



TROUBLE

Managing Your Heart In Difficult Times

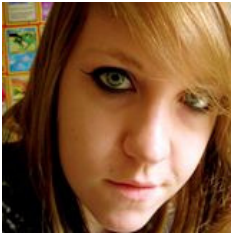
Tim Howington

Trouble

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Tim Howington is just a regular guy who grew up in Texas and Arkansas. He describes himself as someone who has lived life like he played high school football- a little better than average. He lives with his wife Terri and son Josh in Rogers Arkansas. Tim regularly blogs at www.thehowitzerrants.com and www.freedom5oneblog.com. He also has written a couple of e-books called the Best of the Howitzer and How to Manage Yourself when There is no Money to Manage. Both are available at Amazon.



Cover Art by **Lauren Natvig** my lovely and talented niece. This is her second cover she has done for me. I didn't think she could match the first one but I was wrong. Thanks Lauren!

Scripture Quotations Taken from

New American Standard Bible: 1995 update. (1995). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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Ray Lamontagne from his song Trouble speaks to our common experience. "Trouble...Trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble. Trouble been doggin' my soul since the day I was born. Worry... Worry, worry, worry, worry. Worry just will not seem to leave my mind alone." There are times in our lives where God seems very far away, and yet, may be closer than ever, even among the trouble that we face. None of us are exempt from many trials and tribulations in our lifetime. Even Jesus says for us to not to worry about tomorrow because today has enough trouble of its own. This book is about how to navigate your troubles from a Biblical perspective.

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Special Thanks to My Dance Partner Terri

Many people have commented about how great a dancer Fred Astaire was. He was great, but I was always impressed with Ginger Rogers who did all of his steps in time and backwards. In this dance of life, Terri has been my Ginger. Choosing a man to dance who has two left feet and a desire to accomplish something for the Kingdom has been challenging to say the least, and we have attempted some pretty hard routines at times. But, her faithful grace, unwavering faith in me and steadfast love have always been an inspiration for me. The Scripture says that a good wife is from the Lord; and by that I have been extremely blessed. Thanks for your partnership through many of the troubles of my life.



Introduction

I hesitate to write this book. Not because I am unqualified to write it but, because I don't want to be qualified to write this book. Like everyone, I have seen my share of troubles in my 50 plus years on the planet. But my life has been unbelievably blessed and the travesties experienced by so many have not darkened my door, yet. And to be honest, I hope that they don't. But, I have personally experienced the effects and challenges of unbelief, divorce, alcoholism, domestic abuse, financial struggles, infertility and miscarriage, job loss, reputation repair, public humiliation, rejection, relational conflict, health issues, depression, insecurity, poverty, death of loved ones and the like. As a minister for over 30 years (both in vocational ministry and a businessman), I have had a front row seat to many a struggle from folks around me and it is not very pretty out there. Solomon says that "in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge *results in* increasing pain." Eccl 1:18

Jesus says for us to not worry about tomorrow because today has enough trouble of its own. I don't know how that strikes you, but that is a little disturbing to me. This world is filled with trouble and we are having to navigate difficult times. But, that has been true since man fell in the garden; and with him creation was subjugated to a painful longing to be made whole. Our spirits cry out to revisit Eden and for all to be made right again, and they will someday. But, for now we must make the best out of a tough situation. How do we manage our hearts in the midst of trouble?

In this book, I have attempted to lay out some ideas that have helped me maintain a sense of sanity in my own personal struggles. Many of the illustrations in the book are from my life and I am not trying to say that I have had it harder than anyone else (when I know for a fact that my life is a long way from being the most difficult). But, I share from my experiences because I know them best and they are the ones that have helped me develop some coping mechanisms and perspectives to muddle my way through. A good friend of mine says it this way, "there is no way we avoid the struggles of this world, but I want to struggle well."

I hope this book may aid you as you attempt to struggle well.

For those of you who have read my book How to Manage Yourself when There is No Money to Manage, you will find that this book in places sounds very familiar. That's because part of it is almost a carbon copy, but there are a few additions that will add to your toolbox of how to navigate problems. Illustrations have been changed. But the principles of working through troubles are the same whether financial or otherwise. At least from my perspective.

Hope you enjoy!

Chapter One

Managing Your Heart When There is Trouble

Observing how a person manages themselves when they get in trouble is pretty insightful. We all have developed strategies that allow us to work through our pain. Some strategies are better than others, but all are forged on the anvil of real life. Our backgrounds and upbringing help us develop strategies that work for us. But sometimes we also need exposure to how others have dealt with their challenges. This book is designed to expose you to some things that I have used to stand up under the pressure of difficulties. But let me start off by telling you a little about myself.

I was born in Dallas, Texas the year before JFK was assassinated. I was blissfully unaware of the 60's that I grew up in. Even though I enjoyed their songs on the radio I never knew about the Beatles or Elvis. Never heard of Vietnam or Woodstock. And never realized that purple shirts on purple bell bottoms was a fashion statement that should never be repeated.

My folks divorced when I was 10 years old. I can still remember the huge fights that they had leading up to the divorce. It was terrible. Neither of them were walking with the Lord at this time, and that was very apparent to all. Especially me. I can still remember the morning that my Mom drove me, my younger brother and my younger sister to my Grandma Sasser's house in Arkansas. That quick trip from Dallas led us into a life of a single Mom's provision and straight to the poorhouse. How we survived on my hard-working Mom's minimum wage job is still a mystery to me. As the oldest of three, I found myself needing to exert leadership in a strange situation. My Mom was working through her disappointments with a psychologist and he decided to have a family session. During the session, one of the questions he posed was 'who is in charge here' and to my surprise they all pointed to me. I am not sure what that even means, but even at a young age I have felt compelled to control the situations I am in. Now I am not saying that is healthy but we all cope with trouble in our own ways.

