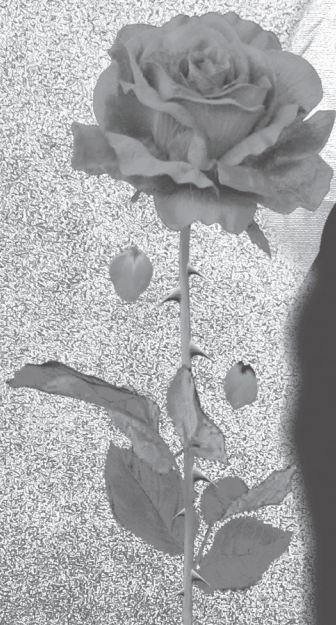


Pain Taught Me to *Love*

Thomas P. Dooley, PhD



Mall Publishing Co.



THE PRINTED WORD THE PLANTED SEED

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Printed in the Unites States of America

Published by:

Mall Publishing Co.
www.MallPublishing.biz
877-203-2453

Credits:

Book and text design by Susan Kramer

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Certain pronouns in Scripture that refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may be capitalized and may differ from some Bible publishers’ styles.

ISBN 978-1-934165-78-2

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Birmingham, Alabama
USA



ENDORSEMENTS

The pain of losing his son is clearly marked on Tom Dooley's face anytime the topic comes up. Also, when it does, he will tell you how he is turning his pain into pain relief for others. His ability to transfer pain into love is inspirational for all of us. He truly is the most passionate Christian I have ever encountered. Best of all, his depth of compassion and caring models the original One. He helps and cares without judgement and allows people to view Jesus through his kindness.

Verna Gates

*Award-winning author and veteran reporter for Reuters, TIME, CNN, and recipient of a lifetime achievement award from the National Federation of Press Women
Birmingham, Alabama*

Dr. Tom Dooley and Laura have been my close friends and partners in ministry for almost twenty years. Tom has greatly influenced my life and the ministry of RIMI and Mission India. We testify that our life's experiences happen by the knowledge of God for our good and the good of others. *Pain Taught Me to LOVE* is brilliantly written, from real-life experiences, to comfort and encourage everyone, especially those who are living in pain and struggling to love. I strongly recommend this relevant book to you.

Dr. Saji K. Lukos

*Founder and President of Reaching Indians Ministries
International and Mission India
Chicago, Illinois*

Tom, as this remarkable book of testimonies shows, has a gifted and dynamic approach to life. To him all of life is spiritual, no bifurcation between the secular and the spiritual. In turn this belief shows how, through the deepest of tragedies, there is an eternal faith, hope, and love.

Dr. David Elms

*UK Director of International Christian Embassy Jerusalem
Liverpool, England*

Pain has a way of bringing us face to face with our desperate need for God. To embrace it is to gain authority over areas of our life that need redemption. Tom's incredible stories of heart-wrenching pain turned into God's love is nothing short of miraculous. The greatest virtue is love. Much of this book could be my own story. I highly recommend this book to all who have been or are going through pain or know someone who is.

Lloyd Miller

*Eagle Valley Ministries and Senior Leader of
the Amish Community Church
Libby, Montana*

Tom Dooley has taught me many things when it comes to living by faith and believing in the power of God. *Pain Taught Me to LOVE* continues this process. What do you do when something or someone causes pain? You turn to LOVE and even more to the Creator of LOVE.

Shaun Alexander

*Husband, father of nine, speaker, author, and National Football
League Most Valuable Player of the Seattle Seahawks
Purcellville, Virginia*

Tom Dooley has written a very heartfelt and honest and Biblical rendition of his own experience. It is well worth your time to digest the depth and insight that are forthcoming as you read. As he opens his own heart, your heart will be touched by how the Lord brought

him to a place of complete healing. A friend for many years, I have always valued not only his brilliance, his prophetic voice, but also His balance as he discusses the Scripture, and always tying it to his own amazing experiences. *Pain Taught Me to LOVE* promises to bring you to a more acute understanding of the Father's heart, and to a deeper comprehension of God's ways.

Steve Sampson

*Author and Conference Speaker
Kansas City, Missouri*

Tom Dooley is a man of great faith, integrity and profound insight. I have read every book that he has written and let me just say that *Pain Taught Me to LOVE* is his best so far. I was deeply impacted by the vulnerability and honesty that is written all over these pages. The Scriptures, stories, and sincerity of what Dr. Dooley has written will touch your heart, challenge your soul, and compel you into a life of love for Jesus and the people in your world. I wholeheartedly recommend this book to everyone that desires to grow deeper in their walk with God and love toward others.

Benjamin Dixon

*Director of Ignite Global Ministries and author
of Hearing God and Prophecy
Seattle, Washington*

In *Pain Taught Me to LOVE*, Dr. Tom Dooley has written a book that speaks to one of man's most pressing dilemmas - how to go on with your life after being struck down by personal tragedy and the despair that follows. Drawing from personal experience, Tom explains with penetrating insight and careful tenderness that each dark experience we have had, or ever will have, is to be redeemed by God Himself, whose fierce love for His creation knows no bounds. For every person who is in pain and questioning God's goodness, I recommend reading this book. May it bless you with the revelation that our God is faithful to transform all heartache and loss into a thing of lasting beauty, if we let Him.

Christian Sanford

*Political Scientist and US Government Employee
Birmingham, Alabama*

If you have ever wondered what the true meaning of love is, this book is for you. My friend Tom shares real examples from his life, as well as testimonies from friends, to provide a multi-faceted view of what love is. He has selflessly drawn from deep pain in his own life and shared the lessons he has learned in this book. *Pain Taught Me to LOVE* will give you a fresh perspective and allow you to see your own experiences through a different lens.

Heather Neighbors

*Path Clearer Board Member
International medical device saleswoman
Sydney, Australia*

Pain Taught Me LOVE gives valuable insights into pain and suffering, as well as love and joy. Love is divine. The author ascertains that only those who have experienced deep pain and suffering can truly begin to understand love. This book highlights experiences of families and friends who dealt with pain and chose to overcome it with love. Dr. Dooley points out that an infusion of hope is needed from someone else at times. I strongly recommend this book to those who have experienced or are experiencing pain. It is a “must read” book. It will give you a strong insight on pain and how to deal with it, as well as to enjoy love with the resultant joy that gives you strength and power to overcome pain.

Dr. Samuel Olu Sorinmade

*Path Clearer Board Member
Pastor in Charge of the Redeemed Christian Church of God
NA Region 6 Province 4 and Cornerstone Worship Center
Melrose, Massachusetts*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Don Carmichael, President of Champion Events and Path Clearer Board Member, for editing the manuscript.

The author is grateful for the many voices of encouragement, training, and mentorship (outside of family and close friends) since the 1970's onward: Benedictine priests Fr. Angelus and Fr. Theodore, Clarence Todd, Ladd Seaberg, Dan Goering, Van Birrer, Richard Tessel, Lou Houston, Barry Polisky, Nic Jones, Ian Hart, Jerry Zins, Charlie Amato, Ted Robinson, John Rouse, Elmer Harris, Lonnie McMillian, Howard Morgan, Mamie Jo Hunter, Bill Elder, Charles Engles, and Teo Dagi. Wisdom is obtained through a teachable spirit, one who listens and acts upon the counsel of older more experienced individuals.



PREFACE

Why would I choose to publish *this* book and now? My first book was published in 2004. *Praying FAITH* was my entry into the genre of non-fiction Judeo-Christian authorship that reached far beyond my professional scientific career as a writer, wherein I'm familiar with authoring highly technical research articles for scientific journals. To date, I have authored 74 scientific articles and 15 issued patents for inventions. But, one can't compare apples to oranges. Scientific technical writing has very little in common with non-fiction Judeo-Christian literature, with the exception that both benefit from ample background research in order to produce an excellent article, patent, or book.

Praying FAITH was followed by a related book entitled *HOPE When Everything Seems Hopeless* in 2008, during the U.S. Presidential campaign cycle. I presciently perceived several years prior that the term "hope" would define the financially tumultuous year of 2008. More specifically, it would commence in the autumn of 2007 and thus affect that election cycle. So, I was determined to have this new book appear in print in 2008. One of the Presidential candidates adopted "hope" as the theme word and a central component of his campaign. Hopelessness was central on the thoughts of many people in that difficult season.

Having already authored books on the virtues of faith and hope, my wife Laura and several other friends asked the appropriate question, "When will you complete the trilogy on *faith, hope, and love*?" Good question.

The short answer was that I only write or speak publicly about topics that I'm passionate about, and for which I believe I'm competent to

provide relevant and/or unique experiences. My response to them back then was to say, “I don’t know enough *yet* about love to write a book on this challenging topic, which is among the most common of themes for authors throughout history.” I was honest. Who would care to read yet another book on love that provided only marginal or incremental insights into such an important topic. No need to recycle what others had already written; no need for any second-hand smoke. I felt that I had relevant experiences to speak with some authority on the prior themes of faith and hope, but not *yet* on that of love.

However, on February 2nd of 2017, that all changed! Our youngest son, Thomas, died.



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Eulogy for Our Son Thomas



Let me introduce to you our 24 year old son, Thomas Sydney Dooley, using the prepared notes that I used to deliver his eulogy at his funeral four days later in Trussville, Alabama. These words were drafted during the late night prior to the funeral service, during the crisis of emotions, intense grief, and planning immediately following his death:

On behalf of his mother Laura and siblings - Isaac, Catherine, and Jeannette - I welcome the extended Dooley and Anderson families, friends of Thomas, friends of our family, the disciples of Jesus who call Grace Community Church their "home", and members of Path Clearer ministries. With gratitude in our hearts we thank you for joining in this tragedy. Yet today is a wonderful day. A day of celebrating the life of my son, Thomas, known online as "PyromanTom".

My strength is improvisational public speaking. Today, I embrace my weakness and will read instead. This is one of the most important messages I will ever deliver, and I want it to be understood.

It is a *tremendous honor* for me to be the father of Thomas Sydney Dooley since he was conceived in Texas and then raised in Alabama up to last Thursday. He was our baby boy. He was precious.

It is a *tremendous honor* for me to be the one sovereignly chosen by the Almighty for the morbid and painful privilege to discover his cold lifeless physical body in a chair in his room in our home on Thursday afternoon. Thank God that I was selected for this honor and not someone else who would have been traumatized at the sight, for a well-prepared father can handle it. In his final two weeks he had tremendous physical pain in his damaged esophagus as well as other issues. I was very concerned for him that it might become critical, which it did.

It is a *tremendous honor* for me to be privileged to deliver his eulogy today. It gives me great delight to do so. I've already delivered the eulogy at his grandfather's funeral in Kansas, Thomas Edward Dooley. Thomas was the third of three Thomas Dooleys. I'm the sole survivor. In fact, my book entitled "HOPE When Everything Seems Hopeless" was dedicated to the other two Thomases in my lineage. Eulogies provide an opportunity to add a powerful "Amen" at the end of the message of one's life story. Don't we all love a good eulogy, with or without tears. Our prayer is that this will honor Thomas' life and draw each of us closer to the heart of our Father God.

A son of John Manwell (who is one of my closest friends for three decades and partner in ministry) wrote to me yesterday. He clearly recalled me preaching in England that, "By your own choice, you can send two things to the Eternal Heaven from Earth. Would you like to know what the two items are?"

Prayers - They rise up like the fragrant aroma of burning incense. Thank you all for joining us in praying for Thomas over the years, as well as for our grieving family now; and... Tears - You probably didn't expect that. Yet tears are stored up in vials before the throne of the Almighty. Your tears are an investment that yields a great eternal return. Thank you for crying, along with us, at this startling start to a long season of grief. In addition, for those who enter eternity in God's Eternal Heaven, like Thomas did on Thursday February 2nd, the Lord will wipe away all tears. For Thomas, the tears were of many years of pain and sorrow and suffering and medication and doctors.

Today I offer to you a Father's Perspective on the life of a son: We are all honored today to be witnessing a picture of the Love of Yahweh, the Father God, for this own Son, the Jewish Rabbi Jesus, who died as a sacrifice. The son was separated to the Earth to die for us. He atoned for the sin of mankind. Nonetheless, our heavenly Father grieved the loss of His son, just as I am today with Thomas gone.

When righteous Job unexpectedly lost his children in a tragedy, he immediately worshiped while in emotional pain declaring, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, Blessed be the Name of the Lord" – in Hebrew, Baruch HaShem Adonai. Job did not blame God for his loss or his pain. The sovereign Creator of the Universe was intimately involved in the situation, but He

had not done anything wrong or unloving. Job wisely chose to worship rather than blame God. The Dooley clan chooses to worship rather than to blame or second-guess God. Please join us.

God is good ALL the time - and ALL the time God is good! In fact, God was good to Thomas as he suffered up to the day of his death, as he was good to me that day as the father to discover a motionless silent Thomas. In fact, on December 13th I received a message in a dream. A voice said to me "Tom, read Psalm 46." When I woke I noticed several familiar verses, and most notably, "Be still and know that I am God". I knew that something serious was about to happen, and I had to be at rest, willing to trust the sovereignty of His plans.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph never has a bad day. He is never worried with anxiety. He will never leave us nor forsake us. He's trustworthy, compassionate, merciful, and patient with us. He's a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Right now, don't we all need a friend like that?

I will now offer a Father's Perspective on "Who was Thomas S. Dooley?"

Some of you know only one side of Thomas' complex life and personality. He compartmentalized relationships. He was good at it. He intentionally permitted you to see only what he wanted you to see. But, I'm his Father and I know my son very well from many different perspectives, both good and bad.

Thomas was thoughtful, compassionate, and sensitive. He was a friend to anyone who felt misplaced, rejected, abused, or abandoned. He had a sensitive radar detector for people who were hurting. Perhaps you were one of his projects. You probably knew this if you experienced the intentional compassionate side of him. It was lovely.

Thomas had a hard time with his Papa - me. I was a disciplinarian and a "get 'er done" driven man. He was brilliant, too...but he just wanted to be himself. Our brains were wired differently. My brain came from Germany. His came from GameStop. There were a lot of misunderstandings between us. Countless times I would callously raise my voice saying "Use your brain!" Then, when I cooled down I would humble myself and say to

him “Thomas, will you forgive me?” I wasn’t as gentle as I should have been. For many years I didn’t know that inside he was living in a hellish repetitive obsessive compulsive disorder carnival. I didn’t know that. It was his secret. He thought that as an embarrassing shameful thing and that he wasn’t normal. I unknowingly made it worse. The Scriptures teach us – Fathers don’t exasperate your children. I must confess that my anger and words hurt Thomas emotionally as a young boy. He didn’t like my demeanor and tone of voice. He was very tender hearted, and I was a bit of a bully. I lacked sufficient Thomas-kind-of-love. Lord Jesus, forgive me. I know that Thomas did. He told me so many times, as recently as October 8th.

But, because of this unique situation, I alone knew a lot about my son that nobody else was privileged to know. I was there in the ICU when he tore out his dialysis jugular cannula at night. I was there when he wrecked Dale Cathey’s four-wheeler and lied about it. I knew a lengthy laundry list of his sins in detail. That is a privilege that a father must steward with great care. Thank God that few of you here with us today ever had to ask Thomas to forgive you. But, I did. And on numerous occasions. Iron sharpens iron. And so does a hard stone. I was Thomas’ hard stone. If I had just hugged Thomas more often, who knows what could have been avoided and averted. Fathers, listen to me. I hug a lot these days! Mercy triumphs over judgment.

If you need to forgive Thomas for anything, please do. If you need forgiveness for any regrets, the Dooley clan says “You are forgiven”.

We have a tradition of adopting the friends of our children into our clan. In fact there are girls named Nicole #3, Kara #1, and Amanda #4. We ran out of numbers, so the next generation of adoptees had the “a, b, and c modifiers, like 3b”. Thomas would love for his friends, especially those who have few friends, to be adopted as Dooleys. The Dooley farms are known for hospitality...we’re good at it.

Thomas was eclectic, quirky, creative, and unflappable. He loved fires, firecrackers, and explosions. I would often return home to find that he had emptied yet another of my fire extinguishers. At one point as a teenager, he went through four of them in a few days! Once he even put out a fire that he had not started. He was PyromanTom. He and his friends built paraffin bombs

in Mountain Branch. He built pneumatic spud launchers. From there, he went on to Glocks, assault rifles, shotguns, and even an AK-47! His worrisome mother, the pacifist, never approved, not even of pellet guns! But, it earned him employment as an armed security guard, which he really enjoyed. He caught 30 thieves at one job site, a metal scrap yard in Birmingham near the railroad. I suspect he was lenient on the heroin addicts who stole copper to resell to the same company.

Thomas would wear the strangest clothes, rabbit fur, a pimp hat, and use women's bobby pins on his shaggy long hair. He wasn't prone to pledging at a fraternity...even though he attended the University of Alabama for several years. Roll Tide.

He was the only white guy in America to build an Indian Tandoor oven in our back yard to cook Indian-style. And, that was before Indian films, food, and culture had become trendy. I had the privilege of taking him to India with me on one of my RIMI - Mission India speaking trips. It was like the trip from hell. His luggage didn't arrive in New Delhi, so he wore my baggy clothes. His camera was stolen. He got sick. We were abandoned at the wrong train station for 12 hours, but at least we could watch the monkeys and rats and people sleeping on the cement nearby. However, the folks on the platform could care less about rodents and nonhuman primates, they thought that we were the entertainment. Not all interruptions are bad (including funerals). They can teach us.

I suspect that few of you knew that Thomas suffered greatly from anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). He had to wash repetitively from adolescent days onward. Although his hands were clean, ironically his room was, honestly, a pigsty. So was his closet. So was his car. And, so was his Mountain Dew collection that took up a quarter of our garage shelving. Those cans are still leaking to this day. You may have several if you like. But, on Friday as we started to clean up his messes, I said to my brother-in-law "This is the last time I will ever clean up Thomas' stuff. Let's take our time and cherish the moment."

God causes all things to work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to his purposes. In my profession, I've invented PanX® drugs to treat anxiety disorders. This is a result of my deep concern over Thomas' suffering and coincident treatments by some lousy addictive drugs. The

invention would have never happened without him being burdened by anxiety and OCD. But, his pain will now benefit others. He died having inspired a patented safer new class of drugs to treat people with anxiety. Oh, if only we had it a decade ago when his OCD problems started.

In addition to ample pain and suffering, he also had substantial darkness within him for the past decade. He was so sweet to everyone up until adolescence. But, then he changed. We all have some darkness, but his darkness was crippling to his thoughts and actions. He was enslaved, and there was a thief working to steal, kill, and destroy him. He nearly died in Tuscaloosa in July 2015, and I prayed over him in the ICU when Laura and I were told by the doctor “Prepare yourselves, it doesn’t look good”. I prayed, “As your father with authority over you, I love you and bless you Thomas, and I release you into the hands of God. He’s a better Father than I am. If this is your day to go to Him, then He may have you. But, I have another prayer – that you will rise from this bed, walk, and fulfill the calling that God has for your life.” He was initially expected to die, then remained hospitalized for 24 days, and His life was divinely spared! Numerous doctors said it was miraculous. He fulfilled his purpose on earth.

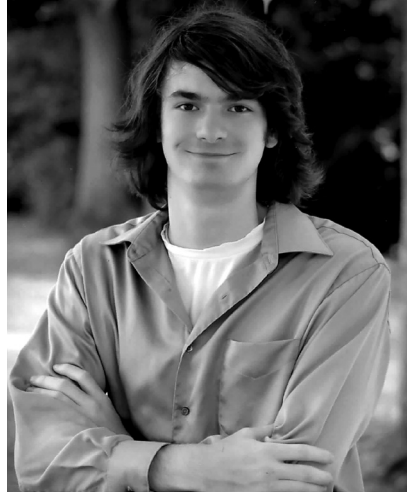
In spite of this dramatic situation, the darkness continued. But, I am glad to report to you that on October 8th, I had the privilege of praying for Thomas to be delivered from his darkness and to enter the light of righteousness. He openly confessed many dark sins to God (and to me as a witness), and he was delivered. He was radically transformed on October 8th, and then grew in this new-found freedom. He and I did Bible studies together that ended at Matthew chapter 20 about the “eleventh hour”. He shared about his spiritual transformation with his friends. Thank God that he was redeemed prior to his untimely death last week. And, thank God that his physical life was divinely spared in 2015 to set up this final three-and-a-half months!

