

Uncertainty and Happiness: The two headed quarter approach to life!

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“Judge not that you be not judged.” Jesus.

An avid duck hunter was in the market for a new bird dog. His search ended when he found a dog that could actually walk on water to retrieve a duck. Shocked by his find, he was sure none of his friends would ever believe him. He decided to try to break the news to a friend of his, a pessimist by nature, and invited him to hunt with him and his new dog. They went into the wetlands near the city and as they waited on dry land, a flock of ducks flew by. They fired, and a duck fell. The dog responded and jumped into the water. The dog, however, did not sink but instead walked across the water to retrieve the bird, never getting more than his paws wet. This continued all day long; each time a duck fell, the dog walked across the surface of the water to retrieve it. The pessimist watched very carefully, saw everything, but did not say a single word. On the drive home the hunter asked his friend, "Did you notice anything unusual about my new dog?" "I sure did," responded the pessimist. "Your dog can't swim!"

If we think pessimistically, that uncertainty is a bad thing, and then when it comes along we will not be happy. However, if we think optimistically that uncertainty is a good thing, we will be happy when we experience it, because we will think that we are on the right track!

Never in my experience have we been facing so much uncertainty as at present. What with the war in Ukraine and all the wildfires in Canada there is a ton of uncertainty. The world as someone spoke to me recently has gone weird. The things we used to be able to count on aren't there any more including our major institutions such as the church. We used to be able, no matter what, to be able to count on the earth and its natural systems being stable. No more!

Then there are the usual suspects in our personal lives: being overworked or overwhelmed, a divorce, loss of job, a failed pregnancy, loss of a loved one to cancer or accident, a failed adoption, an autistic child, violence, theft rape or incest, to name just a few. With economic uncertainty these things seem even harder to bear.

So, what does uncertainty have to do with happiness or unhappiness? **For most of us it is the uncertainty caused by all of these things that makes us unhappy.** Before all the uncertainty came along, we likely thought our little world was good when we had our health care or that career job. But now when the title is lost and the job gone, or when someone asks us now, what we do for

a living, we stammer. When we lose a beloved husband, wife or fiancée and someone asks how we are getting along, we don't want to complain, but if we are honest we may well say "Not so good". We don't have the answers to save face any more and honesty is just too much to handle in public, and so we fall silent, wishing to say something but afraid to, except to our most intimate friends.

I was in California when Arnold Schwarzenegger and Maria split up. Maria said that she had difficulty talking about what she would be doing afterwards and found herself feeling awkward. She would answer questions by saying "I am in transition."

What I want to put to us all today is that this problem comes to us precisely because we are in the habit of asking ourselves, either consciously or subconsciously, especially when facing a crisis: **Is this good or bad for me?** And based on our answer, we decide to have certain feelings about it- if it is a good thing; we can be excited and happy. If it is a bad thing, we can get angry, resentful, depressed or even tongue-tied.

Let's be clear about this. **When something happens, it is not necessarily good or bad in itself –we make it so by our judgment of it... And how we judge something determines our future feelings and actions.**

Barry Neil Kaufman says: "If the stock market drops, we get unhappy...if the stock market goes up, we worry about when to sell and how to hold on to our gains."

Is there a better way than all the seesawing back and forth, all the feelings of nervous excitement or panic that we experience when we answer the question "Is this good or bad for me?" and we conclude that it is bad? Do we have to judge everything as either good or bad?

Sure, we want to protect our family and loved ones. We want to make decisions that are good so we need to be judging all the time, right?

I think not.

There is a huge difference in **evaluating** a situation and **assessing it** objectively, rather than the immediate judgment that something is bad for us or negative.

Barry Neil Kaufman points the way and it is counterintuitive at first. It is the very opposite of what the media does when it reports the news. But it is also the very opposite of being a victim and unhappy.

