

A close-up photograph of a man and a woman smiling warmly at each other. The man, on the left, has dark hair and is wearing a blue denim jacket over a dark shirt. The woman, on the right, has short blonde hair and is wearing a dark blue collared shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting.

When Heaven is Silent

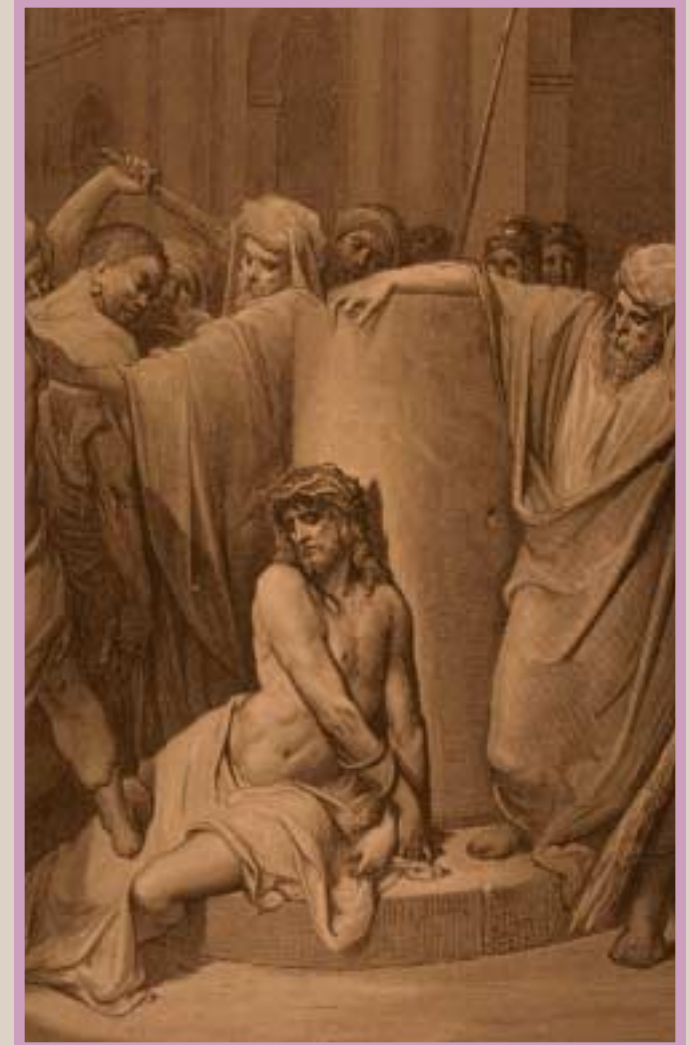
*Devotions and poems to give
you strength and hope*

JOHN POWELL

featuring the paintings of Gustave Doré

Contents

When Heaven is Silent	3	Nailed to His Cross	20
One Thing I Know.	5	Right Song, Wrong Side	21
Proved by His Wounds	6	<i>Poem: Tell Me About the Master</i>	22
<i>Poem: I Asked God</i>	7	Our Scars Have a Purpose	23
God's Working in Your Darkness	8	Freedom Through Forgiveness	24
Waiting Upon the Lord	9	<i>Poem: None of Self</i>	25
<i>Poem: O Jesus of the Scars</i>	10	The Lord Sits Upon the Flood	26
Destined for Mediocrity	11	Jesus Walks Among the Wounded	27
Sifted as Wheat	12	Keep Your Eyes on Jesus	28
<i>Poem: He Giveth More Grace</i>	13	Sometimes Our Armor Gets Heavy	29
God is Greater Than the Noise	14	<i>Poem: God Really Cares</i>	30
God Will Restore Your Wasted Years	15	Love Letters in the Sand	31
A Reminder from the Lord	16	Touched by Jesus	32
What is Your House Built Upon?	16	What is Your Response to Suffering?	33
<i>Poem: On God's Anvil</i>	17	<i>Closing Prayer</i>	34
Examine Yourselves	18		
<i>Poem: Not Down, But Through</i>	19		



When Heaven is Silent



“After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.” (John 5:1-2).

My wife and I nervously walked into the neonatal intensive care unit. We silently strolled past bed after bed of little infants, most born premature, all in serious condition. We stopped at bed 15. This baby was different from all the others. He was full term. He appeared healthy. He was also ours. Born only a couple of hours ago, our little boy had to be rushed to the NICU after a hole developed in one of his lungs. What followed then were two very difficult weeks. Another hole developed in his other lung. Emergency surgery was performed to remove fluid from his abdomen. Then another hole developed. Finally, the day before Thanksgiving, we were able to bring him home. During these two weeks, we asked “Why?” a hundred times. “Why our little baby? He looks so healthy? Why did this have to happen? We pray, yet he keeps developing problems. Why?”

You’ve probably asked the same questions many times in your life. “Why did my spouse leave me? Everything seemed so perfect!; Why did I lose my job? I’m a Christian and I trust God, but my unsaved co-workers didn’t lose their jobs!; Why can’t I find someone to love me? I’m so lonely?; Why did she have to get sick and die? She loved God, but God didn’t heal her. She suffered so much. Why?; Why did God answer his prayer and heal him, but He won’t heal me? Why?”

By now, you may be asking what all this has to do with the scripture above. Look closely at this verse again. There was “a great multitude” of sick and hurting people gathered around this pool. Compound this with pilgrims flooding into Jerusalem for the Passover and you can just about guarantee that there were several hundred, perhaps thousands of people gathered around this pool. Jesus healed a man which had been sick for thirty-eight years. This was a great miracle indeed. I’ve heard sermon after sermon about this man who was healed, sermons intended to build our faith and give us hope that God hears and will answer our prayers. But, I want to talk about the thousands of people that left the poolside that day with no answer, still sick, still suffering, still waiting.

I thank God for every prayer He has answered, for everything He has done for me. Yet, many prayers have gone unanswered. Many times Heaven is silent. My prayers bounce off the ceiling, it seems like, right back into my face. “Why are You silent, Lord? Why don’t You answer? You said You will stick closer than a brother. But, You seem to be a million miles away. You said if an earthly father desires to provide for and please his children, how much more do You! Yet, I don’t see You moving!”

I wish somewhere in this message I could give you the answer to “Why?” I wish I could open your eyes of understanding and answer every question troubling your heart. I know that sometimes we suffer because of bad decisions we have made along the way. But, sometimes, we’re innocent, we’ve done nothing, and out of the blue, we’re struck with calamity. As Jesus and His disciples passed a blind man, they asked Him (John 9:1-3), “Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” You see, your questions aren’t new. Two thousand years ago, these same questions were being asked. Jesus replied, “He didn’t sin, his parents didn’t sin. It’s so that God’s works can be manifested in him. He was born blind, but you’re going to see My power today! I’m going to heal him!” Again, this man was healed, and praise God! But what about you and your illness, your trouble, your situation? You want God to help you, but what if He never answers your prayers? What if you go to your grave never seeing God move in your trial?

Our God is Able, But If Not....

