

The King's Highway

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The Meaning of What We Do

by Bob Pierce

I had often observed that so many of us who have so much give so little, while a few who have so little give so much.

The extent of this was dramatically evident to me on day in Formosa 10 years ago.

My story begins Sunday, September 26, 1954. I had been with Mrs. Lillian Dickson, one of the greatest and most heroic missionary hearts I have ever encountered. We had gone about eight miles out of Taipei, capital city of Formosa, to the walled-in wards of a leprosarium.

As we walked about the grounds where approximately 1,500 lepers were living, my heart was continually broken (as yours would have been). Heartache and tragedy were written on the bodies of these people, leaving the ugly scars and gruesome habiliments of leprosy.

We saw in one room a woman lying on the hard boards of a rough-hewn table. She had been in this leprosarium 41 years. Forty-one years ago she was a young woman with two children and a husband of whom she was very proud.

One day she detected a numbness in her arm and went to a doctor. He discovered the dreaded disease.

Now, of course, in today's enlightened world everything would have been done to soften such a cruel blow. But not in the Taiwan of 1923. The husband renounced his wife and drove her out of the home. The little woman was forbidden to see her own two babies, much less be comforted by her husband. As the disease grew worse she was driven out of the village and forbidden to enter its streets.

Brokenhearted, sick and demoralized, not knowing how to adjust . . . she wanted to take her life. Before she could carry out her plan, government officials took her many miles away to a strange leprosarium.

During those lonely four decades, no relative had ever come to visit her; not a single letter or post card had come telling her what had become of her children. The only family news she received was that her husband had married another woman.

To add to her heartbreak and misery came crippling arthritis, which she had endured for 26 of those 41 years.

Now she lay on her little board bed, unable to move one arm or one leg . . . unable to do anything for herself. She had to be fed. She hadn't been outside the room for more than 15 years. Her total world was inside those four walls.

As we walked up to this dear woman I expected her to be beaten and bitter. She turned to me and I saw her sunken nose . . . the places where eyelashes had been . . . the leathery texture of her face.

And then her lips suddenly broke into a wonderful, radiant smile. I wanted to cry.

I asked her of her purpose for living . . . of the secret of her happiness inside those walls.

"Oh," she said, through an interpreter, "I live for Christ inside these walls and I leave to Him the meaning and significance of what I do. It may be that there are only three people a year within the sound of my voice—whoever is put into this room with me. But I find that no day is lost . . . no day is drab and pointless when I can begin it by asking Jesus Christ to take my pain, my loneliness—whatever comes to me—and help me translate it into sympathy and love and understanding for others who are having a difficult time. I've asked God to turn the reservoir of my tears and pain and loneliness into something with which I can pour out kindness and sympathy to others who come and go through my room."

And then she added: "I think God uses me sometimes."

From the day I heard her say that I've known it's literally true that we never know all the meaning and significance of what we do when we do it for Jesus' sake. Whatever circumstances God permits us to endure, we can give ourselves utterly to Him and turn from self-pity to a determination to make our lives count.

Some folk think by avoiding God or the claims of the Gospel they can avoid suffering. Not so, my friend. Remember this: No man can decide whether or not he will suffer. The only thing he can decide is what he will suffer for. We cannot decide whether or not we will live or die; we only decide what we will die for.

Let me ask you: in the midst of all that seems secure, do you have a faith in God that makes you know that whatever you are suffering here is part of the will of God? Is your life a blessing to God and to others?

This little leper woman taught me that whatever life may bring, there is a way, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven. She doesn't know it, but when that little leprous woman gets to Heaven, thinking she witnessed only to a handful, she is going to get a surprise. I have told all over the world the story of her faithfulness to the Saviour. So one day when she slips out of that little wretched bit of clay she may find that God has multiplied what she did many, many times over.

What is there today in your life that God can use? He is Lord not only of joy but of sorrow, not only of peace but of trouble. He is God not only in the midst of happiness and security and satisfaction, but also through all kinds of difficulty and he wants to be Lord and Master and joy of your life if you'll give your heart to Him.

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Philippians 1:29).

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