

Suffering with Grace

Finding God's Purpose in the Pain

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Part I

Suffering With Grace

Finding God's Purpose in the Pain

Introduction

"What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset." Blackfoot Indian Proverb

Many Are The Afflictions of The Righteous...

In a neighborhood street basketball game, I was dribbling the basketball down the court when, all of a sudden, I fell down skinning my left knee and elbow. My left leg had buckled again. I crashed into the pavement beneath me; the ball went one direction and I went another. Anger rose up within me. The question, "Why is this happening to me, God?" raced through my thoughts. I was so embarrassed, frustrated and overcome with anxiety. All eyes were glued on me, wondering what was going on, as if I knew. But I didn't know. I knew that my left arm and left leg were feeling weird and were not performing correctly.

I sat there too proud to cry in front of the guys, wiping off the blood from my knee and elbow, feeling like a

loser, an alien. I slowly got up and walked home with tears in my eyes, heart pounding, a lump in my throat and totally confused. Little did I know that this would be the last basketball game I ever played, for I was soon to find out that I had a crippling disease for which there was no cure. I was soon thereafter diagnosed with Fascioscapulohumeral Muscular Dystrophy. At the age of fourteen, I was faced with living with a chronic illness and disability.

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous:
but the Lord delivers him out of them all.*
Psalm 34:19

*That no man should be moved by these
afflictions: for you yourselves know that
we are appointed thereunto.* 1 Thess. 3:3

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Chapter 1

The Last Basketball Game

...A thorn in the flesh was given to me...

1 Cor. 12:7b

The Loss of Dreams at 14

In 1983, at the age of fourteen, I noticed some minor physical problems happening to me. My chest was beginning to sink in; my shoulders and arms began turning inward as a result. My left arm seemed to get tired very fast. Weights were getting more difficult to lift. It was becoming harder to lift my left arm over my head. I had no idea that 1984 would be my last year to enjoy good health. I really loved playing basketball and swimming. Little did I know at the time these simple pleasures I enjoyed everyday would be taken from me. Sadly, I played my last basketball game at the age of fourteen. This was only the beginning of dealing with the heartache and losses that come with having a chronic illness and disability.

Of course at the age of fourteen, a boy often has girls on his mind. Besides the loss of the ability to play sports, I soon experienced something I didn't expect. The disease caused the muscles in my face to weaken, giving me the appearance of a fish or reptile. Even the name of the disease FSH is

taken from the word fish. Girls soon proceeded to make fun of my facial deformities that were becoming more obvious along with my shoulders. They would call me "frog face," and they would position their arms and shoulders inward, mocking me. This would have been tough enough to accept from the guys, but it was made more painful coming from the girls.

The rejection, dejection, hurt, pain, self-loathing and self-hatred plummeted me down into a dark hole of utter depression. A seed of resentment toward girls was planted here. To this day, I have never understood why girls (*in different places, in different churches and in different schools*) did these cruel things to me, but the consequences that it had on my mind, heart, emotions, soul and spirit have remained with me all of these years.

So, what effects did these girls' mocking words have on me? I basically grew up feeling unwanted by girls, unloved by girls and undesirable by girls. I began to think:

"There's something wrong with me."

"I am unlovable."

"I will never be accepted or loved by a girl."

"I don't belong down here on this earth."

"Just kill myself."

"I am unworthy."

"I'm a second class nobody."

"I don't deserve to be alive."

By mid-summer, a barely noticeable limp was beginning to show up in my left leg. I remember in particular one warm, muggy, summer night in August 1984. I was fourteen. Our neighbor invited Howard, my little brother, and me to a fish fry and a football game on his farm. The game started out just like any other game: I was quarterback and Howard was my running back. However, about halfway through the game my left leg would collapse from underneath me, and I would fall. It got so frustrating that I had to quit, because every other step I would take I would fall down.

Anger, fear and rage was boiling in my heart. I didn't know what was going on. The part of my leg just above my kneecap felt weird and extremely weak. A few days later at the doctor's office my parents and I were told by a Neurologist, "We're sorry, Mr. and Mrs. Hanshaw, but Von also has Fascioscapulohumeral Muscular Dystrophy like William."

William, my older brother, had already been diagnosed with FSH MD in 1978 while a junior in high school. William continued to battle the disease until his death at the age of 46 in April of 2009. He was a faithful minister of the gospel and a great inspiration to me. I'll never forget one of his sermons entitled, "God is not Limited by Man's Limitations." He had battled the FSH MD for thirty-one years and suffered a great deal during the last

few months of his difficult life.

So there we were with the doctor, my mom and dad and I hearing this news for the first time that my life would never be the same. My heart sank as the doctors further said to me, "There is no cure, no therapy and no medicine to help. The disease will gradually become worse and worse." I was speechless, stunned and devastated.

Can you imagine a fourteen year old athletic boy hearing these life altering words of gloom and doom from a doctor? Can you imagine being physically healthy one day and being diagnosed with an incurable muscle-eating disease the next? Can you imagine the devastation in my mind and emotions? This is precisely what happened to me.

It felt like a death, and, in fact, it was a death: it was a death involving the loss of my healthy body, the loss of my dreams to become a police officer, the loss of my ability to play sports, the loss of even doing something as simple as playing a game with my younger brother. A new life of being a "cripple," disabled and handicapped was beginning for me. A new path of uncertainty was about to unfold. A lonely road filled with isolation, depression, rejection and heartache began to take its course.

A Mother's Love

I want to share about my dear mom who helped me so much during this difficult, dark and lonely time. During this time in my life, she was always there for me, talking me through some of these issues, encouraging me to not let the teasing bother me too much; and she taught me to never to look on the outside of people, but rather, look at their heart. She was fond of saying, "Pretty is as pretty does." From that point on, I never looked at girls the same way. A pretty face with an ugly heart makes a horrible person. Thankfully, the Lord doesn't see as the world sees. "Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). A beautiful heart is truly all that matters. Mom became my best friend through all of this. Without my mom's love, I really don't know if I could have made it.

What is Fascioscapulohumeral Muscular Dystrophy?

What is Muscular Dystrophy? It is a group of forty neuromuscular diseases that are genetically inherited, and that causes a gradual wasting away of muscle tissue which results in severe weakness, deformity and sometimes death. Any of the 434 involuntary muscles can be affected.

My type of MD is called "Fascioscapulohumeral" MD (*also known as Landouzy-Dejerine*) and affects the muscles in my face (*fascio*), eyelids, lips, mouth, neck, shoulders (*scapula*), arms, hands, fingers, chest, back, stomach, hips, legs and feet. Thus, my entire body is affected from the face

down to my feet.

The nickname of FSH MD is "Fish" (*hence FSH*) because the MD deforms our faces as the muscles deteriorate leaving us, as I mentioned earlier, looking like a fish, a frog or a reptilian appearance. It is impossible to pucker, kiss, and whistle. The mouth wants to stay open, and it is somewhat difficult to close my mouth. We generally have either a sad or mad expression on our faces simply due to the muscle weakness. It is laborious to give a pleasant smile because smiling requires muscle. Also, the weakness in my eye muscles prevents the eyes from closing all the way during sleep at night. As the FSH MD progresses, the eyes can sometimes dry out which can injure them. Wearing a patch over the eyes during sleep may become necessary. Furthermore, the muscles that hold the shoulder blades in place weaken, allowing the bones to move excessively. This causes the shoulder blades to stick out and rise up toward the neck as they move, and the protruding bones resemble a wing.

Leverage and the ability to lift and throw things is gradually lost. It becomes impossible to raise the arms over the head. It becomes, as a result, hard to shave, comb your hair or wash your face. In addition, the muscles on the front and sides of the legs often weaken. These are the muscles that allow us to raise the front of the foot up when walking.

I have used a wheelchair since August 1989. Moreover, we have weakness that develops in our abdomen which causes a curve (*scoliosis*) in our lower (*Lumbar region of our*) spine. William and I had severe hip weakness which is not common with FSH MD. Most people with FSH have very little or no weakness in their hips and legs, but we were the exception. This causes trouble walking, getting up out of chairs, off the commode or climbing stairs. I have not been able to get up out of a chair since 1995.

Finally, pain sometimes accompanies severe forms of FSH MD due to weakened muscles that pull bony structures out of alignment or when the joints freeze in one position. COPD (*Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease*) sometimes becomes an issue. I was diagnosed with COPD in May 2009, due to the muscle weakness surrounding my lungs. COPD is a progressive, incurable disease that makes it hard to breathe. It can cause tightness in the chest, coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. COPD is the fourth leading cause of death in America. Breathing Treatments can help slow the progression.

So, what is not affected by FSH MD? The mental faculties, loss of sensation, the ability to control the bowels and bladder, and normal sexual activity are not affected. In other words, we have good minds; we do not become numb in our bodies;

we can control our bladders and bowels; and we can enjoy normal sexual intercourse with our spouses.

To sum it up, you can find anyone in the world with FSH MD, and we all have very similar facial appearances and similar body features. About 40% of body weight is muscle. This is why I must be extremely cautious in cold weather during the Flu/Pneumonia season because my immune system is compromised, and I would find it nearly impossible to resist these type sicknesses. Pneumonia is the leading cause of death among people with MD. On the other hand, I have to be careful in excessively hot weather too because muscles reflect heat; but since most of my muscles are gone, my body will soak up the heat which could result in a heat stroke.

MD can strike anyone at any age. Eighteen years after my grandfather (my mother's dad) died, we discovered that he had FSH MD and had passed it onto us. But this came as a shock to the entire family because he was a World War I veteran, a fisherman and a hunter. He walked until he died. His legs were never affected. The only symptoms he had were in his arms and shoulders.

Yes, I Have a Fear of Falling

Before continuing with my story, let me interject some of my worst falls over the years to give you an idea of what this did to me mentally,

emotionally and physically. Please understand, these falls not only caused some physical pain but also caused mental and emotional suffering and frustrations. Imagine, for a moment, you start to fall and there is absolutely nothing you can do to stop or to brace yourself. The fear is overwhelming.

1985: I had to walk to school, and almost on a daily basis by the time I arrived, my pants were torn, and my left knee was bloody. I would fall several times on my left knee. I looked like a yo-yo as I would fall down, bounce back up, fall down and bounce back up from the force of the impact.

1986: I was stepping down off my porch getting ready to catch the school bus when my leg brace snapped in half. It is a miracle it didn't severely cut my left leg as I fell down.

1988: I was attending Bible College, and the handicapped commode was out of order. I had to use an ordinary commode, one without hand rails. I had to stay on there for over three hours until someone finally came in, and I asked them to help me up.

1989: I was studying on a sermon I was about to preach that Sunday night in a pastor's office. I was alone. I fell down and lay on the floor for four hours until it was time for people to start gathering for the church service, and someone came to help me up.

1990: I was preaching in a nursing home and fell flat on my back on the hard cement-tiled floor, hitting the back of my head on the floor.

1991: I was at a wedding and fell on the cement floor in the fellowship hall during the reception giving myself a concussion. I was rushed to the hospital that time.

1991: I slipped out of my bathtub, and once again hit my head and face on the commode as I fell into it.

1992: I was leading a home prayer meeting and fell straight down on my left knee causing it to swell and throb.

1995: My lift chair was raising me up in my living room, and the bolts broke and the chair threw me into the floor, barely missing the brick fireplace.

1997: I was in a garage getting my vehicle worked on when I fell straight forward on the concrete floor hitting my left cheekbone. The mechanics said it sounded like a .22 rifle going off when my face slammed into that floor.

Below is a narrative poem written by Budd Schulberg, a man suffering from MD. This poem personifies the horrible sufferings caused by MD.

"I hate people, especially children. I like to sneak up on them when they are only three or four years old, when their bodies are straight and healthy, full of bounce and fun, full of life and joy, when they're saying, 'Look at me, Mommy, watch me catch the ball. Look at me, Daddy, see how far I can run.' These are the little ones I like to pull down because I hate people.

I like to watch little children trip and fall, rise slowly, everyday a little more slowly, until finally they have to hang onto a chair to pull themselves up to a standing position. And the more they struggle with what ought to be the most natural of functions, the better I like it because I hate people.

It makes me laugh to watch a six year old lose all the muscles in his legs, arms, shoulders and hands. His fingers lose the power to move. One by one his muscles waste away until he cannot hold a ball or a book, no not even move a piece on a checkerboard, feed himself; and finally must be carried from bed to wheelchair to bathroom: a child robbed of childhood, of adolescence, and soon of life itself.

This Muscular Dystrophy is even better than Polio because once Polio strikes the condition of the victim is fixed. But Muscular Dystrophy gets worse and worse every day of every week, as the muscles waste away. The back curves; the feet turn in and curl up. A body without muscle is like a balloon without air, and finally there isn't a single normal function my victims can perform.

They can't stand, sit, walk, speak, write, swallow, digest, sneeze, cough, feed themselves or roll over in the bed. For the simplest things, even a smile, call on muscle. I laugh, knowing that the minds inside their helpless bodies are normal and keen, longing to break out into the freedoms of the healthy, muscled

world.

And finally, when they haven't a single muscle left, when the inevitable downhill slide into helplessness leaves them without even the final muscles for the final breath, for breathing calls on muscles too, then I say, 'Good, I've done my job well. I've trapped these victims.'

Let man hurl himself into the galaxies and take snapshots of the Moon, but down here on earth where I prowl, he is still unable to find a cure for my scourge. For I am Muscular Dystrophy, the hater of people."

The Losses Mount Up

Friend, only God knows how this FSH MD has tormented my mind, heart, emotions, soul, spirit and body, and the subsequent bouts of depression that accompany such a disease. Feelings of rejection, insecurity, worthlessness and suicidal thoughts plagued me for years after this diagnosis. People don't realize the collateral damage that comes with a chronic disease that racks every inch of your body and affects your physical appearance . . . It's bad enough to suffer from the disease, but even worse is the rejection from others. Just like anyone, I had the same desire to date, to fall in love, to marry and have children some day; but due to the disease, the losses mounted up one by one.

Chapter 2

Rejection in Relationships

The Loss of My First Love

When I was nineteen, my brother Howard introduced me to a girl named Liz at church. Surprisingly, in spite of my MD, she liked me. It was wonderful to know that a girl could look beyond my disease and appearance and find me attractive. I was on cloud nine, wherever that is. Still, due to my past sense of rejection and humiliation at the hand of girls, I had trouble returning her affection.

Keep in mind that I am now nineteen years old and have never had a girlfriend or been on a date through high school and one year of college. In fact,

girls had been cruel to me, as you know, and I couldn't figure out why this girl actually liked me. Well, we started dating. It was kind of scary to me, and I never got around to kissing her, even though I wanted to. I simply didn't know how to show a girl affection. Two months later, she broke up with me, perhaps wondering why I did not get closer to her. As we parted company, she gave me a poem she'd written about me which said that my life and preaching was like a lighthouse to her.