He says, “**Begin by judging everything as good. Then grow into letting go of judgments, completely.** The stock market crashes and we lose our equity. How wonderful! What an opportunity not to rely on our investments. Our spouse decides to leave us. Perfect! I trust that this will be the best for her the children and me. Our employer fires us without notice. How interesting! This can be a chance to reevaluate who I am and what I really want. Our child blames us for making him/her unhappy. Wow! What a fascinating idea. That statement challenges us to question who is responsible for our personal happiness and that search can only enrich me.”

He says that this will appear comical at first but its impact is amazing and immediate. He says, “**Look for what is good and we will discover it.** Just pointing ourselves in a new direction will give us new ears and new eyes. **If we let go of judgments of people and events as bad, we can usher in times of miracles and wonder.**”

Jesus made a statement along the very same lines. He said, “Judge not that you be not judged”. In other words, stop the continuous judgment process; judging and condemning others as bad only negatively rebounds on us. So let’s stop it! Jesus was immensely positive and trusting of God and carefree. He was also a miracle worker of incredible dimensions.

So, is this business of **starting with judging all things as good** the way out of a dilemma as old as mankind? Is it that significant?

I think so! Remember what St. Paul said: All things work together for good, to those who love God and are called by his purpose.

But where does uncertainty come in?

If we start by looking for the good, we will discover it in the midst of the uncertainty and we will be on the right track to handling whatever challenge or opportunity comes along. We will ride the wave to shore, instead of sinking in despair. We will surf on opportunities and turn around our own negative thinking and that of others. And we will be happier for it.

Craig Shergold was a remarkable 9-year-old. He was funny, and exceptionally positive. He loved to make people laugh. He had abundant energy, which he brought to soccer. But it was his soccer coach who noticed something wrong

with Craig. He was slowing up. As the weeks passed the normally exuberant Craig became more subdued. At Christmas Craig didn't even want to ride his new bicycle. Craig was soon diagnosed with a tumor just above the brain stem. Surgery followed with Craig's mother on her knees in the hospital chapel. Her prayers seemed unanswered because the report came back that the surgeon had not been able to get the entire tumor and it was an aggressive brain cancer. Craig's tragic death seemed inevitable.

Craig received many cards from well wishers and his doctor said, "You should try for the Guinness Book of records for the most cards received." Craig took the project on with enthusiasm, determined to look at his problem positively. A national paper heard of Craig fighting for his life and published a story on him. Other papers picked it up as well as television and Craig became 'Our kid Courage' to The British Press.

His medical condition worsened however. His legs became weaker, his vision blurred. Still Craig did not lose his positive attitude or his humor. The fact that so many people cared gave Craig hope. Instead of giving in to the sadness he felt, Craig fought against it with jokes and trying to see his illness positively. He said "Mom I am going to think about the cards. Every time I do it makes me feel better!" His parents told the press that he was out to win the Guinness Book of Records for most cards received.

Craig's public responded. Three days later a truck pulled up outside their home full of cards. The outpouring led to more publicity. He received cards from Margaret Thatcher, George Bush, Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, Michael Jackson and Sylvester Stallone.

Craig started to have hope that he would beat the record of one million and two hundred and sixty five. The Post Office in London England gave him his own selection box to handle all the cards. He was the first person in English history to be treated like a city.

In November one year after the diagnosis Craig surpassed the record and everyone at the soccer club sang 'For he's a jolly good fellow.'

In the States a billionaire John Kluge heard of Craig's story and was urged to send Craig a card. But Kluge was a man who used the wisdom of uncertainty in his life along with an incredibly positive attitude. Surely, he thought to himself, I can do more than send a card. I wonder if everything has been done for this boy medically? Was there some treatment he might arrange to pay for?

He talked to a close neurosurgeon friend Dr Neal Kassell. He asked him to contact Craig's family. Kluge had this deep intuition that something might have been overlooked...

The doctor was unable to reach the family by phone and so he wrote to them. But by this time the cards had reached to over 6 million! The doctor's letter was lost in the stacks of cards.

