



## The Call to Ache

Financially strained, emotionally spent, physically exhausted, and poised to lead Sunday worship, I'm in a valley as I write this column. The last few months of my life have been what is commonly referred to as "crazy." I'm sure you've been there, too. It might be the death of a family member, a job loss, that one person in your ministry who keeps you on your knees, the dreaded words "I don't love you anymore," or just the regular old rollercoaster ride of existence. We find ourselves wondering when it will all stop so that we can really begin living, but therein lies a fallacy about life.

In her new book *The Beautiful Ache: Finding the God Who Satisfies When Life Does Not*, Leigh McLeroy writes, "The call of Christ is nothing less than a call to adventure. Jesus gave no quiet invitation to a life of ease or sofa-sitting or safe observation. He issued a daring challenge to live a life with no boundaries and no guarantees. Well...perhaps one guarantee: There will be trouble."

How often we forget this part! We long for the pain to go away and for the full glory of God to be manifested in us, but the catch is that one cannot happen without the other. I was so moved by McLeroy's perspective that I sought her out to ask her a few questions.

**E. Rios:** What is the "beautiful ache"?

**L. McLeroy:** It is a universal kind of longing that every human being experiences, that nagging "heart hurt" that leaves you wanting more, hoping for more. C.S. Lewis said, "If I find in myself a desire which no earthly experience can satisfy, the most logical explanation is that I was made for another world." Something inside every one of us just knows that there's more, and we ache for it.

**ER:** Tell us about the mystery of God's kingdom being "now and not yet."

**LM:** I love the idea of a kingdom that has come, and is coming, and will come. What a rich, wild idea that is! The kingdom of God came with Jesus' incarnation in time and space. But this world is still broken and battered by other powers and princes and by our own sin, so it's "partial" in a sense. And one day the King will return, right all wrongs, defeat all foes, judge in righteousness, and reign forever, ushering in a new heaven and a new earth. That is an incredible mystery. I learn to live with it by understanding that Jesus' entry into this world in human flesh forever changed the balance of things...but hasn't yet redeemed and resolved everything. I know to expect injustice and evil in the "now" because the kingdom is in the process of becoming all that it will be. And I live with hope because, one day, he will wipe away every tear, and every tongue will call him "Lord." In a sense, everything is resolved. But in another sense, it is *being* resolved. That's a special kind of tension only God's people can appreciate and understand. He has trusted us with this.

**ER:** What are some ways we try to distract ourselves from the "ache"?

**LM:** Most of us have developed our own "anesthesia of choice" when it comes to dulling the ache. A pile of decorating magazines might do the trick for me, or a mindless movie, or even what we would call "service" or "ministry." Doing good can become a kind of "fix" that keeps you from looking at your life and listening to God in the places that are uncomfortable or even downright painful.

**ER:** You talk about the "ache of uncertainty." What do you say to women in leadership, women who feel this ache quite often?

**LM:** I would encourage a woman

who experiences the ache of uncertainty, first of all, to get comfortable with it! The world will try to define our role for us, but we as individuals must be obedient to God's call on our life, to the commands of his Word, and to the leading of his Spirit. There will still be some uncertainty—and we have to let it instruct us, draw us closer to the Christ we follow, and cause us to listen to godly counsel in all things. Carolyn Custis James wrote a wonderful book called *When Life and Beliefs Collide* (Zondervan, 2002) that wisely and rationally calls women to be theologians, secure and confident in their understanding of and relationship with God. I urge women who are feeling the uncertainty of their role in regards to leadership to read it.

**ER:** You mention that some people, in an effort to avoid disappointment, have lost the "ache of expecting," which can happen both in ministry and in life in general. What do you suggest we do about it?

**LM:** I do not for a second believe that the abundant life Jesus came to give is a life of low expectations. Charles Spurgeon once said, "The longer the blessing is in coming, the richer it will be when it arrives. That which has come by many a desperate tug and many an awful struggle is a full weighted and precious blessing. The thing that costs us the most prayer will be worth the most." To live this way you have to trust the Storyteller and stick with the story. It may not unfold the way you think it should, but the ending is sure to fully satisfy. Disappointment is not fatal. Failure is not forever. And faith is not exercised (or God glorified) when we refuse to be disappointed by simply playing it safe. ■

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