

Excerpt from “Three Little Decisions, *how to move Beyond the Bruises of Life*”

By Janet K. Marks

Chapter 8 - Choose Your Own Outlook

*The eyes may be the windows to the soul,
But the expression on your face records each of your fleeting emotions.*

—Susan Krauss Whitbourne

As I stood in the long, twisting line at the San Francisco passport office; it was obvious there would be a lengthy wait ahead. The start of a headache knocked around behind my eyes, I sighed as I again checked the clock on the wall. My allotted wait-in-line-time dwindled fast; clearly, I would not complete today’s To-Do-List. The crease between my eyebrows.

I could do nothing but endure, bide my time, and observe those nearby. One woman caught my attention as she valiantly kept two toddlers occupied. Like a windmill her arms turned and lifted and protected as they asked for more apple juice, explored under the chairs, and cried over a ‘boo-boo’. She caught the youngest one numerous times as clearly, he was just learning to walk and gently called back the other from wandering too far. The tender smile and pleasant countenance on the face of this busy, young mother astounded me. She seemed surprisingly serene despite the hectic situation—not what anyone would expect.

There is no question what my face showed, aggravation due to a long wait and disruption of my schedule. It made the woman with the two small kids even

more intriguing; could she be as serene as her face showed? What secret did she hold to remain composed despite the long wait with busy youngsters in a crowded government office? Anyone watching would have understood if she were harried or stern with those little kids, but instead she presented a calm, sweet spirit. This woman remains unknown to me, but she left quite an impression.

When I sense a frown stretching across my face, the composure of the woman in the passport office still comes to mind. When my eyebrows draw together in annoyance; I attempt like her, to soften my features, lift my mouth into an easy smile and focus on some pleasant thing.

It's amazing how tiny adjustments alter our emotions and bring about a change in perspective. Science tells us when the *smile* muscles in our face contract, there's a positive loop back to the brain, reinforcing feelings of joy. Smiles are not only cheerful on the outside but are also expressions our brain uses to tell us we are happy. Happy! They also have a social impact with far-reaching consequences, as we smile at others, it may lift their hearts and spirits as well. Who knows the good we may accomplish as we smile at those we see?

Anytime the day takes a downward turn, consider the woman from the passport office, try to imitate her positive spirit.

- Find gratitude, even on tough days—there is always something for which we can be grateful.
- Offer a smile to anyone, no matter how small.

- Smooth away those furrows between the eyebrows.
- Encourage someone who seems entangled in a hard day. Perhaps we are the nudge needed to help mitigate a meltdown.
- Let a smile remind our brain we have much about which to be happy.

Nelson Mandela in his book, *Long Walk to Freedom*, wrote, “I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death”. What a great approach to search for the good in dark places! During the days of Apartheid, Mr. Mandela languished for twenty-five years in a South African prison until his release and ultimately rose to the position of President of his country.

We have little control over the difficult circumstances taking aim at us like a tornado roaring across the plains of Kansas. The tornado might descend in the shape of a short-tempered boss, health challenges, disappointing news, or insensitive people, to name just a few. And like Nelson Mandela, we recognize difficulties will land in our lap, but key to survival is our *perspective* about those difficulties. The only thing we control in any unwelcome challenge is our response to said challenge.

I Thessalonians 5:16 reminds us, “Be joyful, always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances.” The idea of finding joy *always* doesn't mean every circumstance we face is easy

or pleasant, but instead we attempt to find the joy, (the good), in the situation. As we pray and seek gain God's view of any situation, we'll be better equipped to find gratitude.

In Dallas, I directed a rehabilitation center where we treated a patient who'd recently had her right foot amputated. When asked how she was getting along, she responded with a shining smile, "Still kickin', just not as high!" What a joyful spirit! In her circumstance, would we have such a pleasant demeanor? She offers a fabulous of example of finding the good in a tough situation.

Turn that frown upside down!

Three Little Decisions

(Make three *little* decisions today to facilitate progress in some area).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

For deeper reflection

Can you smile right now? Could there be some good in today's shadows? Release the breath you're holding and soften the scowl between your eyebrows. Allow joyful thoughts to flow through your mind. Picture one thing for which you feel grateful. If you're aware of someone in a tough life-circumstance who maintains a great attitude, ask what lesson might you glean from them?

Your outlook, your choice.

Keep your face pointed to the sun. And smile, it'll tell your brain you are happy!