Sure, our hearts are tender and broken at the loss of a wonderful son and bother. But, when Thomas was delivered on October the 8th, He hugged me and instantly cried out, “Dad, I love you.” I replied “I love you, too, Thomas.” And he said to me “Say it again, Dad. Say it again!” It was as if he hadn’t been able to realize that I genuinely loved him for the past decade, although

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Laura and I had bent over backwards for him. Not to vindicate us, but we did deserve some shiny medals. But, that all changed by the grace of God. Our 11-year old sweet boy had returned. He had been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. He could hear anew that I loved him and God loved him and that evil was real. Good times had returned to our home.

I will conclude with this: On Saturday Laura and his siblings and their spouses gathered at the funeral home for our intimate final “Good Bye” while viewing Thomas’s body. It was very painful for each of us. My final words to him were, “You told me on October 8th, ‘Say it again, Dad. Say it again!’ So, while running my hands across his silky long brown hair at age 24, I once again repeated “I love you son. I love you Thomas”.



Thank you son, you taught your father how to love! You taught all of us how to love!

The Lovelady Center



Returning to the former question, “Why this book now?”, I trust that you can now appreciate how the tragic loss of a precious child could create a major pivot-point in the life of a parent, who, in this case, coincidentally happens to be an author.

Shortly after my son’s funeral, I received a call from Lestley Drake, the lead pastor of the Lovelady Center (www.LoveladyCenter.org), one of the largest faith-based residential drug recovery facilities in America. He had attended the funeral and asked to come meet with me. The words shared by Thomas’ sisters, Catherine and Jeannette, as well as in my eulogy were deeply impactful to him. He stated that his colleagues had already experienced the deaths of four young women from drug overdoses since the beginning of the year. They had four former clients die in just a month and a half. They had buried about 18 of their former clients the prior year. Overdose deaths were becoming common among the women who had endured addictions and incarcerations. At the time of his call, I literally wasn’t receiving anyone unless they were very close inner-core friends. Laura and I were still catching our breaths from the shock and loss of Thomas. We were in tears every day.

Lestley came to our log home in Clay, Alabama, and we dialoged for several hours. His mother was a former client in drug recovery at the Lovelady Center. His father had many struggles including time in jail. Lestley knew family dysfunctionality and the high price of substance abuse. He eventually became a pastor to help ladies in recovery. When we met shortly after Thomas’ funeral, he commented that he would welcome me to come minister to the Loveladies once I was over the acute phase of mourning.

Two-and-a-half months later, I decided to go there as an invited guest speaker. It was extremely hard talking about our painful recent loss

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to a group of women struggling from some of the same problems that my son faced. In my first session that day I couldn't stop crying. I had cried every day for over two months, but this was deep and painful mourning. Neither could the ladies stop crying. It was like repeating the funeral.

That day Lestley predicted to me, "I believe that your new book on love is starting now."

The Imperfect Reveals Perfect Love



One of my closest friends is John Manwell in Liverpool, England. We met in 1986 while both of us were working in London. His family is my family, and my family is his. He's made a deep impression in my life. While planning this book, I mentioned to John that I earnestly desired for the world to hear about his relationship to his delightful younger brother, Geoffrey. I knew it would be precious. It is a privilege for me to convey John's words to you:

What day is it? Every morning I can be sure which day it is since my Mother passed away. After she died, my brother Geoffrey came to live with our family. Geoffrey is 54, about 5 feet tall, has a great sense of humour, was born with Down Syndrome and he closely tracks what day it is. He starts each day with stretches, a bathroom visit, and more grunts than words until he has had a cup of tea. He then announces which day of the week it is, and therefore what the day should include. He recently commented to me "the days of the week go so quickly!"

The days of the week do go quickly, and the days become years, and sometimes it is worth looking back at what we have become through the years. I suppose we all feel that certain people have affected us, or even shaped us. My brother Geoffrey, with his innocent and trusting approach to people with his vulnerability, dependence and unique wit has been a powerful influence on me.

Seeing people as people: I was about ten years old and pushing a double buggy with two of my siblings, cringing as people walking towards us stared at Geoffrey – who was then about eight. Geoffrey was a cheerful chap with little round glasses. He would stare pleasantly back at those looking at him, unaware of anything odd, while I wanted to hide myself, to avoid the

embarrassed shame and awkwardness that I felt, but really could not explain. My father must have noticed my embarrassment and talked to me about the way people look at Geoffrey, and that they are the ones with the problem.

As his elder brother I had some sort of brotherly sense that I needed to help or support him. I remember one family holiday when I was about six, I decided that some solid one-to-one coaching would accelerate his learning, and I set about teaching him to count to a hundred. I failed through my own lack of patience. In addition to that, the strategy of me counting to a hundred with him repeating each number was probably flawed!

The event with the buggy was quite a turning point in my life, as previously I had not been particularly aware of how Geoffrey was looked at by others. From that event onwards, I started to try to remember my Dad's wise perspective as I wrestled with my own insecurity when out with Geoffrey in public. Although I was struggling to grasp it at that young age, I look back and see that this was the start of me becoming aware of the fact that people who are awkward about disabled, handicapped or generally different, are the ones who need to change, not me or the less-able person I'm with. It was an important part of my growing up, and part of learning to love people equally. As I got older, I moved farther and farther away from being ashamed to be out with my brother or anyone that looks different, to being more and more proud of being with someone unique. Instead of silently thinking "Don't look at me or us", I have increasingly thought to myself "Yes, look at this interesting person who is with me!"

Instead of being concerned about how others were looking at Geoffrey and me, I began to be more careful to think about how I was viewing people – and accepting of differences. Now I love to be out with Geoffrey, and my internally voiced comment to others is, "You have no idea how good it is to be with this fellow – you are missing out if you don't know him!"

Who is caring for whom? In the 1960's, Jean Vanier founded L'Arche Community in France - a small group of less-able people living in community with others who cared for them. The L'Arche community houses and activities replicated and multiplied

around the world, and now number 147 communities in 35 countries.

A few years ago, Jean Vanier wrote a book of thoughts, experiences and wisdom that emerged from the lives and learning of these many small communities. One theme that he develops in his book *Community and Growth: Our Pilgrimage Together* was that many come into L'Arche households with a desire to serve those less-abled than themselves, but as they mature, it becomes clear that it is really the less-abled who have been assigned by God to teach and enable those who think that they are more able!

Patience: To spend time with Geoffrey and observe his ways is to watch a man with some special gifts and qualities. I sometimes wonder what he is thinking while he waits for an appointment or for one of us to be ready to go out. He seems to calmly wait for ages while others are delayed. He will sit and wait and look about himself, or draw shapes in the air with his finger. Seeing him wait when I am eager to get something done or to get to the next task or place, is quite a reminder of my own lack of patience and my seeming inability to wait without having to hurry other people, or find something to do while I wait. There is something of a great contentment within this man who doesn't fill his thinking with long-term goals and doesn't have a pressing need to 'kill time'. He simply lives and waits when waiting is the necessary path. I have seen a great example of what the Bible says in the famous passage about love, "Love is patient".

Understanding gentleness: We live in a culture that reduces gentleness to something soft and ineffectual. Geoffrey is a person whose very being knows no aggression. Having been alongside him for the past 54 years has shown me gentleness in a form that is an expression of innocence and an unassuming lack of exertion of personal power.

In my career to date, I have experienced many aspects of human power, whether through dominating managers or the manipulation of ambitious colleagues. There is the power and control that comes from having or not having financial resources, and the control that is exerted by knowledge and

information: '*who* you know, and *what* you know'. To navigate life, we need to learn to navigate these pressures and influences, and I cannot claim to be flawless when talking about pressuring people to get my way or stepping beyond influencing people into manipulating them. I think that only a fool would imagine himself to be perfect in this aspect of relationships.

The reality is that these power structures and interactions occur in families, friendship groups, churches, clubs and everywhere. As I have travelled through life learning to deal with people, Geoffrey has been a powerful example to me of how to be a gentle person. His simple innocence was a reference point to me from early childhood and a constant reminder through teens and adulthood.

It is not as if he has no personal need to influence others, or that he never has an opinion to be voiced, but his method demonstrates gentleness, and insofar as I have learned from his example, I repeatedly see that Geoffrey has been a gift to me and those around him - to be our yardstick for gentleness as we experience the pull of circumstances to be anything but that. These are vital aspects of love, and Geoffrey has been a tutor to me.

The great leveller: I have always been ambitious and look at life with an attitude of wanting to achieve, to get things done and to influence. Perhaps being the eldest of five siblings started me out with an assumption that I would be in charge! Going through life looking to better a career or to gain influence makes one alert to who has the power and who is the important person in the room. In a similar way to my description of Geoffrey's gentleness, his lack of a personal need to be the leader means that he really isn't relating to people in the room with a sense of the hierarchy. His personal intuition is really about emotional harmony between us all. In a world where there is pressure to be the smartest person in the room, or the most powerful, he brings a different perspective. In fact, he will often sense the person with most pain and, in a completely unassuming manner, will get alongside them - and where appropriate, comfort with a stroke of his soft hand or a gentle hug.

Affection and the inability to retain tension: It is a source of pleasant amusement when Geoffrey is ever stern or speaks back to anyone, usually in the context of a joke or banter. For example, I might comment that he has a strange look on his face, and he will reply with a cheeky retort, “You look like a strange monkey!” There follows a pause in which he does a mock grimace and shake of the head, but after a few moments he will ensure that everything is smoothed over with a stroke of his soft skinned hand and a soothing, “I do still love you John.” It seems that he cannot hold the tension or the emotional gap that occurs with any negative exchange – even when it is completely humorous! This unassuming feature of the way Geoffrey relates to those around him is a constant reset in our thinking of how easily we let tension, argument or even schism develop and remain. Geoffrey has taught us that no gap can be tolerated for any amount of time that stretches beyond seconds. When it comes to smoothing tensions, forgiving and apologising, the way I behave is constantly in need of recalibration against his exceptional low tolerance for residual animosity!

9 O’clock shandy – Rhythm is more important than goals: I began my account with reference to Geoffrey’s daily discipline of identifying the day of the week and then working from there. In fact, this methodical tracking of time and events typifies his rhythm of life. Our mother established discipline and order with a systematic way of life. The table was set in a certain way, vegetables were cut in specific shapes and sizes and the daily routine was disciplined around a predictable timetable. I suspect this was partly the way she was, but this way of life was influenced by living with Geoffrey who thrives on predictability.

Now that he lives with us, we smile and gently tease him at times over his rigorous routine. He loves a coffee in the morning, and maybe another during the day, but after 4:00 pm, coffee is replaced by tea. Later in the evening, he likes to have a glass of shandy (lemonade and beer mixture). If we try to offer it before 9:00pm, he is determined to wait – even for a few minutes - until the clock permits! He has learned to appreciate the value of living with order and anticipating a small pleasure. This is quite a challenging antidote to the prevailing culture, which is always rushing, always pressuring us to have what we want as soon as

we want it. Waiting for the right time may be becoming a lost art, but Geoffrey moves steadily through life enjoying simplicity and rhythm. Living with his schedule and mile markers has been a notable counterbalance in my busy life of tasks, goals and pressure to get to the next thing.

The Movement Monitor: In Geoffrey's step-by-step approach to life management, he operates with a simple logic and unique type of memory. While he doesn't have intellectual skills for mathematics or complexity, he lives life with clarity about the priority of his relationships, and none more than those of his family. He is one of five siblings. The siblings have spouses, and he is uncle to 16 nephews and nieces who have brought along three more spouses. After a call with one of my siblings he will report back what everyone is doing and where they are.

I have realised over time that Geoffrey maintains a clear mental map of who is where and what they are doing. There are so many things that we pay attention to in the world – political, economic, disasters, celebrity events, and so on. Geoffrey seems to have a special assignment to cut through all that complexity and conflict with the ultrasimple grid of his family and a few close family friends that he keeps in mind. When my head is full of competing priorities and the busyness of life, Geoffrey's straightforward relationship-based worldview is a great correction to my tendency to let relationships slide.

The Affectionate Discerner: Geoffrey has a remarkable sensitivity to those who are troubled or upset. He probably doesn't analyze body language and slips of the tongue. I'm sure he doesn't work out what is going on with people in the same way that I try to work everything out. He seems to simply know when someone is in difficulty, and he shows compassion without inhibition and quite simply. Often, he will not even inquire as to 'Is there a problem?' or 'Are you ok?' and he will go straight to giving a hug or stroking the person that he sees in need of affection! In our cultural environment of safeguarding and appropriate physical contact, he comes with the advantage of pure innocence. There is a Bible verse that challenges us to "let your gentleness be evident to all" – as a manifestation of love. Whenever I see my brother freely being affectionate and meeting people's needs in his uncomplicated and sensitive way,

I know that he is really showing me another level of discernment and care. This is unassuming love in action!

Geoffrey, the money manager: I believe that the way we relate to money is a big indicator of the way we love. In an amusing way, Geoffrey has given us a fresh perspective on money. He has always kept a small leather purse with his money in it. If he earned any money at the shelter employment where he worked, or if he received cash gifts from friends and family, he quickly drops it into that purse for secure protection. He keeps a tight control of where the purse is and is quite clear that the money in it is his. He grandly pulls it out to buy one of us a coffee or ice-cream on a day out. The purse has to be in his pocket, and he can tell you without looking how many five-pound and ten-pound notes he has in there.

Recently, we had to get an official letter to enable my wife and me to be permitted to manage his bank account, and the route to getting this letter was for the local practice doctor to assess whether Geoffrey was genuinely free and willing to give us permission to manage the account. In front of my wife the doctor asked Geoffrey if he was happy for John and Marie to look after his money. Without hesitation Geoffrey said, "No, I look after my own money, in my own purse!" The doctor explained in a different way and Geoffrey realized that we were talking about the bank. Of course, he's not interested in the management of the bank money – and is more than happy for us to manage that account! In many ways Geoffrey reflects what we are all like. None of us really want the administration, but we like the spending!

I should also say that while Geoffrey keeps solid control of the location and contents of his purse, he is also super generous and loves to be the one to pay for the coffee or ice-cream. He's a good example of being a reliable steward, but never lets that creep into being mean.

We don't need to be the cleverest person in the room: Thinking about Geoffrey's daily routine reminded me of another way that he reflects us all, but without pretence or sophistication: He really loves quiz shows on TV, and a lot of times these shows are based on quite wide-ranging general knowledge questions. I

was watching him as he intently followed one quiz program and saw his evident pleasure when the contestants got the answers right. I asked him if he knows the answers to the questions. His immediate response surprised and amused me, “No. But they do.” I realised that even the well-informed and seemingly intelligent among us are equally entertained by the flow of contestants responding under pressure. Knowing the answers is not necessary for the entertainment! That helped me feel less inadequate about my inability to answer the questions!

The gift to our family: As I grew out of my childish sensitivity to other people looking at Geoffrey as unusual, when their stares made me feel awkward and insecure, I started to appreciate that this brother of ours is not our burden but our gift. On many occasions over the years, some friends of the family and some well-intentioned outsiders have made comments expressing sympathy for our situation. The implication has been that we have been unlucky in the gene lottery, and God may have been unkind in placing this less capable person in our care.

By now I am sure that I’m making it clear that this is not how we have experienced the companionship, love and wisdom of this delightful man. In fact, in giving this account of what I’m learning and how I’ve been shaped by him, I want to clearly report on how great a gift he has been. In choosing to treat Geoffrey as equal in our family, my parents set a course in our lives for us to treat people with dignity, whatever their capacity or contribution. With this attitude, Geoffrey has thrived in our family. More than that, he has been an encourager, a channel of gentleness, a magnet for many great friends and probably the not-secret ingredient of our family cohesion. God richly blessed us with this brother. I have really come to see that, through Geoffrey, God has greatly enhanced the capacity and gifts within our family.

Often our ability to relax and love people and be content is limited by our insecurity and tendency to work everything out – to be sophisticated and assume that everything is complicated! In fact, Geoffrey is God’s gift to me and my family to see the world more simply and clearly.

The teacher of love: When all is said and done, Geoffrey has been a great teacher of love to me over the course of my life. It's not simply his behaviour or the challenge that he carries, but simply that he is eminently lovable! His artless presence and general innocence in any controversy makes him a gentle, kind, pleasant and easy to love fellow! Having him alongside through the course of my life journey has been a wonderful influence on me and many others. He has not only been appreciated, he has shown us all how to appreciate others. We need to know a person without guile to recognise our own duplicity. We benefit from knowing a simple person to counter our over-complication. I have gained awareness of my need for a healthy rhythm of life from someone who takes each day by name and as it comes.

As a family we love Geoffrey, and he has taught us to love in a special and somehow very ordinary way.

Post Script: I wanted to read this to Geoffrey to get his opinion and permission for it to be published. I decided that I would let him comment and that I would close this essay with whatever he said. Having read this out to him in the presence of my family, he looked around at us and smiled. To prompt him, my wife asked, "Well Geoffrey, what did you think?"

He replied, "I think John did really well."

What Wondrous Love is This?



What is the ultimate price that someone is willing to pay to help you?

If you were kidnapped and held for a ransom payment by a murderous gang, would someone voluntarily take your place? If you were a hostage in the lobby of a bank during an armed robbery, would someone voluntarily take your place? If you were suffocating in a house on fire, would someone come to rescue you and voluntarily take your place? If you were convicted of a felony and sentenced by a judge and jury to incarceration in prison, would someone voluntarily take your place?

There are special times when a hero rises up at a critical moment to place himself or herself in harm's way to be a substitute for another person. We can easily imagine a parent doing this for a child who is in peril. That makes sense viscerally to us, doesn't it? But, there are also occasional examples of heroism by strangers in the news. They might help courageously at a car accident or house fire. Beyond those acts of heroism, what about doing an altruistic act for a reason beyond the preservation of someone's physical body?

If you had been a passenger on the *Titanic* when it sank in 1912 and you fell into the ice-cold North Atlantic, as you experienced life-threatening hypothermia, would someone come to rescue you? A Scottish Christian evangelist named John Harper, having placed his daughter in a life boat in the care of others and having given up his own life preserver, was most concerned about the eternal consequences awaiting ahead for his fellow passengers. He set about to speak to as many as he could, not knowing whether any would be rescued. Harper exclaimed to those who could hear him, "*Are you saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.*" (He was referring to spiritual salvation, as opposed to a physical rescue.)

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A young man named Aquilla Webb was adrift in the icy water when he encountered Harper, who shared those words with him. At that moment Webb was not a follower of Jesus. Shortly after this brief encounter, John Harper drowned. Webb was one of few survivors picked up from the frigid waters that night. And, he was John Harper's last convert!

The selflessness of John Harper that perilous night in the North Atlantic is remarkable. His example reflects so well upon his eternal Savior, Jesus. It reminds us of the chorus of a great hymn:

*What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this
That caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul!*

Jesus voluntarily took our place at Golgatha outside of Jerusalem. He died a substitutionary death on our behalf. His death consisted of beatings, a crown of thorns that pierced his scalp down to the skull, cold, dehydration, public nakedness, iron nails hammered through his hands and feet (more likely wrists and perhaps ankles), and finally suffocation while in excruciating pain. *A dreadful curse for my soul!*

We deserved punishment, not him. We deserved the curse, not him. This was an innocent man and a miscarriage of justice - the "King of the Jews" crucified between two common thieves. Yet, all three men nailed to timbers on Golgatha that day were crucified for taking things that did not belong to them. Two stole possessions from others. But, unlike them, Jesus voluntarily took the full weight of our sin upon himself.

The prophet Isaiah wrote prophetically of Jesus seven centuries before the crucifixion (Isaiah 53:2-12):

...He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

King David also wrote prophetically even earlier – a thousand years before Jesus' birth - of Jesus' future perilous conditions during his crucifixion (Psalm 22:1, 7, 11-21):

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?...All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads...Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.

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I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.

All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

He bore a dreadful curse for our souls.

Jesus Will Hang with Anyone



When Jesus began ministering in Israel starting at approximately age 30, there were three forms of rulers and authorities already in the land - namely the Romans, the Herodians, and the Jewish religious leaders of the Sanhedrin (Pharisees and Sadducees). With only few exceptions, none of them liked Jesus. They despised him. Isaiah chapter 53 predicted it seven centuries before, and all four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) record that it happened to Jesus as prophesied. And, in fact three years later at the time of his imprisonment, trials, and crucifixion, all three of the ruling factions ganged up on him.

First, Israel was an occupied territory of the rapidly expanding Roman government under the rule of Emperor Tiberius in Rome. Roman soldiers, overseen by centurion officers and the provincial governor Pontius Pilate, had no reason to like Jesus. Jesus brought social instability, and instability is unwelcome in the eyes of occupiers. The Italian cohort of troops was assigned to the “God-forsaken” desert on the Mediterranean coast to enforce stability, international commerce, and taxation. The Roman agenda was not Jesus’ agenda.

