

# *God of My Salvation*

God's promise is not freedom from the trials in the race;  
But power to transcend them,  
through His sufficient grace.  
Not rest instead of labor, but in the labor rest;  
Not calm instead of tempest,  
but calm when sore distressed.

Not light instead of darkness, not joy instead of grief;  
But brightness in the midnight and in the woe, relief.  
Not gain instead of losses, not ease instead of pain;  
But balm upon the anguish and losses bringing gain.

Not strength instead of weakness,  
not smile instead of tears;  
Not peace instead of conflict, not song instead of fears;  
But weakness filled with power;  
and tears with radiance spread;  
And peace amid the battle, and song ere fears are fled.

Based on Habakkuk 3:17-19  
—Used with permission of the author, a widower



# Dear Readers



Loneliness is something that everyone experiences at one time or another in life. Some experience it in a deeper way than others. In Psalm 68:4-6 we read, “Sing to God, sing praises to His name; Lift up a song for Him who rides through the deserts, Whose name

is the LORD, and exult before Him. A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, is God in His holy habitation. God makes a home for the lonely...”

I thought it very interesting that before the verse about God making a home for the lonely, He speaks about fatherless and widows. God knows the loneliness that these particular people feel. In Lamentations 1:1 we read, “How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow is she...” It is lonely being without your spouse. Yet God cares for the lonely person. When God created man, the first thing that He saw that wasn’t good was that man was alone.

I heard this story told by Chuck Swindoll: “I was reading the want ads one day and came across this ad—‘I will listen to you talk for 30 minutes without comment for \$5.00.’” Swindoll went on to say that the person got over 20 calls a day. Why? Because the pain of loneliness can be so sharp that some are willing to try anything for a half hour of companionship.

## Memorial Gift Idea

The publishers of CHERA Fellowship desire to provide this magazine free to all widows and widowers for the first year they request it. To continue doing this we need people to share our vision and assist this ministry. Donations, which can be given in memory of your loved one if you desire, are tax deductible. Please see the back cover for details.

After the death of her husband, Queen Victoria said, “There is no one left to call me Victoria.” Even though she was a queen, she knew what it meant to be lonely.

So today if you are going through some hard times emotionally—wanting to change circumstances that have come into your life; experiencing the loneliness of having someone die—remember that the Lord God is with you and He will NEVER leave you. He is the only One that we can count on to say He will never leave and actually do it. God is faithful. Lean on Him today. Enjoy His companionship as King David did: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me” (Psalm 23:4).

—Miriam Lofquist, Editor

**T**o every toiling, heavy-laden sinner, Jesus says, “Come to me and rest.” But there are many toiling, heavy-laden believers too. For them this same invitation is meant. Note well the words of Jesus if you are heavy-laden with your service, and do not mistake it. It is not, “Go, labor on,” as perhaps you imagine. On the contrary, it is stop, turn back, “Come to me and rest.” Never, never did Christ send a heavy laden one to work; never, never did He send a hungry one, a weary one, a sick or sorrowing one away on any service. For such the Bible only says, “Come, come, come.”

—James Hudson Taylor



# For Widowers



Men are fixers. They like to tackle problems with brawn and brain and persist until they reach a satisfying conclusion. My dad, a mail carrier, never took a car to a mechanic or a body shop. He fixed my fender-benders! himself. He even built our house

from scratch without blueprints. But when Mother died, after their 50 years of marriage, Dad faced something he could not fix.

Taking a walk with him one day he told me, “I feel like God has betrayed me. I’m six years older than Mary was and never expected her to go first. What will I do without Mary?”

Although he could not “fix” Mother’s death, he did learn to fix his own meals and go on living alone for nine more years.

Many godly men in Scripture went through times of disillusionment, doubt, and what we today call depression. Unfixable circumstances left them with unanswered questions.

One such man, John the Baptizer, heard God’s voice declaring Jesus to be His beloved Son. Yet when John was arrested, imprisoned, and accused of being demon-possessed, doubt took over. Warren W. Wiersbe says, “When

our vision dims, victories get forgotten and vigor fades; that’s when we need to discern what voice we are listening to.” John wanted Jesus’ voice on the matter and sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the Coming One or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3).

Jesus did not satisfy him with a direct yes and no. John needed to draw his own conclusions, so Jesus said John should listen and look. Listen to the words Jesus taught and look at the works Jesus did.

