

## Choosing Imperfect

- Do you remember what it was like when you were young and you wanted to be picked for a team? I remember several times in my elementary and middle school days when our teacher would divide us up into teams for some kind of competition.
- Our teacher would select two team captains for kickball and each of those captains would then take turns choosing his or her teammates from the rest of us. I also had similar experiences for the class being divided up for math competitions. Regardless of a classmate's ability to contribute, each one wanted to be chosen early to have the best chance of being on a winning team.
- There were some kids who would be very aggressive yelling "Pick me, pick me" but most of us were quiet and very hopeful that we would be picked early and not last. In the end, none of us had any control over when we would be picked or by whom.
- I remember the feeling of longing that came over me as I watched others being chosen before me. But there was always a sense of relief and welcoming after I was chosen.
- I sense that God has a very similar feeling of longing to be chosen by each of us. He is quietly waiting in hope for each of us to realize how important he can be to us as we engage in all the other pursuits and distractions that we have available to fill up our lives.
- In typical fashion for God, he has turned everything upside down for us when it comes to sharing in his Kingdom. He has not allowed himself any control over whether we choose him or something else. He has given control of choosing over to each of us.
- Additionally, he is not asking us to make a choice to divide us into teams. He desires for all of us to choose him so that we may all be unified in him. However, he is allowing each person to choose for himself or herself whether or not to share life with him.
- But still, God is ever present in each person's life whether they know it or not. He is just waiting to be chosen. He is not being aggressive, but he meets us where we are, and he continuously and softly calls to each of us to choose him and come into his Kingdom.
- I am so happy to be among you all who have chosen God. While I have also chosen God, I have found that I have to keep choosing him over and over again in light of all the distractions and other pursuits I incorporate into my life. I believe this is true for everyone.
- This is another thing that God has turned upside down for us. When we were young, we had to long through several occasions of being chosen whenever a new competition came about. Now God has to long through being chosen again every time there is something new in our lives competing with him.
- But when I do choose him again, there is a tension that is released and a sense of feeling welcomed and loved. Maybe that reflects the positive emotions that God also must be experiencing every time one of his children choose him again.

- How is it that we have come to know God and choose him over and over again? We each have our individual stories to tell about that, but every one of our stories will speak to family, friends, acquaintances and maybe strangers who have played a part in leading us to God.
- For many people, this is a natural unfolding of their lives as they were educated about God and experienced his goodness from early childhood. For others like me, their families did not have a relationship with God that they could pass on, so friends, acquaintances, and strangers helped them come to know God.
- Everyone I have met who knows God chose him initially for the benefit they felt from having God in their lives. This was also the reason they continued choosing him again and again after becoming distracted from him.
- Losing God briefly and then choosing him again doesn't ever change for us because it is the inherent weakness of our humanity that causes us to lose touch with him. But our reason for returning to him eventually begins to change.
- After many cycles of losing then choosing him again, we begin to realize our motive for coming back to him is as much for God's sake as it is for our own sake. As our relationship gets more and more personal, we begin to empathize with God for the pain we cause him when we wander away.
- Being able to feel empathy for God is a very important aspect of our relationship with him. It is also very important for the missions we are called to by God. Our empathy leads to compassion, which is a strong sympathetic desire to bear suffering and alleviate distress.
- God emphasized this to me through a vivid dream in the early morning hours last Sunday. This dream stood out as different from most of my fleeting dreams because I was able to fly in this dream.
- While I have only had a few dreams in my life where I am flying, those dreams are always both exhilarating and somewhat frightening as I have a healthy respect for, if not an outright fear of heights.
- In this dream I was in a heavily forested swamp. There were many other people milling about on the dry land adjacent to this swampy forest. However, none of us were interacting with one another for any specific purpose, so I don't know why we were there.
- A young and pretty woman approached me. She had smooth olive colored skin, dark eyes, long frizzy hair, and full pink lips. I was immediately attracted to her and anticipated her approach with a sense of excitement. To put it politely, I felt an instinctive yearning for her.
- As she stopped in front of me, I could sense that she was upset and in distress in some way. I immediately felt a sense of shame for the thoughts that had initially come to my mind when I first saw her physical beauty.