Second, the domestic King of Israel at the time was one of several descendants and members of the House of Herod-the-Great. The Herodians were not Israelite Jews, but rather Hasmonean Edomites. They were aligned with the Romans and were quasi-Jewish in religious beliefs. Remember that Herod-the-Great, in approximately 4 BC, proclaimed an order to kill the baby Jesus after learning of the birth of a possible competing future “king” of Israel from the travelling Magi. The Herodians had no reason to like Jesus. An oppressor will always fight to retain his or her power over the oppressed and will not give up power voluntarily!

Third, the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin council had authority over the Temple’s religious practices, as well as some social and

civic responsibilities. They loathed the Roman occupiers and the Edomite Herodians. The leading Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees had no reason to like Jesus. He wasn't officially trained as a religious leader or Temple priest through their mentoring. One would expect these credentials for a Rabbi. In fact, he didn't meet the genealogic requirement – one must be of the tribe of Levi to be a “full-time” priest. Jesus was descended from the tribe of Judah. He was an outsider to their religious training and was considered as a nobody. “Who does this Yeshua think he is, coming in here teaching the TaNaKh (the Law, the Prophets, and the Teachings that constitute the Hebrew Bible) to our subordinates like he's one of us?” Oppressors never give up their power over the oppressed without a fight!

There is a common derogatory idiom in the USA – “born on the wrong side of the tracks”. It can refer to being raised in the poor and underprivileged side of town. I've lived in Alabama for over two decades, and many folks in the Northern states view people in the South (especially Southeast) as uneducated country “red necks”. Many from the North hold to this prejudice concerning the South. They think of one living in Mississippi or Alabama or Arkansas as an ignorant “hick”.

Were you aware that Jesus was criticized by the Jewish religious elite of being from the wrong side of the tracks? He was from Nazareth in Galilee, north of the “big city” of Jerusalem. If Jesus had been born in the USA he would have been a Southerner; Yep, Jesus was from Mississippi! And, his parents were nothing special in the eyes of the world. He wasn't born in a king's palace, even though King Herod lived nearby. He wasn't born into a priestly Levite family, which would have entitled him to become a rabbi by training and one who was destined to work in the synagogue as a paid “full-time” minister.

Jesus came from simple folks who lived on the back forty. Jesus was not formally educated. He was a commoner, laborer, and outsider from the despised northern region of Nazareth in Galilee. Can anything good come from there? This type of regional bias and denigration happened to Jesus and his disciples from the rulers and authorities in Jerusalem and in their palaces.

There are only a few exceptions of influential people with authority showing any deference or grace toward Jesus. The Gospels record these examples: a Roman Centurion with an afflicted servant, the

chief tax collector Zacchaeus and one of his subordinate tax collectors Matthew, the wife of Pontius Pilate (at least momentarily), and Joseph of Arimathea who was a member of the Sanhedrin and who honored the deceased Jesus with his own tomb. There are a limited number of examples of the affluent and powerful humbling themselves. Nicodemus is another.

Although Jesus was disliked by the Sanhedrin (Pharisee and Sadducee), Herodian, and Roman authorities, he was loved by those that they oppressed!

One day while Jesus was walking down a path, surrounded by his disciples and others, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus cried out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." He was told to shut up, but he repeated his plea. Jesus stopped and asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus answered his request miraculously. Jesus is no respecter of persons. He will hang with anyone, including a blind man who had no other means of supporting himself than begging.

Jesus happily chose to hang out with prostitutes, the non-Jewish "woman at the well" who had five former husbands, Matthew who was one of the despised tax collectors, and others referred to derogatorily as "sinners" by the religious leaders. He was also accused of being a drunkard. These are evidences that Jesus will hang with anyone.

A careful study of the only women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 1 confirms this notion that Jesus will hang with anyone. It reveals a noteworthy similarity between all five selected "mothers" in his direct lineage. The five included Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba ("the wife of Uriah the Hittite"), and Mary. To help us understand this divinely established "coincidence" refer to this table:

Wife	Husband	The Other Man	Scriptures
Tamar	Er (and Onan)	Judah	Genesis 38
Rahab (Canaanite)	Prostitution with men	Salmon	Joshua 2, 6
Ruth (Moabite)	Mahlon (son of Naomi)	Boaz	Ruth
Bathsheba	Uriah (Hittite)	David	2 Samuel 11, 12
Mary	Joseph (betrothed)	Holy Spirit	Luke 1, 2

The most striking observation of this analysis is that the lineage to Jesus through these five mothers all came about through pregnancies via “the other man”, who was not the ladies’ initial husband. This speaks of God’s merciful tendency toward *redemption* and His *sovereign* use of the most unexpected vessels. Yahweh is not deterred from adapting with a redemptive B-plan, after the A-plan doesn’t go as planned.

You might not comprehend or like what I’m about to say, but I can back it up with ample Scripture, “*God may choose to abuse you, in order to use you!*” He’s always good, always loving, and always gracious. But, He is also sovereign and intentional. A profound and clear example is the life of Joseph who was divinely subjected to great difficulties for 13 years as a servant and prisoner in Egypt, so that God could use him for a greater purpose. Something very similar can be said of righteous Job.

All of these five women would appear highly unlikely to contribute to the eventual birth of the Savior. But, all endured hardships for a greater purpose.

Tamar was married to a wicked man, Er, whose father was Judah and mother was a Canaanite. God chose to take Er’s life. Then, under their Jewish religious and cultural norms, his brother Onan was supposed to become her surrogate husband in order that she could have children. But, he, too, was a lousy fellow. He just enjoyed the pleasure of sex with his sister-in-law but refused to inseminate her. During the acts of sex, he would withdraw and waste his semen. Only through a deception did she eventually sleep with her father-in-law, Judah, who should have borne the responsibility to see that she became pregnant to preserve the family name. Judah was the “other man” in Jesus’ pedigree. In summary, this was not a pleasant story -- she had a horrible husband, a selfish brother-in-law who slept with her, and an unrighteous father-in-law who treated her as a presumptive prostitute. But, Jesus must descend from the Tribe of Judah.

Next, we have Rabab, who was a Canaanite living with her family in Jericho. She helped the Israelites’ spies when they entered the land of Canaan prior to their military conquests of the “land of milk and honey”. She is referred to as a prostitute and foreigner in three books -- Joshua, Hebrews, and James. For her courage and assistance to Joshua’s spies, her family was preserved and she obtained a Jewish husband, Salmon, from whom Jesus’ pedigree continues. If I had written the Bible, I

wouldn't have chosen a prostitute and foreigner upstream of Jesus. Yet, God sovereignly chose a prostitute and a foreigner in the lineage of the future King of Kings and Lord of Lords. His ways are higher than our ways.

The third woman named in Matthew chapter 1 is Ruth, a Moabite. She, like Rahab, was also a foreigner. After losing her first husband, the son of Jewish Naomi, the Moabite daughter-in-law eventually married a relative named Boaz. He was the kinsman redeemer. So Ruth was a foreigner and a widow who was redeemed for a greater purpose that eventually included the birth of Jesus.

The fourth woman was Bathsheba. Her husband was Uriah the Hittite, one of King David's mighty warriors. David acted as a real scoundrel toward both of them. He had an adulterous affair with her, impregnated her, tried to cover it up, and eventually arranged to murder his loyal friend Uriah. What a jerk! The life of the son born from this adultery was taken by the sovereign hand of God. After Nathan the prophet aligned David to the truth, he repented. David then married Bathsheba. Their next son, Solomon, is named in the lineage of Jesus. This woman was mistreated in so many ways, yet God orchestrated a multi-generational redemption through her.

Finally, we arrive at Mary, the virgin. She was likely a young teenager, perhaps about 14 years of age, when she was legally betrothed to Joseph. In their culture they were considered as formally married, although not yet sexually consummated. Through angelic visitation and dreams the couple was informed of this divinely enabled pregnancy that bypassed Joseph as the natural father. In the eyes of some people who doubted their incredible story, she would have been perceived as an adulterer, which would have been a capital offense in the Torah. Not only that, but Joseph was instructed to name the boy, "Jesus" (Yeshua in Hebrew), rather than "Joseph" as his first born. This might have enforced the perception that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. Imagine the scandalous rumors and reputational damage Joseph and Mary must have endured at the hands of their heavenly Father! Yet, they were obedient to the Sovereign's plans.

Jesus wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He wasn't born as a royal in a palace. Rather, he was raised, so to speak, on the wrong side of the tracks in Mississippi, the eldest son of a young teenage girl who

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was thought to have slept around. On top of that, he was literally born in a barn used for sheep and livestock and smelling of manure, because there was no room for him in the inn. What an amazing and humble beginning for the great Rabbi, prophet, healer, and eventual King of Kings! Perhaps that is why he is “opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble”. And, perhaps that is why Jesus will hang with anyone.

Love is a Verb: Demonstrating God's Love in Germany



Love Germany and have travelled there often since the mid-1980's. Plus, our Path Clearer ministry teams have traveled multiple times to Germany. We have witnessed first-hand the ministry of Charlotte Frei in Dresden and Herrnhut, who is an effective leader and discipler in these two cities. I commend her to you as a woman-of-God deserving of honor. Here is part of her story:

Here speaks an older German woman, who has recently entered her 70's and who found the Lord and the power of His healing in 2002 in an Evangelical Free Church in St. Peters, Missouri. At that time, my life was broken, my hope was gone, and my heart was pain-pierced by wrong choices and sin. With a career of 33 years of teaching, an education in special education, a masters of psychology and an education in psychotherapy according to Carl Rogers, my life was regarded as successful. But, I was spiritually a mess.

Raised after the Second World War in Germany, my family struggled with poverty and various family issues. I looked for a way out with a career and success at work. Searching for love I ended up in the wrong places, which finally led me to a spiritual breakdown and severe physical health issues. Abundant sexual sin led me into deep loneliness and depression. So much pain inside. My dream to open a restaurant business failed and led me into a great debt. How do I get out of this? I was crying out, but I did not know at this time whom I had called!

I was raised Roman Catholic but left the Catholic faith and church at the age of 30. Thereafter, I became an atheist and engaged in esoteric belief systems. I always had a deep spiritual hunger.

My debt situation brought me into a business expanding to the USA, which I joined to have a chance to make money. I stayed with friends in St. Louis, Missouri. It was quite difficult, as I left behind a broken career in Germany, broken relationships, shame, disappointment.....the list is endless. What supported me in this difficult time to survive?

The Lord by His mercy led me to a woman at Walmart who invited me to a women's retreat. I did not like "church"; I knew only the Catholic one. But, in my despair for rest, I agreed. The event was in a hotel, so this made it easier! The women at the retreat approached me with unconditional love that I had never experienced before. They offered me an invitation to come to church and also to a singles' group.

On a Good Friday service I had a breakdown and an unspeakable experience of forgiveness and love by our Lord Jesus Christ and a revelation of the truth of the cross. Needless to say, I still went through rough times, but one thing impacted my life from there on -- receiving unconditional love without questioning the person's condition is the only way Jesus can touch, convict, and change the hearts of women and men. Judgment is (temporarily) set aside for the sake of the recipient.

This unconditional love prepares the soil in the hearts of men and women to receive the "bread of life", the Word of God. When I was invited to this small group of women, they all had their Bibles open and were feeding their hungry souls with it. I became curious for this power and started to read the Bible too. Reading through this book, I experienced a mixture of anger and joy: anger because of the betrayal I went through reading all the esoteric literature and psychological books seeking to find an answer for the search of truth; and joy because finally I found what I was searching for. Soon, I was determined to move this truth to unbelievers who would perish without experiencing salvation and die without a clue of the will of God for their lives.

I was still in the process of doubting and critical thinking but was looking for a way to build a foundation for my faith. This desire brought me to Midwestern Baptist Seminary, where I landed finally to earn a Master of Divinity and a Doctor of Ministry

degrees. As a hostess at the seminary, the Lord used my gift of cooking and hospitality to connect to people from around the world. I received a wide experience of the family of God.

I was baptized at Pleasant Valley Baptist Church in Liberty in 2003. This has been and remains my home church ever since then. They have been supporting our ministry in Germany, which was started at the end of 2006 in Dresden. The Lord laid this particular city on my heart during my studies, but it took a while following this call. How did all of it start?

I was sent to the most lost and desperate people in the city, the drug addicts and people with deep psychological problems, mostly young adults. The focus was street evangelism in one of the darkest areas of Dresden. The key was to open my small home in the beginning and to use my love for hospitality to provide an environment of love, faith, and hope. Many loved my Schweinebraten, Schnitzel, potato salad, Shabbat bread, and more. Plus, they could receive the saving grace of our Lord Jesus. The experience of my deep sin and pain experiences of life and the healing power of Jesus made it easy for them not to be afraid of shame, fear, rejection, and hate.

It was true, to whom much is forgiven, that one can love abundantly. Our Lord is not a respecter of any person. I reached out to this group of people for several years while living in their midst. Soon, we moved into a larger house and used a former pub to reach out. This location is still run by a former team member. It is a refugee church providing Bible teaching to international people. Later, our ministry was relocated into a former schoolhouse in a village about 20 miles from Dresden. The Lord has used this remote place for the healing of many young people who lived with us and experienced love and truth in a Christian community.

One of these healed young men later studied water science at the University of Dresden. In this academic setting, all kinds of nationalities were found. A new era began. He suddenly brought many international students on weekends to our home. We were overwhelmed by their hunger for fellowship and a "family" connection. We learned that many of the international students

suffered from cultural shocks and loneliness. What an honor to serve them with the love of Christ. From my side it required the study of recipes of Indian, Asian, African, and other cultures, and the providing of many English, Iranian, Urdu, and other Bibles. Many of the students were unbelievers and experienced the first-time unconditional love and grace of our Lord Jesus. This setting also opened up opportunities to assist them with daily needs. I still remember a student from Iran who was married and expecting a child with his wife. Both were Muslims and in desperate need of help to renovate their new apartment, e.g., to buy the baby equipment. He converted to Christianity; she is still Muslim.

There are so many stories to share. We planted seeds, but sometimes we do not know where our mentored friends are living. Last week, I received a message from a Pakistani student who had married and is now a father. He misses the love demonstrated at the schoolhouse and had problems after his stay in Germany readjusting to Pakistan. He wants to come back. He once told me he has a wonderful large family, but if he declared himself to be a Jesus follower that he would likely be killed. He longs for Christ's love where there is freedom and truth.

How did the love story with Jesus continue in the ministry we oversee? In 2016 we had a refugee wave in Germany from countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Desperate people were everywhere in the camps, on the streets, hopeless and waiting for a better future here in Europe. We reached out to many and also took care of a family in asylum who was persecuted in their Iraqi homeland. This church asylum occurred in Herrnhut. This family now reaches out to Muslims with the love they have experienced from Christians in Germany.

Does unconditional love bring disappointments? Yes, it will, but it will never stay without fruit and blessing. We all need a new revelation of the truth commanded us in the Bible. We have no more spiritual debt due to the forgiveness of our sins at the Cross, except the debt to love one another! May the Lord give us grace and strength to reach out with his love and mercy and

be a powerful testimony for his healing power over pain, sin, shame, hopelessness, and fear. Thanks be to God!

At the end of painting a picture of God's love touching people's lives through someone whose hurts were healed, I want to share how the Lord used physical pain and health problems to reach many with his love. Suffering from hip pain and the replacement of both hips, followed by the onset of painful neuropathy, I have visited now three times a rehab program in the Czech Republic called Franzensbad. I went there to stay in hotels where special therapies are provided to treat various diseases. Also, there are many springs where one can drink to aid one's health. This is also a beautiful place to relax and to enjoy the Lord's beauty in nature.

During these stays the Lord has given me many opportunities to share the love of Christ to other guests – to Czechs and Germans and to workers and therapists. The Lord used my gifts of listening and counseling. The Czech Republic is a dark place where not many have the knowledge of the truth. The Lord has put this country on my heart, and I pray that the seeds sown there will be watered, spread about, and yield fruit everlasting.

A Father and a Daughter Separated



Galileo Galilei was an exceptional astronomer of the 17th Century. His oldest and illegitimate daughter, Virginia, was sent to a Roman Catholic convent where she became a nun named Suor Maria Celeste. *Galileo's Daughter*, the captivating biography by Dava Sobel, chronicles the close emotional relationship between this daughter and her father. The book is based upon the archived letters that she wrote to him from inside the cloistered environment of the convent. A nun of this vocation was seldom granted the privilege of meeting with family members. She died in 1634.

Galileo was a brilliant empirical astronomer who contributed to the debate on the earth's orbit around the Sun, rather than the inverse. He was the focus of a major controversy with the leadership of the Catholic Church, and it resulted in an enforced "separation" between the Catholic Church and himself. His reputation as a rebel toward the Catholic leadership in Rome was eventually reconciled and restored, albeit formally so only in our current Century. He had to wait four centuries to be vindicated and thus receive a posthumous "reunion" with the leadership of the Catholic Church.

Galileo was an exceptional and controversial scientist on the cutting edge of discovery. But, he was much more – he was a father. He demonstrated a kindness and affection for his daughter from whom he was separated by Sour Maria Celeste's religious order's cloistered environment. Upon his death in 1642, the remains of his body were buried in the same vault immediately adjacent to his beloved daughter's remains. In the same compartment. Only after death was he reunited with his beloved Virginia following decades of physical separation.

The fondness of a parent for a deceased adult child is exemplified in a wonderful small book entitled *Lament For a Son* by Nicholas Wolterstorff. His young adult son Eric died in a mountain climbing

accident in 1983. This father wrote from a place of deep mourning and captured many of the sentiments that grieving parents are confronted with involuntarily. He understood the finality, the before versus the after, and the substantial change the death makes in the lives of the surviving parents.

My wife and I have shared in many of those same thoughts. The death of a child is final for the child, but it plays over and over and over in our thoughts and tears. It will not be over for us until the day that each of us dies. It is our intention to have Thomas' ashes placed alongside of our earthly remains when we pass into the eternal.

A Father and a Son Reconciled



A man regularly attended a Bible study at our home for several years. He is a devout student of the Bible, very knowledgeable and disciplined. He became a close friend to us. On occasion he would mention that he had been estranged from his son since the season of life when he became divorced from his wife, his son's mother. Although the father and son were living in the same city, they had no dialog, and my friend didn't see or communicate with his son's children. There was a great chasm filled with pain and unforgiveness between the father and son.

One day, the father and I were enjoying an afternoon of recreation together. I asked him about the possibility of reconciling with his son. It seemed an impossibility to him. However, he was aware that his son's wife had made an attempt to bring the two of them back into dialog, yet without success. I attempted to pry some into the pain of the past encounters. I urged him to forgive with words resembling, "Back then you were the Dad; he was the son. You were the adult; he was the adolescent. Why don't you make the initiative?"

My friend stated to me about the history of their difficult relationship as father and son, "I tried to talk with my son during the initial (marriage) separation, but he would not talk with me. This caused anger for me that simmered for years. My son contacted me after an extended period of time and asked for me to meet with him for lunch. I met with him and listened to the words that were spoken, including, if I'm not mistaken, an apology from him. But, I still had too much anger at that time to consider having a relationship with my son. He reached out to me, but I would have none of it."

After spending that day outdoors together, my friend contacted me saying that he was willing to meet with his son, provided that it was

Pain Taught Me to LOVE

in a neutral setting and that I would be there as a mediator. The son agreed, provided that his friend would also serve as another mediator, and that the meeting be held at the son's local church building. I was there to help the father, and the son's friend was there to help the son.

So, the four of us met. There were years of painful emotions and memories on both sides. Both of them were able to share some of their journeys, including with tears, through their troublesome years. There were some regrets and misunderstandings over the years. There were real grievances. While this dialog was happening, I observed something else that was fascinating and tender to the heart – the other mediator and I appeared to quickly embrace the other party's position. It was like a role reversal. He became the advocate for the father; I became the advocate for the son. We were motivated to help build a bridge strong enough to handle the difficult emotions and pain. I recognized a delightful, competent, and amazing son. The other mediator recognized a genuinely repentant father desirous of God's best for his son.

This remarkable meeting and at least one more occurred many years ago. Prior to then, the son was waiting for years on a possible reconciliation before he would "move on" with his life goals. Today, the father and son are in a relationship of mutual respect and love. They pray for one another. They meet together for meals and holidays. They have forgiven one another. The son has moved on to fulfill some of his heart's desires that were placed on hold by the breach in the relationship. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life!" (Proverbs 13:12).