Jesus is the lover of our souls, not the fixer of our circumstances. He allows inscrutable and confusing experiences so we will run to Him with our problems and walk with Him whether He gives answers or not.

Isn’t it amazing that men, as far as we know, wrote the psalms? Men who expressed the gamut of emotions, who explained their struggles to God, and who continually affirmed their trust in Him. In this issue, written mainly for widowers, our authors have done that as well. They are learning not to listen to their own voice but to God’s. You will receive direction and solace from them because they are walking the same turbulent path you are on. If you feel broken by events you cannot fix, let what they share help to comfort, inform, and encourage you

—Marcia Hornok, Managing Editor

## Interview with J. C. McKinney

Mr. J. C. McKinney, of Candler, NC, is a truck driver for FedEx Freight. He has been in the trucking business for 32 years and loves it. The day this affable man shared his story with me by phone, he had just gotten back from a trip to Nashville.

### **Tell me about your wife.**

Pam died when she was 39; I was almost 42. She

was diagnosed in 1995 with an aneurysm above the brain stem. Before surgery she told the nurses, “Look, if there is anything you need—lungs, heart, kidney, or anything like that, you know, it’s yours.”

They couldn’t believe she was talking like that. But I think she knew she was going to die. Her organs were donated to six recipients.

I had my own business and didn’t have health insur-



ance. I ended up paying \$42,000 to the hospital out of my own pocket. The people in Winston-Salem were very gracious to me. The doctor who operated on her didn't charge for his services.

### **Your son Benjamin was 15 at the time. How did you both make out?**

We knew Pam was with the Lord, which was a great comfort. Ben would get mad sometimes and punch something; I think it was his release. But after a few months we both came to grips with it. We talked at length about it. I told him, "You know Ben that she's in a better place. You wouldn't want her back now."

He had been a mama's boy until he was about 12 or 13. After the age of 12, we started getting real close and I feel like it was God's way of preparing us. Ben actually did very well. He was in the ninth grade...a normal kid. He had a lot of friends whose parents supported him, including my large family. They all were supportive and helped us out as much as they could. God got us through it with their help.

My son is 27 now and lives in Texas. We talk once or twice a day. His son, Daniel Clayton, was born last December on the day after Pam's birthday, weighing in at ten pounds!

### **When you were widowed, how did it affect you?**

It was overwhelming. I had to acclimate myself to paying the bills and taking care of everything. I didn't realize how much Pam did. I didn't take her for granted—don't get me wrong—but it just hit me how much she held everything together. It was really hard. The third month was probably the worst, and then it started getting better.

### **What made the third month so difficult?**

People had been calling me every day, but one day there were no calls. My son was away for the day. I could hear the neighbors playing ball. Then it hit me—I was alone. It was very difficult. I think God comforted me and started showing me that Pam had been a gift in my life. The only way I made it through was with the love of God.

I know Pam's death has brought me closer to the Lord. I became a Christian several years ago, but when I saw His love and felt His love, I've been closer to the Lord ever since.

Pam was ready to go. She had been very happy before the surgery during two weeks in the hospital. If she hadn't shown this attitude, it would have been a whole different story for my son and me.

### **How did you take care of Pam's personal belongings?**

I gave a lot of her clothes to relatives who were about the same size. I gave other things to friends and family. It was hard for me to keep them. Yet as they were taken, it was hard to see them go. It was a very emotional time. I stored everything else that would be meaningful like a quilt Pam and my mom had designed. I'm saving that for Ben.

### **How were holidays for you after she died?**

Holidays were extremely difficult. The first Christmas was nine months later and when I think about it now, I get choked up. It was real hard for my son too. He didn't want to go down to my mom's, but I told him, "You need to go...just eat and see everybody and laugh and cut up and everything." We did have a good time, but it was very hard.

### **Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?**

When people go through this...they need to be very careful about starting to date again. I was single for three years. I hate to say this, but I found out there are a lot of hawks out there! That was a real shock. You have to be careful. Some of the girls even came down to my shop... so that is one thing I would warn others about. Especially when you are younger it is normal to start dating again, but be very careful and very patient. I made sure I started dating another Christian.

### **Do you wish someone had given you advice about being widowed?**

Not really. I just thank God for the gift that He gave me for those 16 years. And now I've got my son, a new wife, and new kids in my life.

