

Mom's Bitter/Sweet Tattoo *by Kelly McIntosh*

This past fall, my college-age daughter called me in the afternoon. As I answered the phone I thought, “We haven’t really connected in awhile, maybe she needs money?” As we moved past, “How’s life?” I could tell she was not her usual happy self. She shared how, at times, she was still sad over the ending of a dear friendship/relationship earlier this year. She was “concerned” about why this “mourning” was taking so long. We had a great time of sharing how God understands our hurt and how He promises to walk with us, or just sit with us at the pit (Psalm 40:1-3), while we process all our feelings and hurts. He will never rush us and His plan for us is abundance (Psalm 66:12) even in the hurt/loss.

She said she felt like she had baggage; the baggage of trusting someone with her love and now not sure how to trust again; plus the added baggage of growing-up in a divorced home. And I heard (felt) God say, “You ALL have got baggage, but some of you never open it...take it out...talk about it with Me!” No wonder we need counseling when we grow up! I told her I was so proud of her for opening it up, taking it out and talking about it.

As this special time came to a close, she said, “Mom, I wanna get a tattoo with you! I want to get ‘matching’ elephants, because you love to collect elephants (a Texas A&M University thing – ‘thang’ in a Texas accent) and I will always remember YOU when I see it.” Can’t I just give her an 8x10 glossy of me? She continued, “I watched you these years (through a devastating divorce) and elephants are strong, just like you are strong.” It seemed as if her “trust” in me said, “Mom I saw how you walked with God and cried with God and trusted God. And I don’t think you are perfect, but I know Who is!”

I had given her my approval for a tattoo, so I knew this was not a “plea” for a tattoo. I still had my doubts. What would a tattoo, an elephant tattoo, look like on a 50-year-old body? She assured me that it would be much better for me, because my “skin had already done a lot of stretching”. Was that supposed to make me feel better?

And as we said goodbye, I felt so overwhelmed with God’s love for me, by providing me with this moment, this glimpse into Psalm 40:3 coming full circle. I thought, “I’m getting a tattoo, aren’t I?”

I shared the next day with my mentor friend (who does NOT have a tattoo,

but had no trouble moving me along in that direction). We talked about the elephant figurine she had given me twelve years ago. It sits on my desk at work, a reminder of God’s faithfulness through a very sad, dark season of my life, of a Bible story...not the one with elephants and an ark, but the one of God’s faithfulness to His people (Exodus 15:22-27). God led them out of Egypt. Now they were in the wilderness where the water wasn’t all that great, in fact it was bitter and they (we?) began to complain! “Hey Moses! We do NOT like this! We wanna go back! Egypt was better than this! We are mad/unhappy/frustrated about how our life has turned out! This is NOT what we planned!”. Moses says to God, (maybe under his breath), “Lord, I can so do life with you, but these people are really getting on my nerves.”) “God, Help!”

And God does! He shows him a piece of wood! AND Moses, because of his trust in God, his daily faith walk with the God Who brought them out of Egypt (Leviticus 26:13), looks at the piece of wood and says, “Seriously God! I said we need help with the water and You show me a piece of wood? Did I NOT make myself clear?” And Moses takes the wood and throws it into the water and it changes from bitter to sweet.

And God longs to do the same for us in all the complicated, frustrating, bitter things. When we cry out to Him for help, then trust in His answers, we can watch HIM turn bitter into better, stale into sweet, hurt into healing and a mess into a miracle.

Oh and one more thang, later that week, the Exodus story, about the bitter waters of Marah, was in the Bible study I was doing on the book of James and the following day, that story was in the book I was reading, *The Saving Life of Christ*. Over Thanksgiving I got a tattoo with my daughter...and with God.

P.S. Where is my tattoo? It is in a spot on my back where only God and I can see it, (oh, and also my daughter when she wants to be reminded of my love for her and God’s love for us!). He lifted me up out of the pit...and put a new song in my heart. Psalm 40:2-3

P.P.S. And my daughter’s tattoo? She chose a large elephant holding a piece of wood and a smaller elephant holding onto the larger elephant. Many will see and trust in the Lord. Psalm 40:3

