

Follow up material for the “Laughing and Weeping with Others” class

Adopted from Dr. James Dobson ([Emotions: Can You Trust Them](#), page 97)

Question: I have a great deal of resentment and anger toward my father, for what he did to me and my mother when I was a child. I have struggled with these deep feelings for years; I don't want to hurt him, but I can't forget the pain he caused me and the rest of our family. How can I come to terms with this problem?

After laying the matter before God and asking for His healing touch, I would suggest that you examine the perspective in which you see your Dad.

Martha has a father who has never revealed any depth of love for her. Though she is now grown and has two children of her own, she continues to hope that he will suddenly become what he has never been. This expectation causes Martha repeated disappointment and frustration. When her infant son failed to survive his first week of life, her insensitive father didn't even come to the funeral. He still shows little interest in Martha or her family – a fact which has caused deep wounds and scars through the years.

After receiving a letter from Martha in which she mentioned her father's latest insult (he refused to come to her son's wedding), I sent her a few reactions and suggestions. She said she obtained so much help from what I had written that she shared it with three others experiencing similar frustrations from people who have “failed” them.

“Martha, I am more convinced every day that a great portion of our adult effort is invested in the quest for that which was unreachable in childhood. The more painful the early void, the more we are motivated to fill it later in life. Your dad never met the needs that a father should satisfy in his little girl, and I think you are still hoping he will miraculously become what he has never been. Therefore, he constantly disappoints you – hurts you – rejects you. I think you will be less vulnerable to pain when you accept the fact that he cannot, nor will he ever, provide the love and empathy and interest that he should. It is not easy to insulate yourself in this way. I'm still working to plug a few vacuums from my own tender years. But it hurts less to expect nothing than to hope in vain.”

“I would guess that your dad's own childhood experiences account for his emotional peculiarities, and can perhaps be viewed as his own unique handicap. If he were blind, you would love him despite his lack of vision. In a sense, he is emotionally 'blind.' He is unable to see your needs. He is unaware of the hurt behind the unpleasant incidents and disagreements – the funeral of your baby, the disinterest in your life, and now your son's wedding. His handicap makes it impossible for him to perceive your feelings and anticipation. If you can accept your father as a man with a permanent handicap – one which was probably caused when he was vulnerable – you will shield yourself from the ice pick of rejection.”

This letter was of help to Martha, but not because it improved her distressing circumstances. Her father is no more thoughtful and demonstrative today than he was in years past. It is Martha's perspective of him that has been changed. She now sees him as a victim of cruel forces in his own childhood which nicked and scarred his young psyche and caused him to insulate his emotions against the outside world. Since receiving this letter, Martha has learned that her father was subjected to some extremely traumatic circumstances during his childhood. (Among other things, his aunt told him unsympathetically that his father had died suddenly and then she reprimanded him severely for crying.) Martha's father is, as I suspected, a man with a handicap.

Questions to ponder for the September 16 class:

- How does/did Martha learn to laugh and weep with her father?
- How does her father overcome his “handicap” to learn to laugh and weep with his daughter?
- In my life, in what situations am I like Martha? In what situations might I be like her father?