—Interviewed by Patricia M. Chambers



# God's Fingerprints

We had been married thirteen years in 1984 when Polly was diagnosed with Huntington's disease, a neurodegenerative illness. For nineteen years this unwelcome intruder gradually claimed more and more of Polly's life, resulting in one loss after another. As I look back over those two decades I see several ways in which the Lord revealed Himself to us.

One of our most constant companions during those years was the temptation to discouragement. I'm convinced there is a spiritual battle that surrounds issues such as these in our lives, an enemy who wants to defeat and destroy us. I found that one of the ways that the Lord encouraged us was through the many small evidences of His presence—His fingerprints—in our lives. I recorded these coincidences, and when I string them together, I can see that coincidence becomes providence.

For example, in the early 1990s a package containing a book came to my desk at Probe Ministries. The senders did not know me, but the book was the life story of a couple, the husband being affected by HD—Polly's illness. We eventually met the surviving wife of this man.

I'll never forget the day in 1992 when Polly sat in our living room and said, "Rick, I think it's time for me to move to a nursing home." Only 41 years old, Polly needed twenty-four-hours-a-day assistance by then. I had fulltime work and two children to raise. I remember being captivated by a story on the evening news that very week about a couple going through the process of making this same decision.

Polly had to apply for Medicaid assistance. To qualify, her personal assets had to fall under a certain cap. At the time ours did. But we later learned that if we had waited one more month to apply, our assets would have exceeded the cap, and she would have had to wait two more years to apply again. This was the Lord's doing and His timing for her.

For several years I brought Polly home on weekends and planned various outings for her. Sporting events, concerts, worship at church—something for her to look forward to. I brought her one evening to a concert at a large church in Dallas. About 4,000 were attending, and the lights dimmed as we arrived. I found one seat at the end of

*O Lord, by all Thy dealings with us, whether of light or darkness, of joy or pain, let us be brought to Thee.*

—Phillips Brooks

one pew on the ground floor where Polly could sit next to me in her wheelchair. We took that place and discovered that I was sitting right next to the director of nursing from Polly's care center. I learned she was a Christian.

Eventually Polly had to choose whether to go on a feeding tube—not an easy decision. But the next day I visited a patient at the hospital where I serve as chaplain, only to find she had HD and had also made this decision. I see patients with this illness not more than once a year, but I encountered her on the very day that I needed some encouragement in helping Polly decide what to do.

One morning I was listening to a Christian radio station. The announcer said, "If you knew today would be your loved one's last day, what would you say to them?" I turned the radio off and opened my devotional booklet, "Our Daily Bread." The title that day was, "Say It Now!" It said we should not put off giving our loved ones sincere praise. That evening I made a point to tell Polly how much I loved her and to thank her for all she had done for us as a family. She had been unable to speak for several years, but the look in her sweet brown eyes spoke more than words. Two weeks later, I stood at her bedside as she left us for heaven.

These kinds of events formed a pattern over the years to the very last day of Polly's life on earth, August 6, 2003. I learned to take them as reminders or markers of God's presence and shepherding care over our lives. Even in our most difficult hours.

—Richard Rood has been a chaplain at Mesquite Community Hospital (Texas) since 1996. Before that he served with Probe Ministries and pastored a church in Seattle. To read how God sustained Rick and Polly and ministered to Rick as a widower, see Rick's recently released book: *Our Story...His Story: One Couple's Encounter with the Grace of God in the Crucible of Affliction*, available through Barnes and Noble.



# The Maze of Loneliness

One of the things that I hate most about going through the maze of grief is the loneliness. I remember one time while talking with a group of people at church, the greatness of loneliness struck me so hard that I had to leave and go for a cry. A pastor friend, whose wife had gone home to be with the Lord, told me that as he was preaching one time the anxiety of loneliness became so real that he could not finish his sermon. When we are grieving, loneliness is most likely the biggest Goliath we will face and will be the most difficult to slay. It may arise from a number of different causes, but whatever the cause, we find that God does care and is concerned.

What I am learning regarding loneliness is that it does not arise simply because of the absence of people; a crowd is often the loneliest of places. People may surround you, and yet you feel the desolation of loneliness. It depends not on the number of people around you but on your relationship with the people around you.

I have learned that loneliness is normal, a natural part of the passing of a loved one. You can sit down and feel sorry for yourself (which I often did) or start walking out of the maze of loneliness. You can do it!

