

1 Nameless Tears

ALL I HAVE TO do is close my eyes and I'm there . . .

I can see the large, three-story apartment complex, and the turquoise door with number 319 on it.

Home.

And I can see myself sitting in my room on the edge of my bed, knowing that a certain weird thing is about to happen . . . again. The door is shut and locked in order to spare myself the embarrassment of anyone walking in on me.

Most days were fine. I was a social kid, eager to spend time with my friends after school, skateboarding, hitch-hiking to the beach or just roaming the neighborhood.

When I say most days were fine, I mean as fine as things could be, given the circumstances. I was the oldest of four kids being raised by a single mom who worked 10- and 12-hour days as a waitress to keep us fed and clothed. Just behind us loomed the big, dark shadow of an abusive marriage and an ugly divorce. Los Angeles, California, was our world. The streets were my playground. While Mom was at work, life unfolded before me.

My days included routine encounters with drug dealers and addicts, shootings and stabbings, racial hatred and gang warfare, child abuse and all kinds of other messed-up stuff.

As for any positive spiritual influence, there was none in sight. The concept of God was foreign. We had no Bible in our home, or any other spiritual literature, for that matter. I knew about the rock band Genesis, but not the book of Genesis. I had never even heard of the Ten Commandments. Jesus was a remotely familiar name, but mostly in cursing.

Fine. Most days were fine. Such was life. There was nothing else. Nothing, that is, except those strange times alone in my room with the whole world shut out. There, by myself, I would periodically face a recurring phenomenon I desperately hated to experience. And yet, in a way, I clung to it, because it was the only thing that felt meaningful. It was like a distant pinhole in the blackness, allowing a thin shaft of light to enter, beckoning ever so provocatively. I groped toward it.

Toward what?

I didn't know.

I usually knew when it was going to happen. I could feel it building inside of me. During school I would sense myself pulling away from everyone into a quietness, an involuntary retreating not prompted by a conscious choice. When the final dismissal bell would ring, rather than rushing off with my friends, I would nervously make up some excuse and head home. Down the sidewalk as fast as my right leg could push my skateboard, off the board and running through the vacant field, over the fence, up the three flights of stairs, I would burst through door number 319 and into my room. Catching my breath, I'd sit on

the edge of my bed awaiting the inevitable.

Then it would happen.

“What’s wrong with me?” (Sigh).

I’d start to feel those familiar but undefinable feelings until tears would begin to well up in my eyes. Soon I would be weeping profusely, uncontrollably, for no apparent reason.

Nameless tears.

I call them *nameless tears* because that’s what they were. Tears as passionate as a hurricane, but as unexplainable as quantum physics. If you had been there to ask me, “What’s wrong? Why are you crying?” in all honesty I would have had to say, “I don’t know.” And yet, on some level beyond articulation, in a part of my heart as yet unfamiliar to me, I did know. At least I was beginning to know. With each repetition of the strange experience, I began to gain a more intelligible sense of my feelings. It was as if I were a fish on dry land gulping for water or a mammal underwater gasping for air. With increasing intensity I could sense the existence of a higher reality to which my heart belonged, but from which I was far removed. I hated my world and felt completely out of place in it. The violence, the racism, the sexual perversions and violations, the lying, the child abuse, the raw, unabashed selfishness—with every fiber of my being, I hated it all. And yet, I was part of it, for which I also hated myself.

But not only did I hate the world around me and the wrong within me, I also deeply longed for something different, something better, for myself and for the world. It was more than a nebulous desire. It was a distinct “knowingness,” hazy at first but becoming more and more defined with each tear trickling down my cheeks and splashing to the floor. It wasn’t merely a wish, like a

five-year-old wishes for a Snickers bar the size of a house. I knew that there was, in fact, something true and good and beautiful beyond my scope of vision, if I could just find it. Or better yet, if it could just find me. With all the strength of my youthful passion, I yearned to be embraced by whatever was drawing me from afar.

Finally, the day of peace and resolve arrived. My tears began to catch the image of an approaching personage. The “what” for which I so deeply yearned turned out to be a “Who.” God introduced Himself to me. Not face to face, but heart to heart. I didn’t hear an audible voice, but the meeting was no less real for its silence. (For a more detailed account of my encounter with God, read chapter 1 of my book, *See With New Eyes*.)

In the very first hour of my encounter with God, I knew He was the definition of my heart’s deepest desire. Everything began to make sense. All along, day and night without pause, I had been the fiercely-loved object of a Supernatural Being. Although I was without any religious instruction to guide me, and had not even the slightest knowledge of God’s existence or character, He aroused in me a distinct awareness of the difference between right and wrong, a longing for something better, and a conviction that there was, indeed, something better out there somewhere. While I had been wholly unconscious of Him, He was actively pursuing my heart with ingenious orchestration and relentless passion. The meaning of my tears became clear.

Later on I would read and understand what had happened to me, clearly explained by the apostle Paul:

“ ‘He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should

seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him (feel after him, KJV) and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us' ” (Acts 17:26, 27, NKJV).

What an astounding and comforting reality!

