

The Power of Loyalty

The eleven year old boy was sitting on the porch outside of his house as his father walked up the sidewalk to the porch. He looked down at his son and saw that his face and arms were bruised and battered.

“You are looking a bit worse for wear. Care to tell me what happened?”

“Nothing happened. It is just another day.”

“What are you hiding under your shirt?”

“Nothing, Dad.”

“Boy don’t lie to me. Now I asked what you are hiding under your shirt.”

The boy pulled out a swatch of blue fabric and showed it to his father. The father grimaced and sat down next to the boy.

“I knew this day was coming although I was hoping it wouldn’t come.”

The boy grimaced. “And just what day is that, Dad?”

“The day we need to discuss loyalty.”

“What do you know about loyalty?”

“Son, I know loyalty isn’t black and white which is what your friends would like you to believe. I assume you have decided that you are loyal to your gang. What is the name of your gang?”

“Their name is Money Inc and I am loyal to them. No one messes with us. I am down with them and they are down with me. No one will mess with me anymore.”

The father smiled. “Youth makes it easy to see things in black and white. Let me ask you some questions. First why did they beat on you if they are so good to you?”

“You wouldn’t understand.”

“You seem to think I was born an old man and wasn’t young. It may surprise you but I had a crew at your age.”

“You were in a crew when you were my age?”

“Yeah but I didn’t let them beat on me. We watched each other’s backs because we liked each other. We were all poor and going through the same things. We supported each other out of love and

not fear. We didn't have the violence and money involved in our game. We still fought but we didn't shoot people dead like gangs do today."

"Why didn't you?"

"Where we lived there was no money. No one sold drugs for money because no one had the money to buy drugs. We were loyal to each other because we shared experiences and not out of defense. We didn't have what you kids call work. It doesn't mean that there weren't drug dealers, it means we weren't drug dealers."

"Where is your crew now?"

"Some are dead. Some are in Jail. Some just moved on."

"Are you still loyal to them?"

"A couple yes but mostly no."

"Why not?"

"I learned the truth about loyalty. In my humble opinion you should only apply loyalty to things that aren't variable. You see variables change. If you are loyal to variables then the things you are loyal to can change without your control. People are variable. Because people are variable, so are things comprised of people. Things like gangs, countries and religious organization."

"But you are a religious man. Why is it ok for you to be loyal to your church and wrong for me to be loyal to Murder Inc?"

The father chuckled.

"I am not loyal to my church. My church is comprised of people and people change over time. For me I went directly to the bible. My religion's manifesto if you will. I decided that I am loyal to what it says a man should be. If my church is led astray from the ideals I am loyal to, I walk away and find a church that is comprised of people who are loyal to the same things I am. Those things that I am loyal to aren't variable. You however have declared loyalty to people and a flag that can change."

The boy looked at the flag that the father had on his lawn. He pointed at the flag and smiled.

"What about your flag? You are advertising support for the government and that is comprised of people. What is up with that?"

The father smiled back.

"It is true, they are the biggest and toughest gang. They let me in without a beat down and they have a squad of guys with guns that I can call if I ever need them. Right now I feel they are fair. They do great works around the world. They pave the streets and make sure there are schools. They give

opportunity to many people and they don't kill indiscriminately. I am loyal to the idea of good schools, sewers and roads. I am loyal to opportunity. If they change then so will the flag I fly. That flag is just a symbol that currently I feel the government has chosen to be loyal to things I am loyal to."

"You said you used to be loyal to people but you aren't anymore. Why?"

"My old crew started out of camaraderie but as time passed our differences became undeniable. For example there was Cricket. I loved Cricket for many years. When there was trouble, he was first on seen. When it came to the crew, Cricket would fight ten on one if he had to. I admired him."

"He sounds like the type of guy I want to be."

"You say that now but eventually his other qualities started to show. As we got older he got more aggressive. I think it was partially our fault. We always applauded his aggressiveness. One day came and he beat the shit out of his mom. We did nothing because he was part of our crew. Time passed and he raped a woman. Still we did nothing because he was part of our crew and we were loyal. More time passed and he kidnapped a kid. The police got into it and they killed him. Do you know what I did?"

"What?"

"I thanked God. No longer did I have to be loyal to someone I couldn't stand. He was my friend and he became evil. He didn't start out that way but he sure ended that way. This is how loyalty to a person can make you an accomplice without you doing anything wrong."

"What about the flag though. There are evil people in the country. Aren't you expressing loyalty to evil with that flag?"

"I am sure there are evil people but as I said I am loyal to the ideas that the flag represents and not the people. However there are tricks even there. Remember those schools I am so thankful for, well those schools taught me about history. In history we find a great deal of examples of the twisting of loyalties by governments. There were many good Nazi's. Picture yourself as a baker. You make bread and don't do anything else. A group makes your neighborhood nice and encourages you to make bread. They protect you and are even kind to you. Where there was only poverty, now there is prosperity. You keep making bread. Suddenly you find out that these people, who were good to you, are killing many innocent people. Are you responsible for their actions or not? You were loyal to people and a flag that made your environment better. This is how loyalty to a flag can make you evil without you doing anything wrong. All you did was bake bread."

"I always see your religious friends. You can't claim there is no loyalty there?"

"Religion is the most dangerous of all loyalties. There are examples all through history. There were the crusades. The Spanish inquisition was a time where religious loyalties were abused. Religion

has been used to justify slavery and murder. Many wars were justified by religions. Honestly if you join the wrong church, synagogue, or religious order then your loyalty can be used to manipulate you. Loyalty can and often is used as a form of control.”

“Are you loyal to anything? You seem to be saying I should be loyal to nothing.”

“As I said I am loyal to a bunch of things. I am loyal to respect, love, kindness, helpfulness, compassion, and other things. These things don’t change. What is helpful yesterday, is helpful tomorrow. In fact I think a better question is what are you disloyal to? What crosses a line that you find intolerable? Things like being mean, hateful, murderous, predatory, and other things. When these lines are crossed it is beneficial to spot them to determine your course of action going forward. It might be better to walk alone then with those who habitually act with actions that deserve disloyalty.”

“I don’t think it is as complicated as you make it Dad?”

“No son, it is more complicated than that. There is one other thing that makes loyalty even more convoluted. I call it the aberration. People aren’t perfect. Every time someone crosses the line by committing an action I have dubbed a reason for disloyalty, I have to ask myself a question. Was this act an aberration or was this how the person is going to act going forward? If they are going to continue with these actions, I feel it is best to cut them loose. However if you are loyal to the person you have no choice.”

“So you are saying I shouldn’t be loyal to Money Inc.”

“That is part of growing up. You have to decide what you are loyal to. I can’t tell you what to do. I can only share my observations and pray you make the right choices.