I found a good example in the old testament I hope will help you. It’s the story you probably heard throughout your childhood of the three men thrown into the fiery furnace, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Refusing to bow down before idols, they were bound and brought before King Nebuchadnezzar. It must have been an intimidating situation (think if you were brought before the president with all the pomp and ceremony). I want you to focus on what they said. “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us” (Daniel 3:17). “But if not, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” In other words, “Our God is able to deliver us, but if He doesn’t, we still will not worship your idols! We would rather die than turn against our God!” Our God is able to deliver me and you from cancer, from the death of a loved one, from any sickness, from any injury, from financial troubles, from any situation! But if not.... will you bow or stand up?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the fire, stoked to be seven times hotter than normal (Daniel 3:19-25). It was so hot that the men who threw them into the fire were slain by its heat. But, in the midst of the fire, was a fourth man. He was there in the fire waiting on them! In the midst of your trial, your troubles, you may think you’re alone, but Jesus was already there in the fire before it hit you!

John, the apostle, thought he was alone too. He was exiled to the island of Patmos for the word of God and his testimony of Jesus (Revelation 1:9). He called himself a “companion in tribulation.” Church history tells us that John was boiled in oil for preaching Jesus. This usually killed the victim, but since he did not die, he was exiled to the island of Patmos. He was alone now. The works that he done, the churches he started, someone else is doing it now. Nothing left but memories of what was, and what could have been. He’s in tremendous pain from his burn wounds. He suffers. He is cast down (but he’s not forsaken). Listen to his words, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day (John hasn’t forgotten God; God won’t forget him), and heard behind me a voice, as of a trumpet, saying, ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.’ John said Jesus’ eyes were like fire, his hair like wool, his feet like brass and his voice like the sound of many waters. John once laid his head upon Jesus’ chest during the Passover meal. Not now; he falls at His feet as if he were dead. “Fear not,” Jesus said, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” In the midst of John’s suffering came the promise that one day, there would be no more tears, no more crying, no more death, no more sorrow or pain, for all these things will have passed ”

Great things can happen in the midst of suffering. For the three Hebrews thrown into the fire, for the blind man on the roadside, for the sick man by the pool, for John on the island of Patmos. Great things can happen to you in the midst of your suffering too. But if not... We can keep asking, “Why?”, or we can look with all confidence as Job toward Heaven and proclaim, “Though He slay Me, yet will I trust Him!” (Job 13:15).

The prophet Habakkuk opened his book with the lament, “O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear?” But he closed his book with these words, “For though the fig tree shall not flourish, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no food; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” (Habakkuk 1:2; 3:17-18).

The question I have learned, and am still learning, is not “Why?”, but “Who?” I don’t always know *why*, but I know “*who* I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” (2 Timothy 1:12).



One Thing I Know



“He answered and said, Whether (Jesus) be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” (Read the 9th chapter of John).

Have you ever sat in a circle of friends or family who were unbelievers (or even religious) and had your faith and beliefs questioned? They ask you difficult questions and ridicule you if you don't have all the right answers (as if they know the answers themselves). Even if you do answer them, most of the time, they are not satisfied. Under their glaring eyes and hard stares, they keep after you, waiting for you to slip or say the wrong thing. They respond as if they are hearing nothing you say.

The man in our Scripture above, who was born blind, was healed by Jesus. The Pharisees, angered by the man's claim, questioned him repeatedly. Not satisfied with his answers, they kept after him as if they had heard nothing he had said, “How were thine eyes opened? How did you receive your sight? Give God the praise, for this man (Jesus) is a sinner!” They even questioned his parents, “Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? How then doth he now see?”

Have you been there? You've just been saved. You've just been healed. You've just received some miracle from the Lord, or an answered prayer. Then, here comes a flock of doubters (even religious people may be among them), questioning you... probing you... doubting you... If you fall, they laugh at you and make you feel like a failure.

But let me encourage you; you don't have to have all of the answers. You don't have to suddenly become a Bible scholar with a wall full of degrees. There may be a lot of things you don't know... “I don't know where He is... I don't know how he sees... We don't know Who opened his eyes... I don't know if He is a sinner or not.”

But, there is one thing you do know...
“Whereas I was blind, now I see.”



Proved by His Wounds



“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (Matthew 16:21)

Suffering. Heartache. Rejection. Death. No one really enjoys hearing or talking about it. The disciples were no different. Which is why that when Jesus talked about His coming trial and crucifixion, they seemed to tune Him out. They were repulsed by the Scriptures which prophesied, “He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”

But in Jesus we find such a wonderful paradox! From His wounds came healing; from His rejection came an invitation to draw close to God; from His death came life. To Thomas, who often doubted the Savior, Jesus’ scars proved to him what nothing else could, “I am He who was dead and now liveth, and behold, I am alive for evermore!”

Perhaps in our times of suffering, we are closer to Him than at any other time. For in our suffering Savior we find a Friend who understands what we are going through. By His scars, His words are proven to us, “See, I will not forget you; I have carved you on the palm of my hand.”

*The other gods were strong, but Thou wast weak.
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne.
But to our wounds only God’s wounds can speak.
And not a god has wounds but Thou alone.*





I ASKED GOD

I ASKED GOD FOR STRENGTH, THAT I MIGHT ACHIEVE;
I WAS MADE WEAK, THAT I MIGHT LEARN HUMBLY TO OBEY.

I ASKED FOR HEALTH, THAT I MIGHT DO GREATER THINGS;
I WAS GIVEN INFIRMITY, THAT I MIGHT DO BETTER THINGS.

I ASKED FOR RICHES, THAT I MIGHT BE HAPPY;
I WAS GIVEN POVERTY, THAT I MIGHT BE WISE.

I ASKED FOR POWER, THAT I MIGHT HAVE THE PRAISE OF MEN;
I WAS GIVEN WEAKNESS, THAT I MIGHT FEEL THE NEED OF GOD.

I ASKED FOR ALL THINGS, THAT I MIGHT ENJOY LIFE;
I WAS GIVEN LIFE, THAT I MIGHT ENJOY ALL THINGS.

I GOT NOTHING THAT I ASKED FOR —
BUT EVERYTHING I HAD HOPED FOR.

ALMOST DESPITE MYSELF, MY UNSPOKEN PRAYERS WERE ANSWERED.
I AM, AMONG ALL MEN, MOST RICHLY BLESSED.

— ANONYMOUS CONFEDERATE SOLDIER

God is Working in Your Darkness



“All that night the Lord drove the sea back” (Exodus 14:21)

“And Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.” (Exodus 20:21)

A pillar of clouds separated the camp of Israel from the army of Egypt. It brought darkness to Pharaoh and the hordes of Egypt, but illuminated the night sky for Israel. Movies have depicted the Red Sea parting in just a few moments, but the Bible says that God parted the sea by sending forth a strong east wind to blow all night. The children of Israel awakened in the morning, not to find a sea that *needed* parting, but to find a sea that had *already been* parted by God during the night.

Perhaps you are walking through a period of darkness in your life. You cannot see God moving in the midst of your trials, and it seems He is nowhere to be found. You doubt God. You question Him. You can't understand why this thing has happened to you. And you wonder if God will ever answer, and if you will ever walk in victory again. While darkness covered the earth, God was at work “all that night” providing a way of escape for the Israelites.

When the darkness surrendered to the advance of morning, and the sun bathed the landscape in its light, it was then that the people saw and knew that God had been working. I urge you to keep believing and trusting. God is at work in your darkness. One day, His glorious light will flood your soul, casting away the darkness, and revealing the work He has done!

“Weeping may endure for the night,” David penned in a psalm, “but joy cometh in the morning.” (Psalms 30:5).



Waiting Upon the Lord



“Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” (James 5:11).