My Mom's spiritual renewal in my early teens would begin to shape the way our family would deal with the challenges of this life. She would begin to introduce us to an idea that we are not victims but we had an advocate in

God. My dad was not around so my mother began to ask the Lord to be a Father to her fatherless children. I wish I could say that our lives got easier at that point, but her remarriage when I was 16 to a very godless man would wreak havoc again in our family. My step father seemed ok at first, but we soon learned what it meant to live with an abusive alcoholic. Within a few months, I found life at home unbearable and moved out. Fortunately for me, my grandmother lived in the same town and I moved in with her. My mom visited but never came to bring me home. That always puzzled me. As an adult I asked her why and she began to relay the hell that she and my siblings had begun to endure and she realized that I was in the safest place I could be. At the time, I was a self-centered 16-year-old and it did not even occur to me that the warning signs of the thunderstorm of abuse that had caused me to flee would turn into a F5 tornado that would pummel my family. And nobody told me what was going on.

High school was a pretty calm time for me. I played football and started for the varsity all three years. I had a lot of friends. I was a pretty good student and lived in a stable environment. I have joked that I have lived my life like I played high school football – a little better than average. But, I didn't have a clue as to how it all fit together and just responded to whatever situation presented itself.

Somehow, I ended up at the University of Arkansas where I put myself through college. Aimless and unprepared for life, Providence would continue to guide me and I ended up majoring in a computer science at the dawn of the computer age that was to come. But, on the inside I was empty. I approached college like I had approached everything else: one step at a time, making it up as I went along. That would change my junior year.

My college roommate and I decided to move off campus and into apartment life. He was quite the life of the party so that held a lot of promise for a hedonist like myself. But as the summer concluded, I received the bad news that he wouldn't be returning in the fall and I was left alone in an apartment lease for the year. I needed a roommate. A happenstance meeting with a high school friend who was transferring to the U of A landed me someone to share the load of the off-campus lifestyle I was hoping for. The twist was that this guy was a committed Christian. Funny thing about Christians, when Sundays come they go to church. I accepted the invitation of my new roommate to go visit this church he was checking out. It was the

perfect storm. He was an outsider asking an outsider to go check something out. As an unchurched kid I was intrigued so I went. And my life was never the same. I was exposed to a large number of kids my own age who were walking with the Lord and for the first time the spiritual life made sense to me. The Father to the fatherless had brought me home.

Why do I share my story with you? I want you to understand that as I suggest spiritual answers to the questions of life that I am not some holier-than-thou person. I am just some kid who grew up in a tough situation and by the grace of God landed on my feet. The Proverbs say that the righteous man falls seven times and keeps getting back up. That is me. Not necessarily the righteous part, but the falling part. Over the last 30 years as a believer I have faced some tough things and I have found that it is the comfort and direction of the Lord, the counsel of the Scriptures and the fellowship of the Saints that have sustained me and have given me the strength to struggle well.

My niece designed the cover of my book and I love the story that the picture tells. The scene comes from an encounter that Peter had with Jesus. Seems that Jesus was walking on the water and Peter impulsively asks him to allow him to come to him: on the water. At first, Peter is fine and then takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to watch the effects of the wind. You see the wind had created quite the storm and Peter discovers rather quickly what a great help Jesus is in times of trouble. As Peter begins to sink, Jesus rescues him. Like Peter, we all find ourselves from time to time sinking below the surface in need of a Savior. The answer we all seek for our challenges (whether we want to accept it or not) is a Person. Not a 12 step program or a set of pithy principles but a Person. The person of Jesus.

The inspiration of this book was a financial crisis that rocked our family. As we were working through that situation, I found myself tapping into how we had dealt with other difficult experiences and realized that the principles of working through our financial troubles were the same principles that I have applied to most all of my challenges. In times of need we need help. I guess I am a mid-ego guy and have never been shy when it comes to asking for help. I even stop and ask for directions when I get lost. But, some of us are too proud to admit that we need help. Over time most of come to the realization that our strength is not equal to the task of navigating the trouble we will face in this ole world. If we are willing to humble ourselves before the Lord, we will be able to deal with this world that is full of

situations that will threaten to undo us. How do you deal with the T-R-O-U-B-L-E?

Some of us blame God. Some of us blame ourselves. Some of us blame others. Some of us blame Satan. Some of us blame society. Some of us lash out. Some of us retreat. Some of us try to medicate our pain. Some of us never quite get a handle on why bad things happen to relatively good people. I am not an expert by any means, but have had to deal with enough challenges to at least have the start of a theology on how to deal with trouble. That is what you will find in this book.

The Bible describes the heart of man as the seat of his being. Specifically, the heart refers to the mind, the will and the emotions. If we are to fare well in our battle with difficulties, we must develop the ability to manage well our heart. Proverbs 4:23 says it this way, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it”. In the next few chapters, we are going to be working through some specifics that I hope will help you manage your mind, your will and your emotions.

Chapter Two

Managing our Minds in the Midst of Trouble

I am a thinker. Or at least I think I am. Descartes says, “I think therefore I am”, so I guess I am. I am an engineer at heart, my degree is in computer science engineering (linear thinker, problem solver, logical and sequential). But I am also a bit of a philosopher (love to engage with the abstract and essential life questions like- who am I, where did I come from, where am I going). That combination of engineering and philosophy puts me in a spot to ponder a variety of issues and then come up with some practical solutions.

I love the Bible and theology because it holds real insight to the real issues of the world. I always find it amusing when people discount the Bible as relevant because in my experience it is the only thing that makes sense in real life. I am a self-proclaimed practical theologian which basically means that the part of theology I enjoy is the application of our theological studies in the real world.

But, when a problem gets beyond my ability to solve (and that happens more than I care to admit) I begin to freeze. My thoughts become cloudy and even though I keep pondering the situation, if I am unable to come up with a solution my mind begins to panic. My strength of thinking transitions to be my worst nightmare. I now begin to think through the consequences (real and imagined). Unless I begin to focus on truth I can allow my mind to take me to places that I have no business going. And I begin to lose the battle.

The key to winning the battle for the mind has to do with what we allow our minds to focus on. If we focus on our problems, then we will plant seeds of anxiety that will grow into a real sense of hopelessness. If we focus on what God is able to do, then our minds will begin to experience contentment. Now I know that our thoughts may not pay the light bill, or get us that promotion or fix that fractured relationship. But thinking about the right things keeps our hearts with the right perspective, which affects our attitudes, which allows us to struggle well in times of adversity.

What should we be thinking about?