It was three months later on December 4, 1989, when my phone rang around 6:00 p.m. The caller said, "Von, Liz died at 6:30 a.m. by a single gunshot wound to her stomach; they think it was by suicide. The doctors said she lived about four hours after they started working on her in the emergency room. They saw her lips moving and thought she was praying, but she lost too much blood too fast. Can you come and be with the family?"

I dropped the phone and thought I was going to faint. So much promise--and now she was gone. She was halfway through her senior year, on the honor roll, and was going to be a missionary in Mexico. For the next six years this death hounded me like a ruthless bloodhound on a scented trail of guilt, shame and condemnation. Words cannot begin to describe the guilt I carried like a heavy rock on my shoulders. I truly blamed myself. MY FIRST LOVE - DEAD. These were some of the questions running through my mind:

*Why couldn't I have just shown her a little bit of
affection?*

What is wrong with me?

*What kind of preacher am I that she couldn't even
call me before doing this to herself?*

Why wasn't I there for her?

One thing I learned through that ordeal was to never hide my feelings from those I care about. I learned how to simply say *I love you* to those near and dear in my life. Well, the funeral was packed with her family, classmates and friends. Some told us about how Liz had positively impacted their lives for Jesus. She had even talked some of her friends out of using drugs and alcohol or committing sexual immorality. At the time, reflecting on her death, I wrote this simple poem about the brevity of life:

*Life is but a vapor, a mist,
Here today and gone tomorrow,
Leaving us with a clinched fist,
Death leaves us in sorrow.*

*Questions with no answers mount,
Events with no reason or rhyme,
Heartaches too numerous to count,
Healed only by God's grace and time.*

*Leaving good memories behind,
Living with no regrets or remorse,
Entering Heaven with Jesus on your mind,*

As the Angels sing a heavenly chorus.

Thoughts of suicide haunted me. I would go somewhere to preach, and evil spirits of despair would whisper death thoughts into my ears. Those next six years were a deep, dark valley of despondency, guilt and loneliness. But, by God's grace, Jesus brought me through to the other side where His light and love beamed down into my anguished soul.

I continued to pray for a Christian wife, but it seemed the single Christian women were looking for a different type of man. Some wanted a tall man; some wanted a rich man; some wanted a handsome man. Well, I didn't exactly fit the criteria for Prince Charming. I was 5'7", crippled and in dire poverty. So to say the least, the pages of my black book were as empty as a church on Monday morning. I was *living on a small disability check from Social Security*, not exactly a "catch."

Truthfully, all I ever desired was to find and marry a down to earth Christian girl who would love me for just being me, be my soul mate and my best friend. That's all.

Rejection by Betrayal

In 1996, I thought my prayers were answered when I met a girl named Tonya. We dated for nearly a year and were married in August 1997. However,

to my extreme dismay, the day after our marriage, my older brother, William, was talking to Tonya. She told him she would cheat with the first good looking man she came across. Tonya and I had not had sexual relations in the three weeks we were together, and the marriage was annulled. I had been deceived, betrayed by someone I truly cared about.

I had hoped that finding a woman in church would work out, but I soon learned that appearances can be deceiving. Even women in church can lie and pull the wool over one's eyes. But it was my own fault too. I was so desperate to experience the joy of companionship, that I overlooked obvious warning signals.

Loneliness has a way of distorting perception, of causing one to make hasty decisions, of causing one to deny what is right in front of him. Loneliness clouds sound judgment. I vowed to never make a major decision while steeped in the mire of loneliness.

Rejection by Church Members

In 1991 my brother Howard got married and moved out. This left me distressed because we were so close; he was my best friend. He and I had preached together for five years prior to this. We were 20 months apart, and with moving eleven times over a twelve-year period, we had formed a very close bond. We always played football

together before my disability struck. He was the running back, and I was the quarterback. We would laugh and carry on as the "stars" of the neighborhood team. No one could stop us! With my right arm and his fast legs, we were untouchable. But alas, those days came to end suddenly. Only in my mind can I enjoy playing football today with my brother. Howard, who was only twelve at the time, didn't understand why we couldn't play together any more; and to be honest, neither could I.

While reminiscing about these memories, I moved into a twelve story apartment building for the disabled in downtown Lexington, Kentucky. The rejection of my wife coupled with Liz's suicide sent me into a deep depression. I had hoped to find comfort in a church family, but soon discovered I was rejected once again by those I had believed would love me unconditionally.

Over the years, I've been surprised to find that many people in churches have said hurtful things to me concerning my disability. Also, in the *word of faith* movement in particular, I have experienced a great deal of rejection. My deformed and decaying body apparently doesn't exactly fit into their theology. For those who don't know what the *word of faith* movement is (also known as the *prosperity gospel* and *name it and claim it*), the movement teaches that all Christians should be healthy and wealthy if they have faith. People like I am who have not received their healing are

condemned and often ostracized. They don't know what to do with us. I love Jesus with all my heart and have continued to believe and pray for the Lord to heal my body. Wouldn't anyone want to be whole?

In these churches, I have had more anointing oil poured on me than Crisco and Valvoline can manufacture. That's the truth. I have met some real *word of faith* fanatics that while I'm sure they are sincere, they are sincerely wrong. They've slapped, punched, hit, jabbed and rubbed all over me. I've been spit on, knocked down, sat on and rolled over by these name it and claim it, hyper-faith types who know little about the sovereignty of God's purpose in allowing disease and suffering. They have even tried to cast demons out of me simply because I have a chronic disease. This is one of the reasons I am sharing my story. I don't want people who are suffering to have to deal with this rejection on top of everything else.

Sometimes I feel like screaming out loud, "I have a disability, not a demon." People don't like to deal with the severity of someone in my shoes so they come up with simplistic formulas and platitudes and think it's okay. Jesus didn't say, "I was sick and you cast a devil out of me." He said, "I was sick and you visited me" (Matt. 25). This body is just the house I am living in. Yes, the house is greatly flawed and in need of repair. But it is still just the house I live in and only for this life. In

heaven, I will receive a new body. Praise the Lord! Don't you think being racked with a horrible chronic disease every day of my life is bad enough? Please don't add to my sorrow by rejecting me simply because the house I live in is broken down. The physical pain is difficult enough to live with every day. But to be rejected simply because I don't meet the conditions of your faulty theology makes matters much worse. To say the least, I grew weary of this routine,

So one night, during a frenzied altar call, a pack of these spiritual wonder-workers spied me out of the crowd and gathered around me like ravenous wolves and began their "faith-healing" rituals. I growled at every one of those goofy charismaniacs, and I never saw church folks run so fast. Man, they should enter the Olympics. I laughed all the way home. Nowadays I nip this ignorance in the bud before they ever get started by *quickly and boldly* rebuking anyone who slightly hints that he wants to reject and condemn me simply because I am not healed.

The error of the *word of faith* teaching can easily be proven wrong with the use of one word, "DEATH." Given their formula of faith, we should not have to die, because death was a part of the curse that began when Adam and Eve sinned against God. They say the effects of the curse are totally removed for Christians so we should all be healthy and wealthy. Yet, we still die, so some of

the fall out from the curse still affects believing Christians in this way. To die, the body has to begin to break down and eventually decay. Had Adam never sinned this would not be the case. However, we do have the promise of everlasting life through Jesus. Jesus said, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). Obviously, all of the benefits of Jesus Christ are not realized on this side of heaven.

Hurtful Words

This rejection by people in the church has continued throughout the years in a variety of settings. Following is a sample of hurtful words that have had the effect of wounding my spirit:

A young woman overheard a minister asking me if God had blessed me with a wife yet. Before I could reply, she rudely blurted out to me, "With your looks you could never get a wife. You might find a desperate homosexual."

A couple of ministers on separate occasions said, "You look like you've been beat with an ugly stick."

I shared earlier how girls and even women have said to me, "You look like a frog."

One minister was determined to ask a young lady to go out on a date with me, and she sarcastically said, "Sorry, honey, but I only date good-looking guys."

A deacon sarcastically told me, "The rest of us have

go to work. You're a burden to society because my taxes pay your pathetic disability check."

On two different occasions it was said to me, "I wish I could quit work and draw a check like you do. It must be nice to get paid for doing nothing."

One of my former pastors said in the spring of 1990 from the pulpit one Sunday morning, prior to taking Communion, "If any of you are not physically healed, then you are not allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. If you do, you will bring a curse upon yourself."

One charismatic pastor said to me, "You must like having MD or you wouldn't put up with it. If I were you I would speak the Word (Scriptures) over my disease and make God heal me. I wouldn't be weak in the faith like you. I would ignore all of those lying symptoms."

A few preachers have said, "How can you preach about faith when you don't even have the faith to get healed?"

It's even been said, "You must have some big unconfessed sin in your life or have a demon or God would heal you."

In trying times like these, I don't know what I would have done without the encouraging words of the Lord. I feel like Paul when he said after being rejected by all his companions, "No one stood with me, but all forsook me, . . .but the Lord stood by me..." (2 Tim. 4:17).

Words are powerful. "The power of life and

death are in the tongue" (Prov. 18:21). Be careful what you say to others. One can speak to others life, encouragement and blessing; or one can speak discouragement, death and cursing. Jesus said, "Every idle word a man speaks he will give account of on the day of judgment" (Luke 12:36).

Another Failed Marriage

I was still hoping to find the right woman to share my life with when in December 1999, I was invited to play the piano at a New Year's Eve church service in Flemingsburg, Kentucky. I met a single mom of three daughters, Robin. One thing led to another, and we began dating in February 2000. She was one of the singers on the praise team in the church.

I couldn't believe that I had finally found a woman in church who seemed to really like me. I was on cloud nine to say the least. We started spending almost every day together. She didn't mind to help me in and out of my truck or out of my wheelchair. I had thirty years of backed-up romance built up inside me as I had waited for the right Christian woman, and I was madly in love, writing her poem after poem and love songs. I even produced a couple of videos to express how deeply I loved her. She and I raised her two youngest daughters for the next several years. Robin had a sweet, tender and compassionate heart of gold.

Unresolved issues in my heart and her heart

began to surface. We began having severe marriage difficulties. I was not being Christ like the way I should have been. I allowed my flesh to gain a stronghold on my mind, heart, emotions and life. I was supposed to be the spiritual leader and priest of the home, but I eventually backslid and quit serving God for a time in 2003-2004. Life was miserable. The marriage was miserable. I truly prayed to die. I felt abandoned and forsaken by God. I was so angry at God.

Once a Christian gets to this place, then the doors are wide open for sin, self and Satan to control one's life. We went to seven different Christian marriage counselors trying to get help and find some hope, but to no avail. It became worse with each passing day until our marriage ended in divorce.

It is so true that a "Family that prays together stays together." But what if one does not pray? He is fair game for a devil that never takes a day off. I take full responsibility for my failed marriage. Instead of taking my burdens to the Lord, I carried them, and my marriage could not endure it.

Hopeful Words of Grace

Thankfully, the Lord sent some dear brothers into my life at this time of hopelessness who did not reject me or despise my shame, but loved me unconditionally. After all of these years and even being a preacher of the gospel, I did not properly

understand the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Some good friends, Tom and Jean Hamm, knew I was really struggling and would often invite me over to their house. While Jean prepared some good home cooking, Tom, and his sons, Tommy and Ronnie, and I would play pool in the basement. Tom would speak to me lovingly and without condemnation and teach me day after day the blessings of grace and the futility of trying to earn God's acceptance through performance. Though I had often read the following verses in the Bible, I had not experienced the fullness of the grace of God:

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

Tom opened up the scriptures about grace to me, and they became real to me for the first time. While I was saved and even preaching the gospel, I was not enjoying the blessings of grace. I had been saved by grace but was not living by grace every day. Finally, through the love of Tom and his family, I realized that grace is sufficient for every day, for every trial, in every way, for any kind of suffering in life, in death, through broken relationships, and even for an old wretch like me.

Tom Hamm had laid the foundation for healing

grace in my life, but the Lord had even more in store.

About this time, a good friend named Dr. Emery Emmert told me about a *Freedom In Christ* ministry in Lexington. I reluctantly called the number he gave to me and made an appointment to go through yet another counseling session. This would prove to not be an ordinary counseling session, but spiritual warfare fought with weapons not made by human hands.

So on June 21, 2004, I went to meet Randy Peterson and Chris Schwartz at a church in Lexington to go through this counseling. But I quickly learned that this was no ordinary counseling session. For the next nine hours, these two dear men of God took the time to pray with me, teach me about Grace, help me to forgive those who had hurt me, and help me to repent of all my sins. I had walked in that little prayer room with the weight of darkness on my heart, my mind darkened by hopelessness and angry at God. But nine hours later, *through much weeping and tears*, I was able to lay down all my burdens, guilt, sins, and sorrow at the blessed feet of Jesus. It was one of the most difficult things I've ever done, but oh, it was worth it. One lesson I learned that night that I will never forget is that I am sitting with Christ in the heavenlies. RIGHT NOW, far above the world, the flesh and the devils!

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great

love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Eph. 2:4-6

Hence, even though my physical body is here on earth and suffers from a chronic disease, my spirit can soar on the wind in the heavenlies with Christ. Thus, I do not have to let sin control me. I do not have to let the things of this world sway me. I do not have to allow the devils to destroy me. I was far from perfect, but I was the most free that I'd ever been, and I was forgiven. One more layer removed. One more step towards total freedom in Jesus. One more level of grace, and it was truly wonderful.

The Christian life is comparable to an onion: onions have many layers. Our minds, hearts and lives also have many layers that God peels back when He knows we can handle it. That peeling back process, while painful at the time, reveals areas in our lives in which we need to grow, and it also reveals another facet of God's loving nature.

Let me just take a moment to praise the Lord for His marvelous grace by sharing this song I found in an old songbook of my mom's:

*Long years ago when out in sin,
I had no hope or peace within,*

*Down on my knees in agony,
I cried to Jesus and He gladly set me free.
Now I can feel Him by my side,
My feeble steps He comes to guide,
When trials come He comforts me,
Through Him over sin I have the victory.*

*Oh, sinner come to Jesus now,
At His dear feet just humbly bow,
Confess to Him you're every sin,
He'll save and cleanse you, give you peace and joy
within.*

*Oh, I never shall forget that day,
When the burdens of my soul rolled away,
It made me happy, glad and free,
I'll sing it and shout it, for He is everything to me!*

Chapter 3

Finding God's Purpose in the Pain

And we know that all things work together for good

to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose. Rom. 8:28

I had a life changing dream one night, and in this dream I was talking with Jesus. I said, "Lord, there is so much more that I would do for You if You would only heal me." He instantly replied, "You might, but I wouldn't be in it." I sat up in bed amazed at what the Lord had said to me. Randomly, I opened up my Bible to 1 Samuel 21:9 and began to read. The Lord continued to speak to me through His Word.