Sometimes I think I almost understand what Paul was going through during his dramatic conversion (Acts 9:1-22). You know God wants you to do something, but you don't know what. So you sit around blindly, without direction or purpose, while you wait upon God to open up His will and plan to you. Been there?

I encourage you to continue to wait upon God. It is not always easy, but we have this precious promise. “We count them happy which endure,” James wrote. “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” (James 5:11).

David wrote in the 40th Psalm, “I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.” David went on to add, “He brought me up also out of an horrible pit (is that where you feel that you are?), out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.”

God heard David, and saw that he was waiting patiently. God brought David out of the pit, and set his feet upon a rock. David was able to walk upon something sure and solid. God established David's goings. He knew where to walk, he knew where to go, and he had something sure to walk upon! As as he walked, God “put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God!”

The end of David's waiting was not just for him, but for others as well. “Many shall see it,” David said, “and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.” (Psalm 40:1-3).





O JESUS OF THE SCARS

IF WE HAVE NEVER SOUGHT, WE SEEK THEE NOW;
THINE EYES BURN THROUGH THE DARK, OUR ONLY STARS;
WE MUST HAVE SIGHT OF THORN-PRICKS ON THY BROW,
WE MUST HAVE THEE, O JESUS OF THE SCARS.

THE HEAVENS FRIGHTEN US; THEY ARE TOO CALM.

IN ALL THE UNIVERSE WE HAVE NO PLACE,
OUR WOUNDS ARE HURTING US --- WHERE IS THE BALM?
LORD JESUS, BY THY SCARS, WE CLAIM THY GRACE.

THE OTHER GODS WERE STRONG, BUT THOU WAST WEAK.
THEY RODE, BUT THOU DIDST STUMBLE TO A THRONE.
BUT TO OUR WOUNDS ONLY GOD'S WOUNDS CAN SPEAK,
AND NOT A GOD HAS WOUNDS BUT THOU ALONE.

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Destined for Mediocrity



“John did no miracle” (John 10:41).

John the Baptist was a voice, a lone voice, crying in a wilderness of sin and religious arrogance. He never done any miracles. He never made a lame man walk. He never opened a blinded eye, or unstopped a deaf ear. He never turned water to wine or made a feast from a few loaves and fishes. John the Baptist just pointed the way —the way to Christ — to bear witness of the Light. “One mightier than I cometh,” He proclaimed, “the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.”

Do you find yourself unsatisfied with your Christian experience? Do you think you don’t do enough? Do you not have any special talents or abilities? Do you not see great miracles or signs wrought by your hands, as they were by the apostles, and other great Christians down through the ages? John the Baptist never performed a miracle, but Jesus said of him, “Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.” What John could do, he done with all his heart, and that was to be a voice, a witness of the Light. And long after John was gone, we still see the effects of his ministry — “and many believed on (Jesus) there.” (John 10:42). And isn’t that the most important thing?



Sifted as Wheat



“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.”

(Luke 22:31-32).

Please don't be hard on Peter. He boasted that he was both ready to go to prison and to death for Jesus. And Peter was. In the garden where Jesus and his disciples were surrounded by temple guards, Peter drew a sword and cut off the high priest's servant's right ear. Surrounded, in the midst of a hopeless situation, Peter charged with a sword!

But the battle coming soon is very different. Not physical, but spiritual. Jesus warned Peter, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times you even know Me. Satan wants you Peter. He wants to sift you as wheat. But I'm praying for you Peter that your faith won't fail.”

It happened just as Jesus said. After Peter's third denial, somewhere in the darkness a rooster flapped his wings and crowed an indictment against him. Peter turned and looked straight into the eyes of Jesus (Luke 22:61-62). Was it a look of “I told you so. How could you do it too me?” I don't think so. It was a look of pity, of sympathy.

Jesus went through forty days of sifting by Satan. He knew how ruthless the enemy can be, and He understood what Peter was enduring.

Peter turned and ran away into the night, tears stinging his eyes. All night he wept bitterly. “Why did I do it? Why didn't I stand for Him? How could I have denied Him?” Satan was sifting Peter as wheat, beating the grain with a stick until the outer husk was broken, leaving only the kernel of faith within. But, Satan couldn't touch that kernel of faith, for Jesus said, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.”

Darkness reluctantly gave way to the morning's light, revealing Peter laying in a heap, eyes swollen from a night of bitter weeping, his clothes and ground stained with tears of disappointment, regret and repentance. He failed the Lord. He failed a Friend. Sifted, his faith lay bare for everyone to see. For the next few days, he would replay his failure over and over again in his mind, until he couldn't take it

anymore. His mind weary, he needed an escape. He needed to get away, just for a little while. So he picked up that thing he had left behind so long ago — “I go a fishing,” Peter said.

A night on the sea fishing with a few of the other disciples didn’t help much, for they did not catch anything. Peter threw his net until his shoulders ached, but to no avail. “I can’t even do this right,” Peter thought to himself.

A somewhat familiar voice disturbs the morning stillness. “Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.” (John 20:6). They reluctantly threw the net into the water, and it filled with so many fish, they couldn’t carry it. A memory joggles Peter’s mind. “This is just the way it happened the day when Jesus called me to follow Him.”

Suddenly, John cries out, “It is the Lord!”

Peter can’t contain himself. What do you do when you fail a friend? You go to him. Peter jumped out of the boat half-swimming and half-running toward Jesus as fast as he could. Wet and shivering, Peter stands before his Lord. Jesus didn’t call him a coward, and betrayer..... He didn’t say, “You let me down. I was so wrong about you.” No. He said, “Peter do you love Me?”

Peter said quietly, “Yes, Lord.”

“Then feed My sheep,” Jesus responded. “Maybe you failed, but I still think you have what it takes. Come and follow Me.”



HE GIVETH MORE GRACE

HE GIVETH MORE GRACE WHEN THE BURDENS GROW GREATER,
HE SENDETH MORE STRENGTH WHEN THE LABORS INCREASE;
TO ADDED AFFLICTION HE ADDETH HIS MERCIES,
TO MULTIPLIED TRIALS HIS MULTIPLIED PEACE.

WHEN WE HAVE EXHAUSTED OUR STORE OF ENDURANCE,
WHEN OUR STRENGTH HAS FAILED ERE THE DAY IS HALF DONE,
WHEN WE REACH THE END OF OUR HOARDED RESOURCES
OUR FATHER’S FULL GIVING IS ONLY BEGUN.

HIS LOVE HAS NO LIMIT, HIS GRACE HAS NO MEASURE,
HIS POWER NO BOUNDARY KNOWN UNTO MEN;
FOR OUT OF HIS INFINITE RICHES IN JESUS
HE GIVETH AND GIVETH AND GIVETH AGAIN.

—ANNIE JOHNSON FLINT

God's Greater than the Noise



“The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves.” (Psalm 93:3)

When our second son was born, he was placed in the intensive care unit within a couple of hours after birth. He had developed a hole in one lung, and then later, the other lung. After about a week, he seemed to be fine. The doctors had taken him off the respirator and he was breathing normally. They had taken the tubes out of his chest. Our hopes and spirits were lifted that he would be coming home soon. Then suddenly, his abdomen began filling with fluid, his was dehydrating, and he was fast approaching death unless emergency surgery was performed.

We were overwhelmed. Where once there was hope and faith, suddenly there was despair. The enemy had come in like a flood.