Think about Worthy Things

“Finally, brothers, whatever is **true**, whatever is **noble**, whatever is **right**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **lovely**, whatever is **admirable**—if anything is **excellent** or **praiseworthy**—think about such things.” Philippians 4:8

When my son was in grade school he studied the life of Johnny Appleseed. Johnny planted apple seeds that produced apple trees. In a similar way, the believer plants spiritual seeds that produce spiritual perspectives that guide us along the way.

Listen to Paul’s list of seeds to plant in the gardens of our minds. He gives a great list of things that we should focus our thoughts on. I have rearranged the order to spell the word **PLANTER**. These categories of thoughts could help you make some progress in your thinking. Memorize the acronym and work systematically through the list till you are thinking rightly. When you catch yourself thinking of unworthy things you should try to shift gears to thoughts that are:

P-ure and Praiseworthy
L-ovely
A-dmirable
N-oble
T-rue
E-xcellent
R-ight

As I was working through this section, it occurs to me, that each of these thoughts that I need to be planting in my mind, ultimately describe our Heavenly Father. He is **pure** and **praiseworthy**. He is **lovely**. He is **admirable**. He is **noble**. He is **true**. He is **excellent**. He is **right**. And while there are other things in this world that are worthy to focus our mind's attention on, our God who spoke the universe into place and daily shows His meticulous providence towards us, He should be the major focus of our minds during our times of need.

Think about the fact that God Works Everything for Our Good

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Rom 8:28

What does that mean exactly? It doesn't mean that everything is good. There are a lot of evil things in the world that grieve our hearts and the heart of God. But, God somehow is able to redeem the things we go through and turn them into good.

Our struggle with infertility and miscarriage as a family is a good example of that. For 12 long years we had longed for a child but it was not to be. I don't know about you, but 12 years is a long time for me. We rode the roller coaster until the very end and even as we attempted to start our family through adoption we faced so many setbacks that we almost gave up. But, God took all that pain, all that anxiety, all that longing and turned it into good.

I can still remember the social worker's comments when our son's birth mom changed her mind on the day he was born. And while we were supportive of her motherly instinct to try to make the best of her situation and be a parent to our Josh, we were heart-broken. I told her that we had had enough and we were stopping the adoption process. She said, "Mr. Howington, I know you guys are hurting right now, but I promise you that

on the day we place that new baby in your home you will forget all the pain." And she was right! A month later, Josh's birth mom realized that nothing in her life had changed and that adoption was the best thing she could do for the son she loved. Josh came home to live with us. And God worked all things out for our good.

We can trust God for Wisdom

'If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.'" James 1:5-8

But we are not just looking for peace of mind when it comes to managing our minds. We are looking for answers. We are looking for wisdom. One of my favorite verses is found in the James passage above. I love that it says that God is willing to give us wisdom but that we should not doubt. Over the years, this idea has been a go-to concept for me. It goes like this- I am not sure what to do, I ask the Lord for direction and wisdom and wait and in His time and in His way he makes it clear to me what I need to do. That brings peace and confidence that I am not alone and that in time I will be able to move in a direction that is good for me and my family.

We must manage our Mind.

"You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You" Isaiah 26:3

The Scripture is clear that our minds are a major battlefield when it comes to overcoming trials. The peace of mind that we crave during difficult times starts with what we allow our minds to meditate on. Isaiah says that a steady mind focused on the things of God will serve you well in tough times. Practically, that means that we don't allow our minds to wander to all the worst case scenarios. Now don't get me wrong, I am not saying that we won't experience the worst case. But many times, we borrow tomorrow's trouble when today has enough challenges of its own.

The Psalmist says it this way: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he

meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. (Ps 1:1-3). The mind is a funny thing. It will meditate on the things we tell it to and the key to managing our minds in the tough times is thinking about the right things. Pretty simple huh?

Chapter Three

Managing our Will in the Midst of Trouble

Several year ago, I had taken a lead pastor role in a church in my hometown. I can still remember the first week I preached there. They were so excited to have a new pastor and they all clapped. I was so encouraged. But, that would change pretty quickly. I have been in ministry a pretty long time and this was the first place where I didn't measure up. Twelve long months later, I would be packing my bags and leaving town with my tail between my legs. But, as the primary bread winner in our family and my wife at home with our 9 month old, I did not have the luxury of wading into the discouragement that would follow shortly thereafter. I had to find work to feed my family. With no severance and not a lot in the bank we moved back to NW Arkansas where I found a part time job that turned into a full time job pretty quickly. The Lord had moved on our behalf. But, during this time I remember so vividly how I had to fight with every ounce of will power I possessed not to give up.

I am not a psychologist, so I don't know exactly how the will works. I am more of a pop psychologist and my experience says that the will is tied to the part of the psyche that determines whether or not I will fight or run away. The will is the part of us that says I will or will not give up. One only has to look around at all the people who are giving up on their marriages, their finances, and their dreams these days to see that the temptation to give up and give in is a very real temptation. This chapter is about how we can deal with our will to win when faced with seemingly overwhelming circumstances.

How do we manage our will?

Manage Your Will Like Jesus Did

"Then Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.' Going a little farther, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.'" Matthew 26:36-39

One of the best examples of managing the will is seen in our Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He desired to not go to the cross but was nevertheless committed to whatever the Father had for Him. How many times do we try to squirm out from underneath the trial and move to a more comfortable place? We cannot give into the temptation to move but must rather discern God's will for the situation and then align our wills to His no matter the cost. Proverbs encourages us to, "trust in the Lord with all our hearts and to not lean on our own understanding." (Proverbs 3:5-6) During difficult seasons we must exert our wills to manage the situation we have been handed and resolve to hang in there till the bitter end. In the garden, He prayed with great fervor for the Father to take the cup of the cross away. He prayed till droplets of blood came from His pores. I have never had to deal with anything that intense and hope I never do. But, Jesus models for us how to mold our wills to the will of the Father when He says, "not My will but Your will be done".

Manage Your Will like Paul Did

"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:3-5)

This is one of my favorite verses. Paul had to endure a lot as he was one of the great pioneers of establishing the Church among the Gentiles and is a great example of how we should manage our will. In this passage, Paul gives us great insight into the cause and effect of perseverance and hope. The desired outcome that we all want is hope. Hope is brought about by proven character that has seen God work through difficulties before. Proven

character comes from perseverance. And perseverance comes from dealing with trials and tribulations. To summarize, the only way you get hope is to persevere through trials. That's what James was saying when he said, "Consider it all joy brethren when you face various trials" James 1:2. Is it possible to experience joy in the midst of trials? That sounds like crazy talk. Nobody is happy about trials. But, if we can show some God-centered resolve, we can begin to gain a worldview that doesn't panic when the chips are down. We can learn to trust God and learn to lean on Him.

