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Have you ever noticed how sometimes people can respond to the same situation in different ways? What one person sees as stressful, for example, another may view as no big deal, as was the case when

three women die and all three reach Heaven at the same time. There they meet St. Peter. He tells them he has some other important business to transact and asks them to wait outside. Finally he returns and calls the first woman into his office. He apologizes for making her wait so long.

“Oh, I don't mind at all,” the woman says. “I'm so thrilled just to be here in Heaven.” St. Peter is delighted by her attitude. “Well, then, if you can just answer one question for me, we can finish processing your papers. Now tell me, how do you spell *God?*” The woman spells it for him, and then she goes on into the celestial realm.

St. Peter calls in the next woman and also apologizes to her for making her wait. “It will be worth it, I'm sure,” she answers. “I am willing to

wait one thousand years if necessary in order to see God face to face.” St. Peter is very pleased. He insists, though, on asking her one more question for the Records. “Tell me, dear lady, how do you spell *God?*” The woman spells it perfectly, and then she enters the Pearly Gates.

Finally, St. Peter calls in the third woman. He also apologizes to her, but she refuses to accept his apology. “It was quite rude,” she says angrily. “All my life on earth I had to wait in lines. Wait at the checkout counter, wait at the bus stop, wait for the kids to get home from school, wait for my coffee break. And now you expect me to wait to get into Heaven? Well, I just won't stand for it!” St. Peter said, “I'm so sorry. If you'll just answer one more question for our records, then you can go on in. Tell me, how do you spell *Czechoslovakia?*”<sup>1</sup>

Although we don't ask you to spell a word in order to enter the church, each person may have a different response to the same events, even in the church. For example, when we gather for worship,

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we hear the same music; while some enjoy the mixture of contemporary and traditional music, others may not hear anything they like.

Or another example: Some experience worship with thoughtful and quiet responses, while others may respond with enthusiastic and joyful emotion. It's not a matter of what's right or wrong, but we each respond to God's presence in different ways. God has created us as unique individuals, and while some of us quietly ponder deep thoughts, others may jump up dancing.

The trouble occurs, however, when we begin to judge or criticize how others respond to God, as was the case in the story in 2 Samuel when King David entered town in a procession with what's often called the Ark of the Covenant, or the chest of God. This box-like structure was a symbol of God's presence, something that moved with them in the days when they were nomadic and traveled through the desert. They carried this box place to place, even into battle, to remind them of God's presence.

Prior to this event, the ark had been stolen by their enemies, recaptured by the owners, and then had rested in a small town for about 20 years. As the people became less nomadic and more settled into towns and communities, they did less traveling around. The ark remained more stationary than it had in its earlier years. But David, who had just become the new king, was having this symbol moved to the city of Jerusalem. Through this act, David wanted to make the statement that God blessed his leadership in this new capitol city. This location would become the central place for his leadership, and he wanted everyone to know that God was going to be with him in this new capitol.

When David entered town in a parade behind the Ark of the Covenant, many people had gathered to join in the celebration. There was music from a multitude of instruments: cymbals, tambourines, harps, castanets; people were dancing in joyful celebration. Even David was out in the street dancing, dressed in the royal garment of a fancy robe.

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When David arrived home, however, his wife was waiting for him. Michal had seen his joyful entry into town, and she was not thrilled with his exuberant display. The narrator explains that she felt his scene of dancing in a robe in the presence of all the young women was inappropriate. Michal may have also been concerned that David was gloating about his leadership, for she was the former king's daughter. Her father and brother had died in battle, and she may have still been in mourning, not yet ready to celebrate her husband's new status as the king that replaced her father.

But for whatever reason, she could not get into the spirit of celebration, which I think most of us might be able to identify with. Maybe you can recall a time when everyone around you was celebrating, but you just were not in the mood.

Or maybe you've been in one of those situations where you cannot figure out *why* everyone is celebrating, as was the case many years ago when I took Jonathan to a hockey game. We were sitting in the uppermost row, peering down at the ice rink as

though we were birds sitting on the ledge of a building. Soon a fight broke out on the ice, and everyone around us stood up cheering and yelling. Jonathan and I remained seated, unsure what was happening. He looked up at me and asked, "Why is everyone cheering, Daddy?"

I replied, "I think there is a fight going on."

He asked, "Why would everyone cheer if people are fighting?" I didn't have a good answer then, and even today, many years later, I'm still not quite sure how to answer that question.

We each respond to situations in different ways, but maybe we can strive to respond with intentional ways that bring hope to the world, rather than fighting, starting with the simple act of offering a smile in a difficult situation. Even a smile could ripple around the world to bring a sense of hope and joy, as Yoko Ono, the widow of John Lennon, is trying to do. Back in the 1960s she envisioned a film that would include the smiling face of every person in the world. Now, fifty years later, an app on the iPhone allows her vision to become a closer

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reality. From your phone or a computer, you can take a picture of yourself smiling. The website contains a map of the world, with smiling faces peering from the screen from around the globe. She says that smiling “is the simplest thing to make yourself healthy and make others feel good.”<sup>2</sup>

But if you want to go a step further, you might try dancing to bring joy to the world, as did a famous rabbi who accepted an invitation from a small village to come visit and answer questions about the Torah. The long-awaited day finally came. The excited villagers ushered the wise man into a large room, where they had all gathered.

Rather than inviting the people to ask questions, the rabbi walked slowly and deliberately around the room, silently looking each villager in the eye as he softly hummed a

religious tune. So engaging was the rabbi’s gentle manner that, before they knew it, the people found themselves humming his tune. Slowly, the rabbi started to dance. Soon the people found themselves dancing with him. The movements grew wilder and more frenzied, and the people of the village soon lost themselves in the dance. Together, they moved as one.

When the dancing finally ended, the rabbi took one more walk around the room, looking deeply into the eyes of each person in turn and said, “I trust I have answered all your questions.”<sup>3</sup>

On those days when you have unanswerable questions, try smiling or dancing. And even on those days when you don’t feel like dancing, remember that God continues to smile upon on you, offering the dance of life to you each day.

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<sup>3</sup> Homiletics Online.

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<sup>1</sup> Traditional Humor

<sup>2</sup> Natasha Baker, “Smile, you’re on Yoko Ono’s new app,” June 25, 2012, [www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/25/us-app-smile-idUSBRE85O11F20120625](http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/25/us-app-smile-idUSBRE85O11F20120625)