Unfortunately for some of us, aloneness will be a reality of life whether we like it or not. But that does not mean we have to stay lonely.

The following three principles helped me deal with my loneliness:

First, I needed to understand the personal presence of God's person. God did this with Elijah in 1 Kings 19:9. Elijah was hiding in a cave discouraged and feeling all alone. Then God revealed Himself to the prophet. Elijah needed to learn the lesson that a man who knows the Lord is never alone, because God promises that He will be a very present help in trouble. Elijah needed to "practice the presence" of Jehovah. And in the darkness of his cave (maze) and the loneliness of that situation, God was there. It is not God's power that we need as much as the fellowship of His person.

Second, I needed to understand the personal performance of God's purpose. We should not be standing in the maze with our hands in our pockets and doing nothing to

help ourselves. Although I did feel that way more times than I want to admit. I had to remind myself that idleness is not God's will for a person. I am not talking about activity for activity sake. But as I exercised my spiritual gifts in serving others, I began to leave loneliness behind.

Third, I needed to understand the personal partnership with God's people. Elijah thought he was all alone, but there were "seven thousand in Israel" still following Jehovah. We are not alone! The following are ways to realize this:

- Accept invitations to meals with friends.
- Talk with others you know who have experienced a similar loss.
- Write or call someone who sent you a message.
- Talk about the person you lost, being careful that you do not become a burden to others so they want to avoid you.

As I practiced these things, it helped me to start my journey out of the maze of loneliness.

—Bill Lake Bill serves with Biblical Ministries Worldwide as Director of Pacific Fields. His wife died in January 2005, after 35 years of marriage.

*Without severe testing and the resultant brokenness, we naturally retain some credit for ourselves.... Affliction enlarges our vision so that we can see God and ourselves clearly. Once that happens, it's not difficult to figure out who should be the center of attention: God and God alone!*

—Dave Shive  
from *Night Shift: God Works in the Dark Hours of Life*



# FROM GOD'S WORD

*"That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4)*

Encourage yourself in the Lord by looking at Elijah, a godly man who got depressed.

1. Read 1 Kings 18. After Mt. Carmel, where God so powerfully revealed Himself as Israel's one true God, what do you think might have been Elijah's expectations.

For the Israelite Baal worshippers? \_\_\_\_\_

For King Ahab and Queen Jezebel? \_\_\_\_\_

For himself? \_\_\_\_\_

For God? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Read 1 Kings 19. What lies was Elijah believing?

From 19:2-3 \_\_\_\_\_

From 19:4 \_\_\_\_\_

From 19:10 \_\_\_\_\_

3. What did Elijah ask God to do? (19:4)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Who, besides Queen Jezebel, did Elijah think was out to get him? (19:10)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[Note the irony – He complains that God's prophets often get killed ("I am no better than my fathers") but forgets that he has just successfully done away with 450 prophets of Baal. Furthermore, he thinks either the Queen will kill him or the children of Israel who have forsaken God will kill him, so he asks God to do it instead. Did Elijah ever die?]

5. From 19:1-10, what principles do you see that might contribute to negative thinking?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Elijah did not experience God's presence in what three phenomena? (19:11-12)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Why do you think God revealed Himself to Elijah in the smallest and least obvious form possible?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What needs did Elijah have, and how did God meet them?

In 19:6-8 \_\_\_\_\_

In 19:11-13 \_\_\_\_\_

In 19:18 \_\_\_\_\_

In 19:19-21 \_\_\_\_\_

9. What truths about God can you see in chapters 18-19? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Where did God send Elijah? (19:15)

He let him keep hiding in the cave

To a new ministry location

Back where he had come from

He kept him on the mountain, close to God

Conclusion: God is at work whether we see it or not: He still had 7000 faithful Israelites even though Elijah thought he was the only one left. God works in whispers and stillness more than in whirlwinds and storms.



# Books to Help You Heal

## *The Tender Scar: Life After the Death of A Spouse*

by Richard L. Mabry. Copyright 2006. Published by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 110 pages, \$9.99. Call 1-800-733-2607 to order.

God hasn't promised that things will always work out the way we plan or desire. But He has pledged to help us get through tough times, whether or not we can see a reason for what has happened or agree with the outcome.