Not only did the flood come in, it also lifted up its voice... God doesn't care!", the flood's voice declared. It screamed at us, "Your baby is going to die! There's no use! You might as well give up!"

Perhaps the flood you are enduring now is screaming these same words at you. Your trial may be different, but the voice is always the same, "Give up! God doesn't care! There's no hope! There's no use in going on!"

Listen my friends. I have good news for you. Sometimes the noise of a storm is more terrifying than the storm itself. The floods may lift up their voices, and they may make a lot of noise, but "The Lord on high is mightier than the *noise* of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea." (Psalm 93:4). Hallelujah!



God Will Restore Your Wasted Years



“I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten... And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed” (Joel 2:25-26).

I often look back at the years I wasted before I became a Christian; years I wasted doing my own thing, living my life the way I wanted to, without regard for God and what He wanted. Even after becoming saved, I look back on the time I’ve wasted since becoming a Christian, not seeking His will, acting in haste and making wrong decisions. Like the prodigal son, I’ve wasted years in the pig pen when I could have been feasting at the Master’s table (Luke 11:11-32). But in God’s word, we have a promise, not just for forgiveness, but for restoration of the years we have wasted!

This promise of restoration is incredible! Instead of us making up the years to Him, He said He would make it up to us! The word "restore" here means, to complete, to finish or end, to make peace with. There is a reason Jesus called the salvation experience, “born again.” He wants it to be as if we’ve just been born. There is no past, only future. We can live each day as if we have not sinned, as if we had not wasted so many years. We can praise Him, be satisfied, and not be ashamed!

Paul said he wasn’t perfect, he hasn’t attained, “but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”



A REMINDER FROM THE LORD

I WAS REGRETTING THE PAST AND FEARING THE FUTURE.

SUDDENLY, I HEARD GOD SPEAKING. “MY NAME IS “I AM.””

HE PAUSED. I WAITED.

HE CONTINUED.

“WHEN YOU LIVE IN THE PAST WITH ITS MISTAKES AND REGRETS,
IT IS HARD FOR YOU BECAUSE I AM NOT THERE.

MY NAME IS NOT ‘I WAS.’

“WHEN YOU LIVE IN THE FUTURE WITH ITS UNKNOWNNS AND FEARS,
IT IS HARD FOR YOU BECAUSE I AM NOT THERE.

MY NAME IS NOT ‘I WILL BE.’

“BUT WHEN YOU LIVE IN THIS MOMENT,
IT IS NOT HARD, BECAUSE I AM HERE.

MY NAME IS ‘I AM.’”

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

What is Your House Built Upon?



“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12).

Fire is a great consumer. It is a purifier. It is also a great revealer. When gold is placed into the fire and it becomes molten, impurities found in the gold rise to top where they are skimmed off leaving behind a pure product. Our faith will undergo this same fiery test, a test which will cause impurities to rise to the top where we can see them. This test of our faith will cause us to see what we are really made of, what kind of person we are, and what kind of Christian we are.

Jesus told a parable of two houses. The houses were identical. They looked the same outside and inside. But there was one crucial difference, one invisible to the eye. One was built upon a rock. The other was built upon sand. Jesus said (Matthew 7: 24-27) that the person who hears His words and does them is like a man who built his house upon a rock. The wind howled and the rain beat upon the house and the floods came against it, but it did not fall.

But the person who hears His words and does *not* do them, is like a man who built his house upon sand. The wind unmercifully beat it down, the floods overtook it, and the rain pounded against it, and the house fell, and great was the fall of it.

These storms of life are like fire. They too are a great revealer. The houses were identical, but the storms revealed the foundation upon which each house was built. It revealed the kind of man which built each house.

This fiery trial will come. It has to happen. Peter said, “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial *which is to try you*, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” (Peter knew this better than anyone).

Perhaps you are going through the fire even now. Your faith is being tested and you are being sifted as wheat. If you are, then rejoice! Peter added, “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be

revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:13).

Jesus is preparing for Himself a church without spot or wrinkle, a church where each person’s faith has been tried in the fire. And when He returns, it will result in praise and honor and glory!

The NIV phrases these verses, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”



Devotions

Who is Jesus?

Bible Study

Upper Room Café

Apples of Gold

Chatoom Bible Study

Call to Revival

Free Tracts

Prayer Requests

Left Behind?

Online Bible

Much More!

www.jesuscaresaboutyou.org

Web site of Tel-A-Care Ministry

ON GOD’S ANVIL

PAIN’S FURNACE HEAT WITHIN ME QUIVERS,
GOD’S BREATH UPON THE FLAME DOES BLOW;
AND ALL MY HEART IN ANGUISH SHIVERS
AND TREMBLES AT THE FIERY GLOW;
AND YET I WHISPER, “AS GOD WILL!”
AND IN THE HOTTEST FIRE HOLD STILL.

HE COMES AND LAYS MY HEART,
ALL HEATED, ON THE HARD ANVIL MINDED SO
INTO HIS OWN FAIR SHAPE TO BEAT IT
WITH HIS GREAT HAMMER, BLOW ON BLOW;
AND YET I WHISPER, “AS GOD WILL!”
AND AT HIS HEAVIEST BLOWS HOLD STILL.

HE TAKES MY SOFTENED HEART AND BEATS IT;
THE SPARKS FLY OFF AT EVERY BLOW;
HE TURNS IT O’ER AND O’ER AND HEATS IT,
AND LETS IT COOL, AND MAKES IT GLOW;
AND YET I WHISPER, “AS GOD WILL!”
AND IN HIS MIGHTY HAND HOLD STILL.

WHY SHOULD I COMPLAIN? FOR THE SORROW
THEN ONLY LONGER-LIVED WOULD BE;
THE END MAY COME, AND WILL TOMORROW,
WHEN GOD HAS DONE HIS WORK IN ME;
SO I SAY TRUSTING, “AS GOD WILL!”
AND, TRUSTING TO THE END, HOLD STILL.

—JULIUS STURM

Examine Yourself



“As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.... And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” (Acts 8:3; 9:1-5 KJV)

Paul was a young zealot, “a Hebrew of the Hebrews”, he called himself. He was intent on keeping Israel’s faith pure, and that meant wiping out the scourge of Christianity. So, Paul marched around the countryside, going from house to house, searching for anyone who claimed to follow that Galilean preacher. His gunbelt was full of notches, and Paul was proud of his service for his faith (Philippians 3:4-7). Until one day, while in route to Damascus with more orders in one hand and a sword in the other, Saul was stopped in his tracks by a bright light and a voice like thunder, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?”

Saul, trembling and astonished, picked himself up from the ground, and the men who were with him led him by the hand to Damascus. For the next three days, Saul could not see. Not able to look at anything else, he was forced to look inside himself, and he did not like what he saw.

“I doubt if you can find any one out there who had more confidence in his own flesh that I did,” he would later say to the church at Philippi. “I followed the law to the letter like a Pharisee. I labored for my faith and persecuted the church. I was righteous and blameless.”

Give a man religion without showing him his sin, and the result is Saul.

Blameless in following the rules and keeping the traditions, he is arrogant and tells other how to live. However, show a man his sin and show him Jesus too, and

the result is Saul-turned-Paul who turned the world upside down. "I want to be found in Jesus," Paul said, "not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. I want to know Jesus and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. I want to be made conformable unto His death. I want to forget all those things about me; I want to forget the old Saul. Now, I want to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus!"

