

Quality #5: Finding Joy in the Journey

Handling Hard Times

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OG MANDINO FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Handling Hard Times

Again we pose the question, “What creates or threatens joy at this deep personal experience we call the here and now? Since we will all be called to go through it, let’s explore how best to handle hard times.

There will be times in our lives that are so painful, so debilitating, so overwhelming that we may cry out in anguish seeking comfort that does not seem to come. Peace will elude us. Love will hide its face from us. In moments like this life can become so dark and the despair so thick that exiting this mortal existence may see like the only plausible escape. If you have been here you know of what we speak. If you have not, you most likely will at some point in your life.

In moments like these we may suffer in silence. We may feel abandoned, forgotten, and alone. We may become angry. We may even curse the power that governs abundance. It is our desire to provide comfort if 1) You are currently here, 2) if the pain is still lingering from a past experience or 3) Should you ever have to face such a moment in the future.

Recently Ramona and I attended a little church near our Bear Lake cabin. We were a little late so we sat toward the back of the chapel. Sitting on a pew in front of us was a father with his eleven and thirteen-year-old sons. Paralyzed from the neck down, the eleven-year-old was confined to a wheelchair. His condition was serious. Several times during the service he struggled to swallow. Each time his father gently rocked him or encouraged him with a smile. I was mesmerized.

This was not an act. This was not something they got to go home from. It was something this family graciously dealt with twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This moment was only a small glimpse of a much bigger reality.

I envisioned them bathing, dressing, feeding, and nurturing this ever-growing young man. This routine had already gone on for days, weeks, months and years. He was handsomely dressed this morning making it clear that it happened this very day. Such dedication. Such patience. Such love.

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This is not what they had planned when this child was conceived. This father, who I would later learn, was a rugged outdoorsman. I'm sure there were plans of hiking and hunting, fishing and long talks around campfires. But these things in the traditional sense were not to be. Anger could not change it. Frustration certainly would not serve anyone. Total surrender to "what is" was required and I watched total surrender in action.

At the end of the service we sang, "Lord dismiss us with thy blessings." As we sang the first chorus to the closing hymn, "Oh refresh us, oh refresh us, traveling through this wilderness," I watched this father reach over and tenderly caress his son's hand. Just as he did we begin the second verse, "Thanks we give this adoration to the gospel's joyful sound," It was as if this father was saying to his son, "You are the joy of my life." I lost it.

This is not the only person or family courageously facing challenges of this magnitude or even greater but it was the first time in a long time that I felt it so deeply. That morning had started as usual, "If there is anyone I can serve, put them on my path and I will serve them." I don't remember the sermons taught that day from the pulpit but I will never forget the sermon taught by that father who chose to find joy in hard times. He put everything into perspective. He chose to see the good, accept what was and make the most of it. Joy was his reward. Instead of being a victim, he was a victor and so was his son. That morning I came looking for someone to serve but was instead served.

In Scroll VI: I will master my emotions, Og speaks to being a good example. He writes, "Trees and plants depend on the weather to flourish but I make my own weather, yea I transport it with me. If I bring rain and gloom and darkness and pessimism to my customers then they will react with rain and gloom and darkness and pessimism and they will purchase naught. If I bring joy and enthusiasm and brightness and laughter to my customers they will react with joy and enthusiasm and brightness and laughter and my weather will produce a harvest of sales and a granary of gold for me. Today I will be master of my emotions."



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Challenges harrow out our soul and make room for more joy. As importantly, the way in which we carry our grief can inspire others to be more courageous. When we can find little or no solace in our pain, let us think of others and how our example can serve them. Can we care enough about others to step into their world when our world is in shambles? This may also be the ultimate application of intrinsic validation.

When we bring joy and enthusiasm to the world, especially during difficult times, we will be rewarded with more joy and enthusiasm and that is a granary of gold for a hungry soul. Your greatest service may be your example.

I think of Ramona's mom, Marthane. She was a vibrant, independent woman. To save a few dollars on the new home being built, she took on several tasks including the staining of the cupboards. For years she sewed. She weaved oval rugs from rags. The list goes on. In short, she pinched pennies until they screamed.

Marthane loved to go camping. A consummate storyteller, she would entertain the family with the famed and very funny Watermelon Killing by Fred Gibson or The Owl Critic by James T. Fields. She was unselfish with her time and always had a smile and a warm hug to give. The greatest compliment of all, she was adored by her grandchildren.

Ramona was expecting our first child, a little boy. Mom and daughter were looking forward to the big day. Five months into Ramona's pregnancy we got a call that no one wants to get. Earlier that afternoon Marthane had lain down on a couch in her newly completed home for a much-needed rest. She was suffering from an unusually severe headache. She never awoke.

Marthane had been rushed to the hospital with a massive brain hemorrhage and was not expected to survive. Within hours she was taken off life support and at the age of fifty-four was pronounced dead. It was sudden, unexpected and final. She would not be there for this birth or the next six. She would miss the weddings and birth of great grand children. Her loss would leave a hole in Ramona's heart.