For the past three days, I've been especially prone to crying for no real reason—the simplest thing can trigger a memory and set me off. Maybe all this crying is good for me. I hope so. For two weeks while Cynthia was in ICU, I held myself together by sheer willpower so that I could be there with her, and then after she passed away I continued to hold myself together to get through the memorial service and things that had to be done right away. I guess now is when it really hits. I keep asking myself, “Why did this happen?”

Our pastor told me that grief doesn't really come in nice, discrete stages—it comes in waves (each of which may contain several stages), and he was right. But I've also found that, with the passage of time, the waves don't always last as long or reach as high (or low), and I continue to hope that seas will eventually calm. I can't see rhyme or reason to Cynthia's death, and maybe I won't be able to until I stand before God. Until then, I just have to trust Him.... I don't see any other way to get through this. (Author's e-mail to Cynthia's siblings).

In the days, weeks, and months after the death of a husband or wife, the survivor can expect to experience periods of grief and absolute desolation, and a deep sense of loss, all of which can be devastating. There is no predicting when these periods will come, how long they will last, and to what degree they will prevent any semblance of normal functions. But it is absolutely certain that they will come. And they may be accompanied by anger at God and doubts about His plan for us.

During these dark periods, one of the thoughts that continues to come unbidden into the grieving mind is “Why did God do this?” Or if we're able to get our minds around the concept that God doesn't arbitrarily cause bad things to happen, we ask, “Why did God allow this?” We live in a world where seeming injustices and inequities are a part of daily living. People die every day, many of them taken by violence long before the end of their expected life spans. Some die of cancer and other diseases, perhaps lingering in pain or laboring under handicaps. Does God actually plan for these and so many other things to happen?

This question has been asked since Old Testament times when Job's “comforters” repeatedly asked him what he had done to cause God to punish him. Job's answer speaks volumes for his faith. He doesn't understand the whys and wherefores. He just knows that God has an eventual plan, so rather than cursing his God, Job continues to praise Him. Job's faithfulness was rewarded by God, and things were put right. What bothers those of us who have suffered the death of a spouse is that God hasn't reached down and put things right for us. We don't understand how or why this happened, and because we don't see an end to the suffering and inequity that these circumstances produce, it tests our faith as surely as Job's afflictions tested his.

I accept the fact that God is truly all-powerful and all-knowing, able to perform miracles whenever and however He chooses. I've come to the realization, however, that I will never in this world and within the confines of my own humanity be able to understand God's plan as it affects my life and that of others around me. I cannot successfully argue with God about why He spared this person and not that one, why my wife died and someone else's mate lived. Yet I feel a firm assurance that someday, I and my Christian brothers and sisters will understand the reasons behind events that we now find incomprehensible. For now, all you and I can do is continue to pray for grace for the moment and a revelation of God's continuing will for us, day by day.

—Richard L. Mabry, Taken from chapter 10. Used by permission of Kregel Publishers. All rights reserved.



*Through Tears to Triumph* by John Wallace Stephenson. To order this 134-page book, call 1-800-727-4440, Code #5227, \$9.99.

When Alex told me that Louise, my wife, and Ruth, my daughter, had been killed, my emotions ceased functioning. I became a zombie. Not until I reached the privacy of my own home, and especially my bedroom, did I feel free to express my emotions in a safe environment. When my emotions were released, it was like a tire being slashed and all the air rushing out. This was a cleansing experience and greatly helped me.

Shedding tears and weeping are normal. Allowing emotions to flow naturally is a necessary function in the healing process. Had I denied those emotions I would later have been forced to confront my feelings in a far more painful way. The verse, “Jesus wept” is one of the most touching statements in Scripture. Here, God the Son showed His humanity.

What does Jesus’ weeping mean to me or you when a loved one dies? Jesus is not cold or uncaring. He sees our tears and is moved, perfectly sympathizing with our sorrow. If God can cry, so can a “keep-your-chin-up” man. In my times of tears I sense the presence of my Lord silently weeping with me. I feel a bond in grief with the One who is a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” I am not alone. He cares. My tears are not symbols of weakness. My faith is strengthened, and my innermost being is renewed with hope. I see the reality of my divine Role Model, who told us to “weep with them that weep.” I am mightily encouraged by “Jesus wept.” These words first challenged me to feel the heart sobs of those going through sorrow and then spurred me to try to help them.