Do not miss what Paul is saying here. The Almighty God, who is above and beyond us all, broods over us with “hope.” He is hoping, this lofty yet lowly One—desperately, deeply hoping—that each person will “feel after Him and find Him.” And He doesn’t just sit back on His throne inactively hoping. Rather, He is intimately, personally, aggressively involved in every life. By His wise and calculated providence, He has “determined” the ebb and flow of each individual history, the very place we live and the influences we encounter. All we experience transpires under His loving guidance.

“So that . . . ”

Paul makes it clear that God orchestrates the circumstances of every life with a specific purpose in mind: “*So that* we might feel after Him and find Him.” Not that He is hard to find, Paul hastens to add, for “He is not far from each one of us.” And if not far, then He is near. Near to whom? To “each one of us”; that is, to every single man, woman, and child who has ever existed on planet Earth, during every year and month and day and hour of human history, in every nation and city and home and room. No one has ever escaped His compassionate notice. No one has ever slipped through His fingers. All receive the utmost personal attention. With deliberate intent God has always been near every individual, hoping to be felt for and found.

How near?

Paul answers: “For in him we live, and move, and have our

being” (Acts 17:28). Consistent with Paul’s previous statement that God is “not far from each one of us,” the “we” here is clearly inclusive of the entire human race, for it involves all who “live” and “move” and “have being.” So though it may seem awkward to say so of even unbelievers, there is a sense in which every human being is “in Him.” This is the intimate language Paul employs to define God’s nearness to “each one of us.” Certainly it does not mean that every person is eternally saved, nor is it a reference to any kind of mystical idea that every person is a small particle of God. Rather, the statement that we are “in Him” refers to the sublime truth of our existence by His choice and power. “In Him”—within the desire of His will and the purpose of His goodness—we have life; we experience the movements of life in mind, emotion, will, and body; and we have the “being” of individual personhood and character. We live and move and have identity because God wills it. “He is before all things, and *by him* all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). “*In him* all things hold together” (NIV). Whether we know Him or not, acknowledge Him or not, thank Him or not, the life we live, along with all our abilities, privileges, and blessings, is the gift of God’s grace moment by moment.

“Here is what I have seen,” declares wise King Solomon, “It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 5:18, 19, NKJV).

Life itself continually emanates directly from God as a free gift

to all. The very capacity to work and produce and enjoy the good things of life, even the simple ability to eat and relish food, is an ongoing manifestation of the ever-outreaching grace of God's benevolent character. Every time we encounter something true, experience something good, or behold something beautiful, God is revealing Himself with the passionate hope that we will "feel after Him" as the source behind all blessings.

But why does He want us to feel after Him and find Him?

Because as our Father-Creator, He has designed the inner workings of our minds and emotions to survive and grow and soar with eternal pleasure by means of receiving and giving His love. This most basic and profound reality of our existence is articulated beautifully by the apostle John:

"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16, NIV).

Selfless, other-centered love is the fundamental essence of God's character. Out of that essence He created mankind "in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). We were made for love. The fall of humanity into sin basically consisted of a choice to cease living in the image of God's love and to venture into the dark realm of living for self, which turns out to be an attempt at the impossible, due to the very nature of life as God has engineered it. One cannot live for self and really live life as it is meant to be. Living for self imposes guilt, erodes self-respect and eventually destroys the very will to continue living. Selfishness, by its very nature, is detachment and isolation from all others, most tragically from God, the Source of life and love.

Redemption is all about healing the problem of selfishness in the character of man through a restoration of divine love in the soul;

for love, by nature, is connection and integration with others, most vitally with God. Therefore, John reasons, to live in love is to live in God. The divinely intended meaning of our existence is—simply, profoundly—a love relationship with God and His creation. Restoration to vital union with our Maker involves the restoration of His love in our otherwise “self-*sin*-tered” lives, liberating us from the deep-seated derangements of sin in our characters.

God longs for us to feel after Him and find Him because He loves us with all the energy of His divine being. It is the nature of His love to continually reach out of Himself in tireless efforts to secure our eternal happiness, which is only possible as we embrace His love and allow it to flow freely out of our lives to Him and all others.

I still cry. In fact, I just shed tears yesterday. But now my tears are named.

They are tears of longing for more of God: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:1, 2, NKJV).

They are tears of joy for the pleasure of knowing His love: “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11, NKJV).

They are sometimes tears of sorrow for the times I ignore Him or misrepresent His beautiful character: “Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I cry to You” (Psalm 86:3, NKJV).

I still cry.

Do you?

Pause right now to identify your own tears. If they are yet nameless, recognize that your deepest heart-longings are for an intimate, eternal relationship with the divine Lover of your soul. If they are named, then I welcome you home to the heart of God.

NAMELESS TEARS

Father-Creator: Thank You for finding me in apartment 319, in my room. I was completely oblivious to what was going on in my heart. It is truly an incredible and wonderful thing to finally realize that it was You all along, every step of the way, with every tear I cried. It was You drawing my soul with the powerful current of Your love. You were introducing thoughts into my mind and feelings into my heart. You were whispering inaudible words of truth and goodness and beauty into my darkened soul. What a powerful dawning it was when, finally, the truth burst upon my consciousness, that I was the deeply-loved object of the Almighty God's tireless labors to bring me to Himself! Thank You for arousing in me the unquenchable desire to "feel after You." Joyfully in Christ, Amen.