

Pastor's Column

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Yes or No – Which Will It Be?

John has had a bad day at the office and heads home angry and depressed.

Meanwhile, Sarah, his wife, and their daughter and son, Melissa and Mark, have had a great day at the park and can't wait to get home to tell him.

When the door opens and joy meets anger, things can go either way. It can be yes or it can be no!

What if John's anger and hurt are so severe that he does not want to hear any good news? His family's happiness is an intrusion on his bad mood. His own life has been disturbed, so he will disturb other lives—partly because his misery wants company, partly because he wants to get even, even if it is with the wrong people.

The joyful environment is destroyed; fear and hostility take its place. And the family has learned something about joy and anger, about yes and no, that it may never forget.

It has learned that an angry person is to be feared, that joy is not as important as rage, that power matters more than happiness.

But the whole incident could go in a different direction. What if their joy is so contagious and irresistible that John's anger fades as soon as he sees the joy of his wife and children?

He wants to pout but he is sensitive to his family and open to its influence, so he surrenders to its goodness.

The family learns things from this encounter that it might never forget. It learns that joy is stronger than anger, that anger can be cushioned by contentment, that exuberance is not out of order and that gloom must justify itself.

The family may reflect on the fact that the father is important but his mood is not the determining factor, that other members of the family have enormous resources to create the family environment.

Salvation happens in ordinary things or it doesn't happen at all. But, either way, it has extraordinary effects.

If the angry mood prevails, the children may carry it into their play and be aggressive; people phoning the house will be answered rudely; a planned visit to a lonely relative will be called off because no one now feels like it. There is no salvation in this situation.

But if joy prevails, then there is an atmosphere where generosity flourishes and hostilities are dispelled. People will favor mercy and forgiveness over vengeance. Salvation comes to that house.

But it does not stop there. Families take their joy or anger into their schools, their workplaces, their neighborhoods.

That is why some school atmospheres are relaxed while others are rigid, why offices are cooperative or competitive, why neighborhoods are friendly or dangerous.

No human action is insignificant. All of them contain seeds of salvation or destruction.

Each of us works out our happiness and salvation in everyday ways. The universal atmosphere of good or evil is an accumulation of our ordinary deeds, of our "yes's" and "no's."

F. Mike