And the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you slew in the Valley of Elah, see, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

David had been running for his life from the jealous "green-eyed monster" King Saul, and he had no weapon with which to defend himself. He came to the city, Nob, and they only had one weapon in the entire village, the infamous sword of Goliath. As a teenager, David had killed him years earlier. Most of us know the fantastic story of David vs. Goliath. Many an underdog has been encouraged throughout history by the childlike faith of David and how he killed the mighty giant who had kept an entire army in fear of their lives.

So, David took that sword which *at one time* was meant for his destruction and fought with it. That which was meant for the destruction of David became a weapon to use for the glory of God! The Lord clearly spoke to me from this passage and said, "Take the FSH MD that was intended to destroy you and use it as a weapon for my glory against the powers of darkness and for the eternal blessings of others." By God's grace, I have sought to remain faithful to His call.

Praise the Lord! Finally, I understood the purpose in my pain and could rejoice in the Lord. Many verses in the word of God began to come alive for me. After all, Apostle Paul was chained in a dark prison cell when he said:

Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.
Phil. 4:4

Also, in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul says,

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Exactly what areas do you think the phrase "everything" includes? Obviously we should give thanks in every circumstance. Jesus didn't promise us a life without troubles and pain.

Jesus actually assured us of the opposite, that we would experience troubles in this world:

In the world you will have tribulations, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. John 16:33b

Jesus walked the lonely road of Gethsemane and Calvary. Sometimes we walk a lonely, dark and painful road also. But the abundant life is not about having perfect health and great wealth; it's not about getting everything we want all the time. It's about knowing Jesus Christ and growing in our relationship with Him! Yes, it is wonderful to stand and believe for my healing; but even if it never comes, I will trust in the Lord with all of my heart and believe in His goodness. I will believe He has a purpose for my pain! And friend, He always has a purpose for your pain, too.

From that point on I never felt disappointed about the condition of my body--and not receiving a healing from the Lord. Even though I know and believe with all my heart that He who spoke the worlds into existence can easily heal me, I've accepted that He has chosen not to for His greater purpose and glory. I don't need to know all of His reasons. However, I am 100% sure that when I go to heaven, I will wish that I had never questioned His goodness.

There is a wonderful picture of God's amazing grace found in the story of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel. Mephibosheth was the son of the wicked King Saul who had sought to kill David. He was lame

in both his feet and living in the land of Lodebar. The word Lodebar means a desolate place. When David became King, he called for him to come to the King's palace. Can you imagine the fear of Mephibosheth when David called for him? Being in the direct line of the previous King in most cases would have meant certain death. However, David showed him mercy by raising him up from the desolate and forsaken place and giving him a seat forever at the King's table. Yes, he was still lame in both of his feet, but his inheritance was restored and he enjoyed the blessings of the King's presence.

So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet. 2 Sam. 9:13

Glory to God! Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, has lifted us out of the pit of despair and raised us up to sit in heavenly places by His wonderful grace (Eph. 2:6). Yet, even as Mephibosheth still was "lame in both his feet," there are times when suffering remains in our lives in spite of many prayers and even great faith in the Lord. Even though these trials may cause us a lot of heartache and pain, it does not change our true position in Christ. Our position in Christ is secure in the heavenly places as long as we continue to "walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Not only that, just as David was a vessel to show God's mercy to Mephibosheth, who was both lame and in distress while living in Lodebar (a place of condemnation and

desolation), the body of Christ is God's answer to show His mercy to people who are suffering.

The Lord not only wants to show us His goodness; He wants us to reflect His goodness in this evil world. Through the years, it has not been easy to be dependent on others for virtually everything I do—even simple daily tasks like bathing, shaving, getting dressed, going to the bathroom, getting in and out of bed and my wheelchair are impossible for me. Others have had to be my hands, my arms, my legs and my feet because I am not able. Yet I thank the Lord for sending me Angels of Mercy to help me in my time of need. First is my mom, Eva, who has been my caregiver throughout my life. Imagine the heartache when she and my father, Clayton, heard the news that not only one child had FSH MD, but two out of three of their sons had this crippling disease which would never go away.

Also, my wife of ten years, Robin, literally permanently injured her back while serving as my caregiver. She tirelessly met my every need, for which I am grateful.

Many times people don't realize the amount of sacrifice a caregiver carries out every day of his or her life for a handicapped person. Currently, I am living back home with my parents, and the local home health agency sends in nurses to help me. Without their help, I couldn't function at all. I wrote

this poem to honor all caregivers who faithfully serve the disabled with much work and little recognition. Truly they are God's Angels of Mercy.

Angel Of Mercy

*She comes to help and to serve,
Selflessly giving, even when weary and tired.
From her knees she soars so high,
This Angel of Mercy graces the sky.*

*On the wings of compassion and care,
She helps us our burdens to bear.
Like a radiant morning sunrise,
She has sweet tenderness in her eyes.*

*Angel of Mercy, servant of hope,
Bringing comfort, helping us to cope.
Messenger of light, hands that heal,
Servant to all, willing to kneel.*

*Serving not for wealth nor pay,
For her, I often stop and pray.
She works without pomp, awards or show,
No work is beneath her, none too low.*

*Angel of Mercy, agent of grace,
When I look at you, it's as if I see God's beautiful face.
You receive not many thank-you's in this life,
But in heaven you'll receive the crown of sacrifice.*

While my weaknesses are evident to all, we all have weaknesses, both on the inside and the outside, mental, emotional and physical. As Frances Schaffer once said, "We can have substantial healing in this life but not total healing." Because of the fall and its effects, our bodies are decaying; our emotions are wounded; our hearts are often broken; and our minds are restless and unsound. Only by the power of the word of God can our minds be renewed (Rom. 12:1-2). Yielding to the Holy Spirit will bring our hearts, minds, emotions and bodies under the control of the grace of God. This process of yielding brings about much healing, but it is not complete. Another minister, who preached the gospel for over fifty years, Vestal Hamm, put it this way: "There are three kinds of healing: 1) *medical healing*, 2) *divine healing*, and 3) *final healing*." That final healing will have to wait until we get to heaven. What a day that will be! I'll be able to play some basketball once again! Hallelujah! I hope I've still got my jump shot.

Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? . . . For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.

Rom. 11:33-34, 36

Chapter 4

The Sword of the Lord

*But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions,
do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

2 Tim. 4:5

*But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to
put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak
things of the world to put to shame the things which
are mighty; and the lowly things of the world and the
things that are despised God has chosen, and the
things which are not, to bring to nothing the things
that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.*

1 Cor. 1:27-29

Von the Baptist

Yes, the Lord had shown me that my FSH MD was actually a sword in His hand to carry out his purposes in the ministry. From an early age, I had sensed the call of God to be an evangelist. An evangelist is one who preaches the good news of Jesus Christ to lost sinners. This has led me down many a pathway, and it has been an adventure. To God be all the glory! I'm so grateful to the Lord for all the souls saved and the lives touched through my ministry over the years. At one time, my dream was to be a Christian school principal, but despite many attempts to further my education, I have never been

able to complete it. Though this door was closed to me, God has opened so many other doors of ministry.

When I was ten years old, my dad, Clayton, was the pastor of a Baptist church in Lexington, Kentucky, and they went out door to door witnessing every weekend. Many fathers would have not brought their ten year old son along; but Dad not only brought me, he taught me the keys to winning souls. These lessons helped me to share Jesus Christ to my friends in school and have stayed with me to this day. Little did Dad know, he was laying the foundation for my ministry as an evangelist.

When I was still a teenager, God sent two people into my life who cared greatly about me: Jeff and Cecelia Wallace, my youth pastors. Somehow they sensed the inner war going on inside of my heart. I knew that they were really concerned for me. They took me under their wings and encouraged me in simple, yet life changing ways.

Jeff gave me a bunch of *This Was Your Life* gospel tracts, and I began handing them out in my neighborhood and at my school. Jeff said, "Von, I think God may be calling you to preach." I began praying about this and pondering it in my mind. God placed Jeff and Cecelia in my life for that timely season, and I've never seen them since, but I'll be forever grateful for their encouraging words and actions.

That summer, I wore out three pairs of brace shoes walking door-to-door handing out tracts for the church in which my dad, Clayton, served as the pastor.

On March 15, 1986, I preached my first sermon on Youth Sunday at North Frankfort Baptist Church. I was shaking in my shoes. *No kidding*. Beads of sweat ran down my face before I got up to speak. The church was packed. The youth group was in charge of the entire service. But I prayed every day prior to this date for over a month, and I felt an overwhelming desire to preach the word. I wept as I thought about lost souls plunging into the eternal flames of Hell fire. I preached on the subject "Get On Board," referring to a *train*. The ticket was already purchased by the blood of Jesus and so forth. My text was Revelation 3:14-20.

After I finished that fifteen minute sermon, I knew that I had to preach the gospel for the rest of my life. By God's grace, at the time of this writing, this is my twenty-fourth year of ministry.

The Lord also confirmed my calling while studying the Scriptures with the following verses. Like Jeremiah, I felt too young and very inadequate, but the Lord had other plans. Truly the Lord equips those he calls!

Then the word of the Lord came to me saying,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I separated and set you apart, consecrating you; I appointed you as a Prophet unto the nations." Then said I, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me, "Say not, I am only a youth; for you shall go to all to whom I shall send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak ." Jeremiah 1:5-7

This absolutely confirmed the call of God to me that I was undoubtedly assigned and destined to preach His gospel, and that I would operate in the Prophetic office for the rest of my life. I sensed that God had given me a similar calling and ministry to that of the Prophet Jeremiah. That day is when I surrendered to the calling of God on my life to preach His Word. Slowly, the Holy Spirit began to show me certain truths in the Bible as I would study, pray, fast, read and meditate on Scripture.

In high school, I had a real burden to reach my lost friends. I tried to find a Bible club again that year but to no avail. I was sitting outside on the steps, eating a sack lunch one afternoon during lunch when I read Psalm 27:1:

The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, whom shall I fear or dread? The Lord is the Refuge and Stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?

In my junior year of high school, I felt led to go outside and preach on the Breezeway during my

lunch period. Now you have to understand what this Breezeway was in order to fully get the whole picture here.

This place was an open air walkway that was in the back of the school near the parking lot where all of the meanest and toughest dudes hung out to fight, smoke and sell drugs. This place was off limits to the clean-cut, nice students. Believe me, I questioned and fought God for about a week, but He would not leave me alone.

Being very much afraid, I opened those huge double doors, walked down the steps as my metal brace clanked on the cement, with my olive green Bible in hand. I definitely had their undivided attention. All eyes were glued on me and my Bible. I simply bowed my head, said a prayer and asked if anyone wanted prayer. By now, I was encircled by a hundred students who had a look of shock on their faces.

I opened my Bible to Isaiah 53 and started preaching Hell hot and Heaven pure. Some students began crying; others sat down to listen in front of me; others stood afar off and listened as I told them how much Jesus loved them, and how He alone could set them free from the addiction of alcohol and drugs. Every afternoon during lunch I preached, I gave an altar call right there on those steps and invited them to come to Jesus. To God be all the glory for allowing me that priceless privilege of

preaching to those outcasts, criminals, gangsters, harlots and drug dealers. This was the beginning of my call as an evangelist.

As you might imagine, Satan fought hard against this by using a few teachers and students to try and stop me from preaching. First, a couple of teachers tried to get me expelled; but by God's grace, the principal, *Mr. John Akers*, was a Sunday school teacher at a Methodist church, and he joyfully encouraged me to keep on preaching, ordering those teachers to leave me alone.

Next, there was a drug dealer, Phillip. He had long hair down to his hips. One day he walked up to me while I was preaching and punched me hard in the head, and it threw me backwards against the wall. I regained my composure and told him that Jesus loved him and that nothing he could do would stop me from preaching about the love of Jesus. Then a big football player came up behind me and said, "Phillip, you're not hitting him again, now move on." With that, I never experienced another problem with a student or faculty member.

Some of the students even affectionately called me Von the Baptist.

Strike Force Prison Ministry

Throughout the years, the Lord has used me in unlikely places. One of the ministries that He has greatly blessed is my service as a Prison

Evangelist. It wasn't something I had even thought about doing; but by God's providence, my pastor at Morehead Assembly of God, Ron Hamm, invited me to meet the staff chaplain at the Eastern Kentucky Correctional Complex in West Liberty, Kentucky. From 1998 until the present time, the Lord has given me an open door to speak to hundreds of inmates. These men affectionately call me "Holy Roller" because of my confinement to a wheelchair.

It is a testimony to God's grace that I am ministering in prisons and not on the other side of the bars, given the history of my family. There have been six uncles on both sides of my family who have been in and out of prison for various crimes. My family has had a history of abuse, violence and witchcraft.

So the Lord led me to form Strike Force Prison Ministries in 2004, and by 2006 it became the largest prison ministry in the state of Kentucky. It grew to over 300 volunteers and included 8 regional directors, but the best part of it all was the 4,000 souls that responded to altar calls. In one service, 55 men gave their hearts to Jesus. Literally, it turned into a deliverance service with demons fleeing out of these men in the mighty name of Jesus. The prison gave us special permission to stay an extra four hours to pray with these men, which is unheard of. The service lasted six hours. Jesus still has power over devils.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Heb. 13:8

The Lord even opened a door for me to preach at a women's prison at Pee Wee Valley. Precisely because I was in a wheelchair, the warden allowed me to conduct a service. About 300 women attended the meeting, and it was also piped to about 200 more women who remained in their cells, even to the women on death roll. Praise the Lord for His faithfulness. When I gave the altar call, 186 women responded to the good news of Jesus Christ.

One man in particular I remember during a yard crusade was talking to me. He said, "The reason why you are so effective in reaching us in prison is that we see that you have your own prison to live with, being confined to a wheelchair. We feel like you really understand what we are going through."

The Lord also gave us the opportunity to ordain six inmates into the ministry while they were serving their time in prison, one of which is Thomas. The Lord used Thomas to conduct Bible studies on the yard with dozens of inmates each day. The yard is normally a place divided into gang territories that is very dangerous. Thomas was actually put into segregation for 90 days, not for committing a crime of any kind, but for preaching the gospel on the yard. As soon as he got out, he

went right back to preaching the gospel again, and as a result was shipped to another prison.

Another incident that happened involved a black prisoner named Marshall, standing 6'6" and weighing 290 lbs, who saw me coming on the yard and immediately bowed down to his knee and asked me to pray for him in front of hundreds of other inmates. As a result, a door was opened for me to preach to many others.

It wasn't all peaches and cream, though; sometimes I feared for my life. Once a satanic high priest threatened to choke me to death with a hose. The Lord gave me boldness to say, "You're not allowed to kill me unless God allows it." He dropped the hose and walked off. I heard him mutter under his breath, "You're an alien."

