grace—this gift called salvation. Mercy does not exempt the Believer from “the crisis” or possibly the other causes for brokenness, but it does offer us the presence of God and the joy that endures to the final victory. Mercy does not remove the Believer from the emotions and reactions of the crisis or trouble, but it does offer truth and honesty as well as the desire to look intently into the mirror as a first and continuing step. Mercy does not altogether remove the flaws of the heart, but it does cover them with righteousness. Mercy chastens those who are adrift as a beacon or lighthouse draws the seafaring to the shore. And still, mercy is so much more...

Mercy is only side of God; the Word makes clear that God is also mighty. A contemporary song rings out the refrain that “God is mighty to save”. And the give of salvation, God is might to save indeed. This second side of God—as mighty—goes beyond salvation for the Believer. To be mighty means that God does care and that God is sovereign over the crisis, trouble or all other circumstances or causes that can bring us to brokenness—to greater understanding of and surrender to God. God is mighty too!

Still, I do not have the answers or reasons for the divorce and its aftermath; I do not know why God has allowed my circumstances—but I am left only with the conditions to understand and surrender still. If I can say one positive thing about the family, civil or criminal courts of *this land*, it is that the mercy and mighty God far outweighs them all. I have witnessed the so-called justice system and, consequently, am left with the longing for and belief in justice yet to come. God is mighty, but God offers mercy too.

Though the *lens of God* is always available, it is our choice to use it. I have very bad vision (as yet another physical flaw) but, in the modern age, benefit from contact lens or glasses. Corrective lens have been the difference between a productive life and, quite possibly, a very short life. Needless to say, I do not have to be told or forced to wear lens; I can see clearly with lens and see little without them. The decision to use my lens might very well be the difference between life and death; but for the moment, the lens allows me to type these words.

The figurative mirror or reflection can be distorted by flaws in the glass—to simply that what you see is not a true or accurate image. I have never been through a house of mirrors, but I have seen some examples in a movie or two. Besides the flaws or irregular glass, the house may be further confusing by lights and the reflections of one mirror to another.

One mirror to another was an arrangement of the first house (or condominium) that we lived in; the upstairs bathroom had opposing mirrors above each vanity. Standing at one vanity, the image immediate image reflected off of the mirror to the rear and, to infinity, created an illusion of a vanishing face the image. Maybe this bathroom was the only direct experience that I had of anything like a house of mirrors. She liked the opposing mirrors because it allowed her to the check her hair *in the round*.

To draw another association of mirrors, I turn again to *Why Good People Do Bad Things* by Erwin Lutzer; in the chapter "Lost in a House of Mirrors", he writes:

If a home is abusive or if the parents are addicted to alcohol or drugs, a child will grow-up in an environment with a code of silence: there is an unwritten rule that one does not talk about the family problems. Conflicts are left unresolved and all the emotions put on "autopilot".

This excerpt was particular stunning to me because, as I have written, my wife's family did not talk about the father. What I learned of Jesse (the natural father) I learned from the oldest brother-in-law—and even what little I learned was shared in a one-on-one...and not in front of "the family". Dr. Lutzer continues:

Regrettably, many parents are unable to equip their children to live as whole adults. When I speak of a "whole adult", I mean someone who is able to give and receive love, someone who is capable of relating to others in meaningful ways. Many adult children of divorce and abuse cannot show love; for in doing so, they would have to reveal a part of themselves they would prefer to keep hidden.

I'm not if such content (as that above) was the influence to my previous comments or the confirmation, but what is so compelling is the similarity between the description and what I observed and came to realize: that love is often sacrificed to keep the past—or a part of themselves—hidden. But the sacrifice of love is not without anger too; for in the demands of each role is the requirement to “manage parental expectations”, as Erwin concludes:

Children often mask their anger and hurt to manage parental expectations, and this mask hardens into a shell. They must stay behind the mask to hide their feelings, knowing that their parents cannot handle the full impact of their anger and hurt. Their playacting is a form of dishonesty that becomes the price of acceptance. But as long as the shell is maintained, they never learn how to show love or receive it. When confronted with God's grace and love, they want to turn away. If their parents didn't love them, they reason, why would God?

Is it possible that what Erwin describes has some direct association to what I have learned and have shared in the dynamic of her family...and of her? Is possible for an engineer to read a couple of books and accurately draw parallel between selected content and the family I once was a part of? I do not know—to both questions.

I say again that her anger began long before we met; and her behavior was developed long before our marriage. Consequently, the better question or concern may have something to do with the real source of her anger—as it continues—and the belief that she is full justified in her behavior.

Anger directed at an ex-spouse is not unusual. According to Judith Wallerstein in her book, *Second Chances*, a ten study concluded: “Incredibly one-half of the women and one-third of the men are still intensely angry at their former spouses, despite the passage of ten years.” But the term or length of the anger long preceded the divorce and, as I have intentionally tried to suggest, was long present when we met. Yes, such a statement or view is not without its risks and possible errors; but I do not apologize for my length and depth at which I have tried to understand her behavior—from our courtship to the present.

One problem with those opposing mirrors was that the image continues to a vanishing point and, though fascinating at first, can do more than to imagine your body in miniature. Like “the shrinking man” of some long-ago sci-fi movie, your body is reflected to the point of insignificance. This view is only an illusion but, in the right context, it has some association to earlier content; for when you look “intently into the mirror”, the illusion is not so evident. When you look only at the immediate reflection and not the opposing, then you presumably see the *real image*.

The *real image* is what we need to see—though it may not be what we want to see. I might have preferred to see an image with smaller, sweptback ears, but what I see is the ears that I got from my paternal grandfather. Of course, I should be thankful that I can see at all!

If I am unwilling or afraid as an adult to remember who I was (as a child), then I have no real image of who I am. But if I am unwilling as a Believer to look intently into figurative mirror to see the *real image* of who I am (or have become...), then I have no real sense of God, his mercy and might. Yes, a *real* reflection or image **can** reveal the hurt (or wounds) while confirming our desire to know, to be honest...to know and live the truth. Again, his mercy and his might.

“Ire-reflections Irritating” is looking intently and continuously into that figurative mirror to find the image of Christ in our lives. The desire to be honest and to know truth is not so that God can condemn us, but so that we can accept his grace, his mercy. Still, the life is not without trouble or crisis among other causes that produce brokenness, the surrender to God and his might.