Lean into the hill

Part of our training regiments for off season football in high school was this big hill outside of our school. The coach would line us up and we would run up and down the hill. As we got tired he would tell us to lean into the hill. I guess so that we would not lose our balance. But even more than that, he knew our hearts were weak and we needed to bear down when the going got tough.

In our troubles we will sometimes face hills that we will have to lean into. We will be tempted to quit. But, we can't quit. We have to persevere. The world is watching how we are managing these things. Will we be an example of godliness or worldliness? Will we give up? Will we show our exasperation? Will we manage our will-to-make-it-to-the-finish-line? Listen to what the writer of Hebrews had to say about finishing well.

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrew 12:1-3)

The easy thing to do is quit. But the great victories of our life that we pass on as our legacy are times that we persevered under great pressure. We must press forward and not give into the temptation to walk off the field or worst yet go through the motions. Let's finish well. What do you say?

Chapter Four

Managing our Emotions in the Midst of Trouble

My Dad calls it a flesh break. I call it the tirades of a crazy man. The Lord calls it sin. I have to admit that I was a little surprised by the string of expletives coming out of my mouth. Even though I whispered my displeasure toward the Lord, I think my heart screamed inside. And to my chagrin there is no doubt that He heard me. It has been a long time since I had been that upset. Before I became a believer I had a pretty foul mouth but that was one of the things that I really hadn't struggled with afterward. That is till I hit the wall: the financial stress wall. I had been working through the reality that we were not going to make it with the funds that we had been able to raise in the non-profit that I was working for and that I needed to get a second job.

The Scripture says that anxiety in the heart of man weighs it down. Said another way: anxiety in the heart of man wears him out. Just like a marathoner hits the physical wall, a person who is dealing with ongoing struggles hits the emotional wall from time to time. I would like to think of myself as strong, but the reality is that in challenging times my heart is full of anxiety and I become a little childish and throw a temper tantrum. I know that God will help me but I let the fear get the better of me and explode. Managing our emotions in the face of financial adversity is a key to managing yourself.

But how do you do that?

Pray for peace

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7

The passage listed above is one of my life verses related to our topic. The peace of mind that I long for is found through prayer. One of my favorite experiences with this verse occurred in another late night vigil with the Lord (hmmm there seems to be a pattern forming here). I can't remember what I was upset about, but I remember specifically complaining to the Lord about my lack of peace. He brought to my mind quickly this familiar passage along with some questions. *Tim, are you praying about it? Have you presented your request to Me or are you just mulling it over and over in*

your mind? Are you thankful for the situation? I love the contrast of anxiety and peace, and to be honest this Biblical framework has helped me many a time to move to a place of God's overarching peace that surpasses my understanding even when my circumstances haven't changed a bit.

Paul's encouragement in Philippians says that we are to bring all our concerns to the Lord's attention with a thankful heart and the result is the peace of God. How many restless night have I endured because my heart was full of worry? How many times have I reminded the Lord that what I was experiencing was not peace, only to have Him remind me that *I needed to lay my burdens before Him?*

Keep in step with the Spirit

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, **fits of rage**, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**

Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us **keep in step with the Spirit.** Galatians 5:19-25

It's fun to watch my son connect with some of the TV shows of my childhood via Netflix. One of the most recent is *Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.* I love the image of the opening introduction where Gomer, who is a terrible marine, can't quite keep in step with the platoon. His Sergeant is running alongside pleading with him to get in step. What a great image as to what Paul is saying in the passage above. We need to get in step with the Holy Spirit and when we do our lives exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. Things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. My 'flesh break' the other night exhibited none of those. As believers, the Holy Spirit of God lives in our hearts and will guide us if we will yield our emotions to Him.

Look to the Character of God

"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?" Romans 8:31-32

I love the phrase, "If God is for us then who can be against us". Do we believe that God is interested in our plight? You bet your boots He is. His benevolent kindness towards us is unmistakable for if He did not spare His own Son, then why would He not give us what we need to survive in this world? He takes care of the birds of the air and the grass of the field and yet we are of much more value than they are. It is true that He allows us at times to sit under the pressure of stress, but that doesn't mean that He is unconcerned. The reality is that He is concerned with much more than just our ease. He is concerned that we rightly relate to Him, and one of His favorite tools is pressure. With the pressure of problems, we are forced to look to our Provider and trust Him to take care of us

Getting back to the other night lest you think I am a complete heathen. As soon as the words left my mouth the Lord convicted me of my sin and I repented. I am so glad that He is a forgiving Father who understands my weakness. I am so glad that He understands that there will be times where I will lose it and provides a way for me to confess my sin of anxiety and fearfulness and then gently guides me to a place of emotional wholeness.

Chapter Five

God is Able...

I couldn't believe that it was already over. I had begun my new job just a year before and now I really didn't think I could make it one more day. Maybe I had misunderstood God's will. I had joined a non-profit ministry with a long-time friend and at the time I was so sure that God had directed me here. I had opened up a new satellite office on a Wednesday and started a 2nd job on Friday. Why wasn't God hearing our prayers to raise the funds we needed to survive? Surely, I had missed something.

I was driving back from the chiropractor, which had become a weekly deal since my 2nd job was very physical and as they say, "the old gray mare just ain't what he used to be". As I drove back, I prayed and said, "Lord I think it is time for me to close shop and start moving on to something else". A buddy of mine was trying to decide between 2 ministry options and I had relationships on both side of his options. I planned to call him and start applying for the one he didn't want when I got back to the office. I was done!

When I got back to the office, there were some papers on the floor that someone had pushed under the door. I thought that was funny since I didn't get much mail here. Inside was a stock portfolio worth \$25,000 dollars. Seems a friend and supporter of the ministry had been watching all this unfold and he felt like God was leading him to give a huge gift so that I could focus just on the ministry. When I talked with him about it, his comments were so reassuring: "don't think of this as a generous gift from us, because all we are doing here is being obedient to what God has told us to do."