Of all of the messed up family relationships that I've been privy to in my life, this experience is perhaps the most profound example to me of how pain taught two men to love (more). It was indeed an honor to be an eyewitness to this reconciliation.

Love for Yahweh, the “Echad”, the One and Only God



Perhaps the most familiar and often sung passage to Jews from the Hebrew Bible is found in the Torah within the book of Deuteronomy, *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”* (Deut. 6:4) This verse is known as the “Shema” in view of the first Hebrew term for “hear or listen”. At a minimum it refers to exclusivity and monotheism based upon the last Hebrew word “Echad” for “oneness” in perfect harmony. It has a depth of meanings well beyond the number one, such as all-sufficient, more than enough, indivisible, and the Lord of Lords. But, more specifically to a monotheism directed at the God of Israel – YHWH (LORD in capital letters in the English translation).

This well-known statement was recorded shortly after the Hebrews had departed from 430 years of residing in Egypt, the latter of which were during slavery. Monotheism was not practiced in Egypt; rather, they had multiple gods. Monotheism was uncommon among the Middle Eastern nations surrounding Israel on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean.

The Shema verse is immediately prior to another familiar passage: *“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”* (Deut. 6:5; emphasis added). This instructs Jews (and Christians who share in the common Hebraic root) to direct their devotion exclusively to YHWH (LORD), rather than any other god(s). Once again, it goes beyond monotheism to naming a specific God above all gods.

So, this raises a dilemma for those who worship any god that is not the God of Israel - YHWH. The Hebrews had just departed from Egypt and would soon enter the foreign lands of Canaan and Philistia. The Egyptians served many gods, such as Ra (or Re), Sobek, and Horus.

The Canaanites worshiped Baal and Asherah. The Philistines served Dagon. The same pattern of worship of false gods occurred under the subsequent Kingdoms of Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and then Rome.

The Bible specifically mentions multiple false gods by name, such as Asherah, Baal, Marduk, Molech, Nisroch, Dagon, the “sun, moon, and stars”, Rephan, Tammuz, Chemosh, Artemis, and even deified men who served as kings and rulers. So, when Moses taught the Torah to the newly formed nation of Israel, he provided a clear distinction about which particular god the Jews were to worship. It was an exclusive relationship. Only YHWH was worthy of their worship as the One True God...all others were counterfeits.

Starting in the Creation account in Genesis, the principle of “separation” is essential and of utmost importance. Separation of the sacred (holy) from the secular (profane) is a major theme of the Creation account, as well as the remainder of the Torah, and for that matter, the broader TaNaKh (Hebrew Bible). Failure to worship YHWH and/or the intentional worship of another god was punishable by death. It was a capital offense. A Torah-observant Jew, ever since the Torah (Law) was given by YHWH via Moses, was forbidden from worshipping any other gods. It might not be perceived as a capital offense today, but it is still a very serious matter for Jews, as well as their grafted-in alien step-children, the Gentile Christians (see Romans 11).

It is not possible for a Jew or Christian to love God unless she or he is devoted to the One True God of the Hebrew Bible - YHWH. No other gods will suffice. So, ask yourself - which god(s) do you bow down to in devotion?

More than a millennium later, Jesus was quizzed by a Pharisee (i.e., a conservative, traditionalist, literalist Jewish religious man) who was an expert in the Torah about, “...*which is the greatest commandment in the Law?*” (Matt. 22:36). Jesus replied, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” *This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*” (Matt. 22:37-40). Jesus was reciting from memory from Deuteronomy 6:5 that follows the familiar Shema passage and secondarily by Leviticus 19:18. Thereby Jesus underscored the identity of the One and Only True God as YHWH.

By saying the phrase, "all the Law and the Prophets", Jesus was declaring that all of the commandments of the Hebrew Bible were dependent on these two foundational principles. These commandments would include the so-called "Ten Commandments" as well as all of the more than 600 subordinate commandments. Furthermore, if one were to rank the commandments in weightiness or gravitas from God's point of view, it would likely be the following sequence:

1. Love The LORD (YHWH) with all of your being (Deuteronomy 6:5), and immediately following the Shema - *Hear of Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one*;
2. Love your fellow human beings as yourself (Leviticus 19:18);
3. The co-called "Ten Commandments" (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5), which are amplifications of the two great commandments (above); Many of these commandments when violated resulted in capital punishment, thus an imposed death sentence for the guilty (e.g., idolatry, murder, adultery, rebellion against parents, etc.);
4. Other commandments in the Torah, which when violated result in capital punishment (e.g., various sexual perversions, thus having similarities to adultery);
5. Other commandments in the Hebrew Bible, which when violated did not result in capital punishment but rather a lesser punishment (e.g., eating lobster or rabbit meat, exclusions for "uncleanness" to participate in religious ceremonies and activities, etc.)

Are there any sins that are worse than any other sins? Yes. The Scriptures are clear on this matter. But, the condition of mankind is such that all sin separates us from God. Thus, we all need a Redeemer who can atone for our sins, whether our sins are at the top of the list or at the bottom. Even the seemingly pure and innocent among us are still deemed to be sinners, even if they have only sinned one time in a lifetime. Paul in the book of Romans declares that, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". All sins are missing the mark. But, some are more grievous than others in the sight of YHWH.

If the greatest of all commandments is focused on loving YHWH with everything we have...body, soul, spirit, then Jesus was joining his voice as a prophetic teacher to that of Moses in declaring that we must

do this. Jesus was definitely exclusive. Jesus was saying that the essence of the Torah was summed up in: (a) Love starts with “vertical” devotion to YHWH; and (b) Love continues from our devotion to YHWH into “horizontal” expressions of altruism to other men, women, and children. The two great commandments.

Learning to Love Others While in Prison



My prophetic friend Dale Karoff was in prison in Minnesota for six years. During that long lonely season, he only received visits from his wife, who came regularly whenever she could arrange for the long trip to the prison. Other than she, he received occasional visits from two family members and a minister (Rabbi). Although he knew many people who claimed to be Jesus followers, only one friend visited on one occasion for the duration of his stay. He felt abandoned. Dale learned a lot about loving others while incarcerated. Here are some of the highlights:

One of the things I remember coming through the system was the “first impressions” one makes when meeting other inmates. These inmates always remember how you greeted them, whether it was good or bad. Second, I tried to find the good in others, to highlight those points, and not say, “Oh, you’re one of those guys” or accuse them of their crime. They have heard and contemplated internally more than enough of that. For me, I offered them prayer and encouragement whenever I could. I learned to be an advocate. I learned to lift my focus off myself, to not be a victim. The inmates are watching you all the time. They can tell if you are real or not.

For me, helping out whenever I could meant bringing snacks or a favor to gain their trust. Or, I would take the time to go out of my way for someone else, even if I preferred to do other things of interest to me. I simply put my interests aside and tried to make myself available. For instance, I would spend my time teaching education to those who wanted to get a high school GED, which was in fact a mandatory requirement before they could get a job within the prison. I taught for \$1.50 per hour as a tutor, and later watched them graduate. This was very rewarding.

I never really encountered any problems from anyone...likely because I stayed humble, and especially when something looked like it was stirring. The words of Jesus, "*When I was thirsty, you didn't give me anything to drink. When I was hungry, you didn't feed me. When I was naked, you did not clothe me. When I was in prison, you did not come to visit me.*" (Matthew 25:31-46 paraphrase). Those principles I kept at the top of my list as much as I could, even though it was not always permitted. But, I always prayed from that perspective and proceeded privately. In doing so, I earned the respect of the most dangerous felons in prison. I had many opportunities to share about the Lord. This approach even gained favor with many of the officers whom I encountered.

I would say this: My faith and hope grew and increased by the very points that I mentioned above. It was, if I may say, one of the best experiences I have encountered in life. But, I would not want to go through that again. It was painful experiencing how so many people whom I've met in Christian ministries made no effort to visit or to write to me.

Pastor Joel Osteen* sent me a book called *Your Best Life Now*. In my mind I said to him, "Are you kidding me?!" My best life now? I was in prison with very limited privileges and freedom. Well, I must say that next to my relationship with the Lord, my Bible, and prayer...that book really touched my life. Praise the Lord.

*Interestingly I never appreciated the ministry of Joel Osteen. In fact, I was critical of it. Obviously his messages are more "motivational" than they are conventional preaching or expositions of Bible passages. His approach appeared to me to be lopsided, unbalanced, "Let's all hold hands and sing *Kum-ba-ya*" stuff. He was far too optimistic and too smiley for me. It is wise to consider both sides of an issue -- the good and the bad, the blessings and the curses. Remember, I'm a PhD scientist, inventor, and entrepreneur. I'm a truth-seeker and very prone to criticism. [I doubt that "criticism" is ever listed as a spiritual gift!]

But, I, too, experienced something that changed my perspective about Joel, at least somewhat. After my son Thomas died, I started watching some of his messages on TV in the evenings at dinner time. Once my

heart was broken and in a deep state of mourning, I could begin to appreciate his encouraging messages. I can agree with Dale's comment. Neither Dale nor I expected to have our lives "touched" by Joel Osteen's ministry. But, when you are really down, his messages can lift you back up to a place of hope. Note the irony...I'm the author of a book entitled *HOPE When Everything Seems Hopeless*. Even an author of a book on hope needs an infusion of hope from others at times!

In the two years following Thomas' death, I have taught each week at the Lovelady Center to approximately one thousand Loveladies. A high percentage of them are in residential recovery following incarceration in prison or jail. Many of them have shared their stories. Prison is not a vacation, and a stay in jail is not a weekend at the Hilton.

One of our Path Clearer board members, Wayne Crim, was a former missionary in Romania. He helped to mentor a young man in ministry, Alin Padureanu. Wayne summarized Alin's effective and creative ministry to prisoners:

The prison ministry started when Alin was asked to speak at a prison in Timisoara about the men's ministry program for the inmates while still serving their time. This experience connected him to the families of some of the inmates. He saw a need, and a new vision was being birthed. God knows all things and how and whom to use. This particular prison is one of the most progressive in its approach to rehabilitation.

This ministry needed to raise funds to finance the work. So, they had an idea to bring in junked car parts that had been scrapped and of no use, then re-assemble them piece-by-piece and turn them into a drivable car. They brought all of the parts needed to assemble this car inside the prison and let the prisoners work together to reassemble it to something of worth. The car building project was named "From Zero to Zorro" and was implemented in a juvenile prison.

Alin used this broken car as an object lesson and preached to these inmates about how God can take something broken, repair it back to new life, and use it for His glory and honor. Many men gave their lives to God and repented. After finishing the project car, it was auctioned at the National Auto Show in

Bucharest. The money was used to install artificial turf on the sports field inside of the prison.

They received a lot of coverage from the Romanian news agencies and even had TV coverage of this project in action inside this prison. They really got a lot of notoriety when the auction of this car took place because the Prime Minister of the Romanian Parliament purchased this automobile for 13,000 Euros, or approx. \$15,000 US.

It was probably only worth \$2,500 US or less. The purchaser publicly said he was impressed with the show of love by this organization and the results the discipleship program was having on the inmates. It was also having a positive effect on their families.

After this project was completed, the head of all of the prisons in Romania gave this ministry *carte blanche* permission to minister in all of the prisons of Romania. As of 2017, they were ministering in 22 of the 33 prisons in Romania. They are in both men's prisons and women's prisons, and their goal is to reach all 33 with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Can God open doors? Yes... but He does need willing obedient vessels to go and do the work.

This ministry has started a program called "A Day with Daddy". For a prisoner to qualify as a participant, he or she must go through a discipleship program and meet all the requirements of this ministry as well as all of the prison's restrictions. Then, one day per month, the prisoner is released to go with their spouse and children to a pre-designated place outdoors and be together as a family along with this ministry team.

They get to eat and play with one another, which keeps the family bonded together. They hear teaching about the family from a Biblical perspective and are given the opportunity to participate in a discipleship program. The prisoner has to stay on good behavior as well as do all the homework required by the ministry. The family is encouraged to be involved with a local church that has volunteered to help them as a family until the prisoner is released. The churches are involved in assisting with the physical and spiritual needs of the new Jesus followers.

I had the privilege of living in London for several years in the late 1980's. While living there I first watched in 1986 the musical based upon Victor Hugo's fictional *Les Miserables*. In fact, I've seen a performance live three times in London's West End theatre district in addition to watching recordings thereof.

Les Miserables is set in France in the early 19th Century. The story's protagonist, Jean Valjean, is shown compassion and hospitality from a Roman Catholic bishop after Valjean's release from prison. However, Valjean was jaded by his excessive and harsh prior treatment for a minor infraction, and in bitterness, he chose to steal some of the bishop's silver. When Valjean is accused of stealing the silver, ironically Bishop Myriel granted to him a merciful pardon. The priest sang the following to Jean (within the musical):

But remember this, my brother
See in this some higher plan
You must use this precious silver
To become an honest man
By the witness of the martyrs
By the Passion and the Blood
God has raised you out of darkness
I have bought your soul for God!

Although fictional, this pardon set the course for Valjean's redemption and beautiful life of loving service to others.

A Police Officer's Painful Loss



When our son Thomas, was in critical condition in the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital in Tuscaloosa in July 2015, we received visitors who came to pray for Thomas' survival and to encourage us. Among those visitors were Bill and Debbie White from Grace Community Church. At the time we did not know each other well; we were acquaintances. But, they mentioned to us that they had experienced the tragic loss of their own son and could relate somewhat to what we were facing. Here's Bill's perspective:

If we could plan our lives, I know of no one who would choose the path of addiction for themselves, much less their children. We desire the best for our children, BUT GOD will write His story with our lives just as He did with our son, regardless of our mistakes and bad choices. "BUT GOD" has become some of the most important terms in the Bible and in our lives as we grow closer to Him.

Our son surrendered his life to The LORD at the age of twelve. The immediate and extreme life change was evident and an answer to prayer I believe we Christian parents have for our children. Just as happens with so many young people when they make that commitment to The LORD, our son was soon attacked by temptations and enticed by some older kids (visiting the church youth group) to try drugs. Don't misunderstand this, he made the choice to follow, but the enticement was there from an external source of which we were unaware. This example is just further proof that we must continually vet the friends our kids hang around with. We can't change the past, but we can become part of the solution that stops the devastation of the family.

Drugs took control of our son's life by the age of nineteen, and by the age of thirty, while incarcerated for crimes committed to feed his addiction, our son was separated from the drugs that had become the focus of his life in order that he could just "be normal". In 2006, he turned himself in on a warrant. My wife and I did not bond him out of jail because we were the ones who had sworn out the warrant with the hope of separating him from this addiction.

On the eighth morning of his incarceration, he suffered a brain aneurism that led to his death. But, more importantly, the Sunday prior to this, God restored His relationship with him as two men came in to minister to the inmates at the jail and our son rededicated his life to Christ in front of over fifty inmates. Little did he know that, the following Tuesday, God would complete his salvation - healing him for eternity and fulfilling his salvation as he went to glory. His relationship with Jesus Christ was restored, and the cloud of addiction lifted from his shoulders.

So how should we respond to the loss of our only son? Some people expected us to be mad at God, BUT GOD was the sovereign author of this story. We believed with all our hearts that what the devil (Satan) meant for evil, God meant for good. Our son lost his home, family, job, and eventually his life, BUT GOD never gave up on him. The relationship my wife Debbie and I have with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ began before we were married. Trusting Him in our lives in all things is one of the foundational beliefs our family has lived by. So, as our son went to glory, our next question was, "Where do we go from here Lord?"

We came to realize so many paths could have led to this point in our lives, BUT GOD showed us that His plan is always the best for us and His glory. You see, He could have kept our son from addiction, BUT GOD had another plan. He could have prevented our son from suffering the aneurism, BUT GOD allowed it for His purpose. God could have healed our son during and after our son had the brain hemorrhage, BUT GOD answered our prayers and healed our son for All of eternity.

How have I processed the loss of our son? Coming face to face with this reality Debbie and I realized God had been preparing me for prison ministry through the battle our son was engaged in as he fought for his life in his addiction. He lost the physical battle but won the spiritual battle as his relationship was restored during the eight days he was incarcerated prior to his death. That victory fueled my desire to make a difference in those fighting the similar battle of addiction and incarceration. You see, true faith takes action, and all that God had shown us was not to be wasted. We had prayed for fifteen months that God would heal our son from addiction and restore his relationship with Him. God answered our prayers in the perfect way to glorify Himself.

God led me to be involved in jail and prison ministry with His story of the healing and restoration of our son. Because of the experiences and love God has shown my family, He made real the battle waging for men's (and women's) souls, and how God sees those who are afflicted. The first time I stood before a chapel full of inmates at a state prison to share His story of restoration, I felt God's hand on my heart. It was like a voice in my head that said, "This is what I've been preparing you for and where you were meant to serve". You see, I no longer viewed inmates as people who made bad choices, but as God's sheep who were lost and needed a Savior. My wife and I have a new respect for God's sovereignty.

For the past thirteen years since our son's death, God has used us to minister to those who suffer similar situations and events we experienced. Recovering (if there is such a thing), we've come to realize that when we sin, God's heart is broken the way our hearts were broken at the loss of our son. God has not wasted our suffering. We have continually been called to come alongside families and friends who are dealing with similar situations as we experienced. Just as God called the prophet Jonah to "Arise, and go", this is where God has taken us to limits and places we would never have dreamt.

There have been over one hundred men and women who have confessed a desire for salvation due to God's story about our

son and God's saving grace. From jails to prisons to recovery facilities to churches and to the streets, God has continued to lead us in His path to the lost that we might be a witness for His Saving Grace.

One last point. God gave me a burden to pray for those who sold our son drugs and walked that path with him. I began praying for these people and asking God to put someone in front of them who could share the Good News of the Gospel because God loves them just like He loves me.

It was through these prayers that God led me to a cell block one night to share His story about our son and the Good News of eternal life. As I was sharing about this hope, I shared my son's mug-shot photo. One of the inmates jumped up and called out his name, then said he was one of our son's dealers. In God's infinite wisdom, He had given me the heart, the vision, and now the opportunity to share the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Death Instructs Us to Love One Another



After our Thomas died, Laura and I cried every single day for at least two months. It was devastating, and it drained us of all joy. While dealing with the emotional pain of losing him, we were reminded each day of his absence. His room in our home needed to be cleaned, his clothes washed and sorted. Some items were given to the Lovelady thrift store. Others were retained for sentimental reasons. For more than a year, we could enter his bedroom and literally still smell his presence. There were his invoices for bills, credit cards, and other financial matters. And we had to pay the funeral expenses. We had to collect copies of his death certificate. The results of the autopsy provided a measure of finality, but it did not remove any of the pain.

On top of these factors, there were insensitive and errant comments from individuals. Although most of the words were likely intended to comfort us, they did the exact opposite! They added pain to our grief. A couple of comments compared the loss of our son to the loss of their pet. It is not the same thing. One lady called me to rebuke me because she was offended that I did not speak with her at my son's funeral. Oh really! After delivering my son's eulogy with countless tears and broken words to a weeping audience, I didn't even know that she was in the room! Others came up to Laura and me and declared, "Isn't it comforting and wonderful to know where he is now!" They were implying a heavenly paradise as a consolation. But, the pain of loss was so great. We didn't want to hear that. For Thomas, death was final and binary. But for us, the consequences just kept going day after day. It was anything but final for the surviving family.

Please, just weep with those who weep. Don't offer a theology lesson. If you ever encounter a tragic situation like the one that Laura and I had, do not say to the survivors, "I know exactly how you feel." You don't. I have buried my grandparents, parents, a brother, other relatives, and

friends. But I have never felt such horrible grief as that of losing an adult child in the prime of life! It is definitely among the top of the list of most difficult losses in all of life. No parent wants to go through what we went through. The amount of pain in the grieving process is proportional to the amount of love-as-a-verb given into the life of a child. We had invested 24 years of our lives, some of which were filled with hardship and challenges. That is how we felt. That was our reality. When the child is gone, the level of grief reveals how much he or she was loved.

After Thomas' death, I longed for a dream to see him again. I had one in which he appeared as Boy Scout smiling and looking at me. I ran up to him and, as I attempted to embrace him, I thought, "So, what is it like?" But, he wasn't really there. Rather, he was a spirit of a young man, like a hologram. My arms could not embrace him. Spirit is not flesh.