This same Paul who looked inward for three days in Damascus, now exhorts us to examine ourselves also. To the Corinthians, he penned, "Check up on yourselves. Are you really Christians? Do you pass the test? Do you feel Christ's presence and power more and more within you? Or are you just pretending to be Christians when actually you aren't at all?" (2 Corinthians 13:5 TLB).



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NOT DOWN BUT THROUGH

"WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH THE WATERS"

DEEP THE WAVES MAY BE AND COLD,
BUT JEHOVAH IS OUR REFUGE,
AND HIS PROMISE IS OUR HOLD;

FOR THE LORD HIMSELF HAS SAID IT,
HE, THE FAITHFUL GOD AND TRUE;

"WHEN YOU COME TO THE WATERS
YOU WILL NOT GO DOWN, BUT THROUGH."

SEAS OF SORROW, SEAS OF TRIAL,
BITTER ANGUISH, FIERCEST PAIN,
ROLLING SURGES OF TEMPTATION
SWEEPING OVER HEART AND BRAIN ---
THEY WILL NEVER OVERFLOW US
FOR WE KNOW HIS WORD IS TRUE;
ALL HIS WAVES AND ALL HIS BILLOWS
HE WILL LEAD US SAFELY THROUGH.

THREATENING BREAKERS OF DESTRUCTION,
DOUBT'S INSIDIOUS UNDERTOW,
WILL NOT SINK US, WILL NOT DRAG US
OUT TO OCEAN DEPTHS OF WOE;
FOR HIS PROMISE WILL SUSTAIN US,
PRAISE THE LORD, WHOSE WORD IS TRUE!
WE WILL NOT GO DOWN, OR UNDER,
FOR HE SAYS, "YOU WILL PASS THROUGH."

— ANNIE JOHNSON FLINT

Nailed to His Cross



“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Colossians 2:13-15).

Go back in time with me to Calvary just for a few minutes. Soldiers push Jesus to the ground and stretch out His arms upon the rough timber. Another soldier presses a knee against His forearm and a cold spike against His hand. Before the mallet strikes the spike, think of this hand. It looks like the hand of a man, the calloused hand of a carpenter. His outstretched hand calmed an angry sea, healed a blinded eye, and cleansed a temple. But it is also the hand of God. This hand established the ocean’s boundaries, carved majestic peaks, flung the stars into space, and put a song in the sparrow’s throat. It delivered the nation of Israel from Egypt and opened the Red Sea. This hand sent a raven to feed Elijah, a fish to interrupt Jonah’s getaway, and fingered a message of judgment on the wall of Nebuchadnezzar’s palace.

The sound of a mallet striking the spike rings through the countryside, fastening the Savior’s hand to the beam. But between His hand and the beam is a list, a list of laws and ordinances, a list of do’s and don’t’s which we have miserably failed to keep. And as His blood begins to rush from His pierced hand, it flows down the list, covering each broken law and each broken commandment.

Paul penned, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”. (Romans 8:1). You see, if you are in Christ, there is no need to feel guilty, or to feel condemned. As the Phillips translations reads Colossians 2:13-14, “He has forgiven you all your sins: he has utterly wiped out the written evidence of broken commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it to the cross.”



Right Song, Wrong Side



“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” (Exodus 14:11-14,31-15:2).

What a glorious sight it must have been! With nearly one million Israelites trapped against the banks of the Red Sea, Moses lifted up his rod and stretched out his hand over the waters. God divided the Sea like a scroll, opening up a dry path for His people to cross between a wall of water on each side. And then, just as it opened, the walls of water collapsed drowning the entire Egyptian army led by Pharaoh himself.

As the Israelites looked upon the scene, there was stunned silence. Throats cleared. Some rubbed their eyes in disbelief. But, somewhere in the crowd, a maiden drew out her tambourine and began to dance before the Lord. Then Moses and over one million Israelites lifted their hands and with one voice sang a song of praise unto God, “He hath triumphed gloriously! He is our strength and our song! He is become our salvation! We will exalt Him!”

They sang the right song, a song of praise and adoration to God. But they sang it on the wrong side of the Red Sea. On the other side, during their testing, they saw only gloom and doom. They murmured and complained, “Hey Moses, weren't there enough graves in Egypt to bury us all? Is that why you brought us all the way out here in the wilderness? It is better for us to serve the Egyptians in slavery than to die out here!”

Sure, God wants us to praise Him when He answers our prayers, and when He works miracles for us. But, He also wants us to praise Him when we are suffering, when we are enduring trials and times of testing. Peter tells us to “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but *rejoice*, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” (1 Peter 4: 12-14). “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ,” Peter continued, “*happy* are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.”





TELL ME ABOUT THE MASTER

TELL ME ABOUT THE MASTER; I AM WEARY AND WORN TONIGHT,
THE DAY LIES BEHIND ME IN A SHADOW, AND ONLY THE EVENING IS LIGHT!
LIGHT WITH A RADIANT GLORY THAT LINGERS ABOUT THE WEST
MY POOR HEART IS A-WEARY, A-WEARY AND LONGS, LIKE A CHILD, FOR REST.

TELL ME ABOUT THE MASTER! OF THE HILLS HE IN LONELINESS TROD,
WHEN THE TEARS AND THE BLOOD OF HIS ANGUISH DROPPED DOWN ON JUDEA'S SOD.
FOR TO ME LIFE'S SEVENTY MILESTONES BUT A SORROWFUL JOURNEY MARK;
ROUGH LIES THE HILL COUNTRY BEFORE ME, THE MOUNTAINS BEHIND ME ARE DARK.

TELL ME ABOUT THE MASTER! OF THE WRONGS HE FREELY FORGAVE;
OF HIS LOVE AND TENDER COMPASSION, OF HIS LOVE THAT IS MIGHTY TO SAVE;
FOR MY HEART IS A-WEARY, A-WEARY, OF THE WOES AND TEMPTATIONS OF LIFE,
OF THE TERROR THAT STALKS IN THE NOONDAY, OF THE FALSEHOOD, MALICE AND STRIFE.

YET, I KNOW THAT, WHATEVER OF SORROW OR PAIN OR TEMPTATION BEFALL,
THE INFINITE MASTER HAS SUFFERED, AND KNOWETH AND PITIETH ALL,
SO TELL ME THE SWEET, OLD STORY THAT FALLS ON EACH WOUND LIKE A BALM,
AND MY HEART THAT WAS BRUISED AND BROKEN, SHALL GROW PATIENT, STRONG AND CALM.

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Our Scars Have a Purpose



“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble..” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” (John 20:25).

Have you ever thought or imagined what our new bodies will be like when we reach Heaven? Will we look the same as we do now, except without any flaws? (We might need nametags). Will we carry the scars of our life on earth as a gentle reminder of God's redemption? I do not know. I do know that for forty days after Jesus' resurrection, He still carried His scars. And they were for a purpose. Thomas, a disciple of Christ, doubted Jesus' resurrection and proclaimed, "Except I shall see in his hands the prints of the nails... and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." To Thomas, who often doubted the Savior, Jesus' scars proved to him what nothing else could, "I am He who was dead and now liveth, and behold, I am alive for evermore!" (Revelation 1:18).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "(God) comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble." The scars we all carry from life, whether they be upon our bodies, or upon our hearts, are also for a purpose. Our scars prove to others around us what nothing else can, "See, I've been through what you're going through. God delivered me, and He can do the same for you."