What God has told us to do. How does that strike you? God who owns all things including this obedient Christian brother's bank account had worked on our behalf. I was shocked. I was in awe of his faith. But even more, I was in awe of a God who is able to do beyond what I can ask or think. My friend saved us from walking away. But, more than that God saved me by letting me see just how big He is.

Let's be transparent for a moment. Have you found yourself in just that predicament from time to time? Ready to quit? Ready to walk away? It may not be a job, but there are times when you are looking to God to land that deal, sell that car, turn your sales around or make that bonus check materialize, fix that marriage, change that child's self-perception or open up that door of ministry.

It is at these times that we find ourselves asking some tough questions: Is God **able** to handle my situation? Is God **willing** to help me in my situation?

God is able to handle your situation

"Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen" Ephesians 3:20

In her excellent book God is Able, Pricilla Shirer comments on God's ability to take care of us by saying, "When you really stop and think about it, this has always been His way. He's always been a God of abundance. Is there any reason other than God's 'beyondness' that can explain why, when He decided to create water, He just went ahead and created whole oceans? Wasn't the intense heat and mass and splendor of a single star

impressive enough all on its own? Did He really need to go and create entire galaxies, raging with billions and billions of stars, most of which no human eye will ever see?"

I don't know how that strikes you, but in my mind's eye I begin to travel through the known universe and can see the galaxies to my left and to my right with a never ending path of space before me; and all of a sudden a \$89.24 water bill doesn't seem out the realm of possibilities. The Father knows that I have needs for the life-sustaining necessities. He says that even sinful earthly fathers don't give a snake to their child who asks for a fish. If they give good gifts to their children, how much more so does He give good gifts to His children?

The older I get the more I find myself longing to be the dependent child again. I remember the days of being blissfully unaware that I was safe and secure in my parent's providence. And whether we want to admit it or not, we are not as strong as we think we are and we are very vulnerable. I think that God allows us to move down paths from time to time that are tough to remind us that in Him we live and move and have our being. And He is able to take care of us.

We must believe that He loves us and has our best interest at heart.

The backside of believing that God has the ability is that when He doesn't seem to be moving on our behalf, we don't feel important. Or at least I do. I think this is the part that is the most difficult for me. One of most insecure moments in my life occurred when I was in Junior High. If my Mother was alive she would be appalled that I tell you this story, but one way we survived was to have free lunches at the school. They managed this pretty discretely when I was in elementary school and I was not even aware that we were one of the poor kids. But in Junior High I became painfully aware.

Seems that some bright administrator felt like the best way to manage free lunches was to have the kids come by the office and pick up tickets for lunch. We would then take these tickets and give it to the cafeteria ladies on our way through the line in front of God and everyone. These tickets became a stigma and a sign that I was not like everyone else (which by the way is pretty important in Junior High). To make matters worse, as a football player I ran around with the most popular kids at the school. And as far as I could tell, I was the only one with tickets. This became

unbearable. Picking up the tickets at the office was humiliating as weekly I was reminded that I was not cool. And then every day at lunch I would have to time my trip through the line so that nobody would see me. I was so embarrassed.

Why do I tell you that story? I believe that God has an unbelievable amount of resources to bring to bear on our behalf and when He doesn't I feel like the free lunch kid again. I feel so unimportant. Unloved. Uncared for. Alone again. For me that is the challenge. Why doesn't God move on my behalf? Even as I write this, the clock says 3:11 am and I have been up for almost an hour stewing over the mess I am in. I have been praying and telling the Lord why I am so upset. It is not about the money I need to pay the bills. It's the agony I feel because I don't feel loved.

If I had done something wrong, I would draw some comfort in the fact that we reap what we sow. Obviously my stresses were self-imposed, but in this case (this time), I really don't think I have done anything wrong. I am just in a tough time. But am I thinking correctly? Are my feelings valid? Am I unimportant to the Lord as is evidenced by my plight? The answer is no!!! Not just no but #&!! NO. I am very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very important to Him.

How does God feel about me? Neil Anderson of Freedom in Christ Ministries has some really good resources that spell out our position in Christ. I will list just a few truth statements to give you a flavor of his great work. You can check out other resources they have at www.ficm.org.

Excerpt of Self Image Exercise about who I am in Christ by Neil Anderson

- I am Accepted... John 1:12, John 15:15, Romans 5:1
- I am Secure... Romans 8:1-2, Romans 8:28, Romans 8:31-34, Romans 8:35-39
- I am Significant... Matthew 5:13-14, John 15:1,5, John 15:16

I am accepted! I am secure! I am significant! I am important! These statements seem to be much more in line with the God who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all I can ask or think and calls me His child.

Chapter Six

...but is He Willing?

It is Mother Day weekend in Rogers and I just spent an hour or so with my Mother-in-law in the rest home. She has a bad case of Alzheimer's and she remembers me most of the time. Betty and I have been friends from the first time I met her over 28 years ago. The first time Terri took me home to meet her parents, Betty killed the fatted calf as they say. In her case, she prepared Betty's Spaghetti and German chocolate cake. We have tried to copy her recipe over the years, but nobody does spaghetti like her. And her German chocolate cake is to die for. Well, 2 plates in and 2 pieces of cake and I am stuffed, to say the least. And then it hits me: I need a nap in the worst way. But, I am there to impress them. Betty reads the look on my face and tells me to go take a nap on the couch. This is right down my alley: genuine hospitality. To Terri's horror, I take her up on her offer and the rest is history.

But, this Lady that I love dearly has a degenerative disease that has rendered her in a very lovely childlike state where my Father-in-law feeds her dinner twice a day. And she walks incessantly down a short locked hallway with 8 of her closest friends who have also forgotten most of their lives and families. Is that God's will for her life?

Another woman who I love dearly: my own Mother Charlotte, spent the last year of her life dying slowly and painfully with her weak heart not being able to keep up with her vital organs need for blood and in the end just shutting down. Was that God's will for her life?

And while we are being transparent let me share my most disturbing thought on the topic of God's will. While I am so very confident that God is **ABLE** to handle any issues I face, I am not sure that He is **WILLING** to step into my problems and solve them for me in the way I want Him to. How else would you explain the late house payment, the job search that won't end, the husband who is not coming back, the reputation that will never be repaired or the baby who is not going to come. You can go to the mailbox all you want but the manna is not coming. Or so it would seem. God's will is not our will and His ways are not our ways. He will not be put in a box and He will not be controlled by our desires.