Another time I saw a man called BIG O coming toward me from across the yard. He was a member of the Hell's Angels gang. BIG O stood about 6'4" and weighed 300 lbs. of solid muscle. He had Hell's Angel tattoos all over his arms and a goatee with white hair flowing down to his waist. Astonished that he walked through the territory of two other gangs as he approached me (a dangerous thing to do on the yard), I was concerned of his intentions. Suddenly, he got down on his knees and stared straight into my eyes. Words of my father spoken to me as a young boy came back to me at this time. My dad had said, "If a man is staring you down,

don't blink." I held my ground and stared intently into his eyes, without fear. Then he surprised me by saying loud enough for the crowd and his two warlords, who were standing nearby, to hear, "This man is all right, everybody leave him alone."

I'm very thankful for people who listen to the heart of God and give toward the work of the ministry. The Lord provided for my transportation by moving on the heart of a man named Roland who was one of the volunteer singers for the prison ministry. He bought me a handicapped van in April 2007. I receive only a small disability check each month so without this man's loving gift, I would not have been able to continue.

Street Ministry

Before I started the prison ministry, I was involved in radio and television ministry, as well as street ministry from 1993–1997. I felt led to start a street ministry in the inner city of Lexington called Operation PEACE. Even though I could walk with assistance at this time, I preached the gospel in my wheelchair because I could only stand for a short period of time. We would go downtown to distribute gospel tracts to whoever came across our paths from 9:00 p.m. – 3:00 a.m.

We met a young girl who was in a Gothic street gang early one Sunday morning about 1:00 a.m. This gang wore the black, gothic makeup, and body piercing, and they looked like something out of

a Stephen King novel. To put it mildly, they instantly hated us because we were talking about Jesus. They threatened to hurt us, and the Holy Spirit spoke to us about remaining calm so we could minister to them. All but one young lady walked off angrily, cursing at us. The girl, about sixteen, turned around and came back. She had tears in her eyes saying, "I am a runaway, and these people have taken good care of me, but I miss my mom. She's a strong Christian, and I know what kind of people you are, and what you are saying is true." The gang then threatened to turn on her, but they kept on walking away as we were praying. Some women in our ministry took the girl down the street to a pay phone so she could call her mom, and she boarded a bus to go home the next day.

Another night, a homeless man threatened to kill me and a married couple. We were in the couple's home, and he came in absolutely livid with murder on his mind. He was drunk. He told the woman that he was going to rape her, and he looked at us saying, "You are all going to die tonight!" Then he grabbed a large butcher knife out of the kitchen drawer and gritted his teeth so hard that I heard them pop and crack. He picked up the phone, called 911, and we overheard him saying, "There has been three homicides committed at 221 Lowry Lane." Immediately, he snatched the phone off the wall and threw it through the living room window into the yard. I knew our lives were in jeopardy. I thought we were going to die. But the Holy Spirit

urged me to calmly talk to him. I ended up making a bargain with him, saying the husband and I would go to the store to get him some cigarettes. He agreed not to hurt the wife until we got back. By the time we got back, there were police officers everywhere, from where he had made the 911 call.

The angels of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them. Ps. 34:7

Ministry on Satanism

From 1994-1999, I began conducting seminars on Satanism, Paganism, Witchcraft and Occultism throughout Kentucky. My seminars included two videos that exposed the occult, and I would conclude by teaching a seminar against the occult.

Pro Life Ministry

In November 1997, I felt impressed to form a pro-life group called Eastern Kentucky Citizens for Life in Morehead, Kentucky. We were a conservative group who opposed abortion. We got involved with local politics, legislation, participated in parades, and were regularly in the media. God was blessing our group in numerous ways.

The unborn are the most vulnerable among us, and it is a reflection of the signs of the times and the doctrine of devils when the life of the unborn is destroyed. These demonic spirits of bloodthirsty murderers are ruling at the highest places in our

land. Throughout the Bible, the Lord speaks of how He hates the shedding of innocent blood and will bring judgment on a nation that takes the life of the innocents.

Truly Jesus is speaking of this generation as well as his own when He said:

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because the truth is not in him . . . John 8:44

As a side note, I went to a Water Therapy Unit recently and was refused the treatment due to President Obama's new socialized Health Care Law because I have a condition that cannot be rehabilitated. They told me, "Water therapy is only applicable for people with injuries that are treatable, for people who will improve. Since your condition will not improve, you no longer qualify."

It's a deadly twist of irony that the generation who promoted and legalized abortion (the murder of unborn babies) on demand and taught a whole generation to not respect the value of life will be at the mercy of that very generation when they are old. What will become of them? I foresee the dreadful hour approaching when nursing homes and home health care services will be shut down so as not to waste money on the disabled, the elderly and the terminally ill, for they will be considered

"unproductive" in society.

Following my time in the pro life ministry, I became a volunteer Police Chaplain for the Carter County Sheriff's Department, the Olive Hill Police Department and the Grayson Police Department in the summer of 1999 and served until 2003.

Calvary Riders Motorcycle Club

Currently, I am serving God in the ministry of writing and also serving as the Kentucky Director of the Christian Pool Players Association as well as the State Elder for the Kentucky Calvary Riders Motorcycle Ministry whereby we seek to minister to bikers who need Jesus.

Also since 2005, I have been working in cooperation with the Southern Brothers Motorcycle Club which has been doing rides to raise money to provide 10,000 Christmas stockings for children of inmates across the state of Kentucky.

With names like Head Shot, Tiger, Six Pack and Big Daddy, I was somewhat afraid at first, but the Lord has used these men to help raise monies for this needy cause. I thank the Lord for opening this door to win men to Jesus in motorcycle clubs. I am often able to speak at biker rallies. My wheels may have four tires and their wheels only two, but my wheelchair still qualifies as a bike.

What's next, Lord? I'm waiting and listening.

Chapter 5

God's Grace Is Sufficient

"Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory." – William Barclay

*It is the glory of God to conceal a thing....*Prov. 25:2

I have often been asked, "What have you learned that might help someone else going through a difficult time?" Following this chapter and the end of my story, I will share with you some powerful, life-changing principles that I have learned over the years that have helped me to endure suffering with grace. My prayer is that these same principles will also help you persevere and endure your personal

times of grief, suffering and sorrow, with grace.

I have learned to see beyond the reality of my physical limitations in this world and look to the spiritual realities. We often have the false notion that life is supposed to be fair because we are taught that God is just. God is just but we live in a fallen world, and there are many mysteries yet unanswered. I am sure they will be answered in God's perfect wisdom when we cross that golden shore. We have to be careful not to blame God for our trials, sicknesses and sorrow. In the garden, Satan got Eve to doubt the goodness of God. He still seeks to deceive us with the same temptation. We need to trust in the Lord no matter what is happening in our lives, because He is good. Also, no one perfectly comprehends this visible world, so how can any of us even dare to begin to expect to fully comprehend the invisible world in which we cannot see?

A story is told about a troubled young man talking with an older, wise Christian man outside underneath a beautiful shade tree.

"Sir, why must I suffer?" asked the young man.

"What do you see over there?" asked the old man, pointing towards a majestic mountain.

"I see the trees, the mountain, the rocks hanging off the mountain. That is all there is to see," the young man replied.

"All there is?" asked the old man smiling. He

continued, sitting up on the edge of his chair, "Beyond that mountain lies the ocean, seagulls and ships on that ocean. We see mountains and see them as obstacles and truly believe that we have the complete picture. But God sees all the way into eternity."

Today's questions are held in tomorrow's secret mysteries. No one ever fully understands what God has on His mind. So, it is futile to attempt to predetermine what God must do and how He must do it. It is also useless to try and psyche ourselves up. It is futile to make bargains with God. He always provides what is best to meet our needs. God can handle any crisis that comes to us.

My grace is sufficient for you: 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. 2 Cor. 12:9

I want to speak directly to those of you who have suffered abuse, financial loss, divorce, and those who are enduring a chronic illness like I am. You are not alone. Jesus Christ promised never to leave us alone, never to abandon us, and never to desert us. He is our only hope. Without Him we can do nothing. I encourage you to place your faith in Him today.

I wish that I could wrap my arms around you and hug you as you sob, cry and weep. I wish I could sit there and listen to your story of pain, suffering and heartache. Well, I can't do this for everybody. But Jesus Christ can, and He wants to wrap His loving arms around you, hold you and console you as you pour out your despairing soul to Him. I am a living testimony of the amazing grace of God. My overall objective in writing my story of *Suffering with Grace: Finding God's Purpose in the Pain* is to help you draw closer to Jesus and to give God praise for His grace.

Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

2 Pet. 5:7

I have found this promise to be so true in my life. Jesus cares for us, and we can cast every care upon Him. Not only that, He carries us by His grace when we feel like we can't go on another mile. I want to share with you a story and song that was inspired by the power of Jesus Christ even in the midst of a great loss. In 2005, my brother, William, had to have his leg amputated from the knee down due to complications from the FSH MD disease and diabetes. My friend, Ron, went to see him in the hospital expecting to see a downcast, dejected and depressed person. Yet as they were talking, it was evident that William was thankful and praising the Lord. William joyfully said, "I am praising the Lord for He has given me a little more time to spend with my family." William lived three and a half more

years and counted each day as a gift from God. Ron was so encouraged by the faith of William he wrote this song about the mercy of Jesus.

Carry Me, Lord Jesus

*When a sparrow falls, Lord, you see
The little bird hit the ground.
And, Lord, you know that I am weak,
But you are so strong.
I am just a little child, scared and so alone.
I need your grace to face this trial.
I can't bear it on my own.
I'm crying out...*

*Carry me, Lord Jesus, beyond this place and time.
You said you would go with us until the end of time.
I like the story about that man,
One set of footprints in the sand.*

*Just like him I need you now...
To carry me.*

*Jesus, carry me, carry me...
Past this lonely road.
It is dark; I cannot see...
Which way to go.
This poor man is crying out for
you to make a way.
Save me from my troubles, Lord,
That threaten me today.*

*Carry me, Lord Jesus, beyond this place and time.
You said you would go with us until the end of time.
I like the story about that man,
One set of footprints in the sand.
And just like him I need you now...
To carry me.*

*Carry me past the pain of these bitter tears.
Carry me through the valley of this shadow of death.
My Lord, my God, I will bow down and worship You.
I will bow down and worship You!*

My prayer is that each one of you would learn the art of trusting Christ, of laying all your suffering at the feet of Jesus, and to be an over comer through the abundant grace of God flowing into your life and through your life to reach out to others who are suffering as well.

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If You Are Not Born Again

Life has the false illusion of permanence about it down here on this earth. In truth, we are all just passing through. Where are we going? For those who are born again, we are heading to heaven to be with Jesus Christ for eternity.

For the sinner, he is heading to a place of eternal fire, weeping, and torment: Hell. Yes, Hell is real. 100 years from now, we will all be in eternity in one of these two places. "How" we live here determines "Where" we live for eternity. There are no exit doors, no second chances and no more hope once a soul ends up in Hell.

Our days are numbered and we all have an appointment with Death (Heb. 9:27). I am not going to write a prayer here, but if you are sick and tired of sin, self and Satan, then simply ask God to forgive you of your sins; ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart; and tell someone about your choice to invite Jesus into your life to be your personal Savior. Pour out all your hurt, sadness, grief and sadness to God. He is standing there with arms open wide awaiting you. Cry on His big shoulders. He can handle it. Let Him wrap you in His everlasting arms of care. He really cares about you more than you will ever know.

Do you know the 10 Commandments? Have you broken at least one of them? Sure, we all have (Rom. 3:23). That makes us all sinners, deserving Hell. But Jesus came to take our place, take our

sins away by His death and resurrection; and if you believe this, then you are now born again (Rom. 10:9-10).

If you accepted Jesus as your Savior, buy an Amplified Version of the Holy Bible, find a Bible-preaching church to attend, talk with God everyday like a best friend and enjoy the journey with Jesus. Become a soul-winner and tell those within your circle all about the love, grace and mercy of Jesus that you have just experienced.

I am not going to promise you a bed of roses or a feather bed of ease on this journey with Jesus. It will get harder and harder the closer you get to heaven. But you will grow and receive more grace for each new battle, each new test, each new temptation and for each new suffering.

And at the end of your life, you will be able to say through your fears and tears, "I am what I am by the grace of God."

Part II

Grace For The Journey

Chapter 6

Principles to Live By

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Heb. 4:16

My big brother, William, died in April of 2009 at the age of 46 from diabetes and FSH MD. My mind wanders back to a simpler place and time, a happier time when William was strong and taught

me so many important lessons that would stay with me the rest of my life. William was a powerful preacher who stayed true to his calling in spite of great adversity. As I share these principles with you to help you with *Grace for the Journey*, I am thinking of William.

At the end of each section, there are three discussion questions. This study of *Grace for the Journey* can be used as part of a small group Bible study or by one person. It is my prayer and hope that you will find healing grace to help you in your time of need.

PRINCIPLE # 1: Have A Sense Of Humor And Keep Your Song.

Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is our strength.
Neh. 8:10b

We have to be able to laugh, and remember he who laughs last-- lasts and lasts and lasts. We can never allow Satan, circumstances, problems or suffering to rob us off our song. We have to come to the place where we don't take life or ourselves too seriously. We do this by relying on grace to

help us laugh in our midnight hour. Paul and Silas sang songs after being beaten and thrown into a dungeon. What we receive by prayer we must keep by praise.

Job learned to praise God while he was sitting in ashes and covered with sores. How? Job finally caught a glimpse of the unseen world, and his perspective changed. Job refused to give up on God; Satan's plans were thwarted; and the trial was then put to a stop by God. Job passed the test. Job said, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21), and "Though God slay me, still I will trust Him and praise Him" (Job 13:15). Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?

When our expectations are reduced to zero, we really appreciate everything that we still have left after the smoke clears and after the dust settles.

1. Do you think there is a difference between the joy of the Lord and the happiness of this world? What is the difference?
2. Discuss the statement of Job, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Is this a statement of faith or of unbelief?
3. Discuss the statement, "What we receive by prayer, we must keep by praise." Why is praising the Lord so important in the midst of suffering?

PRINCIPLE # 2: Use Devastations As Motivations.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

Heb. 12:28

We must change the way we view life's trials. We must allow God to help us take those things that should have devastated us to motivate us to grow

closer to Jesus, to help others who are in need, and to be more Christ-like. Use stumbling blocks as steppingstones for God's glory and for the good of others. Obstacles can either be oppositions that we let perpetually hinder us or opportunities for spiritual growth.

For example, when David faced that God-mocking giant, Goliath, all of Israel said, "He's so big we can't win."

But David said, "He's so big I can't miss."

If I have to lose, then let me stand alongside the road cheering on the winners as they go by. If we want to look at the stars, then we will find that darkness is required. God has a use for every conflict in your life. A ruined life is never a wasted life, for God can take up the pieces of a ruined life and make something beautiful, new and lovely: "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Ecc. 3:11a). In fact, God uses every bad thing that happens to us in creating His final work in our lives. When He is through working, there are no leftovers.

