



reACT: Is the Choice Yours?

An Experiment in Dance & Video

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Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SByn6AJS_FE&feature=youtu.be

Abstract

reACT: Is the Choice Yours, is a multidisciplinary, redemptive arts project that uses the arts of contemporary ballet, modern dance and video as tools to ask the question: Do we, as humans, have the capability of choosing to react with mercy, rather than harsh judgment, to life's most difficult realities? And, if we do have this capability, how does choosing mercy actually re-write our histories as individuals and communities? Although we cannot change past events or trying present events, can choosing mercy actually cause painful life realities to be woven into something different altogether? Can trials actually be turned on their heads so that they become life-giving tools? And, if they can, how does this phenomenon impact the way we live our daily lives? As the United States continues to experience increased violence and hatred through mass public shootings, racism, as well as working to pick up the pieces following numerous natural disasters, I believe that these questions are imperative ones for our time.

This video and complementing paper explore answers to these questions through the arts and theology, and include research from the fields of physics and psychology that examines the physiology of emotion, such as that tied to either judgment or mercy.

Mercy: The Power to Re-Write Histories?

As humans, we've all "messed up" at some point. Whether our failures were on a small or large scale is no matter. To receive mercy in response to our failures is not only a gift, but it is a miracle that actually has the power to re-write our histories, and, in doing so, re-writes the histories of those impacted by our lives. Why is re-writing our histories, which are often seemingly broken beyond repair, important? Because God longs for humanity to experience the freedom it was intended for – body, soul and spirit. Giving and receiving mercy in response to our many and varied failures poises us and others for success. In contrast with mercy, judgment brings chains. Judgment, unless it is God's righteous judgment, lacks the ability to see in all directions. Judgment, apart from Christ's righteous judgment, will never fulfill the requirements of justice – eternal justice that is transcendent of time and space. Only love has such power. And love, through Jesus, accomplished just this -- so that we can experience true freedom in our present realities. Mercy renews our vision so that we can see clearly. When we embrace Mercy, we embrace the seed of freedom, and we choose freedom for the generations to come. Embracing mercy allows not only us, but also others around us, the space to be who we and they were truly created to be.

With this in mind, **reACT: Is the Choice Yours?** uses redemptive dance to spark a conversation about the power of mercy in our lives. It is the hope that this project will inspire conversation that is reflective of how we view mercy in our own lives, as well as space to review our reactions to the injustices we experience on a daily basis. The movement processes through the themes of mercy and judgment. Do we as individuals have the capability of choosing mercy in our own spheres of influence: family and personal relationships, work environments, community involvements, church communities? If we do have this capability, where does it come from? How does mercy pave the way for us to experience life to the fullest? Mercy promotes a life-giving mentality, while judgment promotes a right vs. wrong mentality. Nobody can know what is fully good apart from God. But, with Jesus' life flowing through us, as believers, we have the opportunity to receive life where there once was death. As we continually receive life, we have the opportunity to be life-giving to those around us. As Christians, we are conduits of the very life of Christ, as described in John 7:38: He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" Receiving mercy from God allows us to experience healing at the innermost level, in our spirits and souls (1 Thessalonians 5:23), allowing us to function as whole vessels through which Jesus' life-giving waters flow. Through Christ's life in and through us, captives are freed, bonds are broken, broken hearts are healed, beauty rises from the ashes, hope replaces hopelessness, and light overcomes the darkness. We become the free creatures we were so lovingly created to be.

Definitions (All Definitions Taken from Merriam-Webster):

Mercy – Mercy is defined as compassion or forbearance 1) shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one's power; also: lenient or compassionate treatment; 2) A blessing that is an act of divine

favor or compassion; 3) Compassionate treatment of those in distress. It is important to note that mercy is a noun. Mercy is a kind attitude or ‘state of being’ offered to another. It describes the attitude we might take in response to any set of unfortunate or difficult circumstances, or people or group of people. It is also important to note that mercy differs from forgiveness. While forgiveness is also a noun, it implies an action taken toward another person or group of people. Taking this a step further, to forgive carries out the action of forgiveness, and is the outpouring of a decision to release resentment of or claim to requital, or to cease to feel resentment against. Often, mercy precedes forgiveness. Understanding the distinction between mercy and forgiveness is an important part of understanding the motive behind our reactions to people and events. We often choose either mercy or judgment before we decide to either forgive or to hold a grudge.

Judgment - Judgment is defined as the process of forming an opinion or evaluation by discerning and comparing; or, an opinion or an estimate so formed. Judgment is also defined as the capacity for judgment, or the exercise of this capacity. It may also be defined as a formal utterance of an authoritative opinion, or an opinion so pronounced. Another offered definition is a formal decision given by a court; an obligation (such as a debt) created by decree of the court: a certificate of evidencing such as a decree. Judgment may also be defined as the final judging of humankind by God; i.e., sinners awaiting judgment; or a divine sentence or decision; specifically: a calamity held to be sent by God. Finally, judgment may be defined as a proposition stating something believed or asserted.

