

“Dear Cheryl Strayed” Or “A Good Man is Hard (But Not Impossible) to Find”

“Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead...and He shouldn’t have done it. He shown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it’s nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn’t, then it’s nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can...”

--Flannery O’Connor in *The Complete Stories*

Cheryl, your memoir *Wild* was a gift to me as I make my way down the “HLT,” the Human Life Trail. I gained wonder about the trail and wisdom about life.

You write about all the themes that we Christians are interested in like fathers, mothers, grief, romantic relationships, touch, personal failure, prayer, the unseen world, and most importantly, faith. You also explore the theme of redemption/forgiveness versus healing. In other words, you ask throughout the book whether we humans need redemption from someone outside ourselves or just healing that we extend to ourselves?

Wild, p.259: I was “feeling a mounting sense of something that wasn’t quite sorrow, wasn’t quite regret, and wasn’t quite longing, but was a mix of them all.”

Wild, p.134: “I was a terrible believer in things, but I was also a terrible nonbeliever in things. I was as searching as I was skeptical. I didn’t know where to put my faith, or if there was such a place, or even precisely what the word faith meant, in all of its complexity. Everything seemed to be possibly potent and possibly fake.”

These stories from Matthew’s memoir are our gift to you, as you make your way along the Human Life Trail. All three ask one basic question: Is Jesus a good man? Is he worth reaching out to?

The Outer Ring Story Begins

Matthew 9:18 While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and kneel before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.”

Wild, p.23: “It was the same when I tried to pray. I prayed fervently, rabidly, to God, any god, to a god I could not identify or find. I cursed my mother, who’d not given me any religious education. Resentful of her own repressive Catholic upbringing, she’d avoided church altogether in her adult life, and now she was dying and I didn’t even have God.”

Matthew 9:19 And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples.

The Inner Ring Story Breaks In

Matthew 9:20-21 And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.”

Matthew 9:22 Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter: YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL” [ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε].” And instantly the woman was made well.

The Outer Ring Story Continues

Matthew 9:23 And when Jesus came to the ruler’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion,

Wild, p.209: “The universe, I’d learned, was never, ever kidding. It would take whatever it wanted and it would never give it back.”

Matthew 9:24a he said, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.”

Matthew 9:24 ... And they laughed at him.”

Matthew 9:25 But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.

Matthew 9:26 And the report of this went through all that district.

The Overlapping Story

Wild, p.259: “I didn’t want to...torment myself with all the ways I’d wronged [my ex-husband]. What if I forgave myself? I thought. What if I forgave myself even though I’d done something I shouldn’t have? What if I was a liar and a cheat and there was no excuse for what I’d done other than because it was what I wanted and needed to do? What if I was sorry, but if I could go back in time I wouldn’t do anything differently than I had done?... What if I was never redeemed? What if I already was?”

Wild, p. 143: “...perhaps being amidst the undesecrated beauty of the wilderness meant that I too could be undesecrated, regardless of what I’d lost or what had been taken from me, regardless of the regrettable things I’d done to others or myself or the regrettable things that had been done to me.”

Luke 7:37 ... she...brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Luke 7:39 ... “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.”

Luke 7:48-50 And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ... “YOUR FAITH HAS SAVED YOU [ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε]; go in peace.”

For those with conviction about Jesus (faith), who reach out when he walks by, they receive forgiveness for the wrongs they’ve done and healing for the wrongs done to them.

Isaiah 53:4-5 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Cheryl, please meet Kathy Auer, who will share about her experience with Jesus.

Questions for families, groups or individuals

Just to refresh you, Darren’s message is an appreciation letter to Cheryl Strayed, the author of the bestselling memoir *Wild*, which he enjoyed immensely. Cheryl recounts her summer-long journey on the Pacific Crest Trail in 1995 to heal from the loss of both her mother and her marriage. Darren explored her unique experiences, heartache and life questions. In the book, she wrestles with whether she needs redemption from outside herself, or whether self-forgiveness is sufficient. This question drives her hike. Darren shared three stories in *Matthew* about Jesus that he hoped would shed light for Cheryl on her deep inner longings.

1. What’s the longest hike you’ve ever taken? (Cheryl, no one will best you on this one!)
2. Review both the quotes from *Wild* and the three stories from *Matthew* that reveal the power and approachableness of Jesus. What do you think Jesus would say to Cheryl?
3. Look at the key line from Jesus’ lips that’s found both in the Outer Ring Story and The Overlapping Story. *Matthew* is obviously making a point that our faith means everything to Jesus. How do you respond?
4. Interestingly, Jesus speaks these exact words to the man Bartimaeus in the last nanoseconds of his blindness in Mark 10:52. “And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL [ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε]. And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.” Notice what Bartimaeus does with his newly granted sight?
5. Matt. 9:22 takes us inside the mind of the hemorrhaging woman in (“If I only touch his garment, I will be made well”). The Greek verb tense suggests that she didn’t say it once, but repeatedly. What thoughts or statements — if any — about Jesus do you say over and over again? Why is this?
6. Turn the notes over and savor Micayla’s painting. Notice the allusion to Michelangelo. Notice also that Jesus reaches down towards her as she reaches up to be healed. Notice also the visual references to the hemorrhaging woman whom Jesus cures in “The Overlapping Story” recorded in Luke 7. Notice also the “sleeping” eyes of the ruler’s daughter that are about to pop open at the strong touch of Jesus. Spend time meditating on this striking art piece. Talk to God about what he says to you through it.
7. Here’s a question for Cheryl: Cheryl, you wrote bluntly that your mom’s death taught you that “God had no intention of making things happen or not, of saving my mother’s life. God was no granter of wishes.” Does seeing God through the lens of Jesus alter your perspective? How do you respond to this Jesus that you meet in *Matthew*’s memoir? Does he “save” God for you?
8. Find a place to hang up Micayla’s painting. Let it remind you to believe and reach, whatever threats you’re facing.

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