

GOD

WHERE ARE YOU?

Adversity | Suffering | Sovereignty

A 30-Day Devotional **By Casey Treat**

It's a question every Christian has asked. Sometimes we don't want to admit that we've asked it, but nevertheless, most of us have been in a situation when we've looked up to heaven and asked (sometimes shouted), "God, Where Are You?" During the next thirty days, we want to walk together as we honestly contend with that question and learn how to see God shining through, even in the midst of the darkest days. Jesus teaches us that when we take the time to build our house upon a foundation of God's truth, even when the storm comes and threatens to bring destruction, that house will endure and stand strong.

This devotional will give you twenty days of encouragement and teaching, along with ten testimonies from people in our church who have walked with God through some very tough times. I believe their stories will inspire and build your hope. For those of you experiencing clear skies, use this devotional to help solidify the foundation of your heart. And for those of you who are experiencing your own perfect storm, I truly believe this resource will help strengthen your faith as you walk through to victory. No matter what your life looks like right now, remember that Jesus loves you. We love you.

Day 1

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. Psalm 34:17-19

When we are facing the most difficult of times, perhaps one of our greatest needs is to feel heard and to be understood. What an incredible promise to know that at the very moment we cry out to God, He is present to hear us and to deliver us. He is near and He is our source of salvation, both spiritually and emotionally.

These verses above are a double-edged sword. On one hand, the Word assures us that God is ever ready to save us out of our distresses; on the other hand, it assures us that while we are on earth, we will face many afflictions. I don't know about you, but I wish we could have all the deliverance without all the afflictions! But we can't have one without the other, can we? In our doctrine of faith, I think some of us can swing the pendulum to the side of, "If I just pray enough, my faith will keep anything bad from happening to me." However, the verses above (along with many others in the Bible, like John 16:33) remind us that even the "righteous" will encounter many afflictions. It's important to know this so we are not caught unaware.

It's so comforting to know that God promises to deliver us out of them all. But this does not mean He miraculously changes every outcome to be what we want it to be. We have to be careful not to see "deliverance" on our earthly timeline and by our personal standard of comfort. Don't allow yourself to buy into the lie that just because your circumstance isn't changing, God's deliverance is not at work. Faith is believing God's Word is true even when your natural eyes are not seeing results or your natural mind is not understanding the circumstance. Remember, Hebrews 11:35-40 where God tells us about all the people who by faith received their testimony of salvation, even though they did not experience it in their short walk on earth?

No matter what is happening in your natural world, make a choice to trust in God's Word and that He is most definitely at work in your life, bringing about deliverance and eternal results. He is near to you when you are in trouble. He is right beside you when your heart is broken. And He will save you during times of pain and sorrow as He walks you step-by-step toward deliverance.

Day 2

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Romans 8:18

"If my faith is strong and I am right with God, I will never have suffering in this life." It seems that many believe this to be true; and they spend their

lives making sure they live their lives as perfectly as possible, so as to not give any place for adversity to sneak in. But when suffering and struggling come (and most assuredly, it will), they are often left asking God “What is wrong with me? Why did this happen? Did I not have enough faith?” The assumption is that if we experience suffering in any way then we must have done something wrong to cause it to happen.

The fact is, suffering is a reality on planet earth. All of the men and women in the Bible experienced suffering, slavery, imprisonment, death of loved ones, or even martyrdom. Were their trials due to a lack of faith, or a flaw in their behavior? Of course not! The trials were simply due to the fact that they walked on a cursed earth. So just like them, there will be times when we also will face various kinds of negative circumstances...but with the Spirit of God on the inside of us, we can overcome.

Remember what Jesus promised us in John 16:33: “In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.” The Amplified Version goes as far as to say, “I have deprived it of its power to harm you and have conquered it for you.” But how can this promise be true when our circumstance seems to be the opposite? How do we stand on that scripture when the loved one still passes away, or the financial stress actually gets worse, or when the medical diagnosis remains bad?

It's at times like these when today's verse from Romans can fill our hearts with hope. By focusing on the glory that will be revealed to us in heaven, we can overshadow the doubt, anxiety, or condemnation that our struggle might be causing. Even in the midst of adversity, we can begin to believe God will help us rise above it because we know our Father has a wonderful eternity full of His glory prepared for us. Heaven is real; we are only pilgrims here on earth. Our home is with our Father in Heaven. It is our blessed hope, our future, and our joy.

Day 3

Had I Been Wrong All Along? by Casey Treat

Hepatitis C. I could hardly believe what the doctor was telling me. Hepatitis C and less than a 5% chance that I would ever be cured from the disease. What, how could this be? I was a pastor who for almost 30 years had preached faith, healing and deliverance, and that entire time, Hep C had been lying dormant in my body from my teenage drug use. During those decades, I had seen countless others receive their healing, why had I not received mine? I tried to wrap my mind around the irony of it all.

The tests continued, and I got a bad report that changed my life forever: my liver would quickly fail if I did not act. I knew I could not do what I had always done but needed something different. It wasn't only about speaking health and wholeness over my body; I had to also change my lifestyle, and seek out

medical options. Wendy and I sat down, and I remember asking her, “How do we face this? What have we not done that we need to do?”

After much prayer, we felt peace about a rigorous course of eleven months of chemotherapy. I went through a process of internalizing everything that the disease would bring to my life and how I would face going through such an intense regimen of drugs with terrible, 24/7 side effects. It was easy to be miserable. Everything about my body ached, and my mind was constantly shutting down; but I would force myself to focus on healing. I leaned into the Holy Spirit like never before, literally for my life, and He walked me through each horrible day at a time. By God’s Spirit in me, I refused to dwell on the pain but instead would begin to rehearse my victory story.

People have asked me many times if I ever questioned God as to why He let me get sick after all the years of living for Him. But I deeply understood that God was never my enemy; He was my lifeline to help me win. Sure, there were certain points of great pain when I wanted someone to blame, but I knew God didn’t bring the disease or cause me to stay sick for more of my life. I needed Him as my ally and not my enemy. With God, I knew no matter what came my way—He was faithful and His promises were true.

That season of my life was one of the greatest personal challenges I have ever faced. The sickness felt like an attack, and I had to fight feelings that I had somehow failed. But God was and is good, and therefore I knew that eventually, good had to come from it. One thing I learned was that God never promised an easy journey through life, but He does promise to be with us in the midst of every high and low of life. No matter how long it might take to get through the valley, He is forever our Good Shepherd, leading the way and refreshing our souls on the journey.

Day 4

For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us.
Romans 8:22-23

When someone says, “Why did God allow earthquakes, forest fires, volcanoes or hurricanes?” you can know it was not God’s original design. But when Adam and Eve submitted to the serpent, and allowed the god of this world, Satan, into a place of dominion, it changed everything. Thorns and thistles began to grow; the animal kingdom was changed and even nature and the weather was perverted. This is why natural disasters and global changes are part of this world. The earth groans and travails under the curse, the Bible says. This is why we must face sickness and disease,

and the never-ending decay of all that is around us. Even our physical bodies are growing older day by day.

It will not always be so. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the Lord returns, we shall be changed. Our bodies will be glorified and our world will be recreated. Until that day, we groan within ourselves, realizing that there will be an eternity with God. However, we are facing the negatives of life in this present time.

Even though we groan within because of the challenges we face, we also rejoice within. We know Jesus, and we have His Spirit in our lives. Our positives and our future are far better than the challenges we might experience and the negatives of this world. Know and believe that He is working in you and your steps are ordered of the Lord. We live in a world that is cursed, and the god of this world is evil. But we serve a God who blesses and helps us to overcome.