What is God's will for our life?

God's will for us includes agony

"For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." Romans 8:22-23

My wife and I never had children of our own so I never got a front row seat to birth pains, which by the way is fine with me because I am more of the hang-in-the-waiting-room-with-cigars kind of guy anyway. Even though we never faced physical childbirth pains we did experience heart pangs of longing for a family of our own. The passage above speaks to that kind of longing. Creation groans to be complete again. You see when Adam sinned not only did he cause man to deal with being separated from God, but creation also experienced a fallen state. And now we both desire to be whole. We long to experience Eden again. And for a short while God's will for us includes an agony of waiting to be restored.

God's will for us includes abundance

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." John 10:10

And just about the time that we wonder if we are trapped in the abyss, God shines a light into our darkness in the person of Jesus Christ. Though Satan is god of this world and has temporary dominion and is hell-bent on destroying our lives, Christ came to give us life and give it to the full. We have overcome the world because of His intervention.

In the world of provision of our daily needs this means that we will experience times of plenty. Paul talks about this in Philippians when he says that he had learned to be content in both time of plenty and times of suffering need. In both cases we look to God as our provider. But in the midst of need we wonder how to determine what God's will is for us.

This is more than a verse about financial abundance but it also speaks to quality of life. God wants our lives to be full and meaningful. In our family, in our faith, in our jobs, in our friendships, in our ministries, in our health

and even in our hobbies. God wants our life to be full of Him and with that the richness of His presence and provision. He wants us to experience a little bit of the Garden, a little bit of Eden. He wants to walk with us in the cool of the day.

God will for us includes Him working everything for our good

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Roman 8:28

Even though I know that all things work together for good not all things we experience in this life are good. We seem to live somewhere between agony and abundance. After the fall of mankind in the garden, man lives in a frustrated system that causes God to be in constant fix-it mode. Between our flesh, the world system around us and the evil one we are constantly in scrapes that requires intervention from our Heavenly Father. We long for the day when we will not need Him to cause all things to work together for good, but rather everything will be good. But that is in the next world. In this world we move from good to bad and need the Lord's help to sustain us.

In Isaiah we get a glimpse of the Lord's desire to help us when He says, "Do not fear for I am with you. Do not anxiously look about you for I am your God. Surely, I will help you. Surely, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10

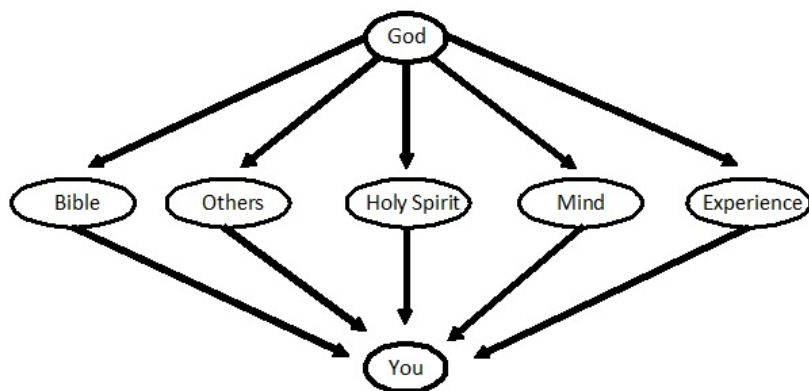
He who did not spare His own Son, how will He not freely with Him give us all that we need.

How can we determine God's will?

"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

Years ago I was exposed to a simple model from one of my mentors, H.D. McCarty that speaks to how God communicates His will to us. He communicates in 5 simple ways.

1. God communicates His will through the **Word of God**. He will never lead us contrary to what He has communicated in His Word.
2. God communicates His will through the **Counsel of Others**. When you are navigating tough time, godly counselors are invaluable to help you.
3. God communicates His will through our **Mind**. He has given us the ability to think through the pros and cons of a decision and move with wisdom. In fact, in James we are instructed to ask God for wisdom and He will give it to us.
4. God communicates His will through our **Past Experiences**. Our experiences, both good and bad, give us some insight into how to handle current decisions.
5. God communicates His will through the small still voice of the **Holy Spirit**. Sometime we work through all these previous ways and we are stuck. And there is only an impression in our spirits that we are to move in a certain direction. Though not audible, our hearts hear a word from Him that says “this is the way walk in it”.



One of our college friends exposed me to a verse that is relevant in this discussion of God’s will for our life. Especially, since at times it appears that He is very comfortable with allowing us to struggle through things. In Psalms 139 the psalmist writes, “How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you “. This passage describes a God whose thoughts of us outnumber the grains of sand. He has not forgotten us. He thinks about us all the time. We are not alone. He is with us even when it may not feel like it.

Chapter Seven

What can we expect from God?

When my mother passed away, my sister began to circulate a letter among our family. It was a typed letter that my mom had written to us. In the letter, she had a paragraph to each of us (her children, our spouses, her grandchildren and her husband Bill) sharing thoughts of blessing and love. Since that time, I have read her paragraph to me many times.

Dear Family, I don’t want you to be sad this day as I am at home with the Lord. Jesus said He had gone to prepare a place for me and when it was completed, He would come and get me. Well!!!!!!... her I am in my new mansion, and folks, it is wonderful (all is peace and no rent or dishwashing).

Tomorrow is going to start without me and in a while I will be just a memory. I hope it is a good memory and I hope you will always remember how much I loved you and how much I believed in every one of you.

Timothy and Terri- Tim you were my first, my #1 son. My boy with the Paul Newman eyes. I thought when you married it would be to someone you could drag around by the hair on her head, but along came Terri. Remember, what I told you- if you miss her, you have missed the best thing that has ever happened to you. I was right wasn’t I. Terri, you have done a wonderful job being married to Tim- that is quite a challenge. And thank you for making me feel special about being his mother. I appreciated that. Trust in God always, continue to read His Word and nothing will be impossible for you Even increasing the catering business.