I could never learn to stand up if I never fell a little bit. Falls are essential in order to teach us how to stand, how to maintain our stance and how to help others to stand. We would never learn to care without going through "Hurt's" door.

1. How has the faith of little David vs. the giant Goliath encouraged you over the years?
2. What do you think David's faith was based on?

3. Share a story of God's faithfulness in your life.

PRINCIPLE # 3: Fellowship Plus Worship Equals
Relationship With God.

*Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking
wine in their oldest brother's house, and suddenly a
great wind came from across the wilderness and
struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on
the young people, and they are dead...*

Then Job arose, tore his clothes and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshipped.

Job 1:19-20

Fellowship with God plus Worship to God results in a Relationship with God. We must stay in love with Jesus because of Who He is and not simply just because of what He does or does not do. The fact is that often God will not do what we expected or desired, especially in regards to how He answers or refuses to answer our prayers. However, we cannot allow this to side-track our faith from Him, and neither can we permit this to distort our love for Him. We must develop a relationship with God distinct from our life-circumstances if we want to maintain faith in Christ when life falls apart.

You see, life often will crumble, but God never falls apart or shatters. Many Christians have a "Conditional faith," which says, I'll serve God if God heals my body, if God answers my prayers, if God makes me rich, if God gives me that automobile, if God gives me this or that. God is not a vending machine. He is God Almighty!

This sort of superficial, shallow faith will not endure the trials of life because it places childish stipulations on the Sovereign, Almighty God of the world. True faith does not attempt to manipulate God to do our will. It positions us to accomplish His

will.

1. What is the difference between a "conditional faith" and true Biblical faith?
2. Can you think of a time when you had an unanswered prayer but later discovered it was for the best?
3. Have you ever felt like your life was "falling apart"? Share a Bible verse that helped you through this difficult time.

PRINCIPLE # 4: Use Suffering As A Platform For Ministry.

And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from

Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done."
Luke 22:41, 42

Even Jesus recoiled from suffering, asking three times if there was no other way to redeem fallen man other than by dying the savage death of the Roman Cross. It is natural to avoid and run from suffering, but it is often beneficial to endure it for a greater purpose.

The story is told in 1 Samuel 21 about David running for his life away from envious King Saul. David came to a city filled with God's priests, Nob, and he had no weapon with which to defend himself. The only weapon they had (*on display*) was the sword of Goliath whom David had killed years earlier. So, David took that sword and fought with it. Remember this very sword was (*at one time*) meant to destroy David. Thus, we must allow God to take whatever was intended to destroy us and begin using it for our advantage, for the benefit of others and for God's glory. We must learn that when life hands us a sour lemon (*and it will*), make sweet lemonade. We need to learn how to allow God's grace to take that very thing that was meant for our ruin and use it as a weapon to honor God and help our fellowman. By God's grace, that is what I have endeavored to do with my FSH MD over the past 24 years . God wants to use my suffering to bless, encourage and inspire others to let them know that they can get through their suffering too, by God's grace.

The will (*Permissive Will or Perfect Will*) of God will never take us where the grace of God cannot keep us. There are no "rest-stops" on the King's Highway to Heaven. Quitters never win and winners never quit. Only a life lived for others is a life worth living. We rise by raising others up. God can and does redeem any hardship that comes into our lives if we simply give that hardship to Him.

Part of my ministry is that of Burden-Bearing, helping those who suffer. Do you want to know where God is today? Find someone hurting, and you will find the location of God. He wants to make us an answer to someone's prayer.

1. How has the example of the suffering of Jesus helped you with your sorrow and pain? What can we learn from his response to suffering?
2. Do you think Jesus understands what you are going through?
3. Von's bitter "lemon of life" has been his FSH MD. Do you have a loss that has plagued you through the years? How can you turn the lemon into lemonade?

PRINCIPLE # 5: Suffering Is A Prelude And Prerequisite To Reigning.

If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.

Romans 8 says that if Christians suffer with Christ, then we will reign with Christ. It doesn't take faith to serve God when you're healthy, wealthy and have no problems in your life. True faith says, "By God's grace, I will trust and suffer even if I am not healed, even if my prayers never get answered. I will serve God when there is no logical reason to do so, only because I love Jesus." Outwardly we are all decaying, but the important thing is the condition of our inner man. Is it being renewed each day to become either more Christ-like, or more flesh-like, or more world-like, or more devil-like? The key is to fix our eyes on what is unseen (*Jesus*), not on what is seen (*the world, the flesh*).

There is a contagious false gospel that has permeated the American churches which teaches that God heals everybody every time. This produces "spoiled saints" who have an extremely shallow and superficial relationship with God; and they end up serving God for wrong, selfish motives: to get something, to get healed, to get rich, to get a spouse, to get a new car, to get a new house and so forth. It actually is a giant "denial" scheme. Instead of facing painful realities and believing God to help us, people are told, "You don't have an illness, only the symptoms of an illness." It is not faith to deny the painful realities of life; it is true faith to acknowledge they are there, but God is able to

deliver! We don't need fancy schemes; we need the power of God. However, even if He doesn't deliver us, we are called to walk by faith and to suffer with grace.

Without suffering we would become insulated then isolated, and then insipid. We must learn to count it a joy to suffer for God. Now, if you are suffering due to wrong choices, then I am not talking about that type of suffering. There are two kinds of suffering (*innocent suffering and self-inflicted* suffering), and God is able to meet us at either place; but my book is dealing with the innocent who suffer, who did nothing to bring it on themselves.

Multitudes have become embittered by the sufferings that brought others into a mature faith in Christ. The choice is ours. There are some God-ordained things we find at the end of our rope that we will find no where else. It is common for those suffering to feel frustration with God, particularly when things happen that seem illogical and inconsistent with our view of God, or with what we have been taught about God; and if God doesn't quickly rescue us, then this leads to us feeling deserted by God and ends in disillusionment with God. Rest assured, however, that God will never allow anything to enter our lives that will destroy our need for faith. Satan will use our pain to make us feel victimized. I have not been "singled out" for sorrow. The truth is, while we are alive on earth we

may never see the purpose for our suffering.

Suffering is universal and comes to us all. Everyone is asked (*by God*) to endure some thing(s) that bring discomfort, pain or sorrow. What do we do with it? We must accept it, claim it, carry it, and use it for the glory of God and the benefit of others. God says, "I will give you the grace to endure it." Those who live long enough will inevitably be confronted by a crisis that they won't understand. We will not always comprehend what God is doing or why He is allowing it.

Suffering and pain do not cause the damage as much as confusion does. The "Why" questions mount. We all suffer to some degree. During such hard times, God says, "Trust Me." Period. We must learn to be content in any circumstance. Acquire the mind of Christ.

God's timing is perfect even when He appears to be too late. Others have endured more suffering than we have and have maintained strong faith in Christ. Life is difficult. Life is not fair. We have to stop counting on life to give us a fair deal. The Cross is the epitome of unfairness, injustice and betrayal. No one is exempt from injustice, not even God.

Jesus offered no way out of the unfairness, but He did offer a way through it. The Cross did overcome evil, but it did not overcome unfairness

and injustice. Remember, this present suffering cannot be compared to the eternal joys of heaven. All of this down here is only temporary. Don't let all of this bad stuff that you're going through get to you too bad because the good news is you are going *through*. You are not staying in this suffering-mode forever. Man's life is only a mist and full of trouble. But, one day, we are going to that Celestial City where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.

Hebrews 2 teaches us that we're *perfected* through suffering. Hebrews 12 says that we produce *righteousness* after we suffer. When we are weak, then God is strong through us. For the Christian, this earth is the only "Hell" we'll ever have to endure. Learn to be satisfied and content where God places you, no matter the condition or circumstances. We are often perplexed with the way we think the world ought to be, but that is not the way life really is. Hence, every sincere Christian will go through a crisis of faith. But we must be able to trust God where we can't track God.

I have a question for us. Scripture says that we must enter into heaven through much tribulation and suffering. How many of us remember suffering before we were born? And we know that, for the Christian, there will be no suffering after we die. So, where do we suffer? When do we suffer? Right here, right now. Jesus learned obedience to the

Father through suffering (*rejection, betrayal, heartbreak, physical pain, persecution, false accusations and mockery*).

Contrary to the popular people-appeasing preachers, Scripture is emphatically plain that God has ordained for His children to suffer in this life in various ways all for their good, for the benefit of others and for His glory.

1. The prophets often cried out, "Why do the wicked prosper?" Have you ever said something similar?
2. Why do you think bad things happen to good people?
3. Have you had a "crisis of faith" in your life?

PRINCIPLE # 6: Resolutely Decide To Serve Jesus Forever.

*Though the fig tree may not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vine;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls-
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord!*
Hab.3:17,18a

Daniel 3 tells of three Hebrew young men who refused to bow to and worship an idol. They made a declaration of faith that will help us to live for Christ, regardless of the difficult situations we may be faced to endure. They said, "Our God is able to deliver us out of this fire, but if He chooses not to, we will still never bow or bend our knees to your man-made idol."

Unfairness is a temporary condition. Suffering will eventually end, if not here, then once we die and go to heaven. Thus, learn to give thanks in all circumstances.

Yes, God did rescue them out of that fiery trial, and they discovered that they were not in the fire alone. God is always with us in our fires of suffering. God plus me equals a majority. He has promised never to leave, forsake or abandon us.

The point is that even if God never saves us out of our specific suffering, then we must have a made-up-mind to serve Him regardless. He is still God, and His grace is sufficient in such cases. For instance, I have battled FSH MD for twenty six years now (*April 2010*); but God is still on the throne, and He has a loving purpose for not healing me.

People who follow God only for the signs, wonders and miracles have a very shallow, superficial faith in Jesus. Once these fade out, a weak faith remains that is not committed and faithful. We expect God to follow some formula for doing things. And if He doesn't, then we ask, "Why?" Weak Christians become stronger Christians by firmly holding onto their faith in Jesus that says: *Things are not as they appear to be. I only see through a glass darkly, but one day it will all make sense to me. In the meantime, I know and trust that Jesus is working it all out for my good and for His honor.*

We grow by striving, enduring and stretching our faith. Hence, God permits times of faith-stretching to enter our lives so we can mature and grow up in the faith. There are too many saints still on the milk-bottle with a nipple in their mouth. It's time to grow up and start eating meat, becoming hardened soldiers in God's army. Man yearns for shortcuts, but shortcuts stunt spiritual growth.

Well, shouldn't faith become easier as we progress in the Lord? No. He (*Jesus*) Who served God perfectly said while dying, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" This perfect man was the least comforted during the hour of His greatest need. Likewise, Paul begged God to remove his "thorn in the flesh" three times, but God said no.

1. The three Hebrew children would not compromise their faith so they were thrown into the fire, but they were delivered! Share about a time when the Lord delivered you from an impossible situation.
2. Discuss this statement: "God has a loving purpose for *not* healing me."
3. Has there ever been a time when your stand for the Lord has led to more suffering in your life?

PRINCIPLE # 7: Appreciate And Embrace The Sovereignty Of God.

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Pet. 5:10-11

God is in control. No more really needs to be said. His sovereign hand is always moving and working in and through every event (*good and bad*) of our lives. Life is not a puzzle to be solved; rather, it is a mystery to be lived.

Consider Jesus Christ, Who was undeniably the greatest man Who ever lived, yet He suffered the worst punishments and died the worst type of shameful death. Is life fair? That is not the proper question. Is God good and faithful is a better question, and the answer is yes.

God weeps with us now so that we may one day laugh with Him. Strong faith is often exercised with strong trials and put under harsh conditions. Former trials will not protect us from future trials. God is sovereign, meaning, that God does what He

wants, when He wants, how He wants, and why He wants without owing us an explanation. Isaiah 55 says that God's thoughts are higher than man's thoughts, and that God's ways are higher than our ways. Romans 8:28 assures Christians that God is behind the scenes, working all things out for His glory and for our good. We must learn to yield to God's will even though it contradicts our expectations and desires.

There are simply times when things go awry for reasons that may never be understood. God typically does not rush in to explain what He is doing or allowing. He will always be the determiner of what is best for us; and this may lead us through seasons of suffering, and we have to trust Him regardless of the outcome.

We do not yet see everything from God's perspective. We have a limited insight into what is really going on in the invisible world around us. We must learn to accept this partial understanding. God felt what it was like to be human when He was born of Mary and wrapped Himself in human flesh for thirty-three years. What do we have a right to expect from God? How can a good, loving God allow suffering? Why do bad things happen to God's people? Why do good things seem to happen to the wicked? Yet, not a tiny feather from the tiny sparrow floats to the ground without the will and cognizance of our heavenly Father. Every hair on our heads is numbered. God has each one of His

people engraved on the palm of His right hand.

God will finally right the wrongs. Only heaven will solve all of our unanswered questions once and for all. What we feel now, we will not always feel. We cannot go forward if we are off balance. The hard blows of life can knock us off center, pulling us from one emotional extreme to another. We must start over by finding solid footing. God is a God of balance, and we must walk that balance. When a pessimist suffers, his emotions become blinders. God wants us to find the balance between our pain and His peace.

1. Name one example of how God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts and His ways higher than our ways.
2. Jesus told us that our heavenly Father sees when a sparrow falls to the ground. Share how the Father gave you grace to help in time of great need.
3. "To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever." What should be our response to the Lord in light of this verse?

PRINCIPLE # 8: Win The Battle Of The Mind.

I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me?" "Why have you disquieted me?" Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God. Ps. 42:9a, 11

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are pure, whatever things are just, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. Phil. 4:8

"Why me?" is perhaps the most asked question by people when they are in the midst of a misery. Pain, grief and suffering breaks the "dam" inside our soul which causes torrents of questions to burst forth into our mind, as we internalize the heartache. The battleground for our soul occurs in our mind. We must daily feed our mind, spirit and soul with the Word of God. What we feed grows. Think on godly, noble, pure, holy and righteous things.

We have to learn to keep our focus on Christ while enduring suffering. We must guard our

thought-life when undergoing trauma or trouble. How? By remembering that God's eyes are on the "thermometer," and His hand is on the "thermostat." He will never allow the fiery trial to become so hot that it destroys us.

Our emotions tend to twist the facts of our painful experience, consequently distorting the truth. Suffering makes it hard for us to make sense of the situation. You see, God works when there are no visible signs of His presence. We must expect the unexpected in this fallen world. We cannot be emotionally unstable and spiritually stable simultaneously.

A holy war between a saint and Satan is to be preferred above the false "peace" of dwelling in Satan's ivory palaces. It is better to battle against sin than to tamely submit to it. The battleground of spiritual freedom must be gained by inches: a slow process. A person can only learn to obey when he is tempted to disobey. A person can only learn victory over sin when he is tempted to sin and refuses to sin. A person can only learn courage when he is faced with fear and is tempted to run, but stands his ground. Nothing can flaw our personality unless we allow it to do so. The problem is not in what happens to us but in how we take it. We must allow God to turn our difficulties into diamonds.

