

No Bad Days

Difficult days? Plenty – that’s inevitable. Challenging days? Countless – that’s a factor. Laborious days? Limitless – that’s a condition. Bad days? Banished – that’s a choice.

On March 15th, 1999, every parent’s worst fear came true for Matt and Cindy Lipscomb. After spending a fun “girl’s weekend” shopping in Chicago at the American Doll Factory with her three young daughters, Rainey (11), Lacey (9), and Jesse (5), Cindy was just starting to drift off to sleep in a cozy Amtrak train sleeping car when her worst nightmare became a reality. She was awakened by a sudden jolt and the entire train started shaking uncontrollably. Remembering that she had let her oldest daughters, Rainey and Lacey, join their cousins for a sleepover party a few cars ahead, she jumped to her feet to find her precious girls. Even her wildest dreams couldn’t have prepared her for what she was going to see. Fire and smoke filled the air as the train’s cars had flipped in a terrible derauling accident.

Cindy’s husband, Matt, was awakened by his brother calling to inform him of this horrific accident. Not knowing any details other than the train that carried all the things in the world that Matt cared about most was in shambles, Matt jumped in a car and drove the four hours to get to his bride and his three young princesses. When he came upon the wreckage, grief and sorrow overcame him. His oldest daughters, Rainey and Lacey, had died instantly on impact.

I cannot imagine a greater tragedy or more heart wrenching loss. Matt and Cindy braced themselves for the difficult weeks ahead and the unanswerable questions that would loom in their minds. Instead of fighting God, they embraced God. Instead of pointing fingers at each other, they lifted their hands in submission. A mysterious peace prevailed in their hearts that began to eclipse the nightmare. Rainey and Lacey walk in peace with God today.

Cindy says today, “I do know there is no better place to be when tragedy strikes than in the center of the body of Christ.”

My dear friend and brother in Christ, Dr. Gary Oliver, is one of the finest Christian counselors in America. He has labored through five bouts of cancer of the mouth and tongue. The treatments have been lengthy and debilitating. Surviving each round miraculously, Gary continues to walk in his faithful, optimistic mind-set. Then in the midst of it all, the unthinkable occurred. His best hunting buddy, fishing buddy, and pal, his 20-year-old son was shot in a tragic hunting accident last spring. Two months later, his soul mate, lifetime lover, and wife Carrie died of breast cancer and a broken heart. A part of all of us who love Gary died that day. I drove to his home to sit by his side and listen. Tears of sadness flowed from his eyes like a heavy spring rain. He fought the monster of despair and depression

and stood in solidarity of faith and resolved to see the sun rise like a mighty army. "How do you do it, Gary? How do you remain optimistic and peaceful?" I asked. In amazement, His reply was steady and determined. "I turn my grief into praise. I just turn my grief into praise."

James says to "consider it all joy when various trials occur." (James 1:2) It's a great Bible lesson but tough to employ when inevitable tragedy strikes. For me, when leukemia and prostate cancer came out of nowhere like a rogue wind from a distant sea, I found peace like I've never known from 2 Corinthians 12: 9 & 10.

"And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

My weakness, His strength. My weakness, His power. I am painfully aware of my weakness. Now, I'm learning daily about His untapped storehouses of strength.

As Gary, Matt, Cindy and I dive into the endless well of faith and the sufficiency of Christ, we find sufficient truth in God's sovereign hand as He "causes all things to work together for good, to those who love God and are called according to His purpose."

Bitter or better.

Pity or praise.

Revenge or resolve.

It's a choice. Joy is a decision. Happiness is always just one giant step of faith away.

Mark these Key Words: God Trials

Old Testament Viewpoint

Psalms, 119:153-154; Psalms, 118:14; Job 19:7- 9, 17, 19, 23-26

Psalms, 119:153-154 Look upon my affliction and rescue me, for I do not forget Your law. Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word.

Psalms, 118:14 The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.

Job 19:7- 9, 17, 19, 23-26 Behold, I cry, "Violence!" but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is no justice. He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, and He has put darkness on my paths. He has stripped my honor from me and removed the crown from my head.

17 My breath is offensive to my wife, and I am loathsome to my own brothers.

19 All my associates abhor me, and those I love have turned against me.

23 Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! That with an iron stylus and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God.

New Testament Viewpoint

James 1:2-4; Romans 5:2-5; Romans 8:28; Hebrews 5:8

James 1:2-4 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter, various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Romans 5:2-5 Through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 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 8:28 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.

Hebrews 5:8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

 **OBSERVATION: What is God saying?**

1) How does Job's resolve to lift up God in the midst of his severe afflictions speak to you in your circumstances?

2) How do you see David responding to God in the Psalms that gives you insight in this season of your life?

3) How do trials progress to perseverance? Why is perseverance a personal attribute to be greatly desired?

4) How has God used trials and afflictions in your past days to bring out His character in your life?

5) How does Jesus' suffering encourage you in yours?

6) How does God's Word make all the difference when you are going through "the valley of the shadow of death?"



PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS: *What else of significance do you see God saying in this passage?*



APPLICATION: *How does this passage relate to me today? What changes does it bring to my life?*



LOCKER ROOM: *Legalism is a list of Do's and Don'ts. Grace is "Do's and How to's", i.e., because God loves us so much He gives us clear direction on how to succeed, and out of the love in our heart for Him we want to "get it right". How has this perspective helped you in your daily walk with Christ?*



MEMORY VERSE: *James 1:2-3*

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.



My Prayers



Adoration: Father, today I praise You for...



Confession: Father, please forgive me for...



Thanksgiving: Father, today I'm thankful for...



Supplication: Father, the people & things that I wish to pray for today are...