The funny part of the letter was when she got to the part about her stuff (which she didn’t have much of). Her exhortation was pretty clear. “All my worldly goods I leave to Bill and when he decides to part with them you guys can figure out what you want to do. I DO NOT WANT ANY BICKERING OVER MY STUFF. BICKERING AT A TIME LIKE THIS LASTS A LIFETIME. One thing Makayla, Ashley and Anna (granddaughters) can divide up my jewelry and Ashley can have my makeup- no bickering.

Yes ma'am!

Clarity over your inheritance can bring peace. But the reality is that when it comes to inheritances people are indeed crazy. So many families are torn to shreds based on how they respond to the loss of a loved one. In our business of helping families with their finances, we engage with people in their estate planning. Without a good estate plan many a parent has sent their household into a pretty predictable outcome of chaos as the children fight over the stuff. A good will and trust plan helps to define what each child should expect as their portion of the estate.

Have you ever wondered what your portion is as a child of God? What should we expect from our Father? This is especially relevant when we are going through difficult times. More than maybe any other time we are face to face with our limitations and even proud men begin to pray. I love the scene in *It's a Wonderful Life* where George Bailey is at his wits end and as a last resort decides to pray. George is not a particular religious man but even he realizes that God is our ultimate provider. His story is one that repeats itself over and over throughout history. Man gets to the end of his rope because of finances and then turns to the Lord trying to negotiate the Ultimate Expectation Exchange: God what is my portion in the life?

Gold is my Portion

"Two things I asked of Thee, do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or lest I be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God." Proverbs 30:7-9

I love this proverb of Agur. I am not sure who Agur is but the insight is much appreciated. He seems to indicate that each of us has a portion. Jesus calls this daily bread. Agur establishes a framework that I use on a regular basis to guide my expectation. Like Goldilocks with the three bears I want something that is not too hot, not too cold, but just right. In the world of finances, we should desire neither riches nor poverty, but that which is our portion.

Many a man has allowed his lust for more to drive him away from God. In the same vein of thought many a man has allowed the desperate plight of poverty to drive him away from God. The road of balance travels through

the idea that God has apportioned to us a share in this life that will sustain us and we can trust Him for that portion. You don't have to look very far to realize that our life experiences are very different and that the portion that God has allotted us is different. The slum dweller in Mumbai has a different life than the New York banker, but God is the sustainer of both. As we seek first His kingdom and His Righteousness He will add to us that which we need.

God is my Portion

"The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; Thou dost support my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me." Psalms 16: 5-6

Have you ever considered that part of your inheritance is God Himself? More precious than any possession passed down to us from a parent is the tangible presence of God as our core inheritance. He is our portion. The psalmist rightly understands that this inheritance has made him a lucky man. He says "the lines (boundary lines) have fallen to him in pleasant places." (Meaning that he likes his inheritance). Sometimes we need to focus on this truth during our crisis point. We may not have much but we do have God. And that is a good thing. But, is it good enough for us? Is He enough for us?

We sometimes forget that God is our ultimate portion. The things that we have lost and are upset about are the very things that allow us to re-center ourselves around this principle. My mom used to say that he who has everything and God has nothing more than he who has only God. That is a big, big concept that I am still not sure if I believe. I still struggle like a teenager who looks to the other immature folks around him to determine what is it that makes me significant. Is it the newest technology, or the latest stylish clothes, or what our family or home look like, or what neighborhood we live in, or who our friends are, or how smart we are, or good looking we are or whatever else the winds of culture throw our way to measure how we should feel about ourselves. Hmmm, seems like not much has changed since junior high as this is the same list I see adults (myself included) struggling with every day.

Ultimately, we have to believe that God is our portion and be satisfied with Him. If we lose it all, He is the one we turn to. He is the one who is our shelter from the storm. He is the one to whom we ultimately answer to. All

good gifts come from Him. And He is enough. STOP for a second and reread that last sentence. He IS ENOUGH. Do you believe that? Do I believe that?

Glory is my Portion

“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.” Romans 8:16 -17

Do you realize that because of our son-ship (daughter-ship) we are fellow heirs with Christ? I have to admit that I am not sure exactly what that means, but someday we will share in His glory. We will someday experience the final result of our salvation: glorification. Our bodies will be resurrected to wholeness. Our spirits will be absent from sin. And we will be in fellowship with our God face to face. We will taste of His presence and His glory. No longer will we languish in pain and trouble. No longer will we soak in the insecurities of our weaknesses. No long will we long for wholeness because we will be whole.

On that day, the trouble we experienced here from time to time will pale in comparison with the glory we are participating in. In fact, my speculation is that on that day we will appreciate the trouble that drove us to Him.

The trouble that revealed that we are so vulnerable and needy.

The trouble that forced us to manage our minds.

The trouble that forced us to manage our wills.

The trouble that forced us to manage our emotions.

The trouble that forced us to think through the idea of wondering whether God was willing and able to take care of us.

The trouble that forced us to think through the idea of what can I expect from my heavenly Father as my portion.

On that day, we will be thankful for this blessing from the hand of God. We will be thankful that the trouble that caused us to ponder one of the biggest truths of our lives. Can I trust God?

Chapter Eight

Can I Trust Him?

My dad was an interesting man. He was the youngest of 9 children. His dad died when he was very young and he grew up without a dad. He is a self-acclaimed late bloomer from a maturity standpoint. This was evidenced in his relationship with my mom. By 21, he had one child and by 22 he had two. Young and immature, both of my parents were in way over their heads. But, he always wanted a family and so when his wife and kids drove away at 31 he was in a world of hurt. He moved to Las Vegas and began a culinary career with the big hotels and casinos. Somewhere along the way he got some advice that he should not try to be too involved in parenting his children's life because it created confusion for them having to deal with different sets of rules and parenting styles. So, that's what he did. Stayed un-involved in his children's life.

And it did cause confusion. We were very confused as to where he went and why he stayed gone. We left when I was 10. We went to visit him one summer when I was 12. He came to my first home run at 14. He came to my high school graduation at 18. My college graduation at 23. And my wedding at 25. With a few phone calls in the middle of the events I grew to wonder if my dad cared for us and if he did why was he so distanced. It wasn't until I became a believer and we began to repair the breach in our relationship that I realized his love for us was real and deep.

I can still remember the night that I finally pressed him for the back-story of why he had approached his relationship with us like he did that my distrust of him began to fade. When he told me about his side of the story, I could understand how things had transpired. I have to admit that it did my heart good to hear him say that the single biggest regret of his life was the way he had mishandled his relationship with his kids. I was able to forgive.