I found comfort in another dream in which I saw Thomas running on a dirt trail in India. Boys and girls were coming up to the dusty path to watch him run his race. When Thomas was a senior at Vestavia Hills High School, he came with me to visit two of Mission India's training centers in Bathinda, Punjab and in New Delhi. I am so grateful today that he and I shared that trip together, even though it was filled with unpleasant circumstances. My passion for international missions wasn't really his thing. But, he always enjoyed Indian food and culture. So, he really wanted to come with me to India. We bonded further as father and son on that trip. As a tribute to Thomas' life, Path Clearer (www.PathClearer.com) and RIMI/Mission India (www.RIMI.org) have established the *Thomas Dooley Centre* for leadership and youth in Bathinda, the same city that he had visited while a high school student.

My friend Irene Thompson of Houston, Texas wrote, "I have been meditating on 1 Corinthians 13 for a few years. I can't digest it, nor understand it. The more I study the subject of love, I become more aware that I don't love. I am faintly aware that at the end of unspeakable pain, there is love for those in Christ. Sometimes, I think that to pour out His love, God allows brokenness in us. I think only those who have experienced deep pain and suffering can truly understand love. I think love is divine. But, I don't know why pain and suffering must come first."

An exceptional example of this love-from-suffering dynamic is demonstrated by the hymn, *It is Well with my Soul*, by Horatio Spafford. In 1873, all four of Spafford's daughters simultaneously lost their lives during a trans-Atlantic crossing when their ship, *SS Ville du Havre*, collided with another vessel. The four daughters ranged from two to eleven years old. His wife alone survived the disaster. But, there was even more sadness to this couple's story, as the Spaffords also lost a young child prior to this episode and another child thereafter.

I can't even fathom that level of emotional pain and disappointment. We have lost a son – but only one child, one out of four total. The Spaffords lost four at sea and two at home. Despite this pain from loss, the father's lyrics capture a deep sense of persevering faith in a Sovereign God and solace in the midst of a storm:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

PS - If anyone you know is struggling with the loss of family and friends and/or the reality of Heaven (and Hell), I recommend two books on what the Bible has to say explicitly about eternity. The two authors are Randy Alcorn (Heaven) and David Jeremiah (Revealing the Mysteries of Heaven).

Processing Lifelong Chronic Physical Pain



Amanda Carmichael is a beautiful and cheerful 22 year old college senior. She has completed her major in vocal performance and opera. She has faced almost continuous physical pain all of her life. As she recently shared:

“What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger”...said none other than the godless German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. However, he was indeed correct. But what kind of strength is his “stronger” referring to? I believe that there are many answers that would sublimely suffice. I am here to explain the role this saying has had on my life, as both a person and a Christian.

I was born with severe bilateral clubbed feet. This means that my feet faced backwards, and my toes were curled up to my ankles, which were twisted and curled up against my shin area on my legs. At 10 days old doctors performed soft-tissue manipulation, essentially breaking both of my feet and ankles and forcing them into a “normal position,” (all of which was completed without any anesthetic). For the next five months I had bi-weekly re-breakings and castings. At five months old, I had a simultaneous surgery on both feet.

Yet my childhood was filled with adventure and laughter! The only differing factor between mine and my three sisters’ childhood experiences was the chronic pain I experienced due to my feet. Even so, it all felt normal to me—I have never been without pain. When I reached 10 years old, my feet began over-correcting themselves, and I started to walk on the insides of my feet and ankles. From then until I was 17 years old, I had at least one reconstructive foot and ankle surgery each year, accompanied by months of post-surgery physical therapy.

Today, I have 11 screws and three plates in my right foot, along with fused and partially-fused joints. These surgeries were intense and excruciating, but I am very thankful for them! Not only did they help me physically, but they also helped me grow in my character and my perspectives on life. Believe it or not, I view the pain I endured, and still endure, as a blessing. Without this challenging season, I would not fully understand what it means to have gratitude, what it means to choose joy, and what it means to live with meaningful perspective and rightly ordered priorities. These characteristics have taught me how to love people, a standard that God has called us all to do.

Gratitude means, “readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness; the quality of being thankful,” according to the Oxford American College Dictionary. I prefer this definition because it depicts gratitude as possessing an active quality, meaning that it can be a state of mind and/or a physical action. Respect stems from gratitude. I learned gratitude through humility and reliance on others. I have gratitude for each nurse that helped me, each physical therapist that taught me how to walk, my Mom and her constant care, and my Savior who provided all of this to me. I could never thank these individuals enough.

Choosing to act and feel a certain way during trying times can prove to be a difficult task. However, it is never impossible. For me, the strength I used to accomplish this was provided by God. It is our human nature to complain, grumble and succumb to our emotions. What God has taught me throughout my surgery trials is that, when I push through that wall of complaining and decide to choose joy and positivity, my entire demeanor and mindset changes. When I choose to exude joy, it gives me the strength and power to overcome my pain. As it says in Nehemiah 8:10, “the joy of the Lord is my strength.”

Living with pain has enabled me to view life through a lens of grounded perspective and priority. I have had the time to evaluate my life and the things I deem most important. Each time, the first two points are the same. (1) I am reminded of my need for God through my daily pain. I need God for several reasons, ranging from forgiveness for my human sin and nature,

to finding the strength and faith to overcome my trials and suffering. This mindset instills a sense of continual dependence on the Lord. (2) People and the relationships they bring are the reason for life. My close relationship with the Lord has opened my eyes to the value and worth that each person holds in His sight. If I strive to be more like Him, then each person should hold the same value in my sight. These priorities allow my attention to not be easily distracted by desires of the world. I am not saying that a person cannot enjoy certain material things; I will be the first to say that I love beautiful gowns, sparkly jewels and fancy restaurants! But I also know exactly where my true priorities are rooted, and I know that I do not need these things to be valued, validated or deemed important.

So, how does this help me to love others? Simple—by understanding people. Going through a painful journey of any kind provides a person with the gift of relatability. The abilities to comprehend pain, emotion and mentality broaden. People are drawn to people who are genuine and relatable. The wisdom and lessons learned during such journeys enable a person to view situations and the actions of others differently. People react to pain differently. People respond to loss differently. Some people are ignorant of the true pain and suffering around them, while others choose to wallow in self-pity. The experiences you go through in life mold you, your habits and your instincts. Why not choose to embrace, learn from and provide encouragement and advice to others who are hurting? Be a helper, no matter your circumstance. As a person who has endured personal growth through seasons of pain and suffering, I am able to identify the benefits of my journey and declare that, while in the midst of everything “bad,” God truly does use it for good!

These surgeries did not kill me. The pain has not killed me. The pain may have been truly awful at times, but the strength that I’ve gained from my journey is immeasurable. So yes, I do believe that “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” if you choose to let it.

My wife Laura’s sister Evelyn Wheelhouse had a congenital limb defect; she lacked an arm. But, she was a woman of compassion and mercy,

served professionally as a social worker, and adopted three children. Her family was so accustomed to her lacking an arm and using a prosthetic arm, that they barely ever noticed it. Her “heart” made up for it. Undoubtedly many unimpaired individuals noticed her defect when they first encountered Evelyn, but her family saw her as “normal”. She had a big heart. Although our attitudes can limit us, our limbs do not contain or limit our soul and spirit!

Another fine example of this is Anthony Robles, who had a congenital limb defect; he lacked a leg. He used his disadvantage to his advantage as a wrestler in high school and college. He compensated for the lack of a leg (and its mass) with exceptional upper body strength and uniquely honed skills. Anthony became a state and national champion wrestler in high school in Arizona. Then, while an athlete at Arizona State University, he successfully competed to become an NCAA national collegiate champion. Once again, our limbs do not contain or limit our soul and spirit!

After decades of pain and countless surgeries, Amanda Carmichael underwent a double amputation in the summer of 2019.

Money Can't Buy You Love



I'm an entrepreneur-inventor with two decades of experience seeking investments for pharmaceutical or biotechnology start-up businesses from high net worth individual Angel investors (i.e., millionaires) and venture capitalists (i.e., sharks). Many of the people I've encountered who have lots of money are strongly motivated by two forces: (1) greed for more wealth, and (2) fear of losing what they already have attained. When multi-millionaires in the USA were asked in a recent survey, "How much wealth would it take before you could possibly be happy?" The answer was not at all surprising to me. Only 13 percent of multi-millionaires in America said it was even *possible* to be happy at their current level of wealth. Thus, 87 percent of people with millions in wealth are convinced that money cannot buy happiness. It is my opinion that high levels of wealth remind the wealthy constantly to seek out possessions to attempt to make them experience contentment and fulfillment, both of which are elusive. And – as the Beatles from Liverpool sang in the 1960's – money "can't buy me love".

Jesus had plenty to say about money and the pursuit of wealth, and almost all of it was framed around overt warnings. He asked, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet lose his soul?" (Mark 8:36) He declared to the Pharisees, who were religious leaders and who loved money, "You cannot serve both God and Money...What is highly valued among men (i.e., money), is detestable in God's sight." (Luke 16:13, 15) And, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19:23).

The Apostle Paul also declared, "The love of money is a root of many kinds of evil." (1 Tim. 6:10) He was warning the people around him in Israel that if money (Mammon) is your primary god, that it will open a whole can-of-worms of related sins. Perhaps Jesus was thinking about greed, lust, selfishness, pride (considering yourself superior to

others), idolatry, oppression of the poor, financial fraud, and trusting in one's own wealth rather than in God. The sin tentacles of Mammon are myriad. We recognize many of these characteristics in modern day Prosperity Charlatans, who are selfish leeches associated with certain Christian media and churches. They are just like the greedy Pharisees of Jesus' day.

What I'm about to say is provocative and might surprise some of you. It is my *opinion* that a large percentage of men and women in the Western world, who claim to be Christians or Jews, actually serve the god of money (i.e., Mammon) as their primary god. They think internally and state externally that Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is their own God. But in reality, these folks are most obedient to Mammon's influences. They are primarily focused on what it takes to make and retain money. Obedience to the commands of Scripture and promptings of the Holy Spirit take a back seat. If they are obedient to the false god Mammon, then they are idolaters and not really serving Yahweh. These folks should re-evaluate their actions in light of Jesus' teachings about "You cannot serve both God and Money." (Luke 16:13).

Ecclesiastes says, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless... but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep." (Eccl. 5:11-12). The author of the book of Hebrews wrote, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have..." (Heb. 13:5). The Bible offers clear warnings about greed and the need for contentment.

I've had many encounters that have informed my opinion on this matter. I might be wrong, but I doubt it. People tend to be very conscious and protective of their wealth. I've seen it countless times when attempting to solicit investments for entrepreneurial companies or when seeking donations for nonprofit organizations.

A friend from church back in our college years at the University of Kansas, Chuck Vanasse, served for a term as a missionary in Costa Rica. While there, he observed how the poor spend almost all of their time working to just meet their essential needs. But we in the West spend the majority of our time working for non-essentials, such as larger homes, extra clothes, nicer automobiles, snack foods, entertainment, and so on. Compared to the poor, we Westerners are pursuing lives of comfort, or in the extreme - luxury.

Ironically, I often find that the people who are the most willing to give of their resources (i.e., money, time, and talents) are often the poor. Too many people lavishly praise billionaires for their public acts of philanthropy, such as Bill Gates. Perhaps folks say this because they see an apparent high level of generosity because the amounts spent are so large from their perspective lower down the economic ladder. However, remember that one's level of generosity is based upon one's ability to give (i.e., scarcity of funds). Jesus praised the sacrificial generosity of the poor widow woman who contributed to the Temple only two small copper coins. She had no husband to provide for her and no retirement savings account.

A kind-hearted billionaire could give away 99 percent of his or her wealth and still be worth north of \$10 million. He or she could still live comfortably. He or she would still be "One Percenters" in household wealth in the US. And, with that much retained, he or she could still not know very much about generosity and sacrificial giving. Two donated copper coins from a poor widow is still superior from Heaven's perspective. I often sing internally a wonderful hymn chorus, "You can have all this world, just give me Jesus."

Generosity is the antidote to the poison of greed. My dear friend Dale Cathey was a former member of the Path Clearer Board of Directors for the first decade since it was founded. He and I loved travelling on ministry trips around the globe (e.g., UK, Europe, India, and Canada). Dale was exceptional at loving God and loving people. He was anointed with love. To Dale, money was only a practical tool. Money didn't make him happy or sad. Money didn't determine whether he did something or did not. He obeyed God regardless of the cost or inconvenience. It was a joy spending time with this lively and generous man. Unfortunately, he died at the age of only 61 years. I had the honor of delivering the eulogy at my friend's funeral.

One time Dale and I (and several other friends) were eating lunch at a Cracker Barrel restaurant in North Carolina. We had just attended a weekend ministry conference near Starkville and were "pumped up" with enthusiasm at what God had done that weekend. We were animated, talkative, and sharing testimonies of remarkable experiences. As a result, waitresses and other folks in the restaurant came up asking "Who are you guys? Why are you so happy?"

We offered to pray for one of the waitresses serving us. But she deferred saying, “That other waitress over there needs prayer more than I do. Her daughter recently died. So, she is taking care of her daughter’s child.” Then Dale asked his work colleague, Mike, for the checkbook in order to write a check from their *Servants of Christ* 501 (c)(3) organization. As we were leaving the restaurant, Dale asked our waitress to give that check to the other waitress, who had not served our table. As we were lingering with some other folks a while in the rocking chairs on the front porch, the other waitress came out with a shocked expression. She asked, “Is this a joke or is it real?” Dale had given her a check for \$2,400 as an anonymous benevolent act. This waitress grandmother was overwhelmed with joy and tears. She said, “I didn’t even have enough money to buy my grandson shoes for school. Thank you. Thank you!” Dale told her about the love of God, and then we left for our drive back to Birmingham. It was the most remarkable example of generosity that I have ever observed.

Once when I was unemployed between jobs, Dale not only prayed with me, but he also gifted a check to Laura and me. It was for \$2,400. Another friend of mine from Moldova in Eastern Europe, Doru Cirdei, is fond of the saying, “In order to be a Good Samaritan, you need two things – a donkey and some money.” Dale was intentional about being a good steward of the assets entrusted to him by God. He was one of the most loving and generous men I have ever known. I still miss him.

Would you like to hear another story about this remarkable man? Dale Cathey was genuine and “real”. Decades before this episode he was a new Christ-follower and had been addicted to cigarettes for many years. One day he was having an “inner dialog” with the Holy Spirit about his dependence on cigarettes. He sensed the Spirit asking him, “Dale, what do you really think about cigarettes?” Dale replied in blunt honesty, “I love cigarettes. I love to open the cellophane wrapper on a new pack. I love to hold and smell a fresh cigarette. I love to light ‘em. I love to smoke ‘em.” He sensed the Holy Spirit thanking him for being honest about his addiction to nicotine.

The next morning Dale was miraculously set free from his addiction, never to have it return again. The desire was banished from his life. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and life...” (John 14:6). You shall know the truth, and the truth (Jesus) shall set you free!” (John 8:32).

Dale was an exemplar of a spiritual man not swayed by Mammon. I admired that about him. The possession of money did not motivate him, neither did the lack thereof inhibit him. He influenced and reinforced the same virtue within me. I'm fond of the hymn, "I'd Rather Have Jesus", by Rhea F. Miller (1922), and popularized later by George Beverly Shea. It mentions the incomparable value of Jesus:

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold;
I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands.
I'd rather be led by His nail pierced hand...
I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today.

Ask yourself these two questions: "To what extent does money control my thoughts and actions?" and, "To what extent is Mammon a powerful god to me?"

While my daughter Catherine and her fiance Patrick were living in Gainesville, Florida they volunteered to help reach out in a homeless community. They befriended a man there. When they got married the couple received an invaluable wedding present from the man who lived in the tent community - his treasured carved wooden box that he used to store his dentures at night. When I saw this unique gift I was moved to tears of compassion and remarked, "Your friend gave you the 'best' present."

What Should a Parent Do About a Wayward Child?



Royce Watkins is the CEO of Cebert Pharmaceuticals, a pharmaceutical sales firm. He became a friend of mine as a result of working in the same industry. But, I soon learned of his devotion to God. This endeared me to him, as both of us place a high priority on our relationship with God. He and I share something else in common that is of profound significance in each of our lives:

My wife, Sandra, and I were blessed with two wonderful sons, Tim and Jim. We were grateful for the blessing of having two healthy boys and wanted to provide a home that loved and nurtured them to become all that God had created them to be.

Our older son, Tim, was a sweet, caring boy who was a leader among his peers. He did well in school, loved to make others laugh and was a better-than-average athlete. I loved playing ball with him, any kind of ball—football, baseball, basketball, tennis and ping pong. I coached his Tee-Ball baseball teams and Pee Wee football teams. I'm certain it was more fun for me than for the kids.

Our younger son, Jim, was also a sweet boy with an amazing sense of humor, who cared little about sports but loved the arts and particularly music. Jim had a great singing voice and began singing solos in our church at age 11. He sang for many functions and events throughout middle school and secondary school. When he graduated from high school, he received a scholarship in music at Baylor University. Eventually, Jim became the Worship Pastor at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama.

When Tim got into his mid-teen years, he lost interest in playing ball. I hated to see him lose interest in something that he was so

good at, but I thought that was just part of growing up. However, I did miss those times we played together. His new friends had little interest in sports, focusing mostly on rock music. Little did we know, they were also focusing on drug use.

We began noticing changes in Tim that concerned us. He would not honor his curfew and always seemed to have an excuse that it was not his fault. We began to notice more and more lies and deception. We began to suspect drug use but had no solid evidence initially. We were hearing about drug use with some of the guys Tim was hanging out with and knew he was likely participating as well. Finally, we discovered drugs hidden in his room. Of course, he claimed they belonged to someone else and he was just holding them. We knew he was lying and we grounded him for an indefinite period. This resulted in just making him more secretive in his methods of hiding and using.

After graduation from high school, he attended a university about 100 miles from our home. This gave him complete freedom to use drugs even more, and he flunked out of school his very first semester. We put him into a rehab program, and this only resulted in a temporary reduction of drug use. We tried everything we could think of to help Tim, but the grip of drugs on his life was stronger than anything we tried. We never gave up on him because our love for him never waned. Tim talked about his desire to quit using and shared how no one would chose to be a drug addict. Though he desperately wanted to quit, the grip was too strong for him to overcome. We loved him so much, it hurt Sandra and me deeply to watch him fail over and over and over. How I wished that I could somehow take this burden away from him.

We could not help but recognize the parallel with what we were dealing with and how God continually deals with us and our sin. We knew Tim could never do anything that would cause us to love him less, just as we can never diminish God's love for us. I remember a former pastor of ours, David Platt, saying that there is nothing we can do to cause God to love us less, nor is there anything we can do to cause God to love us more. His love never wavers or stops. Just as His Word tells us that He never leaves us or forsakes us, neither does His love ever leave us or forsake us.

We read in Exodus how God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Then for forty years in the wilderness, they would follow and fail, follow and fail. Over and over, they would see the amazing miracles of God and follow Him only to turn away again and again. Yet, God's love for the Israelites never once failed.

I was promoted to a Regional Manager position with the pharmaceutical company for which I worked and reported to the Regional office in Dallas, Texas. Sandra was an educator and still had to complete her contract with the Bossier Parrish School Board through the end of the school year. So, I got an apartment in Dallas and moved Tim over there with me to get him away from the "friends" he associated with in Louisiana. While Sandra and I were on a company awards trip, we received a call from our home church pastor telling us that Tim had died of a drug overdose. He had invited "friends" from Louisiana to come to Dallas to party while we were away.

Sandra and I went through the gambit of emotions—denial, anger at God, self-doubt of our parenting, grief, hurt and broken-heartedness. Though we hurt and grieved, we felt God's presence in a tangible way. We certainly had the comfort of family and friends, but we knew God loved us more than we could ever love Tim and Jim. His love sustained us when we wobbled with emotion.

Ephesians 2:1-6 tells us, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

I love the words, "But God" in this passage. Even though we were dead in our sins, living in the passions of our flesh, He

loved us and had mercy on us. *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love for which he loved us...”* Wow! He so loved us that *“he gave his only Son, that whoever believed in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

Royce Watkins and I have divinely impacted one another’s lives. It is an exceptionally ironic storyline. We first met when he was working in the pharmaceutical industry attempting to develop a new drug to treat panic attacks. At that time, I was working in drug discovery and development in dermatology. He asked my professional opinion about his project to see if I could help with their product development. He informed me that there was an unmet medical need for an anti-anxiety medication that was fast-acting for the treatment of panic attacks. I started thinking about this unmet medical need approximately two decades ago.