In the end we win...in heaven, in eternity...we win. Remember everything that was affected by the devil becoming god of this world will be redeemed and God's original design will be restored. The book of Revelation shows the process of change that this world will go through. The result is a new heaven and a new earth, a born again earth. God's plan will win and we will see the fullness of redemption.

Until then, let's keep our heads up and our heart up, knowing God is at work in our lives. He is daily strengthening us and preparing us for a much greater glory than what we are experiencing now.

Day 5

God, How Do I Tell My Kids? by Wendy Treat

I had seen what cancer could do. My mom had left this earth, far too young, after a very long and trying battle with cancer. I helped care for her, and it was indescribably painful to watch as her body slowly withered away. Eventually, she transitioned into heaven, and while I was so glad she was finally free from the disease, I was left feeling the pain of her loss.

When I found out I had thyroid cancer and would need to get my entire thyroid removed immediately and possibly progress into a more serious curative strategy, I was heartbroken not for myself but for the pain I was going to cause my children. I remembered all too vividly what those last several months with my own mother had felt like. Casey and I went for a walk, and I cried just thinking about telling our three adult kids that I was sick. I immediately correlated the pain of my mom's cancer battle with my eminent cancer battle and didn't want them to face the fear, pain, and sadness that I had gone through. I just wanted to stay their strong and protective mom.

My vulnerability was matched with their strength. On the night we told our kids, they rose up with faith and encouraged me that we would fight this together. We had fought for Casey's healing and won, and this time would be no different. They will never know the gift they gave me that night. As a family, we learned to acknowledge and feel the raw emotion of pain and grief, but we also learned to find strength in God. I can remember coming out of surgery, and the first thing I heard was Tasha and Christa laughing. The joy they brought to this challenging time was my medicine.

John 10:10 has always been one of my favorite verses, "The devil does not come but to steal, kill, and to destroy but I have come that you might have life and life more abundantly." The devil doesn't play fair. He throws mean curve balls that try to wipe us out. Prior to my diagnosis, I noticed I wasn't able to teach as long and my voice was tired and weak. How just like the devil to try to destroy my voice! His attacks are brutal and his curve balls relentless. But this I know: the devil is our enemy, God is our strength.

Through it all, I'm thankful for a God who never leaves or turns His eye from us; rather, He is ever ready to see us, hear us and comfort us. Although I wasn't able to be the strong and protective mom I wanted to be for my kids throughout the period I had cancer, I realize now that God was their strength and source, just like He was mine.

The devil will always attack that which is the most valuable to us, but remember Psalm 28:7 says that the Lord is our shield. Even when it feels like war is raging, He is present and faithful to guard us and protect us.

Day 6

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Romans 8:26

God told us that knowledge would increase in these last days, and it is happening just as prophesied. We hold computers in our hands that have more knowledge and power than everything man knew just a few decades ago. And yet there is still so much we do not know. In fact, an argument could be made that even all our cell phones, computers, knowledge and abilities have not made our lives one bit better. Every day we ask why certain things happen, or why our world is the way it is; and yet we don't have clear answers.

This scripture says we are weak, or unable to produce the results we desire because we do not know how to pray. It's not that we can't pray the right things in English, Spanish, Russian, or whatever language we know. It's that there is no way in our natural mind and intellect alone that we can pray perfectly for the issues or needs in our lives. It takes the Holy Spirit to help us, to pray through us and to lead us to the things God has for us.

We must trust God and pray with the Holy Spirit to say the right things and to hear the right things. God has never left us unable to produce; He just says we cannot do it alone. We need Him and His Spirit working through us. And when we surrender our hearts, our mouths and words, and even our will to Him, He moves us forward to His perfect will. And remember, God's 'perfect will' does not mean your 'perfect will.' Sometimes what God deems as perfect looks way more imperfect than we imagined; and once again, we must turn our minds and hearts over to the Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness.

Trust in God with all of your heart, and be at peace knowing that when you pray with the Holy Spirit, you are praying God's perfect will. Trust that your prayer is full of power and is effective. And trust that you are receiving His strength and help to walk through any circumstance you might face.

Day 7

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:4

Often in the Kingdom of God the answer seems opposite from what we would naturally do. To receive in His Kingdom we give; to be promoted, we humble ourselves; to go up we must first bow down. In this verse, we find that mourning is the beginning of healing and comfort. Jesus is not teaching us to mourn as a lifestyle; we do not live in a perpetual state of mourning. He shows us that when we are caught in the tragedies of life, mourning will begin the healing process.

We are never asked by the Lord to ignore pain, deny hurt, or avoid the reality of our suffering. It is important that we are honest with ourselves and our God about the hurt, the disappointment, and even the doubts that adversities and tragedies can bring about. It is not "faith" to stuff those negative emotions down, never address them, and instead spend our time reciting scripture. This is simply burying the pain with religious activity, making it much harder to experience the healing of our heart. And when we mourn with Him, it's not so He will know how we feel...He already does. He relates to it and understands your feelings. But confessing it, acknowledging it, and "praying it out" will release the control and hold that pain has on your heart.

On the other hand, we don't live there forever either. We cry out to God, we mourn, and ask for His help to understand, to move forward, and to be strengthened by His presence. As we stand honestly and vulnerably before our Father, we receive the healing presence and comfort of the Spirit of God.

He desires to help you move forward into comfort and peace. God never wants you to be stuck in pain or suffering, He wants you healed and whole. Start wherever you are today, be honest with God and let the comfort of the Holy Spirit begin to change your heart and mind.

Day 8

Yet I Will Praise Him

My brother and I were inseparable. Just being 18 months apart, we did everything together, and he wasn't just my little brother, he was my best friend. We were partners in craziness as we cheered for our high school teams, played sports together, and carried out fun and light-hearted pranks on our friends. And we loved exploring together.

One Sunday, after the service at CFC, we decided to go hiking with two of our friends. And when I say hiking, I mean the real deal: off trail, miles into the forest and out of cell range. As we drove, we all listened to praise and worship music, classic "Shout to the Lord" on old-school cassette.

It wasn't long before we found Otter Falls, a huge granite face, and we decided to climb it. One of our party didn't have climbing shoes, so it was just my friend, my brother and me. After climbing up several hundred feet, we decided we didn't have enough time to get to the top, so we started coming back down. First to the bottom, I was talking with the one who hadn't climbed, and that's when we saw my brother start to slip. Climbing was something we did often, so I was sure he'd regain his grip. But he never did. His slipping turned into full-fledged falling, and after a horrible 200 foot fall, he slammed into a rock and slid into the water below.

I was stunned, and it took me a few seconds to react. "What are you waiting for?!" called our other friend, still climbing down. "Go get him!" I snapped out of it and dove into the water to retrieve my very hurt brother. I struggled for a time but managed to get him out and immediately began tending to his life-threatening wounds. And then within minutes, my other friend, who was still climbing down, fell as well! Again, I was in the water, pulling his body up to the driest rock we could find.

We knew we needed help, and so I left the party to run the five miles needed to get help. All I could do was pray the entire way. I found some people who ran to my brother and friend to help with their bleeding wounds and perform CPR, as well as another group at the bottom who drove me to a place where I could finally use a cell phone.

Once help was on its way, I was able to walk a bit into the woods and be with God. I needed to know what and how to think. The Holy Spirit told me simply to praise God. It was the hardest thing to do at this awful time, but I did it anyway. A few hours later, I saw the face of my friend, the one who didn't climb with us, and I knew my brother and our other friend had died up at the falls.

There's no way to really describe the next season of my life: the pain and emptiness I felt went way deeper than any words can. But God was there, even deeper than the pain. With my closest friend in the world, my brother whom I'd known all my life...gone, I felt like part of me had died too. I was just walking through the motions of life. God was my life force and basically carried me through every moment of it.