For example, the person hooked on alcohol

must awake from the fantasy world of intoxication (*where everything is temporarily numbed*) and return to face the reality of what he is running from. All addictions are ways to avoid reality and to tranquilize oneself from the pain associated with dealing with reality. Here is the critical point where we must be on guard against self-deceptions and self-disguises (*masks*) trying to control our lives. Sometimes "religious charades" result when we clothe our fears in the pseudo-dress of faith. Why? Because it is easier for us to hide our fears than to expose them, deal with them, repent and forsake them.

When we are suffering and afraid, we want instant results. Anxiety causes us to do self-centered things to protect ourselves. Don't doubt in the darkness what God has shown us in the light. God is never defeated, and neither should we be. The royal blood of heaven flows through our veins, We are serving the Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent God of eternity. He is on our side.

1. In what sense is the mind a battleground?
2. What can we do to win the battle of the mind?
3. Are our emotions always a reliable guide?

PRINCIPLE # 9: God Allows Problems To Come In Order To Promote Us.

But as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order...to save many people...
the words of Joseph, Gen. 50:20

Genesis 50 tells a story of Joseph being sold by jealous brothers into slavery, then falsely accused of sexual misconduct and thrown into a dark prison. But the tables turned, as Joseph's faith in God never failed, and he was "divinely promoted," becoming second in command of Egypt. The Bible says, "God made him fruitful in his affliction." Joseph's suffering set the stage for his ultimate success. We must have faith that God can bring His fruit out of our pain, fear, frustration, sorrow, loss and suffering. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens to a child of God by accident, chance or coincidence. Nothing happens to us unless God permits it, and if He permits it, then He has a loving purpose in mind for us as He knows

that it will ultimately bring Him glory. It is better to suffer injustice than to do injustice against others.

The end of Joseph's story says that "God sent him to prison to save many people." Satan did not do this. *God did*. Satan cannot do a single thing to a Christian without God's stamp of approval. But be assured, if God approves some type of suffering to enter our life, then it is for our good, for Satan's defeat and for the glory of God.

The bravest sight in the world is a man fighting against the odds. Every storm has a divine purpose. Today's impossible situation becomes the pivot point used to accomplish tomorrow's divine objective.

When the New Testament writers speak of suffering, they express none of the questions, indignations or anger that characterized Job, the prophets and many of the psalmists. Why? They offer no explanation for unjust suffering, but they point to two events: the death and resurrection of Christ. The point being, God transformed the greatest tragedy in all of history (*the crucifixion of Jesus*) into the greatest blessing of all history. Hence, a pattern developed: tragedy, darkness and triumph throughout the New Testament writings. Weeping may last for the night, but joy will inevitably arrive in the divine-ordained morning. Thus, we can learn to rejoice in our sufferings, as Paul admonishes us. Why? Because the good it

produces in us is --maturity, wisdom, character, genuine faith, and perseverance--. I'm a winner either way because

If God is for me, who can be against me. Rom. 8:31b

I am more than a conqueror through Him who loves me. Rom. 8:37

Greater is He (Jesus) who is in me than he (Satan) who is in this world. 1 John 4:4b

If you are not shouting GLORY by now, you must be "sleep reading" this book. Only the hottest heat and the greatest pressure have sufficient force to transform a black lump of coal into a million-dollar sparkling diamond. Likewise, the most painful trials shape the most mature lives.

1. Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers and ended up in prison falsely accused for years. What can we learn from Joseph's faith?
2. Share about a time when you were treated unfairly.
3. How does it make you feel to know, "If God is for me, who can be against me?" What does this mean in light of unjust suffering?

PRINCIPLE # 10: Cope With Hope.

For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Rom. 8:24-25

We must learn how to cope with hope: the hope of physical healing when I enter into that glorious city of God, Heaven; the hope of God's grace being sufficient for me as I am called to endure suffering. Without sorrow there would be no reason for joy. Without failure there would be no reason for deliverance. We must always keep in mind that this earth (*and our allotted time in it*) is just a brief transition, a bump in the road on our way to Heaven, if we are born again. I would rather suffer with God on my side than to suffer alone

without God. What hope does an atheist have?

My hope rests in Christ and the finished work of the Cross. As the old song says, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." Most emotional pain is caused by holding on to past hopes, or holding back from the future because of false hopes (*vain hopes, misguided hopes, perverse hopes, shallow hopes, selfish hopes, exaggerated hopes, deficient hopes, self-defeating hopes*). The disappointment of hopes is the parent of despair. Hope is the first and last breath of life. No one can live without it. We move in the direction of our hopes, and there lurks a danger because many of our hopes are not founded on a godly hope.

Overindulgence in childhood can inflate the hopes of being in control of others in adulthood. These adults will manipulate people to achieve what they want. Emotional neglect in childhood evokes fears of ever being loved, accepted, validated and approved which causes a sense of hopelessness and mistrust in relationships in adulthood. Hope is a gift given by mothers to their babies. The lack of parental love is the core of all neurosis in adulthood.

"Patterns" of survival emerge which are self-destructive, and only the Lord Jesus Christ can set such a person free from these "cycles of sin" that

individuals fall into during a crisis. These folks blame everyone else for their problems instead of taking personal responsibility. As their false hopes die within a marriage, fear springs up, and they run from the "flawed" marriage and quickly enter into a new relationship. This new relationship can be another person (*sexually*), vocation, chemical (*alcohol, drugs*), or even spiritual (*a Christian forsakes Christianity and starts following Pantheism or some other cult*). For some, this self-defeating cycle lasts a lifetime.

Optimism, wishful thinking and living in a fantasy world (*where everything is great*) is not hope. Hope admits the reality of the current suffering, yet sees reason for confidence knowing that God is working it all out for our good and His glory. Suffering only seems to clarify hope. Hope is a verb; it is the action that responds to fear with assurance. Hope sets its anchor in the rock bottom of what God has done in all history of humanity. Every prayer is an expression of hope.

False hopes curse a new marriage: the unrealistic hope of finding the perfect spouse or of achieving the perfect relationship without any problems. Adopting "Hollywood's Romantic Idealism" without Christianity's "Loving Realism" is sure to spell dissatisfaction in a marriage relationship. When the individual with this mentality discovers that his or her partner has flaws, then he or she seeks out a new partner who promises to be

a perfect match; but once again flaws surface, and this cycle often continues for the entirety of the person's life. Such a person cannot face reality and lives in a fantasy world of make believe. These childish expectations are a result of unmet emotional needs from one's childhood. He or she will say things like, "I am not *IN LOVE* with you anymore," as a way to run from an "imperfect" relationship just to find that no relationship is perfect, and then he or she is truly regretful for being so immature. Many realize (*after it's too late*) that the best spouse was the one abandoned due to unresolved conflict. False hopes carry a high price.

Hope means to keep living amid desperation and to keep singing in the darkness. Our hopes must find their limitations before they can achieve their true strength. Hope is the key ingredient that establishes self-esteem in a person. Strengthening hope reduces depression, fears and anxiety. Hope takes ownership of all the negative feelings, sees them from God's perspective and gives all the suffering to Jesus. Only when I own the pain can I become responsible for it. Feelings do not exist apart from perceptions.

Early learned and thoroughly practiced, negative self-statements are self-reinforcing thought patterns that create a downward spiral of self-defeating messages. Thus, we cannot put ourselves down without stealing hope. The loss of hope is the loss of options. When I'm depressed, the

world seems to get smaller, and all I can think about is my fears and suffering. But hope opens the door to tomorrow. *Hope smothers despair strangles despondency and silences discouragement.*

Tragedy is not the final word; injustice is not the end; suffering is a prologue, not the concluding word.

1. What is the difference between a false hope and true hope? Give one example of each.
2. How has the "Hollywood idea of romance" hindered and destroyed marriages in America?
3. How does the statement "suffering is a prologue, not the concluding word" bring hope to your heart?

PRINCIPLE # 11: Brokenness Is The Doorway To Wholeness.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise. Ps. 51:17

We cannot fear brokenness. We must view it as a timely *friend* sent by God to humble us, to break our pride and to draw us into a deeper relationship with Jesus. We cannot run away from it when it arrives at our contrite heart's door. We cannot fight it, deny it or rationalize it away. It holds the key to our mental, emotional and spiritual healing. God is never closer to us than when our

hearts are broken and contrite before Him. The broken become the masters of mending and reconciliation.

We have this treasure (*the Holy Spirit*) in earthen vessels (*human bodies, temples of the Holy God*). We often meet God where we little thought of ever meeting Him, especially at the places of brokenness. God can only use cracked pots. His light can only shine through the cracks in our life, those places where we have been broken.

Brokenness is the key to being effectively used by God. The greatest test of courage is to endure defeat without losing heart.

1. When you hear the word "brokenness," what are some other words that come to mind?
2. Think of one of your favorite Bible characters. How did his broken-ness lead to a great work of God?
3. Why is a broken heart more dear to God than great sacrifices?

PRINCIPLE # 12: Truth Is, Both, Devastating And Liberating.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting.

Ps. 139:23-24

Jesus said, "Know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). The sincere truth often wounds before it heals; it cuts before it soothes; it reveals the horror of reality before providing solutions to endure and overcome that horror.

Self-examination is the primary enemy to self-deception, selfishness, and self-righteousness. Self-denial is a key to maintaining true victory in the Christian life. Self-destruction is the consequence of no self-examination. We must love our enemies, for they tell us our faults.

No chains can detain those whom God has set free. Salvation is placing our hand of faith in God's hand of grace. We will notice that God always comes to us in attempt to reach us in ways that leave us the choice to turn Him down.

If we attempt to make a promise of God into our idol, then we nullify that promise. In essence, we must view God's promises based upon the will of God, without any strings attached. If God answers "Yes," that's fine; but if God chooses to answer "No," that's fine too.

Furthermore, some Christians have the false idea that they are exempted from suffering because they are born again.

1. Do you think the truth can "wound many times before it heals"? Give an example.
2. What is a promise of God in your life that has been delayed?
3. What is the difference between letting God "search our heart" and doing it ourselves?

PRINCIPLE # 13: Prayer Is More Powerful Than Performance.

Pray without ceasing. I Thess. 5:17

Conflict, strife, suffering and problems come to all of us to some degree. Bible reading and study is the foundation of a strong Christian, while prayer is the pillars sitting upon that foundation. Prayer may not always change circumstances, but true

prayer always changes us, giving us God's viewpoint on the situation. Our outlook determines our outcome.

He that is content has enough. Let us not grow weary in praying because God never grows weary in hearing. God has a merciful ear opened to all our complaints and a gracious hand opened to meet all our needs.

We can share anything with God: our anger, resentments, questions, grief, betrayal, abandonment, pains, bitterness and even our rage against Him. He already knows what we're thinking anyway.

Prayer helps us to see the "big picture," and this takes the edge off of the sharp knife of suffering. We begin to see that we are never abandoned or deserted by God, for He promises to never leave us alone.

1. How can a Christian practically obey the commandment "pray without ceasing"?
2. Do you think prayer is more powerful than performance? Explain your answer.
3. In what sense does prayer help us to see the big picture of our life?

PRINCIPLE # 14: Betrayal Is Beneficial.

But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" Luke 22:48

Knowing the reason behind a disaster, heartache or a trauma does not lessen the sense of pain and betrayal. God is the ultimate "Wounded Lover" as His people (*both Israel of old and*

Christians today) have consistently committed adultery with idols of the world, the flesh and the devil. God went through that vicious cycle of betrayal (*anger, denial, grief, jealousy, loss, pain, heartbreak, forgiveness, and love*) throughout the Old Testament, and He still goes through it with the modern day church. God would beg His adulterous wife (*Israel*) to come back to Him, but they stubbornly refused and rebelled, lying on the altars of hellish devils, throwing their souls away in order to please the flesh and appease Satan. God is the betrayed One. Guess what? He is still calling us back to Him today through that lovely and bloody act of love that occurred on Mt. Calvary 2,000 years ago. What must it feel like to be God? Jesus, our great example, suffered --so why must I expect not to suffer?

We all need a Judas to betray us, to send us to our own "cross," where our offenses, pains, unforgiveness, and bitterness (*the works of the flesh in our lives*) are crucified. If Judas had not betrayed the sinless Son of God, then Jesus would have not gone to the Cross. In fact, the way to the Cross is through a Judas, a betrayer in our life. Be thankful for this betrayal, however, for this is the catalyst of your personal crucifixion of the flesh in your life.

God never asks us to "give up" something unless He has plans for us to "go up." Every God-ordained bout of suffering is the doorway of

promotion and honor. Petty disappointments tend to accumulate over time, undermining our faith with a river of doubt, which tempts us to pray less often. Disappointment leads to doubt which leads to our feeling like God has betrayed us, let us down. Why does this happen? Because we expect God to do something or to act in a certain way, and He does not do it the way "We" wanted, and we feel betrayed by God. We try to reconcile our current misery with the promises of rewards and blessings of God, and questions flood our brain. We feel like we've been dealt an "unfair hand" in life, like God is silent and hidden.

Then one day this truth hit me: maybe our common impressions of God are very different from the actual God of the Bible. The very foundation of God's character is that God Is Love. He loves humanity, and He wants man to love Him in return. People who have issues with God focus on the human point of view rather than on God's point of view.

Hence, all feelings of betrayal and disappointment with God trace back to a breakdown in our relationship with God. I came to one conclusion. Every disappointment with God is an aftershock from the initial act of rebellion and sin in our lives.

1. Have you ever had a "Judas" (betrayal) in your life? Without naming names, briefly share the

experience.

2. How long did it take you to forgive the person?

3. Have you ever blamed God for not coming through for you in a time of loss? How can we believe the Lord in such a time?

PRINCIPLE # 15: We Cannot Correct What We Refuse To Confront.

For He (Jesus) said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!"

Mark 5:8

What we tolerate is what we will never change. We will only change what we come to hate within ourselves. Anything can be faced and overcome with the help of the Lord. All authority has been given to Jesus. Since He is not afraid of any crisis, neither do we need to be. Don't try to manipulate the future, simply turn it over into the sovereign hands of God.

1. Give an example of how ignoring an evil will lead to a greater evil later.
2. What should be our attitude when confronting evil?
3. How can we let go of the past and turn over the future to God?

PRINCIPLE # 16: In A Marriage, Satan Attacks When The Wife Is Distracted And The Man Is Discouraged.

Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.

