

UNCOVERING THE GOOD IN THE BAD

I want to tell you a story from my life. I'm sure each of you will have one of your own. (Leader: you could share a story of your own if you'd rather.)

Forty-five years ago, I became psychotic and was admitted – for the second time within a year – to Riverview Hospital. Shortly after my admission, my psychiatrist's partner, a person in a private practice, interviewed me. While going through my medical records from that time (records I was later given access to) I came across a letter this doctor had written, a letter I had not been aware of. In it he recommended that I be discharged. The employer I had previously worked for had agreed to let me try to work, despite my symptoms, in spite of my schizophrenia diagnosis. The doctor believed I would recover better in a more normal environment.

But this letter was ignored, and I spent the next six months in that depressing institution – over-medicated, my mouth hanging open much of the time. I found it hard to communicate with people – probably because of too many pills. Those months were filled with misery, misery that only ended when I received a series of electro-convulsive treatments.

When I first found out what those records revealed I was shocked and bitter. But in the days that followed, the bitterness turned to a sense of gratitude. I was thankful for how far I had come since that awful time. I was thankful that I had become a useful member of my community. My records showed that some of the hospital staff had not held out much hope for me. But God has helped me come a long way since then.

I would not be the same person I am today if I had not gone through that time of institutionalization. I would not value my well times as much. As a result, I have a lot of compassion for people who live in institutions. I understand their feelings of loneliness and loss. I realize how important it is to visit them. God has helped good come out of those bad six months.

- In what ways are you thankful for the way your life has turned out, despite your disorder?

Look at Paul and Silas's story from Acts 16:

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

...we know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good. Romans 8:28 (J.B. Phillips)

David is a good example for us to follow, because most of us can relate to him. He also suffered from extreme moods and many troubles. The Bible refers to him as a man after God's own heart. In the Psalms, look at how David expressed his thanks to God, praising him:

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever. Psalm 30:11-12

...Praise be to the Lord, for he showed his wonderful love to me. Psalm 31:21

Let us come before him with thanksgiving... Psalm 95:2

The amazing thing is that the more we give thanks to God, the more we see cause to give thanks to God.

- What bad things have happened to you that worked out for the good?
- How do your expressions of thankfulness to God affect how you feel about him?
- How does thankfulness affect how you see your life?
- How does your thankfulness affect your mood?