*He cannot heal who has not suffered much,
For only Sorrow sorrow understands;
They will not come for healing at our touch
Who have not seen the scars upon our hands.*

—Edwin McNeill Poteat





Freedom through Forgiveness



“He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted...to set at liberty them that are bruised.” (Luke 4:18).

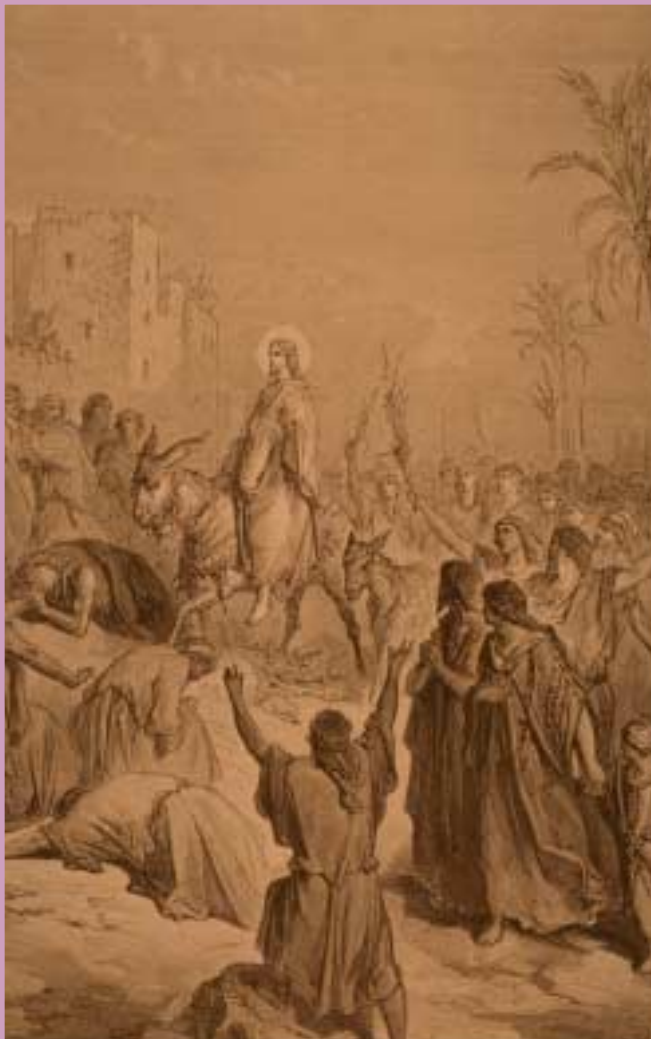
Maybe your wound is fresh. Or perhaps it is old. A family member abused you. A spouse was unfaithful to you. A friend betrayed you. A co-worker used you for a stepping stone. Someone you trusted let you down. You are hurting. And you are angry...at life...at people...perhaps even at God.

But not only are you hurting, you are bitter. Part of you wants to cry, but the other part of you wants to fight back. Part of you wants to get over it, but the other part wants to get even. It is no wonder then that the writer of Hebrews penned, “Looking diligently... lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” (Hebrews 12:15).

It seems strange, when you think about it, that Jesus said He came to set at liberty them that are bruised. People who are bruised need healing. But freedom? Could it be because many people who have been bruised and broken in heart have become bitter, their minds consumed with anger, trapped in a desire for revenge? This is why Jesus taught, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44).

The act of forgiveness is probably more important to the one forgiving, than to the one needing forgiveness. With forgiveness comes freedom. Without forgiveness, bitterness is all that is left.





NONE OF SELF

OH, THE BITTER SHAME AND SORROW,
THAT A TIME COULD EVER BE
WHEN I LET THE SAVIOUR'S PITY
PLEAD IN VAIN, AND PROUDLY ANSWERED:
"ALL OF SELF AND NONE OF THEE!"

YET HE FOUND ME; I BEHELD HIM
BLEEDING ON THE ACCURSED TREE,
HEARD HIM PRAY: "FORGIVE THEM, FATHER";
AND MY WISTFUL HEART SAID FAINTLY:
"SOME OF SELF AND SOME OF THEE!"

DAY BY DAY HIS TENDER MERCY,
HEALING, HELPING, FULL AND FREE,
SWEET AND STRONG AND, AH! SO PATIENT,
BROUGHT ME LOWER, WHILE I WHISPERED:
"LESS OF SELF AND MORE OF THEE!"

HIGHER THAN THE HIGHEST HEAVEN,
DEEPER THAN THE DEEPEST SEA,
LORD, THY LOVE AT LAST HAS CONQUERED;
GRANT ME NOW MY SPIRIT'S LONGING:
"NONE OF SELF AND ALL OF THEE!"

— THEO MONOD

The Lord Sits Upon the Flood



“The Lord sits upon the flood.” (Psalm 29:10)



When our second son was born, he was placed in the intensive care unit within a couple of hours after birth. He had developed a hole in one lung, and then later, the other lung. After about a week, he seemed to be fine. They had taken him off the respirator and he was breathing normally. They had taken the tubes out of his chest. Our hopes and spirits were lifted that he would be coming home soon. Then suddenly, his abdomen began filling with fluid, his was dehydrating, he was near death unless emergency surgery was performed. We were overwhelmed. Where once there was hope and faith, suddenly there was despair. The enemy had come in like a flood.

Job knows about the flood. God removed the hedge around Job allowing Satan to come in like a flood against him. Everything went from peace and tranquility to sudden despair and grief in just one day. Job lost his home, his family, his possessions and his health in a matter of minutes. But somehow, through the fog, Job was able to look with all confidence toward Heaven and proclaim, “Though He slay Me, yet will I trust Him!” (Job 13:15).

You are not alone in your trials. God is allowing them to happen to reveal your weaknesses so that your faith may be purified. It is not easy, but God is faithful to complete the work He is doing in you. The Lord sits upon the flood which Satan has released against you. God is controlling it, and will not allow you to endure anything above what you are able to bear.

God has promised us through Isaiah, “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him” (Isaiah 59:19). “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.” God assures us. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.” (Isaiah 43:1-3).



Jesus Walks Among the Wounded



The grand opening of the new maternity wing at the hospital brought with it a day filled with celebration, music and feasting, long-winded speeches, and great promises of hope for the community's future. But, just a few feet away from this scene of celebration, lay my nephew in a hospital bed suffering from leukemia and the effects of chemotherapy. A horseshoe of family encompassed his bed, some weeping, others trying to be strong. Ironic, isn't it, that a scene of grand celebration could be found so close to a scene of suffering.

If you could picture in your mind a battlefield covered with wounded, this would depict the scene found at Bethesda, a pool near the sheep market in Jerusalem. The streets of the city were bustling, pilgrims rubbing shoulder to shoulder, as they flooded into the city for the Passover feast. So close to this grand celebration was a scene of suffering, the pool of Bethesda surrounded with "a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered." (John 5:2-3). On the outskirts of this scene, you will not find any disciples. You will not see any of Jesus' followers. You will not even see any of the "religious" crowd. No, they are too busy with their "religious" activities. You will see only Jesus, alone, walking among them.

Indifference—a scene of suffering so close to a scene of celebration—a religious celebration mind you. Churches today are filled with people singing, rejoicing and worshiping with hands lifted in praise. While next to them may sit people who are depressed, lonely, sick and suffering. Every week they come, and every week they leave—leave in the same condition they came.

