

FEELING BADLY WHEN WE HAVE IT GOOD

By Jim Mathis

More than 20 years ago, the September 14, 1992 issue of *Forbes* magazine carried an article entitled, "Why Do We Feel So Bad When We Have It So Good?" I kept the issue because there has not been a time since then, or at any time before for that matter, when this has not been the case. For some reason we have a tendency, even at the best of times, to moan and groan about things being or becoming bad.

Part of the problem, it seems, is that politicians spend much of their time telling us how bad off we are, individually and as a society. They issue broad promises that they will make things better. That is, if they are elected. Both incumbent officials and those aspiring to public office assure us they want to "make our country great again," implying that at some unspecified time in the past, things were better.

But making us feel badly when things actually are good is not the exclusive domain of politics – or the media. Some people simply have a predisposition toward pessimism, a "glass half-empty" way of looking at life. Other people take a totally different perspective, leaning decisively toward optimism, wearing the proverbial rose-colored eyeglasses to view containers that are half-full. Philosophers, very adept at being able to support whichever perspective you prefer, assert that whether you think things are getting better or are convinced they are getting worse, you are correct. We always find what we are looking for.

Personally, I am one of those glass half-full types. Yes, we can find reasons to complain, but the many opportunities we have today are unprecedented. We have the world at our fingertips for the first time in history. As a result, it is easier than ever for creative, energetic, industrious people to start businesses.

But therein lies the secret: Being creative, energetic and industrious. We cannot wait for opportunities to suddenly appear on our doorsteps. We must seek them aggressively, and then pursue them with great determination. From a spiritual perspective, our faith and trust in God should give us even more reason for abounding optimism. The Bible assures us that we "*can do all things through Christ who strengthens us*" (Philippians 4:13), and also, "*my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:19).

So in one respect, it begins with our attitude and our outlook. The apostle Paul made reference to this when he wrote, "*Whatever a man sows, he will reap in return. The one who sows to please his flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; but the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life*" (Galatians 6:7-8).

As a professional photographer, my job is to find the best in people and look for beauty in everything. I have no trouble finding it. I have discovered that if you look for beauty and excellence in everything and everyone, it is easy to see. As business and professional people, we have the privilege – and the responsibility – to model this approach for our companies, our colleagues, and our customers.

When Jesus said, "*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden*" (Matthew 5:14), He was calling each of His followers to shine the light of His love, grace and hope, even at times when things truly do seem dark. We should be ready at all times to demonstrate that even when things seem to be taking a negative turn, the "worst of times" can be the best of times as we follow Jesus.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Do you sometimes find yourself feeling badly, even when it seems you should be feeling good about the circumstances you are experiencing? If so, what factors cause you to fall into negative thinking?
2. The pervasive messages we hear about how bad things have become in our society and around the world – in your view, are these largely a result of relentless, negatively oriented media reporting and political posturing? Or is there more to it than that? Explain your answer.
3. Are you typically a glass half-empty or glass half-full type of person? Why do you think this might be?
4. From a spiritual perspective, *should* faith and confidence in God make a difference in how we approach life, whether in a broad, general sense, or in the specific tasks and responsibilities we carry out each day? In your experience, *does* this make a difference for you?

NOTE: If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Psalm 37:1-7, 118:24; Proverbs 3:5-6; Luke 6:38; Philippians 4:8,14-18