My son’s emotions were also in a high state of grief over the loss of his mother and sister. When a family suffers the loss of any of its members, each survivor has his own grief to bear as well as to support the other members. Each of us reacts differently. I was grieving and dealing with my own emotions, but at the same time I had a responsibility to my son, David. I was in this crucible with him, and we developed a special bond. “How are you doing?” highlighted most of our telephone conversations. We found it beneficial to talk over our feelings and share with someone who was a partner in grief.

Days and weeks would go by without a significant dis-

play of emotion, and I would think, *Aha! I am recovering*, only to find myself driving down some street, suddenly stabbed with sorrow as if they had been killed only yesterday.

But that too, is part of recovery. These episodes might occur the remainder of my life. The anniversary of the deaths, and special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas, and Thanksgiving will certainly be times of upheaval, but even everyday events can bring back the sorrow with intensity.

At the funeral I read Psalm 103:14: “For He knoweth our frame: and remembereth that we are dust.” What consolation I experienced in knowing that Jesus understands me. In His compassion He knows my hurting heart and tender emotions. He understands the emotional upheaval in my life. There is nothing as reassuring as knowing that Jesus loves me.

—John Wallace Stephenson *Reprinted from CF, December 1997, and used by permission of Regular Baptist Press.*

Bill Lake wrote to CF to recommend this book because it helped him. He says, “Stephenson shares his insights regarding the struggles, pain, loneliness, guilt, anger, memories, tears, and his triumph through the Lord’s grace, after the death of a loved one. Through it is impossible to deal with every difficult circumstance that death can commence, this book seeks to offer the needed aid for situations that occur most. Sixteen chapters address such topics as: Facing Reality / Dealing with Guilt and Anger / Asking Why / Adjusting to Life/ /Releasing Emotions.”

He also has written pamphlets that are just as helpful:

- Helping a Friend Who is Grieving
- What Grievers Can Expect
- Questions Children and Adults Ask about Grief and Death
- Scriptures for Coping with Grief and Loss

*The pamphlets by Wally Stephenson are \$1.49 each or all four for \$4.99 at the Regular Baptist Press website or by calling 800-727-4440.*



## Unrevealed?

There are some words that never can be spoken;  
Too deep they lie, perhaps a sigh,  
Or glance the only token.  
There are some songs that never are set free,  
Deep in the heart the first notes start  
Of silent inward melody.  
There are some thoughts that never will be heard;  
Too sacred far to reach the ear,  
The tongue could never find the word.  
There are some tears that never reach the eyes;  
No one may see the agony,  
The poignant grief that never dies.

—by Marian Okon written after the death of his wife Jean

The reply by John M. Moore:

But there is One who hears the words unspoken;  
Who knows the thoughts we can't express,  
Who sees the heart so crushed and broken;  
He waits to comfort and to bless.  
His love was shown upon a cross at Calv'ry,  
He bore our griefs, and sins, upon the tree;  
He heals the sad and broken-hearted,  
Trust Him today; Jesus is the Way!

*These words have been set to music and copyrighted by John M. Moore, used with his permission. John is a hymn writer who lives in Ontario, Canada. One of his most well-known hymns is "Burdens are Lifted at Calvary."*

## God of Our Storms

One weekend when I was teaching a Walk Thru the Bible seminar, I mentioned that my wife had lost the function of her arms and legs because of her struggle with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) for more than 20 years. A well-meaning man came up to me at the lunch break and said, "God has told me, when you go home tonight, Lisa will run to the door when you get home, proclaiming she has been healed to the glory of God." He continued to describe more of the details of how God revealed Lisa's healing in his vision. He probably read the look on my face because he asked, "Don't you believe God can do it? Don't you believe in miracles?"

I nodded and said, "I believe with all my heart that God can do that. I pray that when I go home Lisa runs out to greet me. And if she does, you will be the first one I'll call so we can praise God. But if, when I go home and walk through the door, Lisa is sitting in her reclining chair and asks, 'Did your seminar go well?' I just want you to know another miracle happened today—the miracle of God's sustaining grace keeping her close to Him another day."

Many times we want God to calm the storm like He did on the Sea of Galilee to show the disciples His power. If He does, we can glory in His power. If He chooses not to, we can still glory in His presence. Either way, He is with us.

God never promised us the absence of storms. He did promise us His presence in the storms.