Every church has a pool of Bethesda. If your church is indifferent and neglectful of its suffering members, don't be surprised to learn Jesus is not walking among your worshippers, but is instead walking among your wounded.



Keep Your Eyes on Jesus



"And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, Lord save me. And immediately, Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matthew 14:28-31).

Jesus allowed Peter to walk on the water for two reasons. First, that he might walk on water and thus see the Lord's power, and second, that he might sink and thus see his own weakness.

As Peter stepped out of the boat and put his foot upon the water, he exhibited total faith in Christ. But, he took his eyes off of Jesus, and began to look at the wind howling and the waves rising up and down, and he became afraid. Finally, about to go under, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Let this be a lesson to us. As we endure day-to-day trials and problems, let us remember to keep our eyes focused on Jesus. If we do not, then we will begin to sink under the load we bear. It is so easy to get our eyes off Christ and to look at what is going on around us. We forget that He is standing near us and won't let us endure anything above what we are able to bear.



Sometimes Our Armor Gets Heavy



A woman, I'll call her "Mary", and her husband owned a little store. It had seen better days. With sales dwindling, they had to cut back their staff to just a skeleton crew, and they only opened their store three days per week. Their business was on the brink of bankruptcy, and financial ruin lay at their doorstep. Morning and night found Mary and her husband staring into a dark abyss of failure.

Yet, somehow, with this burden on her shoulders, she managed to stand before a group of young people at our church one Friday evening and encourage them in their faith. The text she spoke from was Ephesians 6, putting on the whole armor of God. As she spoke, it was obvious that she was under a strain, and that perhaps she was struggling to believe in her own heart what she was telling the youth. What she spoke that evening I don't remember too well. But, I do remember one statement she made. "Sometimes," her voice shaking, "our armor gets heavy."

I know what it is like for my armor to get heavy. I'm sure many of you do as well. The temptations seem too hard, the trials seem too tough. And God? He is nowhere to be found (or so it seems). Your Bible lays in the same place you dropped it a few weeks ago. Your prayer closet is full of cobwebs. And your armor has become such a burden that you feel like taking it off and walking away. But, Jesus knew that such days would come in the lives of His children. "Take unto you the whole armor of God," Paul said to the Hebrews, "that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Again, the Bible says, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not...Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

James added, "Take the prophets, who have spoken in the Lord's name, for an example of suffering, affliction and patience. We count them happy which endure. You have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord, that He is very pitiful and of tender mercy." Paul referred to his walk as a fight, "I have fought a good fight," he said, "and I have finished my course and I have kept the faith."

Yes, the armor will get heavy. Peter said to think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you. You may get weary at times. You may feel like

giving up. You may feel like walking away. But, I desire to encourage you today, as one who has been there, to not lay down your armor.

King Saul, before sending David out to fight Goliath, gave him his own armor. But, David could not wear Saul's armor and said to him, "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them." (1 Samuel 17:39).

In other words, David was saying, "I don't know if they work. I have never tried them. I need something *I know* will work." David, instead, clothed himself in the armor of God. "The Lord is my strength and my shield," David would say later in his Psalms. And he went out before Goliath and shook his fist in the face of a hopeless situation and boldly cried, "You come against me with man's weapons and man's armor. But, I come against you in the name of the Lord! The battle is the Lord's, and He will deliver you into my hands!"



Upper Room Café Discussion Boards

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Saturday Evenings

6:00PM
USA Pacific Time

Jesus Cares About You
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GOD REALLY CARES

I REALLY DO CARE, HONEST I DO,
I CARE ABOUT THE THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO YOU;
I CARE ABOUT THE THINGS THAT COME YOUR WAY,
AND FOR THE DISAPPOINTMENTS YOU MAY KNOW TODAY;
FOR ALL THE PLANS THAT WENT ASTRAY,
FOR THE FROWN THAT CROSSED YOUR BROW TODAY—
I CARE ABOUT THE DEEPEST SIGH,
AND FOR THE EMPTINESS THAT MADE YOU CRY;
THE SENSE OF FAILURE, AS YOU LOOK BACK,
AND OFTEN ASK THE QUESTION, "WHY?"
SO PLEASE DON'T FEEL SO ALONE,
FOR IF I COULD I'D SAY TEN MILLION TIMES,
"I CARE ABOUT YOU", TODAY.

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Love Letters in the Sand



She longed for love. To the nameless woman in the eighth chapter of the Book of John, love was an ember from a flame, shining brilliantly for a moment, then fading away into nothingness. Perhaps, *this* time, with *this* man, things would turn out different. Suddenly, the door flew open, banging against the wall. Several men, dressed in priestly garments, came bursting into the room and dragged her out of bed into the street...

Sitting in the temple, Jesus was teaching the people. From all corners of Jerusalem, the people came. Rich, poor, blue collar, white collar, all races, all sizes. His words done what no other could do, and that was to give life, and to give hope. And so He sits teaching when a sudden commotion outside the temple causes all heads to turn. It's the group of Pharisees dragging the woman caught in the act of adultery. These men did not care about the woman. To them, she was just simply bait to trap this One who was called Christ.

"The law says we should stone her," they cried in unison, "but what do you say?" Jesus acted as if He did not hear them and casually wrote in the sand with His finger (John 8:6). Weary of their continued asking, He finally lifted Himself up and spoke, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

What followed was stunned silence. How could they answer Him? Throats clear. Feet shuffle. The silence is finally broken by the sound of a stone hitting the ground. Then another. Then another. As one this group came, but they exit one by one leaving behind a graveyard of stones, each one a tombstone marking where man's religious arrogance and self-righteousness faltered under Christ's piercing eyes. Then Jesus turns to the woman, "Where are your accusers? I do not condemn you; go and sin no more."

What Jesus wrote that day in the sand was an essay on love and a rebuke against man's arrogance and self-righteousness. Just a few days later, He would write another essay in the sand, written in red. Each drop of blood which fell from His wounds and splashed upon the ground was another essay on love, and a rebuke against religious arrogance. Don't think it's the nails which fasten Him in place on the cross, but it is love which holds Him there. And what Jesus spelled out so plainly that day were the words, "I do not condemn you, go and sin no more."





Touched by Jesus



“When (Jesus) was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshiped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

(Matthew 8:1-4).

His story is brief. The nameless leper enters the Canon of Scripture and exits only four verses later, and no more is heard from him. But there is plenty we can glean from these four verses. Leprosy was a terrible disease. Because of a lost sense of pain, the victim suffered numerous injuries which would become infectious. Slowly over time, the leper’s body would be overcome by ulcers and decaying flesh. Fingers and toes would curl into grotesque forms. Patches of skin would become discolored and emit a foul odor. In worse cases, the victims would lose fingers, toes, or even a whole hand or foot.

As terrible as this disease was, what made it even worse were the social consequences. The leper became an outcast of society, separated from friends and family. His disease considered extremely contagious, he would be banished to a colony to live out his remaining years. No one dared to touch the leper. When one was noticed on the streets, people around would begin to cry out “Unclean, unclean!”, and the sea of people would part around the leper, leaving him alone and ashamed.

What many people take for granted, the leper longed for: a firm handshake, a warm embrace, a gentle kiss, an evening of pleasant company and conversation. But loneliness is the pillow a leper would cry on every night as he went to sleep. You’ll notice in the Scripture above, a great multitude of people followed Jesus as He came down the mountain. But, the leper, knowing Jesus is coming, is not with the multitude, but is waiting alone for Him to arrive.