Note: It is important to note that we as humans use judgment every day in our lives for the simplest of things. For example, I may look outside, see the snow on the ground, and decide to wear warm clothes for the day. This is a simple judgment call. Or, I may need to make a judgment call in a work situation, such as how to best spend budget dollars for a particular project. For purposes of this project, I am using the term judgment in an un-redeemed way. That is, the kind of judgment that flows from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, rather than from the tree of life (Genesis 2 and 3). Although on the surface, both may look similar, their roots are shockingly different. The roots of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is death; whereas, the roots of the tree of life is life. The first is rooted in self-knowledge and the self as the source of life. The problem is that the self is not, in fact, God, who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and able to sustain life. The roots of the second tree are God, in whom all things hold together. The redeemed self recognizes that God is his or her source of life, and that there is a keen dependence upon God for life in the spirit, soul and body. A simple illustration of this truth can be found in fool’s gold. While both may look sparkly and valuable on the outside, only true gold has value. This difference, especially the way the difference impacts the global church, is something that I would like to further explore in future research. Judging another human’s spirit by what we can only see on the outside, can be extremely harmful, and may actually place the person in an identity that is completely different than the one Christ intended for him or her. Such action has a profound impact not only on individual lives, but also on entire communities.

For Reflection: Verses & Questions

Verses for Reflection

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer (emphasis added). Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Note: some translations use the word mind in place of heart.

Questions for Reflection

Questions that might guide a post-video discussion include:

- What thoughts came to mind as you watched the dance?
- Have you ever experienced mercy in your life? Judgment? What was the difference?
- Was there anything in particular that made you comfortable or uncomfortable?
- Do we really have the ability to choose mercy?
- What motivates our actions in relation to ourselves, others and our community? Is it the idea that we are supposed to be “good” people?
- Is “good” the same as life?

Holistic Freedom: Choosing Mercy, the Physiology of Emotion, and Creative Life Force

Choosing mercy over judgment has a profound effect on all aspects of the human being: spiritual, mental, and physical. The decision to embrace mercy is one that brings freedom, starting with the individual. In addition to the arts and theology, research from other fields, including physics and psychology, also supports the idea that choosing mercy has numerous positive benefits.

Holding onto negative emotions like judgment, anger and unforgiveness not only ties us to negative past events, but it can actually cause physical illness, inhibiting our ability to live freely and to positively impact the world as we were created to do. According to physics, energetic vibration is essential to all living beings. Before I go any further, it is of utmost importance to note that God is the source of this life-giving energy – He is life itself. Any and all true healing must begin with Him as the source. Acts 17:28 says, “For in Him we live, move and have our being.” It is from this vantage point that I examine current research on the energy of emotions, such as that generated by choosing mercy or by choosing judgment.

In physics, energy is defined as the capacity for doing work, whether potential, kinetic, thermal, electrical, chemical, nuclear, or other various forms. Energy is essential to our work in the world. The energies that we carry in our body can either work for us and those around us, or they can work against us and those around us. Energy, including the energy in the human body, can be measured in electric charge. For example, an EKG or an ECG machine measures the electrical activity of the heartbeat. Further, Dr. Konstantin Korotkov, a Russian physicist and leading scientist internationally renowned for his research on the human energy field, developed a tool called the Electrophotonic Camera to measure and study the human energy field. More about his work can be found [here](#). The energy that fuels life, as well as the energies in and about the human body, are real and tangible.

One of the most powerful ways in which the human body interacts with energy can be seen in the interaction between the body and the energy of emotion. In her blog on energy and emotion, Sharon Shores writes, “Emotions are “energy in motion... Do you know the root meaning of the words emotion and motion are the same! *Exmovere* or *emovere* (emotion) means to move out? And the meaning of *Movere*, (motion) from the Latin, means to move? Emotions=Energy in Motion (Shores)”. And, all emotions carry a particular energy, whether negative or positive. When negative emotions, or negative energies in motion, become trapped in certain parts of the body, negative physical effects may occur. This occurs as emotions also release a respective energy in the human body. According to this [article](#), “When you feel an emotion, what you’re really sensing is the vibration of a particular energy. Each emotion has its own vibratory signature, and when intense emotions are felt, they can become trapped in your body... and trapped emotional energy will usually result in physical dysfunction (Mercola)”. How does embracing mercy tie in to reducing physical dysfunction caused by negative emotions? Embracing mercy opens up a pathway for the healing of these negative emotions. This pathway begins with our thoughts, then it involves our choices, and our emotions follow. Embarking upon this journey has significant positive benefits for our individual health and for those around us.

