

It's OK to Not Be OK

You are grabbing your obligatory cup of coffee after church service, equipped with your hellos and fake smile plastered on your face. Person after person seem to ask the same stale, empty question, "How ya doing?" Oh, some may put a little twist on it to make it their own, "How's the world treating you?" or they turn the obvious into a statement/question, "Sun is shining and it sure is a beautiful day?" You flash your equipped smile (because you would never dare come to church without it) and say something along the lines of, "I'm great!" or "Absolutely wonderful day." or my favorite response "I'm ok." The person whom asked the question nods and moves on. It is so automatic we do not even process this interaction anymore. We do not process it as the person asking the question nor as the responder. This is one of the interactions in life we have become so unaware of that if we were to become real about it, I am curious if we would know how to respond.

Take the above scenario and let's get real. Now I am a true believer in discernment in regards to whom we share our personal information. I do not believe we should share our issues with everyone we meet nor do I believe that everyone needs to hear about every single personal ailment we are dealing with at the current moment or every ailment our dear Aunt Maggie is encountering. With that being said, I do believe that as the body of Christ, we are to function as the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31) So as the body of Christ when one part is ailing the entire body feels the ailment. The body is not fully functioning. When asked, "How ya doing?" as in the above example and you are struggling with the loss of a loved one respond, "It's a tough day for me, the loss of my mother is really bothering me today." Plastering on your fake smile and saying everything is fine, when in fact it is not fine, does not allow for your healing. Nor does it help the body of Christ.

As the asker of the question, **how** do you respond? We like to think we have the empathy and compassion to respond correctly. We would like to think that we always make people felt heard and valued when they share the unexpected answer to the "How are you?" question. But do we really? When someone is vulnerable and answers the question of "How are you?" and you don't get the expected response it can be shocking. It usually throws us off balance because it is unexpected. It is definitely not the normal response. I must admit, as a therapist, there have been many times I have not known what to say in response to someone's answer. I have found that at times the best response is a genuine, "I'm sorry. What can I do?" If you have experienced the loss of your mother, then sharing that experience with the other person is sometimes helpful. This empathetic response shows the responder that they are not alone in their grief. In their logical mind they know they are not alone but at the current moment it is their heart that is hurting. They may feel very alone in a crowded room. Possibly sharing a tip that helped you during your grieving process would be helpful. I recommend to always ask before sharing, "Would it be ok if I shared with you something that helped me when I was grieving the loss of my mother on days that were especially difficult?" Be prepared for the responder to say there is nothing you can do for them now. This is a common response, and again, this is ok.

There are a never-ending stream of Christian clichés that people seem to pull out during times like this. You know the ones: God will never give you more than you can handle. If God brings you to it He'll bring you through it. Everything happens for a reason. I would like to caution against the use of these during the times that we get unexpected responses from the "How are you?" question. All the clichés and false hopes we easily fall back on to explain suffering do not come from the Bible nor do they come

from God. We fall back on them as a default because it is natural, it is what we have always said and honestly most of us are just uncomfortable with other people's expression of emotion. Remember you do not have to have the magic answer. Mostly, people need to know that someone else cares and that someone truly heard their response. All our emotions come from God – from happy to sad and everyplace in between.

When it comes to *not being OK*, God has shown us many examples:

- Adam and Eve were not o.k. wandering in the wilderness after the fall
- The Israelites were not o.k. at the hands of the Romans
- Jesus lost his close friend Lazarus and he was not ok, "Jesus wept" John 11:35
- At the time, it was not ok when Jesus died the most gruesome death
- The early church faced persecution and they spent a lot time not ok

Be encouraged that when you are not ok, God is ok. You are not weak, you are not "less than" because you are in a time of grief, sorrow or loss. Be vulnerable and take off the mask when asked, "How are you?" Be honest and respond accordingly. If you are truly great then say, "Great!" But if you are having a tough day, remember: It is OK to not be OK.

Are you in a season that is overwhelming and feels like it is too much to bear? Help is available. If you do not know where to find help, please contact Pastor Josh, Deacon Shannon or Jacquie Atkins. Your request will be held in confidence.

If you would like to talk to a counselor, there are many helpful and qualified professionals at Wellspring Renewal Center. Wellspring Renewal Center offers counseling and therapy for people with mood disorders, anxiety, PTSD, family and marital conflicts, school and relationship problems, issues related to addictive behaviors and more. Call (501) 265-0046 or find more about their services at <http://wellspringrenewalcenter.com/>

Reflection from Jacquie Atkins