The encounter was brief. The leper came up to Jesus and worshiped Him. Pleading his case, the leper cried, “If you will, you can make me clean.” Then Jesus reached out His hand and touched him, and said, “Be clean.” Mark adds in his gospel that “Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him.” (Mark 1:41). Fingers and toes began to straighten out. New skin, like a

baby's, grew over patches of decaying, discolored flesh. His twisted, slumped form stood straight up.

But, the leper had another need. He was lonely, He needed to feel loved. He needed to feel the touch of a human hand. And Jesus knew this. That is why *before* Jesus said to him, "Be clean," He first reached out His hand and touched him. Jesus could have just said, "Be clean," and it would have been done. But that wasn't good enough. Before Jesus healed him, while he was still a leper, Jesus walked up to him (*it had been a long time since someone actually walked toward him*) and put forth His hand, and touched him.

You see, sicknesses of the heart require a touch before sicknesses of the body, for they hurt the most.

For all people everywhere who have cried themselves to sleep at night because they were lonely, you have a Savior who understands what it is like to have your friends turn away, and to have your communion with God broken. For all who have cried out in anguish and discouragement and have questioned God, "Why?", you have a Savior Who also uttered these words in His most trying moment.

And as you continue to walk through your own wilderness and it seems you are alone, you may feel no relief, you may think the answer is nowhere in sight, and you might think that God is a million miles away.

When Jesus began His ministry, He was *led by the Spirit* into the wilderness, where He was tempted of Satan. But I have good news for you. Jesus returned from the wilderness in the *power of the Spirit*, and He can bring you out of your wilderness in the same manner. (Luke 4:14).

Jesus sees you in your struggle, and with tear-filled eyes and a memory of a time not too distant, He understands what you are enduring. We have a High Priest who can be touched with the *feelings* of our infirmities. (Hebrews 4:15).



What is Your Response to Suffering?



*"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word"
(Psalms 119:67).*

Job's dialogue with his friends had provided no comfort and no answers; only more questions. Suddenly, God appears on the scene! The One who has the answers has arrived!

But instead, He only brings more questions.

God never explained to Job the origin or reasons for his suffering. He rather moved the focus from now to the future. "Now that this calamity has happened, what will you do? What will your response be?"

The book of Job reinforces the pattern followed by Jesus (see Luke 13:1-5 and John 9:1-3). He moved the focus on suffering from determining the cause or reason to determining our response. "Suppose ye that these Galilaeans are sinners above all Galilaeans because they have suffered such things?", Jesus questioned the crowd. The cause wasn't important - it was the response of the people upon seeing such suffering which was important. "Don't you realize," Jesus said, "that you also will perish unless you leave your evil ways and turn to God?" (Luke 13:2-3).

In John, chapter 9, when questioned by the disciples as to why a man was born blind, because of his sins or his parents' sins, Jesus responded, "Neither...but that the works of God might be made manifest in him." (John 9:3). Again, the reasons or cause for suffering was not important—it was the response which was important—"that the works of God might be made manifest."

This echoes the statement made by David in the Psalm. "Before I was afflicted I went astray," David said. Instead of questioning why he was afflicted, he focused on what his response to the affliction would be. David continues, "But now have I kept thy word." (Psalm 119:67). David's affliction, whatever it may have been, drew him close to God and caused him to keep God's word.

Likewise, Paul grieved over his thorn in the flesh. Whatever this affliction was, whether a physical ailment or battle with temptation, caused Paul to seek the Lord three times that it be removed. Paul learned however not to focus on the affliction or even on the “why”, but instead to focus on his response. Listen to his words, “And (Jesus) said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). What a response!

In the apostle Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he reflects back on the harsh statements made in his first letter, “I am no longer sorry that I sent that letter to you, though I was very sorry for a time, realizing how painful it would be to you. But it hurt only for a little while. Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain turned you to God.” (2 Corinthians 7:8-9 TLB).

“The pain turned you to God...” This brief but powerful statement describes the role of suffering. When times of difficult trial hit us, let us not focus our attention on the reasons or causes, for we see they are not that important. What is important is what will our response be?

Philip Yancey writes, “God does not, in the comfortable surroundings of heaven, turn a deaf ear to the sounds of suffering on this groaning planet. He joined us, choosing to live among an oppressed people in circumstances of poverty and great affliction. He too was an innocent victim of cruel, senseless torture. At that moment of black despair, the Son of God cried out, much like all people, “God, why have you forsaken me?”

“Jesus, the Son of God on earth, embodied all that I have been trying to say about pain. Like Job, an innocent sufferer who preceded Him, He did not receive an answer to the questions of cause. “Why?...why?” He called out from the cross, and heard nothing but the silence of God. Even so, He responded with faithfulness, turning His attention to the good that His suffering could produce: “...for the joy set before him (Christ) endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2). What joy? The transformation, or redemption, of humanity.”



PRAYER

FATHER, I PRAY FOR THOSE IN THE WORLD WHO ARE OUTCASTS.

I PRAY FOR PEOPLE WITH AIDS, WHO LIKE THE LEPER,
HAVEN’T FELT THE TOUCH OF A LOVING HAND IN YEARS.

I PRAY FOR THE TEENAGER WHO IS SHUNNED BY HIS OR HER CLASSMATES, WHO
DOESN’T FIT IN WITH THE “IN” CROWD.

I PRAY FOR THE THE CHILD WHO, BECAUSE OF A SICKNESS OR DISABILITY,
CAN ONLY WATCH THROUGH THE WINDOW AS THE NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS PLAY,
BUT CAN NEVER JOIN THEM.

I PRAY FOR THE CHILD WHO IS UNLOVED AND ABUSED BY HIS OR HER PARENTS.

I PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE WHO POPULATE OUR PRISONS AND NURSING HOMES.

I PRAY FOR ALL SINGLES, WIDOWS, ORPHANS OR ANYONE WHO, BECAUSE OF
LONELINESS, CRIES THEMSELF TO SLEEP EVERY NIGHT.

I PRAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE HURTING, DISCOURAGED, DISAPPOINTED
AND DON’T KNOW WHICH WAY TO TURN.

LORD, WE DON’T BLAME YOU. NO...WE TURN TO YOU, A VERY PRESENT
HELP IN TIME OF TROUBLE.

LORD, YOU REACHED OUT AND TOUCHED THE LEPER BEFORE YOU HEALED HIM.

HELP YOUR PEOPLE TO TOUCH THOSE AROUND US AND TO EXTEND
OPEN ARMS OF LOVE AND COMPASSION.

FINALLY, I PRAY FOR THOSE WHO READ THIS BOOK.

MAY ITS WORDS BE A BALM FOR THEIR SOULS,
AND SOOTHING OIL FOR THEIR WOUNDS.

MAY THEY FEEL JESUS’ LOVE AND COMPASSION,
AND FINDING HOPE, GIVE HOPE TO OTHERS.

— THE AUTHOR

When Heaven is Silent

*Messages, poems and devotions
to give you strength and hope*



JOHN POWELL

featuring the paintings of Gustave Doré

Unto thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit. Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.

Blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications. The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him. — Psalm 28: 1-2,6-7

*These articles and more can be found on the web site
of Tel-A-Care Ministry: www.jesuscaresaboutyou.org*

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