I honestly never questioned God. I mean, none of it made any sense. I had climbed up and down the same path, and I didn't fall. There was no way to understand why. But I had grown up in a household of prayer, and my parents raised us all to love and trust God. And I'm so thankful for that. I think only because of that solid foundation, as a 19-year-old trying to grapple with my unimaginable pain and loss, I was able to surrender to God as my source instead of getting angry at Him for not saving my brother.

God was so incredibly faithful to me, and my entire family, as we forged ahead. He miraculously provided in so many ways...but most of all, He brought healing to our hearts. The ache of not having my brother by my side is still there, but even stronger than that is my God living through me each day. Along with that, is knowing I will see my brother again in heaven, where we'll spend eternity being crazy and going on adventures together.

Day 9

Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Job 13:15

There are many tragic stories of life in the Bible. Maybe you know them and even have personal stories of living through similar tragedies. Infants that have died; accidents that destroyed; diseases that have struck. These things will never end here on this earth and they are not God's will for us. This is not the way He originally intended that this world should be. But until redemption is complete and we are delivered from this world—where Satan is the god of this world—we face tragedy in many ways.

Job went through the worst of circumstances: the loss of his business and wealth; and even worse, the loss of his children and marriage. Yet he would not blame God or curse God. His statement, "Even if He did slay me, yet will I trust Him," is an amazing stand of courage and faith. This from a man that was not having a good day, but rather struggling with the loss of everything good in his life. For months, Job continued to defend his God and his faith in spite of the loss. And the friends around him were only able to offer him religious tradition and condemnation, yet his trust remained faithful to God.

Healing and deliverance came to Job eventually, but he never got his family back and I'm sure this loss never fully left him. Sometimes we move forward and continue on with God but we have scars from the things we've lost and

the battles we've endured. Sometimes there are no answers as to why it happened, but there is comfort in the Holy Spirit and His presence that never leaves us. Some things we never get over; but with God walking beside us, we can always have the strength to get through.

You've been through things that were not good—you didn't want it and neither did God—but you stand in faith and continue to walk with Him and He heals you as you go. It doesn't change the past, but you can still get on to your destiny. If we get stuck asking why and living in the pain, we may never move on to what He has for us. Let's be like Job, who stood strong even when he knew he would never be able to reclaim that which was lost. But because of his faith, Job ended his life with even greater blessings and a prosperous family.

Day 10

Our Greatest Battle and Our Greatest Blessing

Within hours after our first child, Jordan, was born, we learned he'd had a severe stroke. Doctors said they thought he could see and they thought he could hear, but other than that they did not know. Would he walk? Would he talk? Doctors couldn't say. Ultimately, Jordan had many, many health issues, and for the majority of his 25 years, he functioned mentally less than a two year old. He was physically disabled and medically fragile. He required 24-hour care and could never be left alone.

My husband, Paul, and I seriously loved and served God. We were founding members of Christian Faith Center; mature Christians. How could this happen? Why Jordan? He was innocent.

Initially, I was shocked and scared. I wish I could say I handled it all better. I became very afraid, angry and depressed. I felt extremely challenged in my faith. I could not find God in this. In some ways, I could not find God at all. I felt like I had fallen into a dark abyss.

The love of God and His Word got through to me. The answers to my questions were in the Bible. John 10:10 says that Satan comes to steal, kill and destroy. That's what happened: the devil. That's why Jordan was hurt. Nobody gets through life without challenges, but Jesus came to give us abundant life. I got real serious with God and experienced what it truly meant to live by faith. I knew God was Jordan's only hope. I knew in my heart that I could never blame God. He is our source of life and goodness.

We were determined not to become victims of circumstance; our lives would not be the same, but we would not be destroyed. We could not change what had happened, but we could and did decide to be happy. Those decisions were tested, a battle between circumstances and the mind. We continually prayed for Jordan's healing, and loved him unconditionally. In absolute faith

we added our two other children to our family. Two more citizens for God's Kingdom, who love and serve the Lord.

Was it easy? No! We prayed as the Word says, without ceasing, and made many very, very difficult decisions, including finally letting Jordan go. Everything possible had been done for him. It was his time.

Jordan received his healing when he walked into heaven on March 18, 2011. While we still miss him more than we can express, we celebrate his life with God and are happy for him. We know we will see our Jordan again. In the meantime, we don't look behind, we look ahead. Romans 8:28 says that all things work together for good. As time goes on, we see that more and more. God is good, all the time.

Day 11

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.

Psalm 37:23-25

I talked with Debbie on the day Jordan was born. "The doctor says he has severe problems," she told me. We prayed together and believed that God would do a miracle and her newborn, Jordan, would be well. That was the beginning of over twenty years of loving and caring for a son that was never able to reach his potential. He was an awesome person, loving and fun, but he was limited and they spent years trying to help him in every way.

Paul was an amazing father to Jordan. Every day he served, helped, and cared for him. I've never seen a more giving dad than Paul. Together he and Deb sought for medical and spiritual options to help their son live the fullest life possible. Though Jordan died young and struggled greatly, I know they believe he was a blessing in their lives. How could this be with so much pain and challenge?

It seems throughout scripture, we learn more when things go wrong than when they are right. Sad to say, when everything is good, we often coast along; but when there is a problem we seek God, pray and change. That would lead some to believe that God does bad things to cause us to grow, but God doesn't do evil. The scripture is clear of that. He is not the author of confusion or pain or sickness in our lives. He does use those things though, to bring us to a better place in life.

Jordan's condition may not have been what Debbie and Paul had planned for. But his presence in their family added much to their lives. It doesn't make dealing with the challenges easier, but it gives us perspective when we can see from God's view. Even in this situation, "the righteous were

not forsaken” and the family was never “begging for bread.” God provided extravagantly for this family: emotionally, physically, and financially. Just like the verse above promises, He upheld them when they felt weak; and not only that, I believe Jesus met Jordan face-to-face to escort him into heaven. Today, Jordan is living his eternal life with a sound mind and able body.

Day 12

The ship hit a shoal and ran aground too soon. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was repeatedly smashed by the force of the waves and began to break apart... The commanding officer ordered all who could swim to jump overboard first and make for land. The others held on to planks or debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely to shore. Acts 27:41, 43-44

This is a dramatic account of one of the shipwrecks Paul endured during his ministry. There are a couple aspects that make this particular adventure intriguing to me. One, Paul was smack dab in the middle of God’s will for his life, as he was traveling to Rome, the place God told him he would go, and a violent storm still struck. Two, after many days of the crew hopelessly fighting against this huge storm, an angel came to Paul to reassure him that even though the ship would be lost, all the lives onboard would be saved. So here’s my question: why didn’t Paul answer the angel, “Thanks so much for visiting me and telling me this...and since you’re here, could you just go ahead and stop the storm?” Wouldn’t that have been a much better testimony than a ship crashing and people clutching onto pieces of wooden boards and floating to shore? After all, isn’t that what Jesus did for the disciples? I would’ve said, “Hey, Angel...WWJD??”

We love the accounts of Jesus walking on water and of Jesus calming the sea. Those are so encouraging to imagine and they make great Hollywood endings to our stories of hardship and travail. And sometimes, this kind of miraculous intervention intersects with our diagnosis of cancer, or our financial downfall, or decisive moments in our lives. Sometimes we see the miracle and we get to revel in God’s glorious supernatural power. But sometimes, a wooden board is all we’re going to get, and we have to hold on for dear life as we float to shore.