Another illustration of the powerful effects of both positive and negative emotions (energy in motion) can be drawn from [Dr. Masaru Emoto’s famous water crystals experiment](#). In his experiments with water, Dr. Masaru Emoto photographed frozen water under a microscope. During his experiments, he prayed, spoke positive words, played uplifting music, or spoke negative, angry words and played angry music, photographing the water crystals that formed as he did so. In the positive scenarios, the water crystals that formed were beautiful and symmetrical, no two alike. Conversely, the negative scenarios produced disfigured crystals. Emoto described the crystals that formed in the positive scenarios as beautiful (Emoto). If releasing life-giving energy through speaking positive words or playing beautiful music

has the ability to impact the formation of a water crystal in such a profound way, how much more could the freeing and life-giving energy that is released by choosing mercy impact our lives for the better?

What's more, choosing mercy has a "ripple effect" that goes beyond the individual. When individuals experience freedom, they have a monumental opportunity to embrace a re-written history and to contribute to a re-written communal history. [Research by Dawson Church](#) shows that a simple, heart-felt intention can actually be passed on for three generations through cellular DNA (Liu). When an individual experiences an event, whether negative or positive, the memory of the emotion associated with that event gets stored in cell DNA. This stored emotion holds the potential to shorten the DNA's telomeres. Shortened telomeres are associated with cellular aging and the potential for disease. Sharon Shores points out that individuals are probably not aware of emotions trapped in cell DNA from three generations prior. She writes, "What emotions, or energy in motion, were potentially passed on to me that I am not even consciously aware of? Kind of makes your brain to tilt, doesn't it? What if there are emotions in your body that you are not even aware of that are causing-lack, depression, frustration, anxiety –what do you do?" (Shores). Choosing mercy, then, first for ourselves and then extending to others, acts as a catalyst for much-needed transformation, bringing freedom from perhaps generations of bondage.

This powerful catalyst is rooted in relationship with Christ. In fact, Max Planck, a physicist regarded as the Father of Quantum Theory, asserted the pre-eminence of divine intelligence: "As a man who has devoted his whole life to the, most clear-headed science, to the study of matter, I can tell you as a result of my research about atoms, this much: there is no matter as such. All matter, originates and exists only by virtue of a force which, brings the particle of an atom to vibration and holds this most minute solar system of the atom together. We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind is the matrix of all matter (Nelson 100). Scripture reaffirms this truth: "For in him we live, move and have our being.¹ As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'" (Acts 17:28).

If a creative life force, or a creative energy is at the core of all living things, then the answer for how to restore that life to the fullness it was meant for must lie with that creator. In her book, *Flourish*, redemptive artist and social activist Dr. Maria Pompea writes,

"The inner wounds of individuals, communities and entire nations are deeply ingrained and will never be easily healed. Believing so would dismiss the history, struggles and impassioned stories of... all of us. But the intersection of faith-integrated art, beauty and justice affirm and validate heaven's redemptive truths, thereby causing such a partnership to be uniquely capable of addressing key individual and cultural challenges in imaginative, life-giving ways. Bold and paradoxical, these elements, working together as a fortified whole, are powerful catalysts for rescue, healing and restoration, mirroring the fierce and extravagant beauty of the Master Artist" (Pompea 41).

In order to be whole, what has been created must be re-created. What initiates this re-creation? God's invitation and our choice. We have the choice to react to life's injustices and dark, difficult realities in such a way that invites in someone bigger than ourselves, someone who is capable of handling the

¹ The quoted poets are the Cretan philosopher Epimenides, and the Cilician Stoic philosopher Aratus.

“stuff” that we cannot; someone who not only gives us mercy, but invites us to be conduits of mercy, true justice and re-creation. We have the choice to partake in the creative life-force that emptied Christ’s tomb, and in so doing, change both the trajectory of our history and that of our communities, as our intentions and actions bear impact on those around us. In making this choice, we release freedom in our spirits and catalyze the healing of our souls through the life of Jesus working in and through us. This healing is spiritual, emotional, and physical, and it impacts all of eternity.

And so I ask: *When you reACT, is the choice yours?*

Future Considerations

When researching for this project, I uncovered many interesting avenues that work on the intersection of redemptive dance, or dance in therapy, and mental, emotional and physical health may take. The health of any community begins with the health of its individuals; thus, I think that this project only addresses the tip of the iceberg. For example, this [article](#) describes how the way in which our brain reacts to positive or negative events may contribute to conditions like mental illness or health. Findings from this study include:

“Among the neurons that project to the nucleus accumbens, most were excited by the rewarding stimulus and did not respond to the aversive one. Among neurons that project to the central amygdala, most were excited by the aversive cue but not the rewarding cue. Among neurons that project to the ventral hippocampus, the neurons appeared to be more balanced between responding to the positive and negative cues.”

If different regions of the brain are responsible for processing both negative and positive emotions, and we know that dance and movement have the ability to influence neural wiring, this begs the following questions: Does redemptive dance have the ability to help re-wire the brain in such a way that individuals are more apt to react to life in a positive way? Or that they are more apt to develop resiliency to life’s many challenges? This question is one that I would also like to explore in further research.

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