



Thoughts on the Journey...

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"God is the enemy of my happiness!"

There was actually a time in my life when I secretly felt that way. I wrongly

believed that as long as no one else was being hurt by my actions, then they weren't sins in the strictest sense. After all, I wasn't murdering anyone and I wasn't out robbing banks. What harm is there in getting a little intoxicated once in awhile? Contributing to gossip - if it's the truth, how can that be a sin? How does promiscuous behavior between two consenting adults create a problem? It's my life and my body; what I do with it is my business. Surely God can't expect me to be perfect all the time! God created me and gave me a free will and his commandments were getting in the way of my freedom. If it feels right, why not do it? Right?

WRONG! My journey away from that mindset became a long arduous road wrought with Satan's lies and deception. From Satan's mouth to my ear, I learned a million and one ways to justify sinful behavior and that justification was rooted in the notion that God was the enemy of my happiness. It was the Lord himself who was trying to keep me from a blissful existence.

Then came the rude awakening! After an evening of too much drinking, I ended up having relations with a man. The next day, my stomach was in knots over what I had done. I looked in the bathroom mirror and saw the face of a young woman who was ravaged by her own self-centered choices. In an instant, I had a post-paradise Eve moment. "What have I done?", I thought. My so-called freedom melted into fear beyond all telling. Truth be known, it wasn't the first time I found myself in this place, but this time I sensed that I had gone one time too far. I was terrified that I was pregnant. The God who was the enemy of my happiness with all his commandments, was now the God I was turning to in my fear, begging for forgiveness and pleading that he would free me from a pregnancy.

God had forgiven me, but the reversal of this misfortune as a result of my disobedience was not part of the covenant of the free will he had given me. Freedom comes with a price and the price is living through the chaos we have created. There I was, locked in the cell of my irresponsibility along with a baby that was growing inside of me: a baby who had no choice in this matter. None of this felt like happiness and none of it felt like freedom.

In Matthews Gospel, we continue with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In this passage he is clarifying for his disciples the importance of the law. Jesus told them,

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

Jesus emphasized the commandments and made it clear that anyone who breaks these laws will be considered least in the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who obeys and teaches these commands will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

All of God's instructions, given through the law and the prophets, were for the purpose of helping the people of God to live in ways that fulfilled God's will. Living the *kingdom* life does not mean we sit back and wait for the blessings that will be given to us in heaven. Living the kingdom life is a blessed life now if we strive to do the Father's will.

Satan is traditionally translated as "the accuser" and the person he accuses most is God. In looking back, the whole notion of God usurping my happiness was just another deception of the devil; it was for me as it was for Eve. Our first reading from the book of Sirach says it best: "If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live;... Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him."

During that time of unwed-motherhood, I had nine months to reflect on the road that led me to this time of trial. It wasn't wasted time at all because it gave me the opportunity to slow down and delve into some long-needed introspection. What I learned was that true holiness, freedom, and happiness is not about waiting to get to heaven, but rather all about living the Kingdom life here and now. I also learned that obeying God's laws and taking Jesus' teachings to heart is the path to peace.

When we live within the will of God we are truly free. We are free to love others as God has loved us. We are free to show kindness and compassion even to those who may irritate us. We are free to love without lust, securely trusting that God's love alone is enough. We are free to feel indignation for injustice without resorting to insults and accusations. We are free to forgive. Living the will of God, is less about being fixed on rules and regulations and more about being spiritually formed in the image of Christ. It is about loving God more than we love having our own way. It's about becoming who God created us to be.