

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.
~ Psalm 46:1, 2



Objectifying Subjectivity

By Bob Ragan

These last two years have been emotionally quite challenging for me. This was especially so this past March when, as the result of a violent auto accident, my mom died and my father developed dementia due to a lack of oxygen to his brain. As painful as this has been for me, my parents' accident is just one example of emotional difficulty I've experienced this past year. It seems I have been impacted where I have a significant relational connection.

During the summer I began to realize that dullness had pervaded my spirit as a result. With each emotional challenge, I had been moving deeper and deeper into a place of *non-becoming*—a place where I was no longer becoming the man that God has called me to be. Consequently, sources of personal connection, which normally would bring me comfort, now only increased my growing sense of alienation. I felt detached from community, even when I was in the midst of it.

Having read Josef Pieper's book *On Hope* two years ago, I knew my feelings of non-becoming were connected to sloth.

With each emotional challenge I experienced, I allowed portions of my heart to become frozen. Sloth is often poorly defined as being lazy. It's not. It is becoming stagnant, being unable to continue becoming God's image bearer.

I am well versed on Leanne Payne's teaching about the dangers of diseased introspection, so I knew not to become lost by turning inward into endless, self-focused introspection. However, I did slip into what I will call a state of heightened emotional subjectivity. By this I mean, I was constantly aware of how I *felt* (especially of how

my environment was affecting me), but I was doing little to *resolve* my emotions with the Lord.

In this article, I'm hoping to share with you three important insights: 1) How perilous it can be to become lost in the subjectivity of being defined by our emotions; 2) How looking up and out of ourselves to the risen Christ awakens us to both experience our emotions while also not allowing them to define us; and 3) How the Lord objectively affirms our true selves, empowering us to rise up to walk united with Him as the men and women He calls us to be.

Slipping into Subjectivity

There is a time and a place for deeper introspection, for examining ourselves in the light of the Lord's truth. However, the greater our subjective self-awareness, the more our capacity to be *other-aware* may diminish. If my heightened self-awareness blocks my relationships with others, I can become stuck in a diseased state of subjectivity. My thoughts become *fixed* solely on how I am feeling, and I lose the capacity to be *transfixed* on the One who calls me to stand in true relationship.

During the summer, the music I listened to, the movies I viewed, and the TV programs I watched heightened certain emotions within me. I can see now that I was seeking those emotional stimuli that enhanced my malaise by evoking feelings of sadness or loss. The movies I was drawn to, for instance, were ones into which I could escape into unrealistic romanticism. I sought that which I could emotionally identify with but that did not require any action on my part to bring resolution to my emotions. As a result, I became deeply passive and complacent. I'd wake up in the morning planning to have a quiet time and go to bed that night realizing that I never did. My days and weeks were a blur.

During this time, I admit that my self-deprecating humor sometimes prevented others from realizing how disillusioned I really was inside. Behind my exterior, I

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had a diminished sense of joy and hope, and I was growing increasingly more depressed. Conversations with others about my situation and inner turmoil elicited a range of responses from different people in my life. Some were unable to discern the significant inner turmoil I was experiencing because they saw no problem with my situation. Still others counseled me to simply get over it and have a “just do it” attitude. Interestingly, these two responses reflect two extremes we can fall into: The first is a level of passivity, being lost in emotion and ignoring the good of the cognitive; while the second is a restless activism, trusting in “doing” and cutting off the good of the intuitive heart. What we need is a combination of the two: to be able to discern and name the hurt in our hearts and then to rise up to do whatever the Lord indicates to bring focus and resolution to our situation.

Beginning to Awaken the Sleeper

The Lord *is* aware of our need and condition. He is always speaking to us! When I would make the time to truly enter His Presence, His healing words began to address my condition. First He began to reveal how my emotional subjectivity had consumed me. For example, my involvement in ministry had become a “job” to me emotionally instead of a calling. My focus was on my emotions, only aware of how my daily experiences made me feel or not feel! I was not *other-aware*, and so could not be aware of the One who was with me each moment of the day.

— Please Pray With Us . . . —

Thanksgiving—As we simultaneously celebrate Regeneration’s 25th Anniversary and go through this time of transition in leadership, we thank the Lord that the Regeneration Board of Directors is as committed and strong as it is, and we thank Him also for Alan Medinger’s selfless willingness to come out of retirement to once again serve as the ministry’s Executive Director.