So, if your friend gets the miracle but you only get the board, does that mean you received a ‘less than’ answer from God? Did God come through more for your friend than for you? Does God love your friend more than you? Or did you just not have enough faith? Of course our hearts know the answers to these questions is “No.” But that doesn’t mean our minds don’t struggle with the doubts and the feelings of discouragement.

I don’t know why sometimes we get the calmed sea and other times we get the board. I wish I did. But I do know this: God is ever working on our behalf to turn every situation to good. Sometimes that good is a miraculous

turnaround, and sometimes that good is a fortifying of our spirits and souls as we swim to shore. Sometimes that good happens for us on earth, and sometimes that good is waiting for us in eternity. But God's goodness is always being poured out on us, in the miracles and in the swimming to shore. Victory is always available to us, no matter what our outward circumstances might look like.

And when we walk through life with this kind of trust and assurance in God's love for us, we can be like Paul. Even after all the many, many hardships and trials, shipwrecks and beatings, whippings and imprisonments, he said at the end of his life, "I have run my race and perfected my course." How was he able to declare this after all the bad that happened to him? Because he never allowed those outward circumstances to be the yardstick by which he measured his life. His measure was how many lives had been saved and how many churches had been started! His measure was how even through all those hard times, God's glory and light was greatly manifested in the lives of thousands and thousands. And I know that as he stands in heaven watching the countless billions reading his letters and still being inspired by his teachings, he would say all those afflictions were "light" compared to the greater glory of populating heaven!

Day 13

The Crash that Made Me Rise

It was the height of the real estate market and I was on top. With millions of dollars in assets, I was set to make a few million in the next twelve to eighteen months. My wife and I were planning for semi-retirement, for a second home, and expanding even further into more building developments. Honestly, I felt pretty invincible and I was very excited for the future.

And then the market began to turn and I watched as slowly, all my millions in assets, began to unravel before me. Those assets then turned into an insurmountable mountain of debt. At first, I was sure God was going to rescue us and I'd be back on top in a year or so. But as the months and years crept by, I knew there was not going to be a miraculous ship coming anytime soon. I lost my business, my house, and everything else the bankruptcy claimed.

The next few years were the hardest of my life. Many of my business pals deserted me and I felt all alone. Not to mention, a big failure. When I prayed, the heavens felt like an iron curtain I could not penetrate, as God was silent. What I realize now, is that God was simply testing my heart, waiting to see if I would allow this season of loss to temper my heart that frankly had gotten greedy and self-absorbed.

But God is so good! Even though I can now see how some of this financial disaster was of my own doing, He strengthened and sustained me through

every difficult step as I attempted to rebuild my career. It was so difficult and enormously humbling to go from the guy who was always blessing everyone to the guy who was selling everything (literally!). I even started a job where I would be the one selling the equipment to the builders and their employees. God took my faithfulness to not give in to the temptation to just crawl under a rock and lick my wounds, and He gave me favor wherever I'd go. There were days when my wife and I did not know how we were going to feed the family; I would go out and sell every piece of equipment and materials...I had just enough to fill our cupboards. I cannot begin to count how many times God miraculously provided for all of our needs as we learned to trust Him for every little thing, every single day.

During this season of drought, I'm so thankful I never turned my back on God, especially since He never turned His back on me. It would've been the biggest mistake of my life, because He was my source for the transformation of my heart. When I was at the top, all that mattered to me was where the next success would come from. Once I hit bottom, God reminded me of the only things that truly matter in life: my relationship with Him, my marriage, my family, and living a life that will glorify Him. Nothing else that this world can offer even comes close to those things. Everything belongs to Him, anyway. If He so grants me the privilege to add to my life by allowing finances to come into my hands, I know it's only coming to me so that it can flow through me.

After seven years of putting my dreams on a shelf, and surrendering everything to God, He has begun to give me favor in the realm of real estate development. Only this time I'm better. I understand my purpose, and I understand what success is for. It's not for me...it's all for Him.

Day 14

Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. Genesis 37:5

The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. Genesis 39:2

But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. Genesis 39:21

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Genesis 41:41

Sometimes we think the story is over long before it really is. Joseph in the book of Genesis is a wonderful example of this. He could have been written off as a failure and a loser in the game of life several times. He had the worst treatment from dysfunctional family members, dishonest employers, and even peers, whom he had helped who forgot about him. Yet he never lost

faith in God and kept his integrity through it all. After thirteen years of more downs than ups, he rose to leadership in his nation and ended up helping his own family to recover from famine and poverty.

Your story may be similar: failed jobs, bankruptcy, plans that didn't work out, or even desires that seem too far away. But remember your story is not over yet; you are not finished. And don't give up your faith in God, because you never know what He can do. Sometimes we focus on the finish line instead of the race. We get so desirous of the end that we forget the process to get there. Life is a journey, not a finish line, so keep walking with God and do your best. Do the right thing in every situation. Like Joseph in the Bible, keep your faith and your integrity even when they lie about you or mistreat you. God sees and He is still on your side. His promise has not changed and your story is not over.

How many great turnarounds have you heard about? In business, finance, sports, marriage, family... God is in the business of resurrecting things that seem dead. He can bring you back from the dead and lift you up above your failure. It's not over because you know the Lord. It's not over because He loves you and wants to bless your life. It's not over until God says it's over. The world may say you're done and you have failed. But the story is not over and you will still walk in the promises of God.

Day 15

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:10

Probably every one of us can relate, from time to time, with the feeling of being the underdog, or the one who's left out, or even the victim of an unfair circumstance. And in our world today, simply by being a follower of Christ, we can feel persecuted or ostracized as we stand for what we believe to be truth.

The fact is, righteousness and Christianity in general will never be in vogue. The god of this world, Satan, will always look for opportunities to persecute the family of God. Sometimes it's subtle and easy to ignore, other times it's blatant and murderous. From the beginning of the new covenant, Christians have been persecuted.

So, we realize this truth and we rise above it. The devil and this world cannot keep a good person down. If we can avoid persecution, we do; it's better not to provoke the enemy. But when it's inevitable, we are strong. As Jesus was on the cross or while Stephen was being stoned, we are not ashamed of our Lord Jesus. Because of fear and shame, many Christians miss the blessing of living loud for Jesus. In their attempt to fit into this world, they miss what God would add to their lives.

We must not let the negative thoughts or emotions of other people control our lives. We live to please God, not people. If they despise who we are or what we stand for, we love them anyway and go on to God's will. We don't respond or try to get even when persecution comes our way; we just keep walking in love and succeed anyway. Nor do we react to the world and allow it to dictate our spirit, our attitudes, or our message. Once we find ourselves scrambling to please the world, we have given up control of our lives.

Let's live for God, walk in love, and share the message He has given us. Let's not allow persecution to make us anything but better.

Day 16

Where's My Blessing?

In the summer of 2008, we were expecting our first child. We were blissfully ecstatic when we went for our twenty-week check-up to find out who would be joining our family: pink or blue? A short while later, we were devastated to hear that there were complications which were later confirmed as Trisomy 18. Our baby girl was "incompatible with life." We were devastated.

Tessa Joy was born on September 28, 2008, a beautiful, perfect little bundle who stayed long enough for kisses and "I love you's" to last a lifetime, and then she drifted away into the arms of Jesus.

How could this have happened to us? We had prayed for a miracle. We had begged God for healing. We had read scriptures over our daughter, and in the end, we trusted Him and His plan for her. Those months following her death were terrible days. During the darkest part of our journey, we lost two more pregnancies to miscarriage. We painfully began to wonder if living children would ever be a part of our story. Tessa's death deeply impacted my relationship with God, but I still trusted He had a plan for us.