Mark 10:9

Marriage is a lesson in self-control. Happy marriages are those rooted in the fear of God. Marriages do not fall apart; people do. All marriage serves to do is to highlight our personal internal, unresolved flaws and conflicts. The goal should never be just to restore peace, but to seek ways of resolving the differences. Anything else is superficial and avoids true intimacy. Defensiveness invites defensiveness. Mistrust gives birth to mistrust. Godly confrontation is an invitation for the couple to draw closer together. Indeed the scripture says,

Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath.
Eph. 4:26

It is clear that God gives us permission to "be angry," but not to sin when angry. Also, He gives us some of the best advice for marriage couples ever found: "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath (anger)." Daily forgiveness is called for in a loving relationship. Anger that goes to bed with us does not disappear, but only hides beneath the surface. It builds up and erupts like a volcano when one least expects it. Destructive words, hurtful actions and bitterness are sure to play out in the marriage if daily forgiveness and reconciliation are not practiced. Bitterness is a silent enemy that torments the soul for years and leaves only a path of destruction in its wake.

Enduring love is hopeful. Faithful love is realizing that any marriage problem can be worked out. Trusting love is essential knowing that your spouse is trustworthy and believable. Hopeful love can outlast any storm that hits a marriage. Faithful love is eternal with no thoughts of adultery or divorce ever being entertained.

A godly marriage must be based upon the reality that the marriage will experience problems because neither person is or ever can be perfect. To expect a perfect marriage is to set ourselves up for a downfall. All successful marriages must have the four "C's" as their foundation: Christ, Compatibility, Communication and Commitment. In the holy covenant of marriage, hope makes the covenant possible; love gives it the content of equal regard; and faith provides the enduring constancy and fidelity.

What is true intimacy? The capacity to touch and be touched, to hear and share feelings, and to freely give all of ourselves to our partner. Yet many cannot do this because of unresolved issues from the past.

1. Discuss how the four "C's": Christ, Compatibility, Communication and Commitment help a couple to have a successful marriage.
2. Why do you think divorce has increased so much since the 1960s in America?
3. Why is it important to practice daily forgiveness

and reconciliation if one wants to have a happy marriage?

PRINCIPLE # 17: It Is Wisdom To Make Friendships With Those Who Are The Friends of Jesus.

*The Lord grant mercy to the household of
Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me; and was not
ashamed of my chain;* 2 Tim. 1:16

True freedom and friendship is to share all the chains our brothers and sisters wear. The only way to have a friend is to be one. Be slow in choosing a friend, and be even slower in changing friends. It is God who raises us up friends when we need them.

1. Do you have a close Christian friend? Why is this person so important to you?
2. What are some things you can do to encourage a friend that is having a hard time?
3. Jesus calls us His friends. Maybe He didn't put us in His Facebook page, but He did put our names in the book of life! Share what it means to you to have Jesus as your friend.

PRINCIPLE # 18: Learn From Our Mistakes.

For you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly. John 4:18

Those are careless who stumble twice on the same stone, hence we must learn from our past mistakes. It is perverse to keep on pursuing pain. Those who do not learn from their past mistakes are doomed to repeat them. The freedom to fail is the freedom to grow.

We all have patterns that we do throughout our lives, some good and some evil. We must identify our negative patterns, ask God to forgive us and to set us free from this "cycle of sin" that we repeatedly fall back into when a crisis hits. For example, a man marries a woman, discovers that she is not *perfect*, begins drinking whiskey, drops out of church, meets someone else that seems to be a better match, abandons his wife, and starts a new relationship with the new woman. This is the fourth time this scene has been played out in his life; hence, it has become his pattern of sin, and a very serious one at that.

...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Heb. 12:1b-2a

There are many other examples of the cycle

of sin that can be given. Overeating (Gluttony), Sexual immorality, Gossip, Greed, Anger, Hatred, Jealousy, Drunkenness, Drug Abuse, Child and Spouse Abuse and on and on the list goes (see Galatians 5:19–21). Jesus didn't come to save us in our sin but to save us from our sin. He said, "Whoever commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34b). Sin has terrible consequences for the individual, the family and ultimately, the country.

Only the power of the blood of Jesus can set people free once they come to the place where they loathe and hate the besetting-sins in their lives, and this only after they come to repentance and faith in Jesus.

Remember the woman that Jesus met at Jacob's well. WELL, she was bound by a pattern of sin and had been with at least six different men in unholy matrimony, yet was totally unsatisfied. Why was she so unhappy? Jesus put his finger on her problem. She was trying to fill an eternal thirst for the living God with the pleasures of sin for a season, in this case, a man. However, when Jesus offered her the living water of life, *and she accepted His offer*, praise the Lord, she was free at last! She ran into town to tell everyone of the good news of Jesus, a man who offered even poor, thirsty sinners like she was, living water from a well that would never run dry.

1. What is the "cycle of sin"?

2. How can we be free from these negative, destructive patterns of sin?
3. What was the greatest need of the woman at the well?

PRINCIPLE # 19: The Pleasures Of Sin Last For A Season, But The Punishment For Sin Lasts For Eternity.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he also will reap. Gal. 5:7

It is easier to stay out of sin than to get out of sin. Thoughts give birth to actions. Repeated actions produce habits. Habits produce strongholds. *Most people want to be rescued from the troubles and problems caused by sin, but they don't want to be saved from their sins because they enjoy them too much.* Nothing is to be called a "mistake" that we do willfully. We cannot do wrong without suffering wrong. We will inevitably reap what we sow.

Being the chosen people of God has a cost. Once we've been touched by the Holy Ghost, we are never the same. We can never sin and get by with it again. We can never outrun God. We can never ignore God. Just as God found it nearly impossible to live among the Israelites (*the backslidden people of God*), likewise the Israelites found it nearly impossible to live with a holy God. Like the Israelites of the Old Testament, God has given us a free will, and He will not and cannot violate it. We have a choice to make. We need to make the same choice as Joshua who said,

"...Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).

The Bible says, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Jesus told the true story of the rich man and the poor man, Lazarus (see Luke 16:19-31). Both of them died, and the rich man being in torments in hades (hell) said, "I am tormented in this flame." Lazarus went to Paradise. The rich man asked father Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers who were still living and warn them about hell lest they come to this place of torment. Abraham answered him, "...If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). It wasn't because the man was rich that he went to hell, but because he was wicked and rejected the word of God.

In sharing my thoughts about how the grace of God helps us in our suffering in this life, I must also emphasize that same grace is the only way to escape eternal suffering. Indeed, the scripture says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a Salvation?" (Heb. 2:3a) Why do sinners suffer in hell forever? Or we could ask the same question in another way as it is often asked by the skeptics, "How can a loving God send people to hell?" People don't go to hell because God is loving; they go to hell because they *reject* His love and choose

to serve sin and Satan. Jesus said to those on His left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41b). God is holy, and He is the source of light, love, goodness, peace and the only hope for the resurrection from the dead. Hell is the only logical end for those who choose to follow the devil and reject Jesus Christ. Why is this so?

1) God is the source of Life so everyone who rejects Him will suffer at the hands of the enemy of life – DEATH! Not just physical death, but an eternal state of death. This is why hell is called the second death (Rev. 20:14). (This means to exist eternally and being alive but in a death like state—kind of like those scary zombies you might have seen in a movie, except much worse). People cannot sustain life on their own; only God can, so if He is rejected, eternal death (hell) is the only other option. People who don't know the Lord are already "dead in their trespasses" spiritually (Eph. 2:5a). The wicked are the *walking dead* in this life, but in the next life they will be the *living dead*. Now you see why John the Baptist was so bold in warning sinners to flee from the wrath of God to come. Jesus also gives this strong warning:

But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. Rev. 21:8

2) God is the source of Light so everyone who rejects Him will be cast into "outer darkness" (Matt. 25:30).

3) God is the author of Love. As a matter of fact "God is Love" (1 John 4:8b). Everyone who rejects Him will be in an eternal prison of hate, regret and grief where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13).

4) God is the source of Goodness, so everyone who chooses Satan will live in perpetual pain, suffering in torment and "everlasting punishment" (Matt. 25:46).

5) God is the source of Peace, but in hell "There shall be no peace to the wicked" (Isa. 57:21).

6) God is the only hope for the Resurrection from the dead, for it was He who raised up Jesus Christ after three days in the grave. In answering those who did not believe in the resurrection, Jesus said, "He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken" (Mark 12:26). After Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, He said, "I am the resurrection and the life; He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25).

7) The wicked must suffer forever because God is Holy, and "without holiness, no man shall see God"

(Heb. 12:14b). Since God is holy, and His standard is perfection, He cannot allow any sin into His presence. "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). If a person's sin is not forgiven through the grace of Jesus Christ, the books will be opened and "the dead will be judged according to their works, by the things written in the books. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:12b, 15).

In this life, people enjoy the gifts of God to some degree whether they know Him or not: "...for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). A young man and woman fall in love with each other. A mom holds a newborn baby in her arms. A son tosses baseball with his dad. We are blessed with love, family, friendships, food, fun, water, plants, jobs, games, strength, children and so many other gifts. While these gifts and the goodness of God are for the purpose of bringing us to repentance, many mock His gifts and go their own way. But after this life, "It is appointed unto men once to die and then the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). At this time only the righteous will enjoy the gifts of God in His eternal kingdom, for they have chosen Him.

In conclusion, Satan is the ultimate source and first cause of all the suffering in this world so when a person sides with him, the only logical end is

everlasting suffering. Satan makes a lot of promises, but this is the end of those who choose him over God: "The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God" (Ps. 9:17). Many people are asking the question, "Who am I?" Perhaps a better question would be, "What must I do to be saved?"

1. Moses chose to suffer with Christ rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. What advice do you think Moses would give you today if you talked to him?
2. Name and discuss three reasons why hell is the only logical consequence for sinners.
3. Answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" and discuss why there are so many lost sinners who are confused about the answer.

PRINCIPLE # 20: Whatever Can Cause Me To Lose
My Faith In Jesus Has Become My Idol.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. 1 John 5:20-21

Whatever or whoever can cause me, persuade me or influence me to turn my back on following Jesus has become my *idol*. Although we may be brought to our wit's end, let us never be brought to our faith's end. There are two tragedies in this world: getting what we want, and not getting what we want. It seems that the more we have of this world, the less we want of God. If we don't keep watch, invisible idols will fill our hearts.

1. Today in America most people don't bow down and worship idols, but can you think of an idol that people put before the Lord?
2. According to 1 John 5:20-21, what can we know

for sure?

3. How can a person keep watch or guard his heart from idol worship?

PRINCIPLE # 21: Understand The Silence of God.

Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Heb. 13:12-14

Many mysteries surround God. Where is God when I hurt so bad? He is in me feeling what I feel, trying to help me endure if I simply ask Him to take the pain. *Can we still believe in Jesus even when He appears to be our enemy?* His silence seems like a lack of concern. Job sets the pattern for anyone who ever faces suffering, doubts and loss. At the moment when faith in God is hardest to keep and the least likely to be maintained is when we need faith most.

The Book of Job does not answer the "Why" questions, rather, the Holy Spirit deals with the "To What End" question. The answer is finally revealed:

to sanctify Job and to demonstrate the sovereignty of God.

1. *Sanctify*: To sanctify something is to declare it belongs to God, to set apart for the purpose of God. The word Saint comes from the word and means to "belong to Christ."
2. *Sovereignty of God*: His absolute right to do all things according to His own good pleasure (Dan. 4:25, 1 Tim. 6:15, Rev.4:11).

Suffering has a peculiar way of sanctifying us (*separating us from the world, the flesh and the devil*) more than any other thing, and so God lovingly permits times of suffering to enter our lives in order to conform us more into the image of Jesus (Rom. 8:29).

When Job questioned the sufferings in his life, I believe what made it even more difficult was the silence of God and the accusations of his three close friends. But let me be clear, God was justified in His silence, but Job's friends were not justified in their false accusations. At first his friends chose a wise course and simply wept with him. However, after a week, his three friends began to accuse Job of everything under the sun, of unbelief, of secret sin, of despising the poor, etc. Sounds a lot like the *word of faith* teachers today, as well as the New Age proponents and the "pop psychology human potential" gospel teachers, who simply do not take the whole counsel of the word of God. They cherry

pick the Scriptures to prove their formula of faith, their brand of religion. However, while Job had his questions, in the end, he had to pray for these ancient *word of faith* teachers so they would not fall under judgment for making such accusations against a man who was simply suffering in the sovereign will of God. Yes, Satan was the cause of his suffering, but God in His perfect will allowed it. God is developing our character and integrity. He puts us on the potter's wheel, and that wheel is always painful. This children's song by Joel Hemphile reminds us that the God who created the world in six days is still working on us!

*He's still working on me to make me what I ought to be,
It took Him just a week to make the Moon and the stars,
The Sun and the Earth, and Jupiter and Mars,
How loving and patient He must be: He's still working on me.*

*There really ought to be a sign upon the heart,
Don't judge him yet, there's an unfinished part,
But I'll be perfect just according to His plan,
Fashioned by the Master's loving hands.
In the mirror of His word reflections that I see,
Makes me wonder why He never gave up on me,
He loves me as I am and helps me as I pray,
Remember, He's the Potter; I am the clay.*

During a test at school, our teachers were silent. Likewise, so is God when He gives us one of His "tests." I would rather walk with God in the dark

than go alone in the "light." Faith in Christ is what God values above anything else, and faith is the best way for humans to express our love for God. The difficult thing is to learn to believe in God when there is no reason left to believe in God during those dry, dark and lonely times of divine silence coupled with our waiting on God.

God still speaks through His ministers today if we are willing to listen. Many want to hear an audible voice from heaven when they won't even hear a word from a God-ordained prophet. Please understand, however, that a true man of God will bring a message of judgment, wrath and vengeance upon sin, coupled with a message of grace, hope and forgiveness for the broken in heart. But we must be willing to hear a harsh word from God sometimes especially if we are growing cold, callous and indifferent towards Jesus. During a time of suffering, we must not draw hasty conclusions.

Also, God often keeps silent for our benefit. He delays sending judgment on the wicked as an act of extended mercy, giving them time to turn from their sins. He refrains from answering all of our prayers with a yes in order to protect us from something we cannot and do not see. We will never see God, and we may never hear an audible voice from God this side of heaven; but He is always there with us, in us, and for us.

1. Have you ever felt like God was giving you the

silent treatment in a time of great trial? Explain.

2. What could Job's friends have done differently in their attempt to comfort him?

3. Read Heb. 13:12-14 again. Give one example of how we can go "outside the camp, bearing the reproach" of Jesus.

PRINCIPLE # 22: What God Blesses Us With We Must Honor Him With.

...And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two small copper coins... And He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "...I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury, for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty, put in all that she had, her whole livelihood." Mark 12:42-44

If God blesses us with a job, we are to honor Him with that job. If God blesses us with a new home, we are to honor Him with the new home. If God blesses a couple with children, they are to honor God with the children.

It is not the size of the gift that matters to

God, nor does it take a big offering to please God. This poor widow woman only had two small coins, but she gave it all to the Lord. Little things offered with a lot of love go a long way in the kingdom of God. The little boy gave his lunch, and it fed 5,000 men in the hands of Jesus. Where two or three are gathered in His name, Jesus said He would be sure to be there. The publican prayed a "little" prayer of just seven words, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner," and he was saved.