I share this story because many of us are affected by our relationship with our earthly fathers, particularly as to how it affects our ability to trust our Heavenly Father. I am no different. For years, my dad was this distant figure who I wished I had a relationship with but for some reason he was not interested in me. God was like that too. He lived in heaven and had an interest in me from a distance. His spiritual nature makes Him seem

somewhat distant even though as we mature we see that He is indeed very present. It wasn't till I was 22 that I realized that my Heavenly Father wanted desperately to have a relationship with me and I began to walk with Him. Not coincidentally, it was my repaired relationship with God that allowed me to begin to repair my relationship with my dad. I then began to understand what he meant when he said, "not always with you face to face, but you are always in my heart."

I am not saying there is a direct correlation of our two father-figures (I will let the psychologist sort that one out). But, as we are dealing with life challenges our confidence in our Heavenly Father's interest in us is very important. If we think He is interested and present, then we deal with trouble one way. If we think He is dis-interested and not present we deal with trouble another.

The long and the short of it is simply an issue of trust. Can you and I trust God? Can you trust Him to make all things work out for good in your life? This is the essence of the faith walk: trust. Without faith (trust) it is impossible to please Him and faith (trust) is in its very nature a belief in things we cannot see. If you and I must walk by sight, we will struggle in the faith walk. And if I am honest, it is at this point that I struggle. Can I trust Him?

My Dad passed away recently and I am so glad that our relationship was repaired over the last 25 years of his life. As he was struggling through his last days I saw the fear in his eyes of uncertainty about death. He was a strong believer, but the reality of death had him shook up a bit. But he faced his fear with faith. The last time we were together he had seized on a few verses and repeated them over and over. At a time like that, it is the promises of Scripture that give hope. And I watched as he convinced and re-convinced himself of his trust in God. Oh, he may have looked like he was talking to me but he was speaking to his own heart and mustering up the faith to face his final battle. He finished strong!

This is the same process we go through in difficulties. We see how things are right now but cannot always see how they are going to turn out. So we convince and re-convince ourselves of God's trustworthiness to take care of us. We know that we are to trust in the Lord with all our heart. We know that we are not supposed to lean on our own understanding. We know that we are to acknowledge Him in all our ways. We know that if we trust Him,

then He will direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5-6). But that is not easy to do. It takes faith. He promises never to leave or forsake us. He loves us and can be trusted. He really can!

Chapter 9

Choose Your Dance Partner

In the acknowledgement section of this book, I made a reference to my wife as my dance partner in life who has stood by me through thick and thin. While I am unbelievably thankful for her, the Dance Partner that I am writing about in this chapter is not a great spouse, or a great friend or even a great group of friends who rally to your aid. The Dance Partner I am talking about here is God.

It occurs to me that when faced with a trial or tribulation in this world we can make a choice to dance with our trouble or dance with the Lord. Let me illustrate. Let's say you just found out you or someone you love have cancer. You have the choice as to whether you will allow cancer and all its fear and intimidation to be the thing you hold on to and follow its lead. Or you can bring your fear and trepidation to the Lord and follow His lead.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

To be honest, even as I write this I am not sure what this dance looks like exactly. But, I am very familiar with my first instinct when difficulties come to embrace them and begin the slow downward spiral of heart mismanagement. I begin to release my mind, my will and my emotions to the alluring music of my temptations and find myself in step with a dance that I am not familiar with and really have no desire to participate in. Contrast that with the times when I find myself in the confident grasp of a Dance Partner who leads me confidently and gracefully through my struggle.

I think we have a choice as to who we are gonna dance with.

Cancer or the Healer.

Bankruptcy or the God Who Provides.

Betrayal or the Loyal One.

Anxiety or the One who gives peace.

Death or the One who holds our hand through valley.

Divorce or One who is closer than a brother.

Unbelief or the Faithful One.

Aimlessness or the Purpose Giver.

Childlessness or the One who causes all things to be good.

Unemployment or He who created us for good works.

Death of Dream or Dream Giver.

Financial Pressure or the One who owns the whole earth.

Getting old or the Blessor of the Aged.

Conflict or the One who help to forgive.

Your dance with the Master may look different than mine but I would like to encourage you to consider dancing with the Lord into your troubles instead of dancing with your troubles alone. I don't even know if that makes sense to you. It barely does to me, but I think there is an insight here that is life altering. I just know that the God we talked about within these pages is One of love and desires to come along side us as we deal with the difficulties in our lives. To the degree that I learn to walk with Him instead of walking alone is the degree to which I will be able to walk through my troubles.

"Trouble...Trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble. Trouble been doggin' my soul since the day I was born. Worry... Worry, worry, worry, worry. Worry just will not seem to leave my mind alone."

Jesus.. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Jesus been savin' my soul since the day I was born.

May the Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you

The Lord turn His face toward you give you peace.

Post Script

I can't help but wonder at times why we are allowed to experience the trouble in this world that we are. Many point to an uncaring deity who is distant and uncaring. A God who spun the world in place and then folded His arms and said, "Hope it works out for you." But, a discerning look at the Bible shows the very opposite. A caring Father who has given us enough rope to hang ourselves and hanged ourselves we have. I would be remiss if I didn't at least share with you about the good news of the Bible.

Because of God's great love for us, He sent His Son Jesus to die on a cross to pay the price for our sin. He experienced our trouble for us and made a way for us to rightly relate to the Father. Now He won't force you to take His solution. He will allow you to experience your own trouble for your sin (which includes spiritual death and separation from the Father). But, if you and I are humble enough to admit that we have failed Him (committed sin). If we believe that Jesus' death on the cross pays for our sins and then commit our lives to Him, we can experience eternal life and thereby get to enjoy the world that has no trouble.

Seems a little backwards I know, but I have a sneaking suspicion that it is the Trouble of this world that helps us understand that we need help and Someone to save us from this world and guide us into the next. I know some wonder about all this talk about the next world, but if God has indeed put eternity in our hearts we know that there is more to our life than what we are experiencing. We intuitively know that there is something more than this and our hearts tell us it is better. But the better life we crave is only found in Jesus. He says, "I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me." Let Him take on your trouble and lead you through this world of trouble to the next world.