

StreetLevel

Your great gladness, Your great sadness

In recent weeks, conversations with colleagues here in Jordan about “calling” coincided with the death of American Christian author Frederick Buechner at 96. Why does this matter? Frederick Buechner did not grow up in a family of faith. His family moved often as his father tried to find work. When Buechner was 10 years old, his father killed himself, seeing himself as a failure. After this trauma, the small family re-located to Bermuda. From there Buechner made his way to Princeton University and Army service in WWII. He eventually settled in NYC to concentrate on his writing. After this sad and somewhat secular upbringing, he found himself attending Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church where the pastor was George Buttrick. Buttrick preached about the Christ who comes into our hearts with “confession, and many tears and also laughter,” a striking concept to Buechner whose life had not known much joy. He committed his life to Christ, was ordained and began a new life of teaching, preaching, writing and lecturing. Along the way, he also authored probably the most quoted sentence about Christian calling (now you can see the connection!):

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

Many voices call us, but for Christians, a calling assumes a Caller—the living God. Discerning your call involves a look inward to understand your gifts, personality, experiences and desires; a call also involves a look outward at the world and its crucial needs. This is not selfish ambition, but rather becoming who we are, who God created us to be, and to count for something worthy. In spite of serious challenges, our call should also bring us joy.

One author suggested that God might use “your great sadness” in addition to “your great gladness.” For some, there have been deep, life-changing traumas that have been processed into equally deep and beautiful new callings and ministries. A great example is Joni Eareckson Tada, who, as a young, athletic and vibrant woman, dove into Chesapeake

Bay in 1967 when she was 17 years old, breaking her neck and becoming a quadriplegic. Through numerous medical procedures and over 50 years of pain and difficulties, she has become a radiant, effective activist for significant ministries to disability communities around the world. Her great sadness has been turned into fruitfulness in helping others. Another simpler, more local example would be a man we met in Los Gatos this summer. When he lost his wife after a long illness, he was invited to a GriefShare study at church. He found this study so meaningful that he has now become a crucial part of the GriefShare leadership, guiding others who have lost loved ones through this helpful course. He was committed to this new calling... with gladness and sadness all mixed in.

Praise

We are always grateful when things work better than we expected. Since Covid, any process involving US passports has been prolonged for weeks and months. This past month, our passports were renewed here at the US Embassy in just two weeks, start to finish! The Kennedys just celebrated the 23rd anniversary of their arrival in Cairo. The Wrights in Nairobi just got their household shipment and are finally moved into their permanent housing. The intense, prolonged heatwaves in California and Jordan are mostly over. We have enjoyed using our roof for “ice cream nights” again this summer. Bob continues to pursue some interesting new contacts in our focus community. Some Iraqi refugee families have been able to travel to their new countries, but those who remain are such a blessing to our fellowship we sort of want them to be with us forever!

Prayer

In the last month, perhaps 20% of our church people have been infected or re-infected with Covid. Will we ever be done with this? The symptoms are generally light, but people are out of commission for at least a week. Just as we are re-launching ministries such as Sunday School, youth meetings, visiting and our annual church conference, Covid has put us back into “be careful, wear masks, stay at home” mode. Added to this has been an increase in Jordanian society of murders, suicides, drug addiction, and domestic violence. Pray for Christians here to be realistic and effective ministers to those with physical, mental and spiritual needs!

Suzanne for the Robertsons

October 2022

Sharing Christ's love with Urban Arabs