Petitions—If you receive this newsletter before November 6th, please pray for our 25th Anniversary conference and banquet—that the Father will bring those He wants there and that the day will significantly impact Christ’s ministry to the sexually broken. Also, please pray for Jeff Johnston and his family in their time of transition. All of us who know Jeff know that the Lord’s hand is on Jeff’s life in a tremendous way, and we pray the Lord will guide him to a wonderful new work.

* For more in-depth prayer requests, E-mail regenjosh@juno.com.

I began to see how drawn I was to *subjective* worship songs—songs that focused me on how *I felt* rather than on who *God is* or His calling forward my true self. A line in one of my favorite worship songs confesses being sorry for turning worship into something besides truly worshiping God. I began to ponder if this line applied to me, and the Holy Spirit showed me that I had become attached to the emotions I experienced during worship. It was just like those programs I watched which heightened my emotional awareness.

Two prayers became a key part of my quiet times during this period. In the first prayer, I asked the Lord to help me be an “adult son,” not one acting out his brokenness but one responsibly choosing to put away childish things. In the second prayer, I asked God to awaken the sleeper, to help me be like Samuel—able to hear the voice of the Lord to wake me out of my lethargy. In this prayer, I needed to confess my sloth as sin! He who is faithful hears us (Hebrews 10:23).

Rising Up

In my prayer journal, the Father spoke very clearly for me to rise up in my present circumstances. I knew that He was not asking me to enter into restless activism, but to rise up in my true self. In my sloth I had forgotten *who I am in Christ* (Acts 17:28). In my passivity I had lost the capacity to tell myself the truth. It took time, but eventually I began to allow the Holy Spirit to empower me to rise up.

Once again Josef Pieper’s book *On Hope* confirmed something about which the Lord had often warned me. In my years of journaling the Lord would admonish me not to despair. Josef Pieper showed me that despair is a sin! Despair doesn’t simply rise up within us; we actually *choose* to embrace despair. We *choose* to despair in the face of the One who has redeemed us! This truth helped keep me from turning to diseased introspection and losing myself in despair.

Another truth that helped me not despair is that *nothing catches God by surprise*. He is never caught off-guard (Psalm 121:3). He has an exact plan for every circumstance I experience. I can place my trust in Him no matter how dismal my life appears. I look up and out of my earth bound, limited vision and see the bigger picture of which I am a vital part! I tell my heart *His* truth regarding the emotions I am feeling.

Our lives are already laid out before Him! Our areas of brokenness comprise only a portion of our personhood. All life’s experiences are part of the process of

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sanctification which is transforming us into the men or women we're called to be. We're okay because as people in process, God accepts us right where we are. However, He loves us too much to leave us in that place, and beckons us into greater becoming.

In my case, the Holy Spirit began to strengthen me to turn off those sources which lulled me into non-becoming. I turned off my TV for a week, not viewing programs or DVD's! I was amazed how sensitive I was again to hearing His voice beckoning me to come away for a quiet time. My prayer journaling increased my focus and provided the direction for which I had been longing.

The most significant thing the Lord did was to reveal again my heart's deepest desires. During a time of counseling and healing prayer, the Lord spoke very clearly to me: "I know your heart." The grief, sorrow, and two surgeries I had this summer left me unable to remain focused and function efficiently in the office. I was very vulnerable to the enemy's attack. I agreed with his "critique" of my poor performance and heaped condemnation on myself, furthering my feelings of alienation and pain. I turned to addictive behaviors which confirmed my feelings of condemnation and the lie that *I was* shameful.

One morning I began to weep heavily and cry out to the Lord about the state of my being. Up through the tears rose the deep desire I had to be an adult son. I expressed how much I longed to once more be intimately connected with Him. My heart yearned to be free to minister again with joy and compassion. I knew again that beneath all the emotional turmoil in my heart, these deeper desires were still present and He indeed *knew* they were! It was *I who had forgotten*, not Him. Immediately my heart was filled with renewed hope.

The Saturday following this time of prayer, I was driving to the office for two appointments when I realized that not once had I bemoaned the loss of "my" Saturday! Within me welled up an excitement and desire to truly enter into what God had in store for those two appointments. He was renewing my passion for the ministry.