- She began to communicate to me in broken speech and through gestures. While we could not communicate clearly, I understood that she was desperate to get home to her family; but she was afraid to travel through the swamp.
- She pointed down a long clear-cut channel through the forest that was filled with dark murky water. She indicated that she didn't want to swim down that channel for fear of the alligators that infested the waters.
- I felt so sorry for her. I could feel her longing for home and her fear of this place. I didn't know why she came to me, of all people, for help. I couldn't see how I could help her, and I didn't feel like I should given the lustful thoughts I had entertained as she first approached.
- I told God "I am not worthy to help her." But God replied saying that he wanted me to help her get home. He told me that my imperfections would not be a hindrance. Then God showed me how I had an ability to fly and that I would be able to carry her out of the swamp.
- As I hovered above the ground a few feet, I briefly entertained the fear of falling from a great height and a fear of falling into the alligator infested waters. But I dismissed those fears putting my full trust in God.
- I also dismissed my feelings of attraction to her, now seeing her only as a child of God in dire need of help. I was completely focused on my task of getting her home as I wrapped my arms around her and we lifted off the ground.
- We picked up speed as I flew down the watery corridor through the forest. Neither of us was scared, but we were excited by my ability to fly through the air and by the sense of freedom we felt as we left the swampy forest behind.
- As we sped down the waterway, we began to lift higher and higher. We were soon flying way above the trees. We continued to ascend higher, flying above all the land formations.
- Soon the land below looked like a large map. I was mystified as we continued to go even higher, and I could see the curvature of the earth as we flew up through the atmosphere approaching space.
- We never reached our destination. I flew so high that I flew right out of my dream. I gradually woke up. I just lay in bed recounting this fantastic dream. The imagery was amazing and the sense of flying was invigorating. I asked inwardly "How could that have been possible?" A cryptic answer came immediately: ***"Anything is possible when passion is joined with compassion."***
- I reflected on this dream over the next three days. Every day revealed a new message from this dream for me.
- On Sunday, the Gospel of Matthew recounted the Sermon on the Mount, which relayed how Jesus gave us the Beatitudes informing us of how we will know lasting happiness. Father Kelly summed up the essence of the Beatitudes in his homily stating that true happiness comes from being humble, holy, and simple.

- This seemed to echo what I experienced in my dream. I became humbled when I felt the shame of my thoughts and realized my imperfection. I felt the call to holiness when I accepted God's mission for me. And I saw and embraced the simple purpose of his task: to get this young woman home. All of these elements of my experience led to the feeling of an enlivening happiness.
- Later it dawned on me that our destination in the dream was not an earthly location where the girl lived, but an eternal home in God's Kingdom. That is why we didn't arrive there in the dream. It wasn't our time yet.
- On Monday, the Gospel recounted Jesus healing a very strong man possessed by many demons, collectively named Legion. I considered how Jesus must have dispelled a crippling fear for that possessed man and all the local towns people as well, allowing them to resume normal lives again.
- In my dream, Jesus enabled my ability to fly by dispelling my fears of falling and maybe being attacked by alligators. I then reflected on my past and realized the number of times Jesus dispelled my fears so that I could perform the ministries and the mission he has led me to.
- When I first desired to know God personally and to grow in our faith, I was afraid and embarrassed to lead prayer within a group of believers. He helped me overcome my fear and self consciousness and now I lead prayer publicly on a regular basis.
- When I first began attending adult faith formation classes, I was thankful for the class facilitators, but I thought to myself, "I could never do that." But he gradually eased my fears and I eventually became a facilitator leading classes for about 5 years.
- When I became fully aware of the beauty and the wonder of the Mass, I became somewhat disappointed that I wouldn't be able to participate as fully as I wanted to. I was afraid to sing out loud the many prayers, Psalms, and worship songs with the rest of the congregation. I was embarrassed by the sound of my singing voice.
- However, thanks to no small miracle aided by our Mother Mary, I got over my fear and now I sing robustly (and I am sure to the dismay of those people around me). I am now participating in every aspect of worship at Mass.
- When I first joined our Knights of Columbus Council, I would listen with interest at the end of our meetings to the Lecturer. But I said to myself, "I could never do that." I was afraid of putting myself out there and being judged by my brothers. But God showed me that was an unfounded fear, and I have now been in this role for over 3 years.
- This has been the pattern for every ministry that I have become involved with. My initial feelings of not being worthy or of being afraid are overcome by God's love and desire for me. Nothing that I have undertaken has killed me. But all of it has taught me what it means to die to self so that I can let God work through me.

- On Tuesday, we read in the Gospel how Jesus performed two life-giving miracles. He brought Jairus' daughter back to life, and he healed an ostracized woman afflicted with a hemorrhage for 12 years freeing her to return to the temple.
- Both of these miracles illustrate Jesus' compassion for these suffering people and his passion for making them and their community whole again. This Gospel reading brought to mind the mystifying answer to my question I posed upon waking from my dream.
- The miracle of flying in my dream is much like all the miracles that Jesus performs. He does these things because he has a deep compassion for those who suffer, especially those who suffer patiently. He also has a burning passion to make us all whole again, uniting us as one with himself and the Father.
- When he sees true faith in those who suffer and those who want to alleviate suffering, he sees a real opportunity for healing. This opens up a possibility for miracles to happen.
- While only God can perform miracles, this makes me wonder what more could he do through me if I open myself fully in trust to him always. I think this is a question for all of us.
- Our empathy for God keeps us coming back to him again and again. We choose to worship him. We choose to let him love us, and we choose to love him back.
- But do we fully allow him to choose us for whatever purpose he might desire? Do we hide behind our imperfections? Do we let fear control our availability to him? Do we fully trust that he can act through us?
- Our mission is not to get ourselves to Heaven. That is someone else's mission. Each of us has a mission to encourage others to fully know Jesus.
- As we know, there are many people in this world who are not initially open to choosing God because they do not know about him, or they only have a surface level understanding of him and do not know him in a personal sense.
- We allow God to reach these people through us by, first, realizing our empathy and compassion for our longing God waiting to be chosen. Then we surrender to him completely, allowing him to light in us a passion for leading others to choose him.
- So fear not, brothers. Let's leave here tonight with a desire to show others how to fly!

Peace Be With You,

Marc Barrett