Later my own son developed anxiety issues and could benefit from a fast-acting anti-anxiety medication. He was treated by psychiatrists with benzodiazepines (e.g., Xanax, Klonopin). Benzodiazepines are effective, but they have serious safety concerns, most notably dependence and addiction. These drugs did not help my son; rather they harmed him, turning him into a lethargic “zombie” during high school years. I earnestly wished for something other than a benzodiazepine to help Thomas.

My son’s mental health issues became prominent in my thinking about the pharmacology of this opportunity. I eventually invented and patented a new class of anti-anxiety medications, named PanX® that are fast-acting, effective, yet without using dependent or addictive active ingredients. They are benzodiazepine alternatives. My own son’s life and death experiences were *the* catalyst for the development of PanX® as a new approach to treating anxiety.

After Thomas died I met with Royce and was surprised to learn for the first time that he, too, had lost a son to drug addiction. I hadn’t known that. His quest for an anti-panic attack medicine was prompted in part by his son’s life and death. I also learned for the first time that day that Royce had intended decades before to name their future potential drug product “Panex”. However, it was never commercialized. I didn’t know that Royce fancied the name “Panex” when I later chose and obtained a US Registered Trademark for PanX® for my invention.

What Should a Parent Do About a Wayward Child?

Today it is easy in hindsight to see the divine hand of inspiration of a Sovereign God working coordinately between two fathers who lost their sons, as well as two pharmaceutical professionals who were motivated by their painful experiences to make a difference in the medical industry! I thank God for Royce, my dear brother.

Some Men Can Be Horrible



I've had the privilege of teaching and ministering at the Lovelady Center to more than a thousand women in recovery in just two years. The *Loveladies* have taught me some things about love. One of the most remarkable women I've met there is Amy Hailey, who was a former client in recovery, but is now employed on their staff.

Amy was incarcerated 43 times for over a decade of her life. The worst experience in all of those years in prison or jails happened when she was in her 20's shortly after arriving in prison. She witnessed three ladies with solid bars of soap inside of socks mercilessly beat another lady who was asleep. But, Amy was the victim of something on the outside that was even more horrendous.

Approximately a week or two following the death of her father, she was emotionally downcast and hanging out at a gas station located on the rough side of town. A man approached her saying, "I've got ya" -- meaning I've got drugs for you. He hit her in the head with his fist and pulled a knife on her. Two of his buddies joined in the assault and they threw her in the back seat of a car. She was forcibly kidnapped. They continued to hit Amy. Then, one-by-one all three of these belligerent inhumane thugs raped her. Then these heartless men drove to multiple houses of their friends and acquaintances. They presented her to be raped by other men in exchange for drugs for themselves. Although that was already bad enough, it got even worse.

The three rapists then drove Amy to a place where they intended to murder her. It was a pond. They tied a cement cinder block using duct tape to each of her ankles. They said, "We're gunna watch your white ass gasp for your last breath!" To this Amy replied, "If you're going to kill me, then give me something." She was addicted to crack and the men had been getting high on crack. She thought that her life couldn't

get any worse than this, so she was resigned to just take a hit of their amphetamine to get high, and then be forcibly drowned by them.

But, something unusual happened at that moment. They heard a limb crack. The drug-hazed rapists were paranoid and thought that she had friends there to rescue her. In fear all three fled. This torture episode of multiple rapes, assault, and attempted murder lasted for 12 to 16 hours. Some men can be horrible, vicious animals who lack even a basic notion of a moral conscience! Depraved minds affected by demonic force.

For decades Amy was in a deep valley of despair, while attempting to mask her pain through alcohol and drug abuse. She went into literally dozens of rehab programs. She was angry at God for her circumstances and thought, “God, what have I done to piss you off so much?!” She wavered between believing in God and atheism, and the latter was increasingly more convenient for her. She wanted relief from the many trials of her life, but could not find it anywhere.

Amy Hailey’s horrible life turned around at the Lovelady Center. She arrived as a client filled with skepticism. But, she experienced God’s amazing grace. She learned about His great love for her and others like herself, which is demonstrated through the Bible.

At the time of this writing, she has served for several years in the “Intake Department” on their staff. She meets the new ladies coming in the door from the “street” (e.g., drug abuse, alcoholism, homelessness), incarceration, or judges from various jurisdictions in many states. A high percentage are court-ordered. All of them have their own horrible stories. But, I dare say that none of their stories is any worse than Amy’s raw testimony. Amy uses her historic traumatic pain to bridge from hopelessness to hope. If it can work for Amy, it can work for anybody! She often thinks when helping a new arrival, “It just might be ‘her’ time for God to set her free.” She loves telling the story of being apparently beyond redemption, yet Jesus had already paid such a high price for her in the distant past.

She has also learned to love the rapist perpetrators from her past. She said, “They are still my brothers. I don’t know what hardships each of them faced in their own lives that contributed to their sin patterns, to make them believe that it is okay to assault and rape a stranger.

They are loved as much by God as I was during my long hopeless valley. Jesus would grant them redemption, too, if only they would ask for forgiveness for their many sins.”

Amy is transformed and speaks passionately to the Loveladies. Approximately one thousand women come in the door each year. Almost all of them have the privilege of hearing her story. Amy is real and genuine. But, just like all of us whose lives have been transformed by the Lord’s mercy, she still faces ongoing challenges. In her case she struggles at times in her mind with her gender identity; confusion which resulted directly from historic traumas at the hands of many evil men starting in her childhood.

When in her valley Amy Hailey formerly said, “What kind of a God lets all this crap happen to people He is supposed to love?!” However, today having been touched by His grace she says, “What kind of a God lets all this good happen to people, who don’t deserve it?!”

My wife Laura and I frequently hosted evening Bible studies in our home. A woman in her upper 50’s was a regular participant. We learned that Karen Mitchell was a martial arts instructor, and a couple of her students also attended our evening sessions. On occasion she would demonstrate remarkable kicks and flexibility in our living room, which was quite unexpected for a mature woman and in this context. She shared with us that she had been kidnapped by a man, who was a serial rapist, but managed to escape this extremely dangerous fellow. Karen was one of four women kidnapped by this man, and she was the only one who escaped without being beaten or raped.

She vowed that it wouldn’t happen a second time. So, she studied Taekwondo as a means of learning self-defense skills. She mastered the trade and achieved the rank of 8th Degree Black Belt. But, our friend Karen didn’t stop there; she went on to become a nationally ranked women in her age bracket, and established her own business in 1981 to instruct others. She wrote this:

I started Taekwondo training in approximately November of 1978, not long after I had been kidnapped. I’ve continued training and teaching all those years. It was most of the 1980’s that I was in the Top-10 in the national Taekwondo organization I was associated with. I was in my middle to late 30’s at that time.

In 1990 I had stopped competing, but I have always continued my training.

To this day I know God took what was meant to harm me and turned it around for good. I have been given a gift of motivating other people who struggle with low self-esteem. I'm an encourager to those who sometimes rarely win. God put that gift of encouragement within me as a child wherein I encouraged neighborhood kids to keep going when we would be losing in our back yard football or baseball game. I always choose the weakest kids to be on my team. I just wanted them to win! We would always come back and win. I knew I had something within me at that time. But, I never knew until I was an adult and came to Christ, learning about each of our gifts.

A girl that took martial arts instruction with me had a dream. She drew a picture of her dream and gave it to me. It was a figure standing on top of a mountain encouraging others to come on up as they were escaping from bad things. She said that the person was me. I have the sketch in my home. It was really a true testament of how I feel about everybody. I've only told two people about that drawing. God put that gift of being able to encourage others. I feel it in my gut.

In later years Taekwondo was my voice to communicate not only to children, but to adults as well. When I get up in the mornings, I ask God to help me encourage someone. There are many hurting people all around us; we are all in the same boat. We have to understand God has a plan, and we just have to keep moving forward and seeking Him.

Trauma can be a potent motivator in life. We should learn from the examples of these two women, Amy and Karen, and moved from being victims of circumstances to victors over them. Yes, redeem the past to build a better future. And, remind yourself of the wisdom of Dr. Seuss in, *"Oh, The Places You Will Go!"*

An Army Officer Forged into Love by the Refiner's Fire



On a half dozen occasions during the prior decade I was privileged to visit leaders and personnel within the Pentagon, the headquarters for the US military. I was there as a hope-giver. These special opportunities started because of an invitation by a friend, Albert McCarn, who was a former US Army officer stationed there. He opened the door for me, because one can't just walk into the high security environment of the Pentagon without justification and invitation. Coincidentally, I've met many former servicemen who said that they had always wanted to visit there, but weren't afforded the opportunity. As a civilian, I was granted this privilege. So, I wanted Al to share some about his professional and personal life's challenges:

Military things fascinate all boys. Well, maybe not all boys, but the military did captivate a large percentage of the boys who grew up in my generation in the American South. It may have been generational for me. My father's tales of service in the Army Air Corps in World War II and of my grandfather's service as a Combat Engineer in World War I captured my imagination. So, too, did anecdotes of my Civil War ancestors, fighting as they did for both the South and the North. The men of my family have taken up arms in nearly every conflict of America's history since the war for independence from England.

No wonder, then, that all I desired in my youth (in addition to a life of service to Jesus, my Savior), was to dedicate my life as a warrior of the United States of America. In 1979 I left home in Birmingham, Alabama, to begin my college studies at Florida State University. Four years later, having acquired a dual degree in Russian and German, and a commission in Military Intelligence through the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps, I

embarked on what I expected would be a long and successful military career.

The career was neither as long nor as successful as I hoped. The life of a junior staff officer consists largely of the unbroken tedium of managing minute details on every imaginable aspect of human behavior. It is a school of hard knocks, and seldom do the job's daily requirements include the more appealing skills taught in the Officer Basic Course. Even so, during my assignment in Germany in the early 1980s, I never lost sight of the fact that I was part of the great American military machine that would stand against the Soviet hordes should the Cold War grow hot.

I finished the 80s assigned to the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Stewart, Georgia. By that time, my life had been immeasurably enriched by Charlayne, the woman who had become my wife. It was at that time that we experienced the reason for our professional existence: fighting our nation's battles. Early in August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and before the month had ended, my colleagues and I found ourselves in Saudi Arabia preparing for what another president in another time would have described as a "splendid little war." Whether splendid or not, I played my part and came home in the spring of 1991. Before the summer ended, Charlayne and I had moved back to Fort Huachuca, Arizona, the place we had met, and there we became the proud parents of our first child.

Our little girl had not yet reached the age of two before we received the worst possible news. Worst, that is, if the focus of one's life is the prospect of serving in the Army until an honorable retirement at a high rank and advanced age. Those dreams shattered in a heartbeat, with one sentence from the mouth of my battalion commander. It was the week of Thanksgiving in 1993 when she came unexpectedly into my office, sat down in front of my desk, and explained that the promotion board had determined there was no room for me to advance from the rank of captain to major.

Her tone was sympathetic, and her words were as kind as she could make them, but they cut like crystals of ice into my

heart and soul. Vaguely do I remember what she said next – something about doing everything possible to get me ready for the next year's board. But after this radioactive bomb had dropped on my reason for existence, I was no longer capable of listening. Not only was the Army my life, but it was the sole means of support for my growing family. Just a few weeks earlier, Charlayne had surprised me with the joyful news that we were expecting our second child. And now this.

My non-selection was the fruit of the post-Cold War peace dividend. With no Soviet bear to fight, the Army was downsizing significantly. That was the year of my only real chance to be picked up for promotion. If not selected, then my choices were simply to take the considerable benefits package offered to entice soldiers to leave the ranks, or wait another year to be passed over again and be invited to leave without the benefits. I cannot say whether all that went through my mind on that bleak November afternoon, but it certainly entered into my unconscious calculations.

How could this have happened? What deficiency was there in me? The brutal self-assessment commenced from that instant. Could it have been that incident in Saudi Arabia, on the eve of the Gulf War? I was beyond exhaustion, having driven our vehicle in convoy all the way up the Tapline Road from the Persian Gulf to our new encampment on the Iraqi border. Having slept not at all in nearly two days, and very little in the previous month, and having avoided a potentially deadly head-on collision during the drive, I was stressed beyond measure. Our hard work of setting up our camp did not meet with our colonel's specifications. A word from him set me off on an insubordinate rant that caused my sergeant to grab my arm and pull me immediately out of the area. Maybe that had been enough to seal my fate? But no; it was combat-related stress, and my consistent performance over time would not have been undone by such a singular incident.

Perhaps it had happened at Fort Stewart when a disagreeable supervisor had awarded me the only lukewarm performance assessment of my career. A year later I learned from a superior who had commanded us both at different times that he had

written the man an assessment that should have put him out of the Army. It did, but about four months too late to help me. By the time he left the Army, he had already done violence to my career.

But I could not blame him. Neither could I blame those who, for one reason or another, put off my selection as a company commander – the premier qualifying job for a junior officer. Each of them had their reasons, and I was but one of many good candidates for a limited number of positions.

My brigade commander at Fort Huachuca could also have shouldered some of the blame. In two years as one of his company commanders, I had received from him adequate performance appraisals, but not the outstanding appraisal that a promotion board expected for a company commander in that era of post-Cold War reduction. That alone could have been the reason for my non-selection. Yet I was but one of 19 company commanders this man rated, and he hardly knew me at all. This was apparent when I had my final office call with him early in 1994. When I mentioned that I had resigned my commission, he was surprised to hear it. The surprise turned to embarrassment when I mentioned that he had endorsed my resignation – embarrassment that cut both ways. We both realized at that moment that he did not really know who I was. Seeing the man so discomfited at this revelation of his own deficiency, I was moved not to indignation, but to pity. The pressures of his high rank and position were far greater than the pressures I had endured. They had rendered this brilliant man unable to keep track of the million details for which he alone was responsible. He was neither insensitive, nor unkind, nor calculating and abusive, but rather a good man overcome by his circumstances. He did not deserve the blame for my lost career.

Who, then, could I blame? Myself? Perhaps; I had performed well at every turn, but had not been able to take the usual assignments expected of a Military Intelligence officer. Could I blame Charlayne? She, after all, had caused me to rethink my career and embark not only on a completely different direction, but to choose assignments that would make us both happy

rather than further my career. Yet I could not blame her either. I loved her more than anyone else, and it was because of this love for this particular woman that I willingly changed the pattern of my life. Whatever my professional fate, the rest of my life had been brightened immeasurably by her presence in it.

She pulled me back from the brink on that dark November day. The first task after hearing the shocking news was to tell her. Not surprisingly, my accustomed eloquence failed, and within seconds I dissolved into a weeping mass of broken manhood in her arms. She, too, was devastated. As the daughter of an Army Chaplain, the military had also been her life. Now she faced the frightening prospect of leaving the comfortable Army family and entering an unexplored civilian world.

Yet she did not face that prospect alone. We were a unit, and we faced it together. Moreover, we faced it with the hope of guidance from the God of our fathers. Both of us had inherited strong faith from our Christian families, and both had professed at an early age our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. In fact, we had met in church, and our shared faith became the foundation of our relationship. Our first resort, therefore, was to prayer, and that is how we weathered this most difficult transition of our lives.

It helped that Thanksgiving was upon us. The holiday preparations distracted us from the looming question of what to do, giving us a measure of time to process that question in the quietness of our hearts. The opportunity to talk it out came early in December at our favorite restaurant. With the raw emotions largely contained, Charlayne listened as I laid out the situation, and then allowed me to reason out loud. The result was a logical course of action: resign my commission, take the separation benefits, enter the Army Reserve, and move back to Alabama.

What would I do there? Go to school, of course. We did not know exactly what I should do for my next career, but a graduate degree in history seemed to be the next step. That could open the way for an academic career, or perhaps a career in government service. Thus, we decided together that I would

apply to the graduate program in history at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

What I recall of that conversation was a sense of utter peace that came over me. Neither of us knew where we would end up, and we certainly did not know how we would provide for our children, but we knew that this step was ordained of our heavenly Father. He would show us the next step after we had taken this one. Our task was simply to take the current step in faith.

That was December 1993. Within six months, we were out of the Regular Army, transferred to the Army Reserve, and on our way to Alabama. Two years after that, the Army called me back to active service in Europe to support the American intervention in Bosnia. In the meantime, I had earned a masters degree in American History and been accepted to the doctoral program at the University of Arizona. We moved to Tucson in the spring of 1997 and remained there until the end of 1999. In that time, I completed my course work for a PhD, but became disillusioned with the realities of academic politics. When a friend in Washington offered the possibility of a job in her agency, we jumped at it, and thus found ourselves living in Alexandria, Virginia, at the dawn of the new millennium. Then came a year and a half of introduction to the Washington bureaucracy – a dream job in which I learned how the government really works, and in the process had interaction with every part of the National Intelligence Community.

Then came the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Within a month, I was again recalled to active duty and assigned to the Army Intelligence Watch in the Pentagon. Soon thereafter, I was honored to be selected as part of the team of briefers who presented the morning updates to the Army's senior leaders. That lasted two years, resulting ultimately in my long-awaited promotion to lieutenant colonel. In September 2003, I was out of the Army again and back in civilian service, but only temporarily. By the winter of 2005, the Army was in need of senior officers in my specialty, so I applied, and within days had been accepted to resume my commission as an officer in the Regular Army.

My dream had come true. After ten years of uncertainty, I had at last received assurance that my military career would reach a successful conclusion. Not successful in terms of high rank, but highly successful in terms of thirty rewarding years of service and, upon my retirement in 2012, a well-earned pension.

It is a nice story with a happy ending, but this is only the outline. The real story comes in the aggravating details that cannot be told without tears that unmask the anguish of soul and spirit that accompanied this journey. I have explained the wrenching loss of my Army career in 1993. What I have not explained is why that had to happen.

The young man who entered military service in the spring of 1983 was different from the man who took his family to Washington, DC, in 1999. I had wanted to go to Washington since I first visited the city early in 1980 as an ROTC cadet. Yet at every turn, my efforts to go there met with resistance. It was as if God had set before me a door no man could open – a door He had shut for my own protection.

Those who have lived and worked in the national capital city know how heartless and cruel it can be. The power flowing through the halls of Congress, the Federal agencies, and the Supreme Court bends the unsuspecting and unguarded to its will. Those not beguiled by the corrupting enticements of access to high offices and the men and women who occupy them fall victim to a slow drain on their very essence that leaves them devoid of compassion, initiative, and anything more than the instinct to survive.

Such would have been my fate had my wish come true at the time of my choosing. A young, ambitious, capable Army officer is no less susceptible to the withering effects of power than any Congressional intern or political appointee. One does not have to wield that power to suffer its effects. One needs only to be around it – serving the hands that wield it, adroitly manipulating their direction, and gleaning with satisfaction the considerable perks of service to whatever cause they profess to champion. Power is a capricious mistress, at one moment seducing the

young and unwary, and the next moment devouring them as a black widow consumes its mate.

I would have been so consumed, along with my family, had we not been prepared for our sojourn in Washington. That preparation required me to be broken and taken down to nothing before I could be useful to my God, my family, and my nation. That was the purpose of losing my Army career, and of the very difficult years that followed. The Army was my idol, and Charlayne and our children were but the necessary accoutrements of a successful officer. My attitude came close to driving them from me many times, but always the grace of God kept us together – often in a dogged determination simply to persevere for the sake of the children.

It is strange what God uses to pierce the hard shell of pride in a man's heart. It took several divine missiles to eradicate the barriers I had established, beginning with being deployed to Korea when our oldest daughter began to transition from crawling to walking. It occurred to me that I had missed a once-in-a-lifetime moment because of the requirements of my profession. How many more such moments would I miss if I continued on the same path? That line of thinking progressed to the point when, two years later, the tears of both little girls brought me to my senses as I realized I had turned my back on them, literally and figuratively. Through them, a sense of compassion and genuine love awakened in me that I had not known before. Charlayne was ever there to nurture that awakening. She did so through her prayers, her wise and patient counsel, and her determination not to leave me and our family in such a desperate condition. I did not know until years later the heroic work she had done in cleaning up the messes I made. She has not yet received adequate compensation for her efforts.

It would take many words to give a proper account of the adversity and pain we faced. By 1999, we had progressed to the point that we really did love one another in a deeper way than we had thought possible. It was love that inoculated me against the effects of Washington's power and put my Army career into perspective. Six months after my retirement, few people

remembered what I did in the Army, but sixty years from now, my daughters will be telling their grandchildren about the father who loved them and their mother, and who demonstrated that love with action. Such a legacy is far greater than any other accomplishment or accolade in this life.