— Greg Hatteberg *Greg is Director of Alumni and Admissions for Dallas Theological Seminary. Used with permission from Dallas Connection, Fall 2006, Vol. 14, No. 2.*

*We can sink no lower than  
the Everlasting Arms.*

—Dr. Chuck Swindoll



# This Weary Walk

I am now eleven months into this weary walk without my wife Donnie. Those whom I have trusted with my grief have told me that it is necessary eventually to enter back into life. But that is like climbing Mt. Everest. For fifty years, to do life meant being with Donnie. Now I must learn to live the rest of this earthly life without her.

Making an effort to enter back into life I went Friday to my granddaughter's track meet. Being with my daughter, son-in-law, granddaughter, and two grandsons is joy. But Donnie was not there. The overwhelming sense of loss in being without the most important person in my life is not now as powerful as it was, say, ten months ago. But it still feels like a colossal, dark cavern has been carved out of me.

The track meet was good. My granddaughter won the 800 meters and is the district seventh grade girls' champion. I am proud of her, and I enjoyed watching her run and win. But Donnie was not there. We sat in the stands and cheered, but I would look up into the clouds drifting over the stadium and pray, "Lord, You could come get me now."

Saturday morning, I babysat the two grandchildren my son Jon and his wife have given us. With compassion I enjoyed caring for these youngest grandchildren.

As I was preparing to leave Jon's, he showed me the Anacacho orchid tree he bought last fall. He had ordered it from one of Donnie's gardening books that I had given him, since he seems to have inherited her love of all things green and growing. Now, this spring, the tree is covered in hundreds of buds. Without warning, grief overwhelmed me. Standing in Jon's driveway, I cried. Overcome. Tears running down my cheeks. I would so rather have her than a tree. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

During my drive back to my house, not our house, but my house—Donnie will not live in that house ever again—I took a call while waiting at a stop light. Would I like to go eat lunch? That looks to me like the providence of God: "He saves those who are crushed in spirit." From my friend I draw a little strength.

Back in my house, I cry again. I sit down at my wife's desk, where I do most of my studying now, and translate 1 Timothy 3:16: "Confessedly, great is the mystery of godli-

ness: God was manifest in flesh." From Scripture, the Lord gives me a little strength.

Saturday evening, I go to Dinner Group at a friend's house, and though I am always so aware of being without Donnie, these people are my friends and my brothers and sisters in the Lord, and in our conversation the Lord quiets my heart and gives me a little strength. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted."

Back home I get ready for bed, read from Scripture and a novel by Randy Alcorn. I turn out the light, pray and recite Scripture, and I sleep.

Waking up on Sunday, it is the Sunday after Easter, but every Sunday is resurrection Sunday. And the Lord, who is close to the brokenhearted, gives me a little strength for my weary walk. In this new day.

—Wesley Spradley, Wes and Donnie were married nearly 47 years when Donnie suddenly went to be with the Lord on May 10, 2014. A graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, Wes does ministry in the Austin, TX, area and on mission trips overseas.



# Drowning in Sin

Before I learned to swim, I nearly drowned at the age of ten. I had jumped into the deep end of a large pool in my neighborhood. I remember struggling to reach the surface, gasping for breath and going under repeatedly. The highlights of my brief life actually “flashed before my eyes,” sparking through my brain like an instantaneous slide show.

At a young age I also realized I was drowning in sin and needed rescued. By nature I wanted to run my own life, please myself, be disobedient and deceptive. The Bible calls it being “dead in trespasses and sins.” It says we need eternal life, which comes by being “born again.” Jesus’ death and resurrection made it possible for us to become spiritually alive. “God, Who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ: by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

How did my spiritual birth happen? In essence, the nail-scarred hand of Jesus reached down to me when I was

over my head in sin. By faith I trusted Christ to pull me out of the deep waters of spiritual death.

My Pennsylvania pastor, Glenn Yeckley, ended every Sunday morning service by saying, “It is choice and not chance that determines your eternal destiny; what will you do with Jesus?” Dr. Billy Graham called his program, “The Hour of Decision.” It would probably be more accurate to say that trusting Christ is more a persuasion than a decision. It’s like an epiphany—it happened the moment I realized that Jesus paid for eternal life and I needed it! I placed all my trust in Him and received it, based on God’s words, not my own good works. What a relief—it’s not up to me!

When I was drowning in my neighbor’s pool, I could do nothing to save myself nor even assist in my own rescue; I could only cry out for help. My friend jumped in and pushed me to the edge of the pool, saving my life.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

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