Have I fully "risen up"? No. Like all of us, I am still *becoming*. But now, my eyes are no longer cast down (Psalm 34:5). The Lord has given me the capacity to use His divine objectivity, rather than my emotional subjectivity. As I write this article, I anticipate the beginning of our Northern Virginia Living Waters program where we sing some of those incredible hymns which cause us to look up and out of ourselves to see Him, the Victorious One who calls us forth to stand in the true self united with Him. ■

More Ministry News

(see page 4 for additional Ministry News)

Vision for the Future

As we close out our first twenty-five years of ministry, our staff is turning its attention to the future, maybe not the next twenty-five years, but at least the next two or three. We are prayerfully seeking a vision for what God would have each part of the ministry look like two or three years from now.

You might be able to help us in this. Many of you, through prayers, financial support, encouragement, and volunteer efforts, are a part of this ministry. If God gives you any sense of direction for the ministry, please pass it on to us.

Baltimore Readers:

We're Looking for New Office Space

Regeneration has occupied a little house on Joppa Road in the suburbs of Baltimore for about seventeen years now, and we have seriously outgrown it. During the coming months we will be trying to find new facilities for our offices and book ministry.

To our friends in Baltimore, do you know of a likely place? We need about 1,300 square feet, of which about one-quarter would be for storing and shipping books. We would like to be in the northeast suburbs of Baltimore, near where all of our staff live. We probably will rent, but a purchase is not out of the question. If we rent, it would be wonderful to have a Christian landlord.

Growth into Manhood Being Published in Polish

A Christian publisher in Poland will be publishing a Polish language version of Alan Medinger's *Growth into Manhood: Resuming the Journey*. Since being published in the United States in 2000, the book has become a standard among Christian men overcoming homosexuality. It has even been used by a Jewish group in New York.

In addition, last year, *New Directions*, a 21 week support group program for homosexual overcomers—also written by Alan—was translated into Portuguese, primarily for use by ministries in Brazil. ■

Ministry News

Wishing Jeff Johnston a Very Fond Farewell

As each of us adjusts to Jeff Johnston's absence from the Regeneration staff, we couldn't pass up the opportunity of this newsletter to wish him an official *Regeneration News* farewell. Jeff has blessed the lives of not only many men and women through this ministry, he has also forever blessed the lives of the Regeneration staff and volunteers. Although we are certain only good is in store for both Jeff and the ministry, his absence is keenly felt here and we miss him. Thank you, Jeff, for all you have given us, for your friendship, and for showing us through your life a better picture of the kind of person Jesus is. As you go, may the Father bless your life beyond all you could ever ask or imagine!

NoVA Dessert Rescheduled

The November 5th Northern Virginia Celebration Dessert in honor of Regeneration's 25th Anniversary has been rescheduled. Keep an eye on this newsletter for more information about this event, which will take place next spring!

New Beginnings in Baltimore

Baltimore's New Beginnings program for men dealing with lust, Internet pornography, or other forms of sexually compulsive behaviors will begin its next session at the beginning of January! For over ten years, Christian men caught in the addictive cycles of sexual sin have been finding freedom together in this program. For more information, call 410-661-0284 (ext. 4).

Rose Marshall Undergoes Leg Surgery

Rose Marshall, who came on board as our Northern Virginia office manager at the beginning of 2004, left the staff in September to undergo leg surgery with unrestricted time to recover. Those of you who pray for the ministry through our E-mail prayer requests, may remember that Rose has had continued problems with her leg since an auto accident in August of last year. Thank you, Rose, for your service and refreshing presence while you were with us!

Archived Newsletters Available On-line

You can view archived versions of this or past newsletters at www.RegenerationMinistries.org.

Financial News

Many of you may already be aware of our new Board-sponsored initiative, "Project 25/25." We want to remind you to help if you can. Project 25/25 serves two important functions: First, after many years of postponing staff salaries in order to cover expenses during financially lean times, we are now raising a \$25,000 *reserve fund* specifically to ensure that our staff can continue to be paid, even during those seemingly inevitable times when donations decline for a season. Second, we're raising another \$25,000 to set the ministry on a firmer financial footing to cover expenses and to pay for some long-deferred equipment.

Project 25/25 is unique in that it is primarily future-focused. What you give today can reverberate in the ministry for years and years to come! Please prayerfully consider investing in the future of Regeneration with your generous gift today. ■

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