Two years after Tessa died, we started looking into options for growing our family, and eventually settled on foster-adoption. We went through a year-long process to get licensed, then settled in to wait for the right placement. A year and a half passed; one infant girl was with us for only two days, a toddler boy was just hours from coming home with us when a distant relative claimed him; and we waited months to be approved for two little girls, only to be turned down again.

Those were the hardest times – waiting. Believing God had a plan – but what? God, where are You? Have You forgotten us? One particular day, I was drowning in the injustice of it all. Twice that day, I complained to friends about situations I knew of where couples seeking adoption had babies "dropped in their laps," and I was crying out, "What about my lap, God? I want a baby to drop out of the sky into my lap!" It was literally the next day

that the phone rang, asking if we could take two little girls – a toddler and an infant. They were dropped off on our front doorstep two hours later. My friends still laugh about the two little girls who dropped into my lap!

During the holiday season of 2010, God told me, “It’s time; talk to your husband.” We talked, and agreed to start the foster licensing process. On Friday, February 27, 2015 we adopted our girls, Lily and Chloe. I realized recently that our foster-adopt journey began four years ago, when God stirred hope and urgency into my soul. Lily is four years old. She was born in December of 2010. At the very same time that she was taking her first breaths on this planet, God was whispering to my heart, “It’s time!”

God didn’t forget us. He knew exactly what He was doing, and He was there with us through all the grief, anxiety, frustration and questioning. He hasn’t forgotten you, either.

Day 17

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me? Hebrews 13:5-6

How do we get through the financial failure, loss or bankruptcy? How do we get over a family member, friend or business partner causing us to go through a disaster? These are hard situations that God is aware of, and in His Word, He speaks into these trials. First of all, we have to remember and to believe that God will never leave us. Period. No matter how successful you are, God will never leave you. No matter how much you might fail, God will never leave you. Faithfulness is simply who He is, and you can absolutely have faith in the promise that God is always right beside you.

On the other hand, there will be times when people leave you. Even the people you felt were the closest, the ones you thought you could always count on - sometimes even these will disappoint you. People may hurt us, but God will be there to get us through. Don’t worry about getting even or proving yourself to everyone that did you wrong. Move forward with the Lord and see what He has for your future. The quicker you can forgive and leave the past behind, the quicker you will see what God has planned for you. He will use even your failures to take you to a better place in life.

Sometimes our pride is hurt and we are embarrassed for the circumstances we are in; especially when the hardship we are facing is by our own doing. Our marriage has failed, or we’ve lost our job. Or, we’ve lost the nice house, and now we’re driving the smaller car, unable to afford to go out with friends. But these things don’t change what God thinks about us. He is still there and will lift us up to success in every realm. And the friends who are true and godly will feel the same way.

Maybe the biggest lesson for us is that we are not here for what people think of us. We are not serving them and they are not our Lord. We serve God and we are concerned with pleasing Him. When it is people we are trying to impress, ego, pride, jealousy and competition take over our lives. And nothing good will come from that. Keep your eyes on your Father in heaven who loves you unconditionally; there is life in that.

You can rise above every failure when you are moving forward in God. Forget what is behind, and remember: God will never, ever leave you.

Day 18

Abraham, who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." Romans 4:18

Sometimes when we read the Bible, we think the miracles came often and fast. For Abraham it was not so. He was seventy-five when He obeyed God and went to the Promised Land; and he left all he knew, uncertain where the Lord would take him. He was "living blind." It was twenty-five years later before Sarah conceived their first child and Isaac was born, twenty-five years! That's a long time to wait for the promise of God to come to pass. You and I get anxious when we have to wait a few days or weeks.

Notice the scripture said "contrary to hope, in hope he believed." That's an incredible thought. Hope seemed to be gone for Abraham, as he was so mature in age. And yet in hope, Abraham believed anyway. You have been there, I'm sure. When hope seemed to have disappeared and the promise impossible. In fact, to continue to hope in God seems foolish. And so, some of us (like Abraham) think that maybe we need to take matters into our own hands and produce our promise for ourselves. But this is never a wise choice, as we see the negative results of Abraham's son, Ishmael, birthed by Sarah's handmaiden, playing out even in our world today. Abraham didn't walk his destiny perfectly, but he sure did finish strong in faith and in hope... and God honored His promise to Abraham.

The fact is, when we walk with God, there is always hope. Even when we lose heart, and even when we take matters into our own hands, God is always faithful to His Word. Maybe the fulfillment of some of God's promises will not be seen in this lifetime on earth, but certainly in heaven. We will see our loved and our lost ones in eternity. We will experience unbroken fellowship with God and unending prosperity in all realms of life. And so, our hope is in Him even if the circumstances on earth are contrary to hope.

Your hopes may be answered in ways you had not thought of. God may have a different plan for your family or your business. While one hope seems gone, He is preparing a different answer and you can trust that you will

receive the promise. Remember, our hope and faith is in Him, not in what we want. He knows some things that you don't. Hope in God!

Day 19

It Rains on the Just and the Unjust

My wife and I had the perfect life: happily married, a two year old daughter, and a newborn son. And then in a flash, all of that changed. I was working as a carpenter on a marine construction site, and we needed to move a tugboat that had a bent propeller. My boss and I hoisted up the boat with a crane, and as we shifted it overhead, the crane failed. The tugboat dropped directly on me, shooting me through two thick sheets of plywood and into the water. Luckily my boss was not hurt, and he was able to pull me out of the water. I was immediately rushed to Harbor View Medical Center.

I was told I would never walk again. Those words were incomprehensible for me and fear began to set in. The first several months were a blur of surgery, recovery and relearning how to move without my legs or being able to rotate my spine. And to make things worse, there was a psychologist who felt it necessary to meet with me and tell me that almost 90% of marriages don't make it through this kind of trauma; so I needed to brace myself for my wife divorcing me and the depression that would follow. How was this helping me?

I am very thankful that I had a wife who was so diligent to focus on reading the Word of God and to dig deeper into her relationship with Him. She was truly my rock and helped to root up the seeds of fear that psychologist tried to sow into my heart. We both resolved that no matter what, we were going to get through this with our marriage intact; in fact, better than ever before!

There was a time when I asked God, "Why did this happen to me? I'm a good person." And I felt Him answer, "It rains on the just and the unjust." At the time, I didn't even know that actually was a scripture in the Bible. He was telling me that He would never do this to me; but we live in a world where sometimes bad things happen to good people. He didn't cause this, but He would certainly help me through it.

My goal became to get out of the hospital and home to my family. In therapy as I was learning how to take care of myself, I would always do double what the daily goal would be. I'll never forget the day my wife marched in and said with authority, "You will walk again in Jesus name!" It was life to my soul, and on that day, we came in agreement and began praying and believing that God would heal my body.

It's 30 years later, and we are still praying in faith for my healing. Yes, it's hard to believe and hope for healing for so long without it manifesting in my life, but something in us just cannot stop believing. We know God is able.

Regardless what happens in this short time on earth, we trust completely in God and His plan for my life. We never sit back and accept this, because I want to be healed; however, if I live the rest of my life in this wheelchair and one person comes to Jesus because of the example of my life, then it would all be worth it. Life is a blink compared to eternity, and every bit of this life is worth it if it helps someone else get to heaven.

As a family, and as our kids grew up, we had to come to terms with the fact that we continued to pray in faith without seeing the manifestation. We had to teach our kids that what we “see” doesn’t change the truth of God’s Word. Faith is a choice...no matter what the outward circumstances might be. And in the meantime, my job is to be the best Christian, husband, father, grandfather and friend that I can be. I can’t dwell on what I don’t have, especially when God has so richly blessed our lives. I focus on what I do have, and am committed to never feel sorry for myself. Even though my kids don’t remember a time I was able to walk, we have a fun-filled and rich life together. My wife and I count our blessing daily and remind ourselves that God truly is good.