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World War II in Europe



Like many other folks, I have always been fascinated by the World Wars. But, unlike many others, I had the pleasure of researching and identifying relatives who fought on both sides (Germany and the USA) during both WWI and WWII.

One example is Lieutenant Oscar Trompeter from Horton, Kansas, who served in the cavalry in the American Expeditionary Forces in WWI. He was gassed during the Argonne offensive, and returned to the US with some rare war booty -- a German cavalry saddle and bit, the latter from the German 7th Regiment of the Jager zu Pferde (riflemen on horses). Oscar died young as a result of his afflictions and is buried in the Presidio military cemetery in San Francisco. My mother owned that saddle and bit. Upon her death, my siblings and I donated the objects to the *National WWI Museum and Memorial* in Kansas City, Missouri, in commemoration of the Centennial of the Armistice in 1918.

In the 1980's while researching my genealogy that is predominantly Germanic, I discovered that two of my German Bickel relatives from Bayern (Bavaria) were career commissioned officers in the General Staff of the Wehrmacht (Army) for the duration of WWII from Hitler's pre-war preparations in the early 1930's through the end in 1945.

The elder Bickel brother from Bayern (Bavaria), Karl was a Generalmajor (equivalent to a 1-Star General or Major General in the USA). He was a commander in both the Eastern and Western fronts. He served in Poland in 1939 following Hitler's blatant disregard for the earlier Pact of Non-Aggression between Germany and Russia. Near the end of his service in France, Karl was under the command of General Karl-Heinrich von Stuelpnagel, a sympathizer and/or leader of the Schwartz Kapelle – the secretive resistance movement opposing Hitler from within the Wehrmacht. However, I do not know whether Karl was a participant in

the Schwartze Kapelle. Karl became a prisoner-of-war in 1945, which coincidentally had also occurred to him during WWI. I have visited the Bickel family homes in Lenggries, Germany several times, starting in the 1980's. However, Karl had already passed prior to my visits.

The younger brother, Hans Bickel was an Oberstleutnant (equivalent to a Lieutenant Colonel in the USA; one rank below General). I knew him personally. Hans was the second-in-command of the 91st Infanterie (Infantry) at D-Day in Normandy. His superior was Generalleutnant (equivalent to a 2-Star General in the USA) Wilhelm Falley, who was the first German General to be killed during the Allied invasion. My relative Hans told me about General Falley's death and D-Day in some detail. Falley had requested that Hans leave with him from their Division headquarters at Chateau de Bernaville in Picauville (near Sante Mere Eglise). But, Hans replied that policy dictated that the top two officers could not leave at the same time. With General Falley killed in action by American paratroopers on June 6th, the first day of the Normandy invasion, Hans Bickel became the temporary successor commander of the 91st Division.

In the 1980's when Hans lived in Munich, he showed me many photo albums including photos from Normandy before and during the invasion. The photos included Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, who was present until June 5th overseeing the strategic defensive fortifications from an Allied invasion that Rommel considered likely to occur during June 1944. The Allied invasion was code-named *Neptune*. Hans was very annoyed that the Luftwaffe failed to obtain any relevant reconnaissance information about the largest sea-based landing operation in history. Had aerial sightings been attempted, then the events of June 6th and thereafter might have shifted in favor of the German defenders, who could have moved fierce Panzer tank regiments from elsewhere in the West, to fend off the Allies.

Hans Bickel was a participant as a leader at one of the greatest moments in European (and US) military history. In *Bodyguard of Lies* by Anthony C. Brown, immediately prior to the Normandy invasion, "...there was disquieting intelligence from Normandy, Rommel had suddenly made new dispositions in and around the Cherbourg peninsula that showed he might at least have obtained partial knowledge of Allied intentions. The 91st Airlanding Division, specialists in fighting paratroopers, and

the 6th Parachute Regiment had moved inexplicably into exactly the area around St. Mere-Eglise where the American paratroop divisions were to land on D-Day. This movement was reported on May 29...and the man who had prophesied disaster at Dieppe, delivered a solemn warning to Eisenhower. The arrival of the 91st, he said, meant that Allied paratrooper formations would be cut to pieces and that perhaps 50 percent of the air transport force involved – some five hundred planes – would be lost. Eisenhower responded that, whatever the risks, the operation must proceed; without it, Neptune could not succeed.” (The Lyons Press, 1975, pp. 617-618). Eisenhower was the Supreme Commander of the entire European war. And, he anticipated the critical role that the German 91st Division might play in defense of the Cherbourg peninsula.

Not only was Hans second-in-command and temporarily in command of the 91st, but he was also familiar with other infamous Wehrmacht officers, Field Marshall Erwin Rommel (a Schwartze Kapelle sympathizer) and General der Infanterie (General of the Infantry) Dietrich von Choltitz. The latter is known for being entrusted by Hitler with the planned destruction of Paris, if it fell into Allied hands. But, von Choltitz usurped Hitler’s plans and saved Paris’ amazing historical architecture. He is the focus of the book and film entitled, *Is Paris Burning?* During the war Hans and von Choltitz dialoged about the foolishness of Hitler’s strategy to fight on both the Eastern and Western fronts simultaneously. That meant one thing to them...Germany’s certain defeat.

Hans greatly aided my genealogy research in the 1980’s, providing historic depth and first-person testimonials of the WWII period. I remain grateful to this day for his assistance and friendship. I loved Hans and his wonderful wife Marianne, who lived to be 101 and died in the USA. During the difficult years of the war she was a young mother with several small children under her care. She coincidentally survived being sexually assaulted by foreign troops because she was hospitalized when those troops arrived in town. The other women were not spared this disgrace and shame. She provided for her children by collecting firewood during the lean years of the end of the war and beyond. She lost her extended family in the Allied fire bombings of historic Dresden. But, she was graced with forgiveness and love. What a wonderful woman. I’m honored to be related to Hans and Marianne and their extended family.

Hans taught me that Wehrmacht officers and soldiers were not “Nazis” as commonly portrayed in the West. The National Socialists (Nazis) were a political party led by Hitler and unrelated to the Wehrmacht Army per se. However, the Nazis did exercise direct control over the SS (Schutzstaffel) as a political paramilitary force, independent of the Wehrmacht. Hans clarified for me that even within the ranks of the SS some of the men were conscripted against their will.

The third German soldier in my extended family is the husband of another Bickel relative. Hans Otto Jung was a soldier taken as a prisoner of war in Russia, which was especially difficult in view of the deprivations as consequences of Germany’s hostilities to the Russian people. I have enjoyed staying in Hans Otto’s family home on several occasions. He and his family are warm and loving. My life has been enriched by knowing my German relatives since the 1980’s, many of whom lived through the perilous days of WW II. I have learned much about how love can manifest in unusual circumstances...even those circumstances that many American and British people have difficulty in relating to due to their own biases. Love can thrive in the most unusual circumstances.

A Light in the Darkness of the Warsaw Ghetto



In the 1940's Irena Sendlerowa worked for a secret organization in Poland during the horrors of World War II, as the "Final Solution" to the Jewish problem was kicked into high gear. The Final Solution was masterminded by Heinrich Himmler, under the watchful eye of Adolf Hitler. My friend Dale Cathey and I once visited Himmler's evil SS school-cult-retreat headquarters at Wewelsburg Castle in Germany. Today this dark place is the site of the SS Museum.

Poland in the pivotal year of 1939 was invaded by the military forces of Germany (and Russia). The Germans used the might of the Nazi-aligned SS to corral the Polish Jews, dissident Catholics, intellectuals, and others into a restrictive Ghetto in Warsaw. It was like a precursor to a concentration camp, and prior to sending folks off to almost certain death at concentration camps elsewhere. In the Ghetto the corralled masses were squeezed by deprivation and overcrowding.

Irena Sendlerowa was a social worker who supervised the cryptic rescue of 2,500 Jewish children out of the Ghetto. She smuggled the children out of the Ghetto using risky and ingenious methods. They were transferred into safer accommodations using falsified identities to prevent their Jewish names and heritage from being known. The children's real Jewish names were written down and buried underground in a safe place, so that attempts could be made to reunite them with family members later in life. Irena was a benevolent "Grandmother" and savior of valor to 2,500 Jewish children. She risked her life and those of her colleagues to save as many children as possible.

Over a decade ago we flew a Path Clearer ministry team from England and the US into several countries in Europe and included a day visiting the former Warsaw Ghetto. The trip was focused on the theme of "piercing darkness over Europe", because we recognized the rise of

antisemitism and neo-Nazism in the European Union. While there at a memorial site, I led our group in dancing in public as I sang (actually rapped) a song – “Baruch HaShem”, which means “Blessed be the Name” (of the LORD). It was odd for sure, but filled with happiness. In a place of historic darkness and death we exchanged beauty for ashes.

Coincidentally as we did this, buses of Israeli youth arrived to pay their respect. They were shocked to experience joy and singing, and in Hebrew no less (their native tongue), instead of melancholy at the sight of a memorial to the Warsaw Uprising. They joined in with our team -- rapping and dancing. It was probably one of the unexpected highlights of their pilgrimage. Then they asked us, “Who are you and are you Jewish?” I told them that we were friends of Jews and Yahweh, their God, and followers of Jesus. They were surprised and puzzled.

I have visited multiple sites associated with the European Holocaust - Auschwitz, Dachau, Flossenbug, Wewelsburg, and Warsaw, in addition to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. I urge you to do the same.

Learning to Love (More) Through Adoption



Doru Cirdei is an influential ministry leader in the Capital of the communist East European nation of Moldova. I was introduced to him two decades ago through our mutual dear friend, Melvin Slotnick. I respect Doru, and I seldom use the term “respect”. He is an exemplar of a great leader. When asked how he learned to love (more) through adoption, here’s his reply:

As a couple my wife Nadia and I never dreamed to give access to our lives and family to orphans and children in severe need. It happened that God caught my attention in a distinct way while I was waiting in my vehicle for the green traffic light in our city, Chisinau, in December 1997. There, a street child, 5-6 years old, approached my car window begging for money. As I was searching my packets for some coins, the Divine loud voice sounded in my heart and I believe in my ears, too, with a plain but peace-taking question, “This is all that you as pastor should do for such children?” I got convicted right there in my car, that my life and ministry will be meaningless and poor if I will refuse to provide some care for the orphaned homeless children. I had no clue what I was going to learn about God’s love through a lifestyle.

First, we started a daily feeding program at Filadelfia Church, where I serve as the lead pastor. Very soon we discovered that the street children of Moldova had never been in school. They also have no places to stay overnight. These basic needs led us to establish a literacy class for them. This process eventually resulted in the only Kindergarten through high school level Christian School in the entire nation of Moldova, fully accredited by the Government. It is ranked as one of the top 10 excellent

schools of the country. In order to create a Christian family environment for these homeless children, we created a family-style orphanage. At present we have ten houses with volunteer Christian parents raising multiple former street children in each home. It is called the Bethany Christian Center and is located in the verdant farmland outside of the city.

During a time of crisis when a couple that were serving as home volunteer parents were forced to quit, my wife and I decided to replace them and become home parents while handling the process of identifying a new married couple to take over the home's responsibilities. On the very first day, the orphans kindly asked me and Nadia for the permission to call us Daddy and Mom. They were so excited receiving hugs from us and inviting them to stay on our laps! I cannot explain in written words their joy. After a few days, my wife told me, "I cannot leave these children. They have overcome my heart". My response was: "Why should we ask others do the work God gave us to accomplish. First, God caught me in traffic through a beggar boy. And, now He caught me through these lovely children's love. We have to lead by personal example".

Here we are after 18 years of home volunteer parenting. We've raise 4 biological children given by God to us through birth plus seven others through adoption. We did our best loving and influencing our children. We have succeeded to some degree. The children did their best assisting us in the Christ-like love development and they fully succeeded. Loving your own biological children is natural, but loving the rejected children is godly. Godly love has no favorites!

The book of Romans, chapters 9-11, inform us that Gentiles (Non-Jews) who follow Jesus are grafted into the Hebraic root of God's family. Thus, whether Jew or Gentile, by genealogy or by adoption, both are children of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Not by circumcision of the flesh, but by circumcision of the heart; that is how we belong to our Creator and Lord.

A Caregiver Tested by His Wife's Ailments



One of our former Path Clearer colleagues is a wonderful man of prayer and intercession. He is a precious friend to me. He has lifted me and our ministry up in prayer for decades. Although he has been a vital prayer supporter to our ministry, he had experienced years of difficulty with his own marriage. He has shared with me (anonymously) the emotional pain and struggle that he experienced in loving his own wife over many years, while she slipped into poor health:

My love for my wife had grown cold. My love for her was deteriorating due to her long-term sickness. In my daily prayers and devotion I was confronted with God's command that I should love my wife as Christ loved the church. To this, my reply was, "I cannot do that after the multitude of times that she has not noticed me or appreciated what I've done for her." Again the Lord confronted me with the same command. I replied, "Lord, I've tried!" But, the Lord replied to me, "I know you can't. But, let me demonstrate my love through you."

I surrendered my life to do what He asked of me. Day by day I allowed the Lord to love her through me. In the end he reconciled us, and a short time thereafter He took her home to eternity. My advice to men like myself in a similar situation is to never allow one's children to come between the primary relationship of husband and wife. The Lord is always faithful in his promises.

A Corporate Executive's Transformed Heart



I have had the honor of knowing Joel Dobbs in both professional and ministry settings. He has a rare testimony - that of a man who had attained superb corporate achievements, yet still lacked in other ways within his "inner man". Jesus said "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world (*e.g., wealth and status*), and yet lose his soul?" I commend Joel to you and trust that you will enjoy this testimony of transformation of the heart:

When I was in the fourth grade an English muffin literally changed my life. I grew up in a small, rural town in North Alabama in the 1950's and 60's. Most folks there were either farmers or worked in various factories in nearby towns. My father, at that time, worked for the power company, a rural electric cooperative.

There were very few people who could be considered wealthy in our community. One exception was the grandfather of one of my close childhood friends. This gentleman, Mr. Weaver, literally owned the local telephone company as well as the movie theatre in the town and a significant amount of real estate. He built an incredible home on the brow of the mountain overlooking the Coosa Valley. The home was not only massive (at least compared to other homes there) it also had a pool, something unheard of in those days. My friend invited me to spend the night there shortly after the house was completed and we spent an afternoon and evening swimming in the pool and hiking around the property. The next morning, Mr. Weaver's housekeeper cooked breakfast for us and, along with the eggs and bacon, she served us an English muffin, something I had never seen. It was one of the most wonderful and exotic

foods I had ever tasted. I had a childhood epiphany and realized that I liked the idea of wealth, and that the key to that lifestyle was to get an education.

From that day forward, I became laser-focused on my schooling. I would graduate as valedictorian of my high school class, attend college and graduate at the top of my class. A masters and doctorate followed, eventually leading me to a career in the pharmaceutical industry where I excelled as an aggressive and competitive rising executive.

As I look back on those early years in my 30's and early 40's, I would describe myself as both ambitious and, at times, ruthless. I had also drifted far from the faith of my childhood becoming an agnostic. All of that began to change as I approached my mid-40s. We had adopted two boys, and I was enjoying a lifestyle that far exceeded the one that my friend's grandfather enjoyed. The strange thing was that it didn't feel like I thought it would. John Wesley would have described my experiences at this season of life as the result of prevenient grace. I believe that God was telling me, sometimes in a not-so-subtle way, that there was more to life than titles, wealth, and status.

One morning in the fall of the year, I awoke and went into the bathroom to shave. I turned on the water and, while waiting for it to get hot, absentmindedly stared into the mirror. Suddenly my eyes came into focus and I found myself staring into my own eyes. I had the sudden realization that I didn't like the man who was looking back at me from the mirror. About the same time we, started attending a Methodist church in the town where we lived mainly to get the kids into Sunday school. On one of our first Sundays there we stood and recited the Apostle's Creed, something I surprisingly remembered from my childhood. As I stood there I suddenly realized I wanted to believe that but wasn't sure how. C.S. Lewis' "Hound of Heaven" had finally caught me.

This began a journey that would lead me, over the next few years, to read everything I could about the origins of Christianity and to take a course in which we read about 80% of the Bible. I also had the opportunity to read the writings

of C.S. Lewis and eventually reached the conclusion that the Scriptures and the claims of Christianity were true. As is the case with most converts, the trajectory of my life changed in many ways – but one area that was most dramatically impacted was my approach to my colleagues at work as well as the sense of duty and stewardship I felt for my employees and the large organization I led. This guy who saw people as instruments of accomplishment or authority figures that needed to be coddled and managed began to see people as individuals, created in the image of God, each with inherent dignity.

As my career progressed, I continued to advance and was subsequently recruited as a member of a turnaround team for a large, established pharmaceutical company in New Jersey. I inherited a large, dysfunctional organization and spent a couple of years restructuring and refocusing the organization and ultimately turning things around. After several years there, we held our annual Holiday party around Christmas at a restaurant we had reserved for the evening. Several hundred of my employees were there along with their families. I spent the evening talking with everyone and meeting their spouses. As we got into the car to leave, my wife, Rita, turned to me and remarked, “You really love these people don’t you.” I guess I had never thought of it that way, but I realized that, yes, I did love them.

In the many years since, I have come to realize that it is impossible to truly lead unless you love those who are under your leadership. Leadership guru John Maxwell is fond of saying, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Today I am retired from the pharmaceutical arena and am honored to be a business school professor and executive coach. I have learned that loving God with all of your heart and loving your neighbor (or employee) as yourself is really the greatest commandment and is the key to successful leadership. I am still amazed that the Hound of Heaven would use an English muffin to change the trajectory of the life of a country boy from Alabama and would bless me with the opportunity to impact the lives of others in a way I would have never imagined.

Faith Tested by Trauma



It is important to emphasize that real faith isn't doing anything while the sun is shining and the birds are singing. Faith is revealed by extreme "tests", those circumstances that take us beyond our capabilities into a new realm. This fire exposes how much we really love God and love others. I want to introduce to you Ramon Diaz of Houston, Texas, a man of persevering faith. I asked Ramon to share about an extreme test of faith that his family experienced:

I once had a dream in which I saw a man's leather-gloved hand inserting an iron rod into a furnace. He would then remove the red-hot iron and would place it on an anvil, where he would then proceed to hammer it with his other hand. Every now and then, he would insert the rod into a bucket of water, where the rod would release a cloud of steam from the dark water. He would repeat this process several times while I watched the whole thing as if I were at the movies, surrounded by sounds, smells, and the heat coming from a fiery furnace.

In this dream I said in a loud voice, "I don't understand," expressing my confusion over what I was seeing. It was then that I heard a voice, which I assumed to be the Lord's, that said, "Son, just as an iron rod can be transformed into a powerful sword, so can you, if you submit to me and are willing to be forged into one." The Lord continued, "You are the rod," He added that the hand that held me represented Himself. "The fiery furnace is the heat I provide to soften you and expose your true heart. The water is a symbol for my Word, which enters you when your heart has been softened. The hand that hammers you on the anvil is my Holy Spirit, and the anvil represents the trial that you are going through at that time."

As I watched the process, I began to see the shape of a blade

being formed and then it all made sense to me. If I wanted to be a powerful weapon in the Kingdom of God, I needed to allow the Lord to forge me in His fire. Little did I know then the type of fire my wife and I would experience within a few years.

On February 23, 2013, I was suddenly awakened by my wife's loud cries as she shouted at me, "Get up! Amber has been hit by a car." She had been struck by a vehicle while crossing the street. Nothing I had experienced before in my life had prepared me for the moments I began experiencing then. Through it all, we saw God's merciful hand move miraculously. We rapidly headed from our home in Humble, Texas, toward Hermann Memorial Hospital in Houston.

I remember reaching the Emergency Room entrance and dropping Susanne off while I went to park the car. I ran to the ER door as fast as I could and I pushed it wide open. The security guard, upon seeing the look on my face pointed to a room and said, "She's in there," referring to Susanne. I went in the room and found my wife being comforted by a nurse and the Hospital Chaplain. I asked the man, "Is my daughter dead or alive?" "I think she's alive", he said, to which I replied, "Brother, go help someone else, I got this." To this day, I don't know where those words came from. The boldness with which I spoke certainly didn't match the quivering of my knees at the time. But, God gave my wife and me a supernatural strength that allowed us to confront the enemy and foil his plans. What followed next was a series of events that are still difficult to describe.

Amber was alive, though barely. A Dodge Ram truck had mowed her down on the side of the road traveling at fifty-five miles an hour. Only her left leg remained unbroken. She lost her baby, being four months pregnant. Her liver did not stop bleeding for four days. She required over fifty units of blood and her brain was so swollen that they decided to leave her abdomen open in order to bring down her internal pressure.