What can we do with one day? We can honor the Lord by giving the gift of that day back to Him for His eternal purpose and glory! How can we do this? One day at a time.

1. Name one thing you would like to change in your life to honor God.
2. "Little things offered with a lot of love go a long way in God's kingdom." Please share an example of how this is true.
3. How can living one day at a time help us to honor God?

PRINCIPLE # 23: Happiness Is Not The Goal In Life;
Developing Godly Character Is.

Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.

Col. 4:14

*For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this
present world.*

2 Tim. 4:10a

No change in circumstance can renew a faulty character. Character is who we are in the dark. It is what we do when no one is looking. Character is easier kept than recovered once it is lost. Much of the teaching today is centered around our own personal happiness, rather than the issue the Lord is most concerned about—righteousness, the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ

alone.

For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." Rom. 1:17

The "Pop Psychology or Human Potential Gospel" of today won't take us to heaven; neither will it deliver us from Satan's snare. What is the "Pop Psychology or Human Potential Gospel"? It is the teaching in many circles that twists the scriptures to only share what is popular with people--a positive message about one's own personal happiness, while ignoring the scriptures that focus on obedience, holiness, the judgment of God, repentance, the call to suffering and personal responsibility. A pastor of one of the largest churches in America was asked the following question by Larry King in a June 20, 2005, interview:

Larry King: *"What if you're Jewish or Muslim, you don't accept Christ at all?"*

The pastor said, *"You know, I'm very careful about saying who would and wouldn't go to heaven. I don't know ..."*

This is not what Jesus taught.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

The irony of it all is this false gospel won't even make a person truly happy, for it promotes worldliness; and this world is passing away, but he who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:17).

1. An emphasis on personal happiness and a de-emphasis on righteousness seems to be the trend even in much of the church world.

Why do you think this is happening?

2. Discuss the statement "Character is who we are in the dark."

3. How does one receive the righteousness of God described in Rom. 1:17? What is the difference between the righteousness of God and self-righteousness?

PRINCIPLE # 24: God Is Love.

*You number my wanderings; (and) put my tears into
Your bottle; Are they not written in Your book?*

Ps. 56:8

Be sure that a God of unspotted purity does us *no wrong*, and that a God of infinite goodness means us *no harm*. Jesus is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, sufferings, heartaches and problems. The ministry of Christ was spent healing the brokenhearted.

I cannot truthfully blame any tragedy on God. Rather, Satan is the author of all suffering and pain.

Yet God uses this for our good and for His glory. He collects all of our tears in His bottle. Each tear has a name, a reason, a purpose and a divine destiny. If we could fully understand how deeply we are loved by God, we would never feel lonely again.

Jesus is praying for us right now. What is He praying for? Among other things, I am convinced that He is praying that our faith not fail in the fire.

Having said that, understand that God has no rivals, no equals. Satan is the opposite of Michael (*the archangel*). Both are created beings while God is Creator of all. In fact, God uses Satan *and the demons* in order to accomplish His own purposes. Without Satan there would be no sin, and there would be no need for a Savior.

It is unnecessary for me to be told "Why" I'm innocently suffering just as long as I know that He loves me, and He never makes a mistake. We must enter heaven with the simple faith of a child. A child trusts his parents to be in control, to protect him and to meet all his needs.

Whatever He permits to come into my life must pass through His "love-filter," and He has a loving purpose for allowing my suffering. Therefore, we need to let God be God. He doesn't have to explain Himself to man. We are incredibly precious and loved by God. When our faith is under fire, we must rest in God's unconditional love of us.

1. Who is the author of all suffering and pain? Explain.
2. Since God is love, how can His loving kindness and the ever present suffering be reconciled?
3. What is it about having the faith and trust of a child that will help us in understanding God's loving purpose for suffering?

PRINCIPLE # 25: We Are In A Spiritual War.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Eph. 6:12

The enemy will often use a direct attack to engage the battle and an indirect attack to win. Satan only entices Christians with something that he knows will be very tempting for us to take. *All warfare is based upon deception.* If Satan can

deceive us prior to engaging us in a battle, then he is more likely to win. Satan will sometimes distract us on our *left side* in order to attack us on our *right side*. Satan likes to choose the place of the battle; hence, we must be very careful where we go. In this spiritual war, the key is for us to not fight at all, just surrender it to Jesus. For the battle is really the Lord's anyway. One key is in how we respond and react during our suffering.

Because we live in a depraved, sin-soaked, devil-led world, we cannot avoid the pitfalls of pain. *The truth is, suffering is too valuable and its work too important for any of us to miss its visit.* But we don't have to assume a victim mentality either. How? By inviting suffering, pain, grief, heartache and sorrow into our lives as friends instead of enemies. In so doing, we can live with peace, joy and a sense of purpose while enduring the unavoidable, the incurable, the irreversible, and the undeniable. To count all things loss for the sake of the cross is indeed true riches.

"Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken"

Henry F. Lyte

*Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee;
Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,
Thou from hence my all shall be:
Perish every fond ambition,
All I've sought, and hoped, and known;*

*Yet how rich is my condition~
God and heaven are still my own.*

*Go, then, earthly fame and treasure,
Come disaster, scorn and pain,
In Your service, pain is pleasure,
With Your favor, loss is gain,
I have called Thee, Abba Father,
I have stayed my heart on Thee,
Storms may howl, and clouds may gather,
All must work for good to me.*

1. According to Ephesians 6:12, who is our enemy when it comes to spiritual warfare?
2. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. Share how each weapon helps us to fight against these demonic powers.
3. Read the poem "Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken" by Henry Lyte. Discuss the commitment he is making to Christ and his cross. Is there a cross that you need to embrace in your life?

PRINCIPLE # 26: The Freedom Of Forgiveness.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matt. 6:14-15

God's people are all called to be merciful just as God is merciful, and to extend forgiveness to others as God has also forgiven us. Doing so sets us free from our past and prohibits Satan from

taking advantage of us. Forgiveness is not forgetting. The pain and hurts may not instantly go away, but as we forgive, this opens the door and allows the Holy Spirit latitude to begin the healing process in our hearts.

Forgiveness is a choice, a decision of the will. Since God requires us to forgive, then it is something we all can choose to do by God's grace. Some people hold onto their anger and hurts as a way of protecting themselves from future hurts. Others want revenge, but we must let the person off our hook and let God deal with him or her. Why? Because as long as we refuse to forgive that person, we are still hooked (*soul-tied, bound*) to that person. Hence, we must let go of all the bitterness, resentment and revenge towards that individual. Nobody can fix our past, but we can be free from it.

Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin. In fact, we are all living with the consequences of someone else's sin (*Adam and Eve*). The choice is whether we do so in bitterness or in the freedom of forgiveness. We must forgive from the heart, not a shallow, superficial forgiveness. Allow God to bring all that pain to the surface, confront it, feel it and admit to God how we feel. Healing will then have freedom to flow.

Forgiveness is choosing not to hold someone's

sin against him or her. This means we don't bring up how he or she has hurt us in the past. We must not wait until we feel like forgiving to forgive. It will never happen. Make the hard choice to forgive. This allows God the opportunity to begin the healing in your mind and soul.

Put your grief away when the "grief-work" is over. Refuse to spend the rest of your God-given life living in the past, growing bitter, and dwelling on the painful event. Some people turn grieving into a recreational activity where they never move on. They are in bondage to self-pity.

1. What did Jesus say would be the consequence if we refused to forgive others?
2. In what way does forgiveness bring about freedom in our lives?
3. Describe how you felt the first time you knew your sins were forgiven by God through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

PRINCIPLE # 27: I Am Not Perfect, Just Forgiven.

If by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Apostle Paul, Phil. 3:11-12

Grace is getting what we do not deserve,

cannot earn nor work for (eternal life). Mercy is not getting what we do deserve (eternal death in hell).

For years I thought that I had to be perfect or God hated me. That is a false notion and belief. It is true that Christians must STRIVE to live our best for God, and we are not to willfully sin on purpose.

It is spiritually deadly and dangerous to commit sins of presumption (*willful sins*). You know, if we truly love Jesus, then we will not want to sin because our sins, first of all, hurt God's heart. Since He has done so much for us (*on the Cross*), then we should not desire to hurt Him by willfully sinning against Him.

Having said that, we also realize that we are still human, still in this flesh, still in the world and still have demons who try to destroy us, meaning, that (*at times*) we will sin, but hopefully not on purpose. Then we ask God to forgive us and to help us not to sin against Him. What a beautiful promise of God's offer of forgiveness we have in the book of 1 John!

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Christians are the eyes, legs and arms of God on earth. The perfect God has decided to live in imperfect humans. Wow, what a humbling thought.

Now listen to me: even Christians can become victims of unanswered prayers, never-attained promises and can become really messed up if we are not careful. Many people (*sinner*s) are disappointed in God because they are disillusioned with imperfect Christians. But let me tell you, we cannot reject Jesus because of His flawed servants.

I am not perfect and neither are you. Billy Graham is not, and neither is your favorite preacher. So, we must get our eyes off of one another's faults and keep our focus on Christ. The faults we see in each other are revealed to us so we can pray for that person to overcome those flaws, not to crucify the person for being imperfect. God loves us too much to leave us the way we are.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, nor any-thing else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom. 8:38-39

1. Apostle Paul said he was not perfect, but pressed on. What was it that kept him motivated according to Phil. 3:12?
2. What does the gift of God's grace mean to you?
3. Why do you think it is important to confess our sins to God *after* we are Christians?

Chapter 7

God has the Final Word on Suffering

*...God Himself will be with them and be their God.
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes,
there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying.
There shall be no more pain, for the former things
have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne*

said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

Rev. 21:3b-5

The Bible honestly appraises the current state of this sinful world, explains the reasons for so much sin and suffering, and offers the only possible solution (or way out of this mess) through the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the beginning, God spoke the worlds into existence, created Adam and Eve and placed them in a perfect paradise, the Garden of Eden. "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day" (Gen. 1:31). There was no sin, suffering, sickness, sorrow, pain or death. However, everything changed when God's crowning jewels of creation, Adam and Eve, chose to disobey Him.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—

Rom. 6:12

Not only did sin and death enter the world, so did sickness, sorrow, pain and suffering. And it's clear from the Bible that we are all guilty of sin (see Rom. 3:10, 23). We are all part of the problem, but thankfully, our Father in heaven did not leave us without hope. He spoke through His prophets and told of a coming Savior. Then He spoke again--this time by sending His dear Son to help us:

..When the fullness of time of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman,... Gal. 4:4

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. John 3:16-17

For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even in Christ all shall be made alive.

1 Cor. 5:21-22

Currently, we walk by faith and not by sight, if we have turned from our sin and believe in Jesus (2 Cor. 5:7). Praise the Lord! Someday soon our faith will become sight, and all sin and suffering will cease.

God will have the final word and remove all suffering forever! Nobody is immune to suffering in this life no matter how much faith he has. Even the Apostle Paul who wrote half the books of the New Testament (by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) shared about a painful trial he was going through. He had healed many people in the power of the name of Jesus, but there came a time when God chose not to heal him.

You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you

enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Gal. 4:13-15

It is obvious from Revelation 21:3-5 that suffering, sorrow and death touch each of our lives while in this mortal body. You can read more about the suffering of the saints in the *Hall of Faith* chapter of Hebrews 11. Throughout history, godly people have suffered as a result of the clash between good and evil. Today is the day to be engaged in this eternal fight of faith for the souls of lost men and women. Eternity will tell the tale of the ages. God wins! But for now, there is suffering in this present time. Why would God need to wipe away our tears in the future if we never cried in the present? As a matter of fact, why would we even have the ability to cry tears at all?

Thanks be to God for the grace and peace we have in Jesus Christ! Yes, there will come a time when sin, sorrow and suffering will cease. But until that day comes, what should be our response when we suffer? When Job's losses mounted up, he bowed down and in his heart worshiped God saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21b). Even in the midst of the pain, we can praise the Lord. The beauty of praise in the midst of adversity is captured both in Job's response and in this popular song by Matt Redman:

"Blessed be the Name"

*...Blessed be Your name
When the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be Your name
On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be Your name.
Every blessing You pour out
I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord,
Still I will say
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name, Jesus
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name
You give and take away
You give and take away
My heart will choose to say
Lord, blessed be Your name*

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. 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. Rom. 8:16–18

The greatest of life's joys is to be a child of God and enjoy the hope of heaven. While there is

suffering in this life, we don't have to be alone in our suffering. We can "suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:17b).

In the first three chapters of the Bible, sin and suffering enter the world through Adam's disobedience. Adam and Eve are not allowed to go near the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). In the last three chapters of the Bible (Rev. 20-22), sin and suffering are removed once and for all. Jesus Christ is the King of Kings who rules over heaven and earth! God is with us forever! There is a new heaven and a new earth, and the tree of life shall be beside the waters of healing (Rev. 22:2b). It is in this beautiful place that God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

Then He who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Rev. 21:5a

Each of these Bible verses is a prophecy yet to be fulfilled in the near future. Given that all the prophecies about the first coming of Jesus came true, it is certain that these prophecies concerning His second coming will also come to pass.

When you get there, look for me.

I'll be the one playing basketball on the streets of pure gold.

Until that day comes, I'll leave you with this word of encouragement from the last verse in the Bible.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.
Amen. Rev. 22:21

1. What will it be like when God "wipes away every tear from our eyes" and removes all sin and suffering from the earth?
2. How will you react when you first see Jesus?
What person will you look for when you get there?
What is the first thing you would like to do?
3. Given the hope of such a wonderful future, how does this help you in responding to your present suffering?

Von and Ron shared a joyful experience in the writing of this book for our hearts were joined together by the love of God for one purpose--to help those who are suffering discover the healing grace of God. *Lord, let it be so in the hearts of those who read this book.* Additional copies of the story of

Von Hanshaw, *Suffering with Grace: Finding God's Purpose in the Pain* are available by contacting Ron Hamm, co-author and agent at ronhamm01@hotmail.com. Also, Von is available to share his story for your group.

Other writings by Von Hanshaw include:

Roadblocks and Recovery in Romantic Relationships
What is Christianity? (A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount)

Pornography: The Prison of Pleasure

The Prophet's Treasure: 365 Days of Devotion

Angel: A Mini Novel About Satanism (based on a true story)

The Spirit of Jezebel

The Snare of Jezebel

Other writings by Ron Hamm include:

The Man of Striving

Praying With Power

The Dreams of Mr. Green (children's book)

A Song and a Prayer (Devotional)

Under the Sun (A Study of Ecclesiastes)

Spirit Led Witnessing

The Spirit World Revealed (A Study of Revelation)

The Law and the Gospel (Rightly Dividing the Word to Win the Hearts of Sinners)

Ron has also written about 100 poems and songs.