Day 20

O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand? Turn and answer me, O Lord my God! Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die. Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!" Don't let them rejoice at my downfall. But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me. I will sing to the Lord because he is good to me. Psalm 13:1-5 NLT

I’m sure there have been times when you’ve felt like David did when he wrote this psalm, I know I have. My only problem was, for years I was afraid to express my pain or hurt, thinking that it meant I didn’t have faith. I didn’t want to say, “God, did you forget me?” because I knew the Bible said, “He will never forsake me,” even though it was exactly how I felt at the time. And so instead of talking about it with someone, I’d make myself feel worse as I condemned myself for being a faith preacher who was doubting his faith! It took me a long time to understand that God is not afraid of my doubts or fears, and that having those feelings were not the determining factor of my quality of faith.

David got this revelation early, and wasn’t afraid to be completely vulnerable before his God. As he delved into this kind of an authentic friendship with God, we see he doesn’t stay in his negative emotions for long. He would quickly remember God’s Word and promises and begin to confess his faith in God’s love. Even though nothing had changed at this point in David’s circumstance, he was encouraged in the Lord by remembering His love. This

is a place of power, and the posture we all can strive for. Once we release our pain and doubts, we can then receive His loving kindness and healing. And even though it might take a long time before your actual circumstances change, you can be encouraged in the loving kindness of your Father.

So why not express them to our loving, heavenly Father? He knows our heart and mind anyway. He knows what we're going through and being honest in our prayer and crying out to Him will help us stay close to Him. Remember, we get closer to who we pray to, who we pray with, and who we pray for. Being honest with God doesn't hurt your faith, it just strengthens your relationship with Him.

Day 21

A Love that Carried Me Through

I am a church girl who grew up at Christian Faith Center. I understood faith, and loved God with all of my heart. Shortly after high school, I went on a fun trip to Hawaii and met my opposite: a wild, adventurous, handsome man. He was so different from anyone I'd ever dated, and I quickly let him sweep me off my feet. When he proposed, I accepted, even though I knew he definitely loved a party lifestyle with alcohol and drugs. But my father had been the same way when he'd met my mom, and as soon as they got married, he gave all that up. Surely this man would do the same for me... especially because I had the power of prayer and faith on my side.

My marriage did not look like I'd imagined. My husband only partied harder as the years went by, no matter how much I prayed. The next eight years were a whirlwind. I cared for our three small children while my husband barely came home; and when he would, I would fear for the safety of my kids. Very disillusioned and feeling like a failure, I knew my only option was to find a way out. He was clearly choosing drugs, alcohol, and gambling over our family.

Before I could take our kids and leave him, he had a terrible accident. He was forcibly pushed out of an 8-story building. He landed on his feet, and survived! His body was terribly broken, but he was alive. I thought, perhaps this was his "rock bottom," and he'll finally be ready to change. If I leave him now, I'll never know if I could've salvaged my marriage. Besides, how could I leave him now when he is virtually helpless?

For almost a year, my husband was in the hospital, and I carried the stress of helping to care for him, worked jobs to pay our bills, and parent our three children. The stress of this time was almost unbearable. I remember coming to church and crying out to God to help me make it through each day, and to change him into the man I knew he could be. After twelve months in the hospital, he finally was able to come home, but that meant I would need

to be his nurse 24/7. The pressure only got worse. But he and I had many good talks, and I believed we would be able to rebuild what was lost.

And then four months after his release, I watched helplessly as my husband walked out of the house, wearing his prosthetic leg and carrying his IV, to go to the casino to drink and gamble. Several hours and thousands of dollars later, I finally had to come to the realization that nothing was ever going to change. God was not going to be able to change him no matter how hard I prayed; the choice to follow Christ rested solely on his shoulders. I knew I had to make a better future for myself and my kids.

It only got uglier once I filed for divorce. He would threaten our family, and once while we were at church, he came and completely vandalized our new home. Restraining orders and arrests were made, and eventually we were able to move on. Our entire family still prayed for him, that he would at least make a decision for Christ. I'm not sure if he ever truly did, and two years later, he died of a drug overdose.

There were so many times during those ten plus years when I would go to God, crying, "Where are you? Why won't you change my husband?" But I realized that I was asking the wrong questions. Deep down, I knew God could only change those who came with a willing heart. And I also knew that God had been my strength and shield throughout this entire time. His Spirit lifted me up each and every day, and He protected my children from physical and emotional harm. They are all serving God today and are healthy and strong in spirit. He also supernaturally provided finances that I can never explain. So the answer to my question, "Where are you?" was that He was with me, carrying me through, every step of the way.

Day 22

***...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will... In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.
Ephesians 1:5,11***

If God is sovereign and predestines our lives "according to His will" do we have any choices at all? Is our life just the result of what God wills for us? And are the good and the bad, the blessings and curses that we face, is all of that God moving and making our lives what He wants? These are great questions to ask...and to seek answers for. If we believe that God is the cause of things like cancer and destruction, then how can we pray to Him to help us find victory?

First, we must read any scripture about predestination and foreknowledge with this in mind: God is not bound to time. Past, present and future, hours, days, months and years are only a part of our earth existence. God's

spiritual home, heaven, is existing in a constant state of the eternal now. Eternity is such a hard concept for our finite minds to wrap around, but that does not make it any less true. God knows every choice you will ever make, not because He is your puppet master, but because He sees your yesterday, today and tomorrow as one and the same. Adam in Eden, Jesus in Jerusalem, and you reading this devotional are all happening at the same time to God! This is how you were predestined and foreknown. Make sense? It's hard for our minds to grasp, right?

In addition, we know that God heals and helps us, but we must also know that the Bible is clear: God does not desire, nor is He causing, sickness, disasters, sin or evil. John 10:10 is very clear about this. Though He knows and sees, He is not the author of evil or confusion in any way. How could He be our loving, heavenly Father, and then also bring sin and evil to our lives? That would be totally confusing, and God is not the author of confusion. But we do have an enemy, Satan the devil, and he comes to kill, steal and destroy. He is the beginning of sin, the cause of the curse that is on this earth, and we must resist him steadfast in the faith.

God knows and loves you. He knows every thought, every hurt, even the number of hairs on your head; but knowing doesn't mean controlling. Knowing what is going to happen, does not mean that God desires or causes everything to happen. Paul wrote that, "Whom He foreknew He also predestined..." God knows those that will turn toward Him and who will desire to walk with Him. And then based on what He knows about you and me, He plans a wonderful life and destiny! He does not control—you always have the free will to opt out—but He does establish a path that you can walk in if you want His will. And this path is filled with His strength and power to enjoy the good times and remain steadfast in the bad.

Day 23

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. Colossians 3:8-10

Sometimes it seems like bad things can come in bunches. One challenge might not be that bad, but when they begin to come one after another, it gets hard. We start to think, "What else can go wrong in my life?" We even begin to believe things will go wrong. We expect the worst because of things we're going through. When the negatives are piling up on us, it is easy to let anger, depression, frustration or negative words take over our lives. We get dark in our heart and mind and things can go from bad to worse. Sometimes we may think, "It can't get any worse." But the fact is, it can. When anger, depression, etc. start running our lives, things will get worse.

Being driven by what we are experiencing in the present moment will perpetuate feelings of fear, doubt, anger, and negativity. When the greatest challenges of life start coming at us and days begin to look darker and darker, the last thing we want to do is speak positive and remind ourselves that we are new in Christ. We don't want to confess Colossians 3:10 over our lives, we want to live in our misery. But God's Word is a higher way of living and will bring about a shift in our circumstances when we force ourselves to live different. Every negative decision started with a negative thought first; but every thought can be shifted with a choice. Let's begin to grab those negative thoughts that are driving us to negative choices.