She was hooked to six different kinds of monitors, which were beeping constantly, indicating their alarming numbers. What

was left un-bandaged and exposed of her body was black and blue, her once beautiful face was unrecognizable to us.

The hours that followed seemed to take forever. We set up camp on a corner of the Trauma ICU waiting room. There, we waited for the ICU doors to open and watched for anyone to come out to give us any good news. Somehow, we knew Amber would not die. We trusted God and along the way, we saw signs and wonders that showed us how much God loved Amber and us.

Because of our unwavering faith, Susanne and I earned the respect of the chaplain and the nurses, who were quick to point us out to all the relatives of the patients that kept coming into the Trauma ICU Unit. Those nurses told everyone they met that if they needed prayer, they should talk to us. More than one person asked us if we were part of the hospital's chaplain staff because we were willing to pray for anyone at any time.

One man, whose son was involved in a terrible accident on a sport ATV in which the vehicle's handlebar went through his face, was sent to us one night shortly after midnight. I remember the father's face because he was visibly moved by pain and sorrow after he was told his son was not going to make it. Susanne and I joined hands with him and prayed for a miracle. Afterwards, the man was shocked to find out our daughter was in ICU also. "You are willing to pray for my son, and your daughter is also between life and death? You have time for me?" He asked in disbelief. "Brother, God has our daughter's situation under His control and He wants us to pray for your son," I said to him. Within a couple of weeks his son was out of the Trauma ICU!

Amber's condition remained beyond critical. The doctors gave us zero hope. One early morning, around 3 am, the nurses came and got us, advising us to say "goodbye" to her while we still could. The six monitors hooked up to her were beeping madly, in fact, the nurses had stopped resetting them because the alarms would not shut off. The sound of those monitors going off simultaneously for what seemed like forever, was an unnerving sound I will never forget.

Susanne went in first, she prayed and stayed in the room for a few minutes. I went in afterwards and knelt on the side of the bed. I wanted to lay hands on Amber and did so on the only spot on her body that was not bandaged, her left shin. Not knowing what to say to God that I had not said yet over the last few weeks, I pleaded with Him thinking that would be the last time I would plead for her life. In a low voice, with tears in my eyes, I spoke out loud, “Lord, you have used me many times to pray for the sick, and you have healed many of them. Can’t you use me now to pray for my own daughter?”

Then, the sounds in the room changed dramatically! I remember looking at the monitors and, to my amazement, I watched every single one of them as they began to come down from their alarming high values to within normal parameters. Heart rate, blood pressure, intracranial pressure – all six monitors were indicating normal values at once! Through my tears I watched this miracle take place for about ten seconds before every single monitor went out of whack again! It was then that I realized that God was going to answer our prayers and heal Amber, but in His timeframe, not ours! I thanked the Lord for giving me a glimpse of the future. I went out and reassured Susanne that the Lord would indeed give us our girl back!

I knew God had foiled Satan’s plan to claim our daughter’s life, but that didn’t stop him from continuing to try to wipe out our faith in the Lord. Satan began to use the doctors and nurses to give us the most horrible reports anyone can imagine. One doctor told us once that he expected Amber to be hooked to a respirator for at least twelve months. Within twelve hours of that evil report they had to unhook her from the respirator because she began breathing on her own! Other reports followed with the same prognostication of time. Time and time again, the Lord changed Amber’s condition within hours of the doctor’s predictions.

A neurologist took Suzanne and me to a room where she proceeded to show us a monitor that was displaying Amber’s brain activity. On one side of the screen, the monitor reflected the activity in Amber’s left side of the brain; on the other half,

the right side. While her left brain portrayed an incredible electrical storm of activity, her right side showed absolutely nothing! After several seconds of watching this, the doctor turned to us and said, "I think you should get used to the idea that if your daughter lives, she will be like a vegetable! She may not be able to see, speak or even be conscious of her surroundings." Susanne and I looked at each other and without a previous rehearsal, we said, "Thank you for your report, but we do not believe God would spare her life for her to be a vegetable forever!" The doctor simply shook her head and tossed Amber's chart in the air! She stormed out of the room, leaving us to our own craziness!

When Susanne and I walked out of the room, we ran into the physician who saw Amber for the first time when she came in through the E.R. weeks before. Upon seeing our faces, he asked what had happened. We related to him the latest negative report. He listened attentively and then said, "My neurology professor works at Baylor College of Medicine nearby. He does not have doctor's privileges here at Hermann Memorial, but I'll ask him as a favor to look at your daughter's brain scans."

Three days later, Amber was transferred to a room outside of the Trauma ICU, where she was monitored around the clock. We were with her when an older looking doctor walked in holding several folders in his arms. He looked at us and asked, "Are you the parents? Susanne and I answered him and after introducing himself, he said. "I have examined her brain scans and what I find is the effect of a minor brain injury! A minor injury! Just three days before we were given the most horrible possible prognosis concerning Amber's brain. God came through again and His healing power was having the final word regarding her condition.

The weeks that followed presented new challenges and obstacles. Amber was still in critical condition, but her state remained stable. Susanne and I continued our battle against the enemy. We were playing Praise and Worship music around the clock. When we were not doing that, we were playing recordings her husband had made of their two toddlers playing together and laughing out loud.

I know that many people thought we were crazy! Susanne and I continually said into Amber's ears things like, "You will live to fulfill your destiny;" "Your boys need you, you need to get well soon," and so on. On top of that, Susanne would go to the roof of the Hospital and blow her ram's horn (shofar) to express her faith.

As the weeks turned into months, we continued our spiritual battle against the powers of the enemy. Little by little, the monitors began to be unhooked and just when we thought we were seeing victory, the unthinkable happened. The medical staff determined there was nothing else they could do for her. Amber continued to be in a coma. Medicaid had already paid over a million dollars...actually, the bills accrued to over a million in just thirty-five days. Now the hospital was telling us that we needed to send Amber to an assisted living facility that specialized in brain injuries. Since the only place in Texas that met the requirements and had an opening for her was in Lubbock, that meant we would be over five hundred miles away or over ten hours driving time from her.

We decided that the best thing for Amber would be for her to stay in her own home, surrounded by her playing toddlers and people that loved her. Even though she lived well over an hour away from Susanne and me, the thought of not being able to see her often was something we were not willing to do.

At some point before the hospital released her, Amber opened her eyes while she was still in a coma. The hospital staff continued to try to curb our enthusiasm, assuring us that although her eyes were open, she was still in a world far, far away. Although we believed she was reacting to our words, we actually had to video her moving her fingers in her left hand as a sign of understanding our words in order to show the video clip to the nurses who did not want to believe us. Our thoughts were that if Amber was reacting to our commands by moving her fingers, there had to be a conscious effort on her part in order to do so.

Then, one day, something incredible happened. I was at work in my office, standing behind my desk, when my phone rang. It was my wife who simply said to me, "There's someone here

who wants to say hi to you.” My knees gave way under me and I dropped on my chair when I heard for the first time in several months, “Hi, Daddy.” Hearing Amber’s voice represented the biggest victory blow God had delivered to the devil in my life.

Amber was talking like a parrot, albeit, with slurred words. Soon after, she was able to stand and began walking with the aid of a walker and a lot of physical therapy. To all of us, she was a living miracle unfolding before our eyes. But, nothing we had experienced yet during this whole ordeal could have prepared us for what Amber was about to share with us.

It happened soon after she began to talk that wonderful morning, when right after her mother hung up the phone with me, out of the blue Amber told her mother, “Thank you because you and Dad would not let me go!” She then proceeded to relate the most amazing story I have ever heard in my life.

Amber said that on the night of the accident, she had already crossed two lanes of traffic while she was pushing a shopping cart, past the median and the opposite two lanes when all of a sudden, after making it to the grassy side (there are no sidewalks in this area) a pickup truck coming out of nowhere mowed her down and continued on its way.

She told her mother that she died on the side of the road and her spirit hovered over her body long enough to see the ambulance driver come by and declare her dead as they loaded her body into the helicopter that would fly her to Hermann Hospital. She continued saying that she remembered being taken into “hell”, not for her punishment, but to observe what others were experiencing in that place of torment.

Once there, Amber saw Satan, as well as some of her relatives that had died in the past, together with relatives that she knew were still alive, but would undoubtedly end up there! To add to this amazing experience, Jesus showed up and placed His hand on her shoulder and told her, “You must go back. You don’t belong here. Your parents are calling you back!” Amber said that shortly after that her spirit was in the same room in the ER where the chaplain, Susanne and I were! It was there that she

saw her mother and me praying for her and calling her to fulfill her destiny!

Amber gave her mother minute details of what was happening inside that ER room. It would have been impossible for her to know the things she talked about had she not been present to witness them! Jesus allowed Amber to survive that horrible accident and to live through one amazing spiritual experience.

Today Amber is alive. She has difficulty walking without a cane and her speech is still not one hundred percent the way it was before the accident. But, neither she nor we are concerned that God cannot improve her condition, considering the road we left behind; this one is a cakewalk.

In the words of the Apostle Paul, "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12 ASV).

Prayer to Overcome Pain



In First Chronicles a tiny and somewhat obscure portion of Scripture is interjected about a man named Jabez:

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, “I gave birth to him in pain.” Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” And God granted his request. (1 Chronicles 4:9-10; emphasis added)

His Hebrew name, Jabez, is rooted in pain. We also note that while Joseph had suffered unreasonable hardships for 13 years in Egypt as a servant and prisoner before being promoted to Prime Minister, he recognized his own pain in the naming of his two sons:

Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” The second son he named Ephraim and said, “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.” (Genesis 41:50-52; emphasis added)

The ancient Hebrews often selected names for their children that denoted something of significance – a noun, a verb, a phrase...just as the name Joshua/Yeshua/Jesus means “Salvation”. Jabez, Manasseh, and Ephraim carried within their assigned names remembrances of pain in the past by their mother or father, respectively.

However, Jabez cried out to be one victorious over a life of pain. He was asking the Lord to essentially reverse the name assigned at birth. Who would want to be literally named throughout their life as Pain or

Pain Taught Me to LOVE

Suffering or Affliction, etc.? Nobody would mind a name like Wisdom or Dooley. Coincidentally, my daughter-in-law's maiden name was Wisdom, and Dooley is related to the Greek Doulous used in the New Testament, which means servant.

Nehemiah: Redeeming, Rebuilding, and Restoring



The citizens of Israel and Judah had been prisoners-of-war for decades in the nations to the East – Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia. The Hebrews of Israel and Judah were there because of their own covenant-breaking patterns of sin, their lack of trust and obedience in the LORD Yahweh. The God of the Jews had already delivered them centuries before from captivity in Egypt, but they had forsaken His counsel and revelation after the establishment of their own nation in the land of Canaan. Sin repeated over time leads to slavery; confession and repentance lead to redemption, rebuilding, and restoration.

The prophet Jeremiah had precisely predicted that they would be prisoners in a foreign land for 70 years. It was now the time of prophetic fulfillment - to return to their homeland during the mid-Fifth Century BC. Yahweh provided two key men-of-God for this great and challenging task. First, the Levitical priest Ezra was prompted by the Spirit to return to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Shortly thereafter Nehemiah was prompted by the Spirit to return to rebuild the walls of the formerly fortified city of Jerusalem. The Temple first, the walls second.

While in captivity Nehemiah was the royal cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes I. He was the official taster of the king's wine. If someone intended to kill the king, Nehemiah would have been his experimental "Guinea pig"; Nehemiah would have died instead of the king. [Parenthetically, note that when Joseph was a prisoner in Egypt, he prophesied to Pharaoh's cup-bearer. That Egyptian cup-bearer eventually remembered to advocate to Pharaoh on behalf of Joseph. Cup-bearers have the king's ear.]

When Nehemiah heard a report from Jerusalem of how its walls had been destroyed and the wooden gates burned, he sat down, wept,

mourned, fasted, and prayed. He first petitioned Yahweh and then the King. He requested to be appointed as the Jew's leader to return to redeem, rebuild, and restore the walls of the great city.

But, there was great opposition to this project in the land by powerful oppressors, led by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. Oppressors never give up their power over the oppressed without a fight! Nehemiah demonstrated wisdom and courage in motivating the fearful Jews during the process of rapidly re-building the walls of protection from their oppressive enemies. He motivated them declaring, "Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, (fight for) yours sons, (fight for) your daughters, (fight for) your wives and (fight for) your houses." (Neh. 4:14b)

This is the historic context of the Book of Nehemiah. If you want to better understand redemption, rebuilding, and/or restoration after a great loss, I urge you to study the Book of Nehemiah. Having lost our son I'm now actively engaged in intentionally redeeming that loss. Nothing will replace him. He will not return to us. But, the PanX® medicine to treat anxiety disorders and teaching at the Lovelady Center are two examples of intentional acts of redemption. I have chosen to embrace the practical instruction of Psalm 126:4-6:

Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams in the Negev.
Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.
Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

While mourning in tears, we need to offer up sacrifices of praise and continue to do the work of the Kingdom of God, symbolized by the term "sowing".

Failure: A Springboard to Success



Often times we celebrate the achievements of people who are highly successful, such as collegiate or professional athletes or film stars. But, we can't always relate to their lives of celebrities. To the contrary, it is a natural tendency for most humans to sympathize and draw near to stories of failure. Perhaps it helps us to anesthetize our own disappointments, losses, and shame and regrets over our own failures. Regardless of why we do this, there is something therapeutic about relating to another person's problems. It is called empathy. So, this setting provides me with another opportunity to be vulnerable to you, my reader.

During an interview for a leadership position, a member of the organization's Board of Directors who was highly distinguished in his military career at the Pentagon said to me, "Dr. Dooley, you have two of the most remarkable resumes I have ever seen. Have you ever failed at anything? Your resumes don't give me a single hint of it." (FYI, one was my professional resume and the other my nonprofit/ministry resume.) This statement could have been flattering to me, but I laughed in response, "Oh! I've failed in many things in my life. For instance, one cannot be a successful scientist without failures."

Let me elaborate. As an empirical scientist I am accustomed to taking risks, to reach into new realms of study, to go beyond what has already been published. As an inventor, I must go beyond what has already been patented. The cognitive and emotional challenges are to embrace the fear of the unknown and walk into it. Excellence in science demands this. One can be a mediocre scientist and just sit around sipping on coffee and discussing with one's peers about old published studies. That can be helpful and is often relevant, but it doesn't involve any risk. Excellence demands risk. As a side comment, note that I have formerly defined genuine faith as "risk-taking belief in action". Thus,

a successful scientist is a person of faith. He or she is often probing beyond the known. He or she is a risk-taker in action. Let me provide some examples:

I've published to date 74 scientific articles. But, the number of submissions would easily be twice that number. I've had as many manuscripts rejected as accepted during the binary review process. Rejection of manuscripts during peer review is common; it is very common when reviewed by a top-shelf journal. At one point in my career, I had a couple of manuscripts with preliminary results that were rejected by perhaps ten publications. The science was good, but the standards of those journals were exceptional. You learn to pick yourself up after each rejection notice, to revise the manuscript, and to resubmit it elsewhere.

In my early career I was assertive and competitive. I earnestly desired to be rapidly promoted in status and rank. This was my internal drive, my search for significance. I had experienced a wonderful and rapid ascent during graduate school at Indiana University while being mentored by Dr. Barry Polisky. I received my PhD in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology in only four years, much faster than normal. Plus, along with receiving the degree, I received multiple professional competitive honors and awards by outside organizations. My early career trajectory had all of the hallmarks of great potential as a scientist.

However, even while a graduate student, I had challenges to overcome. Dr. Polisky was an exceptional scientist and writer. When I prepared my first manuscript on the control of DNA replication in bacterial mini-chromosomes, he literally red-lined the entire manuscript. He wrote in the margins something like, "Dooley, you are illiterate." He was correct. Funny now, but it wasn't back then. He graciously and patiently held my hand and walked me through countless major edits of that manuscript. After many "failures" it eventually met his standards for submission.

If it hadn't been for the excellent training I received in technical writing from Dr. Polisky, I might have never written this book or my three prior books on faith, hope, and truth. Those early failures with science manuscripts as a graduate student in my twenties not only aided my scientific career, but they also eventually helped me as a writer of Judeo-Christian books in the nonprofit/ministry side of my life.

While working in academia, a scientist's career is dependent on external grant funding. For a scientist in the Life Sciences that typically means funding by the National Institutes of Health or similar granting organizations. They only fund about one in ten applications. My average for successful funding was near that level. In essence, for every grant application that was successful, I had to write at least five to ten. Those are horrible odds. With regard to grant writing, I have far more experience with failure than with success. But, one can't win the lottery without buying a ticket. The odds of success aren't especially stacked in favor of the intelligent and creative, but rather to those who are hard-working and diligent at their craft.

As a biomedical entrepreneur for two decades, the single most difficult challenge of my numerous activities has been seeking investments from angel investors or venture capital firms. However, I have experienced some limited success. For instance, I've raised seed capital for IntegriDerm, then angel and VC funding for MediQuest, and finally seed capital for Trends in Pharma Development. In aggregate, I directly solicited or helped to raise more than \$20 Million for these three biomedical firms. But, there were countless emails, phone calls, conference calls, letters, and PowerPoint presentations during road trips to San Diego, Boston, and Sandhill Road in Silicon Valley. It feels like playing a game of badminton during a fierce desert sandstorm. All you can see is sand, and it fills your eyes with unpleasant grit at every juncture. Many folks envy financially successful entrepreneurs, but trust you me, it is a painful process to raise investments. It is difficult, and many of the people you are soliciting investments from are filled with greed, impatience, and a know-it-all arrogance. After a while you realize it is all about the money. Been there, done that, many times.

All that to say, in spite of the obvious appearance of success in my resumes, I do know a lot about failure. But, one must demonstrate resilience to springboard to success. It isn't a failure unless you stay on the ground after stumbling. Chris Hodges of Church of the Highlands says, "I'm not down. I'm either up or getting up!" When Thomas died, it sucked the joy out of my life. It might have been easy to keep it all to myself and to avoid talking about it, as it was so painful. But, I chose to speak about it to the Loveladies and elsewhere in public in order to "redeem" his story.

Resilience is the key to overcoming and to success. Nick Saban, the uber-successful coach of the National Champion University of Alabama football team, quoted from someone else (and I paraphrase), “You have five choices: You can be bad at what you do; You can be mediocre at what you do; You can be good at what you do, and good is linked to your God-given talent; You can be excellent at what you do; or You can be elite. However, being excellent or elite requires something special, something much greater in discipline and initiative.” Resilience is a key to transitioning from hopelessness to hope and from failure to success. Even the greatest batters in the Major Leagues seldom hit homeruns. But, they persevere throughout all of the “outs” waiting for another “at bat” opportunity.

There are so many things outside of our control. Unless you are a boss, a jailer, a policeman, an oppressor, or a manipulator you don’t really have the power to make another human being do anything. You can’t change the weather. You can’t make gold out of lead. You can’t stop the aging process. You can’t reverse gravity. You can’t abrogate the Second Law of Thermodynamics – everything does tend to go from order to disorder. We have very limited control over “our” circumstances.

When I was 17 years old I thought I knew everything.
Oh, I would never be any smarter.
But, now that I’m nearing retirement age,
I have a few dents in my fenders.
My life-long “get ‘er-done” resilience has been tested.
I can more fully realize my weaknesses and limitations.
I now humbly embrace pain, disappointments, adversities,
and failures;
for they can serve as the springboard to success and a greater
capacity to love.
To fail while leaning forward is to advance.
(TP Dooley)

About the Author



Thomas P. Dooley, PhD is the founder of Path Clearer, a 501(c)(3) organization with the motto -- *Influencing Nations with Truth*. Dr. Dooley is an experienced communicator among the nations, and the



author of ***Praying Faith*** and ***Hope When Everything Seems Hopeless*** and ***Half-Truths are Lies***. Tom has a diverse professional and nonprofit/ministry background. Tom has a PhD in molecular biology and has worked for three decades in leadership in the pharmaceutical industry and in academia. Dr. Dooley is a serial entrepreneur, having founded various biomedical companies and nonprofit organizations. He is the inventor of PanX[®], a patented new class of drugs

to treat anxiety, among many other biomedical inventions. He has authored 74 scientific articles and 15 patents. He addresses life's issues from a Biblical worldview and firsthand remarkable testimonies of faith and truth-in-love. Tom and his wife Laura have four children, the youngest of whom is deceased, plus seven grandchildren.

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