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Only five years earlier at Christmas, Ramona lost a sister in a tragic automobile accident. Five years after the passing of her mother we would be notified by another phone call that Ramona's dad had been critically injured in an accident. He would linger on life support for nearly a month before passing. Both parents and a sister were now gone. Even years later, late night phone calls can create a shiver or two. Life can be fragile. However time can be a great healer.

Ramona chose to memorize Marthane's two favorite stories. This past year, some 35 years after her passing, many still uncontrollably laugh when Ramona dramatically delivers those famed and funny stories.

I shall never forget Ramona's birthday this past summer. Surrounded by her seven children, their spouses and our eighteen spellbound grandchildren, as she gave it her all. Luckily we captured it on video. Then there was also a lunch around a campfire atop the Rocky Mountains during a couple's retreat. There Ramona stood, covered head to foot in dust from an early morning ATV ride, bent over, finger pointing, snarl on her face, mimicking old Tas Bolten, "Get out of my watermelon patch you thieves or I'll blow a hole in ya' so big they can pitch a dog through it."

Og adds, "And how can I laugh when confronted with man or deed which offends me so as to bring forth my tears or my curses? Four words I will train myself to say until they become a habit so strong that immediately they will appear in my mind whenever good humor threatens to depart from me. These words, passed down from the ancients, will carry me through every adversity and maintain my life in balance. These four words are: This too shall pass."

Ramona has outlived both her mom and dad yet their memory is still alive. Time does not take away the memories or the pains of lose. I'm not sure we'd want that. However, time combined with humor does heal the soul. If you are in mourning, give yourself time to mourn your lose and let time work its magic. As soon as you can, re-introduce laughter.

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In the early 1990's, Ramona and I attended a Life Management seminar. We were still drowning in nearly a million dollars in debt with little hope of rescue. Toward the end of this seminar we were each given a pine board.

We were instructed to write on one side of the board our current circumstances and on the other side where we wanted to be in ten years. I remember writing my miserable story on one side. The pain of loss was still very acute. On the other side I wrote, "debts paid," and a very specific annual income figure. I remember scoffing and shaking my head in disbelief as I whispered, "Ya, right."

We were then instructed to break the board in one smooth and deliberate action – to break through to the possibilities. I did not break the board the first time...too many doubts and fears. Those of us who failed on the first try were instructed to make a total and complete commitment to create this outcome – this new life. After doing so, the board easily broke.

This experience has been the source of much reflection. Wanting a different outcome would not make it magically happen. Just writing it down certainly wouldn't. Fantasizing about a time "when" stress was gone and mentally frolicking in vivid visualizations about what it would be like "then" would not create it. Wasting time catastrophizing and agonizing over things that may happen or were happening would not create it. It would need to be intentionally created in the trenches, one millimeter at time and hopefully in partnership with the power that governs abundance.

This kind of change starts when we make an absolute commitment to do everything in our power and with a trust that we are not doing it alone even though at the time it may seem lonely and nearly impossible. This level of commitment must be followed by focus, discipline, effort and action.

The most critical moments of all are when we feel swamped with emotional pain, when the whole world feels like it is crashing in on us. These moments require a Herculean

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effort – and Hercules was a mythical character of great strength. We are mere mortals. There will be moments when we must struggle with all our might against these emotional forces that would tear us down. It is in these pivotal moments that we will want to be conscious enough to say, “Not today. I am not going there today. I am going to stay focused on creation.” Some of these moments will be screaming so loudly in our mind that we will want to scream back just as loud in our mind, “No I am not going there today. I am staying in creation. I will stay focused on what I can create, how I can create it and how this will serve!”

Og wrote about these moments in Scroll III, “I will avoid despair but if this disease of the mind should infect me then I will work on in despair. I will toil and I will endure. I will ignore the obstacles at my feet and keep mine eyes on the goals above my head, for I know that where dry desert ends, green grass grows. I will persist until I succeed.”

The millimeters of creation finally lead us to August of 2000 when we wrote the last \$14,000 check. The joy experienced in that moment was so full, so complete, it drove us to our knees in deep gratitude. We had experienced a miracle. That which seemed impossible just a few years earlier had become not only possible but an accomplished deed. Time, laughter and persistence are the ingredients for creating joy in hard times.

I often reflect on Og words, “In the Orient young bulls are ‘tested’ for the fight arena in a certain manner. Each is brought to the ring and allowed to attack a picador who pricks them with a lance. The bravery of each bull is then rated with care according to the number of times he demonstrates his willingness to charge in spite of the sting of the blade. Henceforth will I recognize that each day I am tested by life in like manner. If I persist, if I continue to try, if I continue to charge forward, I will succeed. I will persist until I succeed.”

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Reflect on any pain that you may be experiencing. Make a list of everything that needs to happen – everything that needs to be done. Prioritize the items. Make the decision today to focus on the first item on the list. Make this an accomplished deed. Now move to the second. Experience your partner participating in the process and speeding up the result.

It is my belief that most concerns, if any, around the existence of this power may have less to do with whether or not this power exists or whether or not this power can comfort and buoy us up in difficult moments, and more to do with a misunderstanding about how to access and partner with this power. This misunderstanding may be further complicated by unpleasant childhood memories due to way adults administered “religious” beliefs, the impact of beliefs on adult relationships, the conflicts between our public image and our private and even secret lives and our need to be in control. These complications add natural and understandable levels of resistant and even rebellion. Now add unwanted guilt, shame and even blame. In the end, this confuses everything but changes nothing.