Don't follow a bad situation with a bad decision. Don't let the negatives start to pile up... at least not the part you can control. Keep a good spirit and a positive outlook. Keep saying what God's Word says and be nice to those around you. Things may be bad but they can get worse. Don't add to your trouble with more bad decisions. Follow those problems with faith, hope, godliness and then believe that they are working for your good.

Day 24

Peace Greater Than Grief

My daughter, Telia, was the love of my life. I truly believed she was the best thing that had happened to me, I thought if anything ever happened to her, I would not be able to go on. When she was about six, I gave my whole heart to Jesus Christ, started coming to Christian Faith Center, and every Sunday, she would come with me. Together, we began learning about God.

One evening, she started to complain about a headache. It continued to get so bad that her mom took her to the emergency room, and soon after I received a call to meet them there. Several tests were taken, and hours later, we still didn't have any answers. It was late, and I had to work early the next day, so I prayed with Telia and asked her mom to call me as soon as the doctors had a prognosis.

About twenty minutes later, my phone rang and I was told I needed to come back immediately; something was very wrong. I spun my car around and realized I was just blocks away from CFC. I drove into the church parking lot at 2am, stood in front of the main doors and lifted my hands in the air. It was the only thing I knew to do. I prayed that God would give me the strength to handle whatever diagnosis I was about to hear.

When I got back to the hospital, the doctors sat her mother and me down. "Your daughter has a brain tumor the size of a golf ball, and the chances of her recovering from this is very, very slim." Those words hit me like a ton of bricks. How could this be happening to my sweet, innocent girl? I knew God had a plan for her, and this was not it. And then peace hit me, and I just knew this was the time that God was going to shine! Telia was going to be

miraculously healed, and her mother and step-dad were going to finally give their hearts to Christ because of it, oh what a testimony this was going to be!

Over the next eleven months, she endured intense chemotherapy and radiation. We watched as her little body got weaker and weaker, until the doctors told us there was nothing left for them to do. I knew that my God could do the impossible; however, I also knew God was filling my heart with the most incredible peace. I wholeheartedly trusted Him...no matter what. It was a mystery to me. In the natural, my worst fear was right before my eyes, and yet my heart was filled with such a deep peace and sense of God's presence.

Telia and I prayed together until the very end. And when she was with me, whenever she'd have intense pain in her head, I'd pray and God would miraculously take away the pain! She never even had to take medication when we were together. It was a beautiful thing to share with her.

Just a few days after her tenth birthday, my sweet girl passed away. I was right there with her, and God filled my heart with so much love and peace, the grief was never able to overcome my heart. He was so good to me during this time; so present and so strong. Never for a moment did I have an ill feeling toward Him. How could I, when He was so evidently holding me up?

People in the world have asked me, 'How could your God have done this to you?' But I don't see it that way. I say, "One thing I learned is Telia was never mine to begin with; she was God's. She was a beautiful gift on loan to me and all who knew her. And she will be in my future."

I thank God for CFC, because my church saved me. I was there whenever the doors were open. Pastor Bill asked me if I would consider serving in KidZone, and at first I thought it would be too difficult working with little kids. I was afraid it would remind me too much of what I'd lost. But it was the opposite! What started with one Sunday a month has turned into every Sunday that I'm in town, and I love serving those kids. They were a lifeline for me as God healed my heart, and now I can't imagine not serving in KidZone! God has been my strength and refuge during the absolute worst time of my life, and He carried me through with His love and peace. Never say 'If this — happens, I could not go on.' It's not true. No matter what you face in life, if you let Him, God will be your rock and will give you the ability to overcome.

Day 25

So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord and orshipped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. 2 Samuel 12:20

How do you get your faith back when tragedy strikes? How do you pick yourself up again once you've been thrown to the ground by the negative circumstances of life? We know it's possible, because we've seen other people endure great hardship and rise back up to a blessed life. But we've also seen those who've been struck down and never seemed to recover. How do we make sure we are part of that first group? David gives us a great example.

In 2 Samuel 12, tragedy hits the house of David, and his son gets very ill. For seven days, David fasts and prays in hopes God will have mercy on his son. But in the end, the child passes away, and King David makes a truly remarkable decision. He rises from the ground, washes himself, and goes to the Lord to worship Him. Notice that before David takes care of his physical body with food, he first tends to his spirit and soul by going to the House of God. And in doing so, David offers us a model of how to get our faith back when we feel like we've lost our way.

First, David deals with the pain. For seven days he mourns and cries out to God, presumably until there is nothing left in him to cry. It's so important to deal with the pain of loss and failure, no matter how deeply it might hurt. Only by looking square into the face of our pain can healing begin.

Second, he gets up. He makes a choice to turn the page of mourning and he "arose from the ground." I think this can be the hardest choice to make. Sometimes we think if we make the choice to stop hurting that somehow it lessens the magnitude of our loss. If we stop crying, then does the person's life that was lost have less value? If we forgive, then does it make right the wrong that was done? If I have grace for myself, then does that mean I'm somehow condoning my bad decision? The answer to all these questions is, "No." But we cannot live in the valley of loss, unforgiveness, or condemnation. We have to be honest with the pain, but then we have to "arise from the ground" and start to take steps toward healing and restoration.

Third, David goes to the house of God and worships. So often in our most vulnerable times, we want to stay hidden and private. While it is excruciating to have others see our pain, the other side of that is the great comfort and support we will receive from our church family and friends. Don't forsake the assembling of the saints, for it is a place of tremendous healing and comfort. When we find that we've lost our faith, let's follow David's model to lead us back to an even deeper faith!

Day 26

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28-29

Many times throughout scripture, God tells us things we must “know” in order to be the people He called us to be.

“We know” that all things are working for our good. Do we really know this? It seems that many of us do not know or we often forget when the times get challenging. How many times have we found ourselves in a situation thinking it is bad and certainly not working for our good? I think this is because when we read this scripture, we interpret it as “When we love God and are called to live for Him, He will take every bad situation we face and make it all work out tidily in the end.” (Just like all the happy ending movies we like to watch.)

This is not what this scripture is promising. Here, God is saying that no matter what trial you might face, no matter how intense or bad the situation is, if we will remain in love for Him and steady in our faith, He will use that situation to produce amazingly “good” things in our heart and mind...even if the situation in the natural never changes. You see, often the problem or challenge before us is the very thing that will get us to a new place and make us better. If we curse every challenge that comes our way, and feel bad in every difficulty, then we can miss the opportunities for growth and blessing.

Let’s “know” and remember that not all things or circumstances are good; but God will use all things to move us forward in His great plan, if we will let Him. Don’t let negative thoughts and emotions keep you from believing and moving forward with the Lord no matter what. He is so big and so good that He will use even the things that are not good to work for your good. And what can be “good-er” than that?

Day 27

Not Wasting Another Moment

From 2000-2006, I was completely bedridden with a very strange and debilitating digestive issue. For six long years, I had the most severe nausea I’d ever experienced, causing me to feel like throwing up 24 hours a day. I saw over seventy doctors, went to clinics all over the country, and tried every protocol, surgery, and treatment that was out there: from the traditional to the extremely alternative. Still, no one could figure out what was wrong or provide any relief. I had done everything I knew to do, both physically and spiritually, and felt just like the woman with the issue of blood, spending all she had, but growing worse. I got down to eighty-five pounds, needed constant care, and worst of all, was missing precious years with my three young boys. To say that life was dark for me is an understatement. It was pitch black and everything in me was crying out, “God, where are you?”