Craig's condition worsened. The latest scans showed the tumor growing again. Craig's mother, not knowing how important this decision was, in order to take her mind off things, decided one day to open some of Craig's get-well cards. Her eyes fell on a letter from Dr. Kassell which was air expressed. She opened it and began to cry when she read it. "I can't believe this!" she said.

Craig's mom, although hopeful, called Dr.Kassell and gave him the gloomy prognosis. The doctor said that he could promise nothing but that his Med Center had been recently given a gamma knife, which put radiation directly into tumors. "It might be a possible treatment," he said.

But after reviewing the scans, his hopes fell. The tumor was too large, in a difficult place and too deep for gamma radiation.

So Kassell called the billionaire Kruge and told him the bad news.

Kruge who had trained himself to look for the good in difficult uncertainties and situations said simply to the doctor, "I want you to think about it some more."

The surgeon Kassell, who was also a father, asked himself whether he would operate if it was his own child? The answer was yes, he would risk everything and so he called Craig's family and said "I might be able to remove most of the tumor surgically and get the rest with the gamma knife. But the risks are great..."

His parents were in agony because of the risks and so they decided to let Craig himself make the decision. Craig said simply "Mum, no pain, no gain."

On the day of his surgery, he said to his mum "I am going to be alright; you will see."

During surgery the doctor discovered that the tumor was encapsulated by a membrane- a good sign. The tumor no longer appeared to be malignant. Had it changed its character? Could that possibly be? The more the surgeon cut the more he became convinced that Craig might beat the odds. In the midst of the

surgery some three hours in, the resident physician concerned that Kassell was too deep into the brain said “Don’t go in there!”

Kassell paused. Everything had been a gamble from the start. He knew he had to gamble again. He went deeper into the brain.

The surgery took over 5 hours. He never used the gamma knife. He had got everything except a piece of dead scar tissue.

He told the parents the good news and Craig’s mum said to Craig “The cancer is gone- all gone!!”

Craig’s recovery was remarkable. There were no cancer cells in the tumor tissue!!

Dr Kassell informed Kluge, and one day Kluge came to the hospital to see Craig. Craig’s mother grasped his hand and said, “You are our angel.”

Kluge brought a small gift and beaming at Craig he gave him a great secret- the one at the heart of this sermon. He gave him a two-headed quarter. ‘This way, he said grinning, “you’ll never lose.”

When we decide to only judge things as good, we take the two headed quarter approach to life. We move into win-win no matter what. This way of looking at life gives us a persistence to look at the crisis for the opportunities in it. Would money solve it? Would a great surgeon solve it? Would a gamma knife solve it?

If we are looking for the good, we may find it even in the heart of the tragedy itself. That is the essence of the Christian message of Easter- that even after death there is resurrection, hope and joy. That is what founded the Christian church. That hope of life after life, that embrace of Hope, is the major contribution of Christianity to world religion. At its heart it is good news and wherever we are, in whatever context, it is the promise that if we search for good news, we will find it both in this life with all its challenges and in the life to come.

One last word. Jesus said: “Happy are those who know their need of God.”

In the doubt, in the uncertainty, in the fear, those who know their need of God **reach out for help through prayer**. Jesus said Go into your room and shut the door. Get alone with God. These folks seek God asking for a win-win, betting on the odds that a two headed quarter approach to life has far more possibilities in it than a heads and tails approach. Believing that we can win with God no

matter what uncertainties and odds we face, is an attitude of faith; it can change our personal lives. It can transform the world because it believes that the dice are loaded for the essential goodness of the world.

Dr Martin Luther King Jnr. had a favorite phrase that was his two-headed quarter approach to justice. Four days before his death, preaching in the National Cathedral in what would be his final sermon he used it for the last time. He said, "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice."

If we let go of judgments of people and events as bad, we can go with the moral arc of the universe and begin to usher in a time of miracles, wonder and happiness!

May it be so for you today!

Amen.