Og simplified the potentially controversial topic when he wrote, “Who is of so little faith that in a moment of great disaster or heartbreak has not called to his God? Who has not cried out when confronted with danger, death, or mystery beyond his normal experience or comprehension? From where has this deep instinct come which escapes from the mouth of all living creatures in moments of peril? Move your hand in haste before another's eyes and his eyelids will blink. Tap another on his knee and his leg will jump. Confront another with dark horror and his mouth will say, ‘My God’ from the same deep impulse. My life need not be filled with religion in order for me to recognize this greatest mystery of nature.”

As discussed in the Partnership section of Quality #1: Connecting with people, give this power whatever name you wish. As Og emphasized, “Who is of so little faith that in a moment of great disaster or heartbreak has not called to ‘his’ God?” The important principle here is recognition that there is a power. Second, our deep and honest intent



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to step into the world of others and acknowledge them as human beings - to notice them and suffer with them - is the way “we” open the door to partnership.

Surrender to the possibility. If you do, you will eventually know, as do I, that this power is very real. Hard times can create the humility and circumstances sufficient to crash through our often resistant and rebellious natures. When our partnership is in full swing and we are in a more pleasant and joyful season with these dark nights long behind us, we will look back and express gratitude for these breakthrough moments. Not suggesting for a moment that we would want to re-live any of them, we wouldn't. But knowing then what has been made possible in partnership, we will find joy.

I have shared this earlier, but it may be worth repeating. In the darkest of the dark hours I cried out in anger, “I long to cry to the God of my youth, but the God of my youth will not hear my cry. I must change my God or change my cry.”

I had to change my cry. This unconditional power, our greatest cheerleader, cannot answer a request that would rob us from the agency of taking action. That action may be as simple as making the conscious choice to stay in creation, using our mind one of five constructive ways. It may be as simple as staying still yet in creation listening until our partner manifests an inspired idea, impression or a solution to problem that ignites our passion (see Quality #2: Goals and Expectations). It may be as simple as focusing on the millimeters of creation and doing the hard things knowing that our partner will fill in the void by endowing us with more ability, when needed, or placing people on our path that we can serve and who will serve us (see Quality #3: Completing Tasks).

I also shared this earlier but again in this context it bares repeating. When that last \$14,000 check was sent and we experienced unspeakable joy, I felt the undeniable impression, “What did you learn?” I knew the answer, “You open doors of opportunity and I do the work.”

Og clarifies this experience when he wrote, “Never will I pray for the material things of the world. I am not calling to a servant to bring me food. I am not ordering an innkeeper

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to provide me with room. Never will I seek delivery of gold, love, good health, petty victories, fame, success, or happiness. Only for guidance will I pray, that I may be shown the way to acquire these things, and my prayer will always be answered.”

This power will comfort and provide guidance. This power will endow with additional ability when we are fully maximizing the gifts already give. This power will open doors to marvelous opportunity. However, this power will not do the work we are capable and can become capable of doing. If it did, it would rob us of the joy that comes by overcoming, the joy that comes from accomplishment, the joy that comes from being a self-directed intentional creator of our lives.

Let our cries for help be cries for guidance and may we trust the inspired ideas, impressions and solutions to problems that are manifest. And then may we have the courage to take the action to create these inspired visions and dreams in tangible reality. We can choose to go it alone or we can do it in partnership with the power that governs abundance. It has been my experience that when I do the latter, the painful periods are shortened, the road to success clearer and the journey filled with joy.

When faced with hard times we can choose to become victors by choosing to live these four principles:

1. Serve others and find joy in lifting their burdens. Be a good example
2. Introduce or re-introduce laughter which will keep things in proper perspective and lighten our load.
3. Persist with undying tenacity – never, never give up.
4. Surrender to a power greater than ourselves and work in partnership with this power.

The alternative is bitterness, resentment, blame, shame, escape, avoidance, fear and anger. This is the road chosen by victims and victims never heal. In fact they often compound the pain and make it worse than it was.

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Focused on themselves they do not see the suffering of others. Laughter is an unwelcomed mirror. Persistence is a waste of time. Prayers are left unanswered. Blame, shame and anger abound. They drain their own energy and then suck it out of everyone around them. They are takers and not givers in the equation called life. Miserable and overwhelmed they continue to compound their anguish.

Have you lived life as a victim or victor?

We have watched others suffer nearly beyond comprehension. We may have been one of these people. Trust that with a commitment to bless the lives of others, a willingness to laugh in spite of the pain, the work to back it up and an undying faith in a power greater than ourselves, we will witness miracles. We may in fact become victors.

In summary, handling hard times may require that for a season we hang on with our fingernails. Those who do so even when it seems impossible, live to tell a tale reserved only for true heroes. Let us be both witnesses and participants in these miracles. We may not be grateful in the moment, but we will eventually be grateful for this moment. This too shall pass.