The ironic thing is, I was growing deeper in God than ever before. When you walk through hard things, you find out what’s really in you, and what you really believe. Do you still love and trust Him when life is hard? When prayers aren’t answered? When it feels like He’s left the building? I love Job’s

answer on that: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him...” (Job 13:15). He misunderstood who was slaying him, but that makes his statement even more powerful! I didn’t understand why I wasn’t healed, or why God seemed so silent, but I decided that no matter what happened, no matter if I lived or died, no matter if I was healed or not, that I would trust Him with my life, and worship Him forever, regardless of the outcome.

Finally, after six years, answers came as a doctor found that I had a form of mold in my blood, and was basically toxic from head to toe. No one knew how it happened, but after months of treatment, I finally gained my health back. The thing is, I was never the same. In so many good ways. I not only had a new appreciation for everything in life, but a much deeper love for and trust in God. Yes, I had questions, many questions, but I could also see the truth that He had carried me through that whole storm, sustaining me and giving me the strength I needed to get through every tough day. I was never alone, even when I felt like it. He was nearer than I thought, He was guiding when I didn’t realize it, and He knew there was an end to my pain, when I couldn’t see it. We may not always understand why things happen or don’t happen, or why things take a long time, but we can respond like Job and say, “Yet...I will trust you,” no matter what.

Day 28

We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

Sickness and pain is a slow drain on everything in the person who is sick, as well as the family and friends close to them. And not knowing why you are sick does not make it better. Sometimes not knowing what is wrong makes the struggle even worse as helplessness begins to weigh heavy. The previous testimony from Cindy and her husband, Doug, is an amazing example of a long-term struggle, but a triumphant victory.

I sat with Doug many times as he and his wife went through over seventy doctors, and a myriad of tests, with no results. Every new appointment became more painful, and every, “I don’t know what to tell you” seemed to add to the darkness and pain. Weeks became months, and months became years as Cindy struggled; missing out on her sons’ activities at school and church, and painfully missing the joy of marriage with her husband. The amazing thing about this couple was a sense of hope in the future no matter what they went through. I know they questioned God and felt like giving up, but the next day they would be seeking new options and looking for a way to move forward. Even when they were frustrated with God, they were calling out to Him for strength and healing.

Don't think that you cannot pray and believe for God's help because you are angry at Him and questioning why this is happening to you. The fact that you're mad at God means you still believe in Him and know that He is your help. David often started his psalms to God with his anger, doubts and fears. As he would pour his heart out to God, he would end up with words of praise and faith, knowing that God was his healer and protector. Don't let the enemy tell you that you can't pray because you're frustrated with God; this is the best time to pray. Add your emotional passion to your faith and know that God is always there.

Doug and Cindy eventually walked through the sickness, pain and the dark years of struggle. They have ministered to so many because of what they went through, and now they know they can overcome any challenge that comes their way, with faith stronger than ever before. It wasn't a miracle on a particular day or a spiritual breakthrough that brought their healing. It was daily trusting God even when they were hurt and angry. Even when they doubted and questioned, they knew God was there. Today they are examples of more than conquerors.

Every thing or part of life won't be perfect or even the way we planned it to be. But that doesn't mean that it's not good or something God can use to bring about great blessing.

Day 29

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Philippians 1:12-14

Once again, Paul demonstrates unbelievable selflessness as he boasts that his imprisonment has furthered the Gospel. Not only did it make his followers more passionate to proclaim the Truth in their cities, but also, Paul's example of living helped to bring salvation to everyone in prison, even the whole palace guard! Paul truly understood that his life was so much bigger than the sufferings he was currently occupying; he knew that how he chose to live—even while in chains—could change the eternities of those around him...even the ones responsible for his chains.

Could it be that when we find ourselves in "chains," if we will use those sufferings to help others, then we too can say our "chains are in Christ"? Not that they come from Him, but that by living in Him we are able to see the bigger picture and serve those around us. Instead of becoming so engrossed in our own pain, if we will just look up, God will show us those

people who are also in chains but have no idea how to free themselves. We become the key to unlock their chains. Contrarily, when we stay focused on our own hurts and circumstances we tend to get stuck in them. We don't get better, we just become bitter.

Wendy and I have a few friends that have lost children at a young age. How tragic, and there is nothing I can say that will make that experience better for them. But the ones that have moved forward and are living a healthy Christian life have done so by continuing to help others even while they were hurting. By serving to release others from their bondages, they have found their own chains have been loosened.

Today, can you see your hurts and problems as “chains in Christ” and use them to help others get through their hurts? Maybe your healing will come as you help others be healed. It could be that your understanding of losing a child or handling a crisis is what they need, and that's why God has brought them into your life. Instead of being senseless, your pain now has significant meaning. In addition, the confidence and the boldness of the Lord will begin to rise in your heart, and you will find yourself moving into a new place in life.

Day 30

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13*

Can you imagine Paul saying these words in prayer and writing them to the church while he was overcoming one of the many beatings he received for being a Christian? Paul was whipped five times, beaten with rods three times, stoned one time, and shipwrecked three times! All these lashes from the Jews, and beatings with rods from the Gentiles, scarred his body for life. Yet he encouraged others to have hope and to keep believing, and he never allowed himself to become negative or bitter toward the world around him. If anyone can teach us how to be filled with joy and peace simply by believing, it is Paul.

Often Paul wrote scripture to the church from jail cells, and much of the New Testament was written while his body was healing from being beaten. How could this be? Where was God? How could He have allowed one of his finest evangelists, teachers, and apostles to be treated like this? Paul's life is a tremendous example of what being a Christian sometimes looks like. Christianity is not a country club where we only experience the nicest and the best. It's not a freedom ticket to living an easy and problem-free life. We are Christ followers and we serve the Lord because we believe in Him and desire for all people to come to know Jesus as Lord. The End.

But the world will not like it. We will face persecution, and circumstances will not always be good. But just like Paul, we can still be filled with hope in

believing. Then the Holy Spirit rises in our hearts with something way more powerful than defeat, discouragement, or any other kind of emotion. He fills our inner man with the spiritual force of joy and peace. Wow! In the midst of some of our worst days we can experience His great joy and peace. This is not the joy you can get at the mall with a new purchase, or the peace that comes from this world. This is vastly deeper than those shallow emotions that fade quickly. The joy of the Lord is a strength from within, and the peace that passes understanding is a stabilizing anchor in our hearts even in the eye of a hurricane.

I have heard many testify to me how in the midst of their most distressing times, they were able to feel God giving them peace that went beyond what they could understand. I have experienced this phenomenal spiritual power too...and so can you.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal and release in you joy and peace that will carry you through the challenging times of life. Your circumstances may not change, maybe not for your whole life. But God is still there and the Holy Spirit lives in you and He will enable you to move forward. Because the God of hope will fill you with all joy and peace as you continue to believe.

Dear Friend,

It is our prayer that you are encouraged and moved forward to the healing of Jesus through this devotional. We're believing these days together will cause the compassion of the Lord to make you strong and whole.

We never forget the hurts and pains we go through but we can move forward and be whole again. So many things remind us of people we've lost or problems we've gone through but you can also be reminded of the love of God and the compassion of Jesus. Let those memories lift you. Let the scriptures and thoughts from this devotional empower you to move forward in destiny. We cannot change the past but we can experience an exciting future. And when challenges come again, you'll remember that you overcame one time, and in Him, you will do so again.

I pray others are encouraged by your strength and healing and that you will pass what you have received on to those around you. It's no accident that you read these words and walked with us for these 30 days. God is working in your life and His will is ahead. Be strong and be healed in Jesus name.

BeYou,

Pastor Casey



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