

Comfort for the Suffering

Shelley's Devotional

On January 19, 2004, my wife, Shelley, experienced a major stroke at the age of 44. Hastily gathered within a small room, I remember the looks on everyone's faces within our family as the neurosurgeon shared with us her dire circumstance. If they didn't quickly stop the swelling from the trapped fluids within her ever-expanding brain, she would surely die.

Right before he performed an emergency craniotomy, he bluntly informed us that he would like to try and save her life because she was so young, if I wanted him to, but he believed that she was already too far gone.

Some broke out sobbing, others sat there with wide open mouths in disbelief that we had come to this point so quickly. I told him to do it.

We were then told by him that we could go see her before they began the operation. We knew that he was kindly telling us to, in all probability, say our last goodbye.

I walked into a dimly lit room with Shelley's family and our four oldest children. I was in the front with my arm around our youngest daughter Erika who was crying. One by one we spoke to my unconscious wife, sharing our hearts with her through many tears.

I can still see the faces of the six or seven people who would be involved with the surgery standing in a row a few feet behind Shelley. They all had masks on but I could see their eyes. They looked at us coming in to tell our wife, mother, and daughter we love her and they all began to cry. My heart went out to them as well.

As you can imagine, it was a terrible scene in the hallway as we exited the room. We all broke down with a

feeling of utter despair. I went around to my children, hugging and consoling them. Once everyone calmed down, I told them that we needed to go to the Lord in prayer. What a prayer meeting that was! Have you ever heard children begging God to spare their mother's life? If angels cry, their tears were spilling in the heavens.

The next four hours involved much prayer. At times I would pray with family, at other times with friends who were quickly gathering, and sometimes alone with God. I remember crying out very loudly to the Lord, reminding Him of the promise He had given Shelley and I about future ministry. I said to Him, "that was WE not just me!" He didn't mind me yelling, I'm sure. In fact, I believe He likes it when we hold Him to His word. It reveals our dependence upon Him, as well as our faith that He will fulfill His promise.

About halfway through Shelley's operation, the Holy Spirit reminded me of a promise that He had recently given me. I was in prayer one morning on my way to work about one month before Shelley's stroke. He suddenly spoke to me saying, "I'll be with you every step of the way." I said thank-you Lord, not being quite sure what He meant.

At one point, while off to the side by myself in the family waiting room, the Holy Spirit reminded me of this previous promise. Suddenly, I had a wave of peace roll into my heart. I had this overwhelming sense that Shelley was going to live, and she and I would have many more steps together with the Lord. What a Savior!

As I sat there alone praising the Lord, my oldest son Brandon came up to me and said, "Dad, you aren't going to believe what just happened to me. I was just praying in another part of the hospital and all of a sudden a great wave of peace came over me. Mom is going to be alright!" As the Bible says, let everything be confirmed by two or three witnesses.

I started proclaiming on the rooftops what the Lord had just whispered in my ear. The entire spirit in that waiting room immediately changed. There was a sense of great relief. The Master had just stood up in the boat, seemingly aroused from sleep, and said "Peace, be still." That's the God I serve. He's not the God of the dead, but the living.

We finally received the no longer dreaded phone call, but the now joyously anticipated phone call from the operating room. They informed me that they were sewing up the incision, and that the doctor would soon come to speak with us. Shelley was alive.

There would be many times in the immediate days following her surgery that the Holy Spirit would need to remind me of His promise to be with us every step of the way. It would be a gradual recovery filled with ups and downs. Through it all, even to this day, He has fulfilled His word.

While in rehab the next few weeks, Shelley would cry in speech therapy when she heard her normal tone of voice for the first time. There would be more tears the day of her first step as she learned how to walk again.

I remember watching her at our son's graduation party that Spring as she sat down off to the side, by her self, exhausted and a little shaky, but thankful to be alive. Each day truly is a gift from the Lord.

Shelley and I pray that the story of our personal journey will bring glory and honor to His name. Surely, our Lord Jesus Christ is worthy to be praised.

About two months after her stroke, Shelley, began to write in a daily devotional. Contained within the next few pages are some of her personal struggles with all of the physical and emotional highs and lows. I know what I felt as I read her scribbled entries. She was learning to write again, causing the handwriting to be somewhat shaky.

They deeply touched me as I felt her heart and innermost feelings during the early part of her recovery. It

is a very personal part of her story that I believe will bless anyone who takes the time to read and meditate on the priceless nuggets, especially those who are going through a similar state of suffering.

The daily devotional that she used, and will be quoting, is a very popular one by the name of "Streams In The Desert." It was written by Mrs. Charles E. Cowman and first published in 1925. In the beginning of the book, Mrs. Cowman writes;

"In the pathway of faith we come to learn that the Lord's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. Both in the physical and spiritual realm, great pressure means great power! Although circumstances may bring us into the place of death, that need not spell disaster- for if we trust in the Lord and wait patiently, that simply provides the occasion for His almighty power."

She wrote these daily tidbits for others out of her own personal struggles. They sustained her during her years as a missionary in China and Japan, and in particular the six years she nursed her husband while he was dying. It is within these struggles of our lives that the Lord develops His testimony in our hearts to encourage others when they are struggling.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

Within this public revealing of a portion of her daily devotion, Shelley will be giving the date of the devotion, along with certain quotes that she highlighted, and then her own thoughts as she reflected upon it.

We pray that these humble expressions of her heart bless you in whatever experience you now find yourself as you follow the Lord. Great trust is developed through great tests. Worthy is the Lamb!

Through the sharing of Shelley's heart we also pray that the Lord will comfort and encourage those with heavy hearts, struggling with an overwhelming sense of despair and discouragement. The dark clouds of hopelessness can mercifully be removed in the light and love of Jesus Christ's embrace. He specializes in bringing order out of seeming chaos.

May your healing and restoration begin...

March 14

This was my first devotional entry. The Bible verse for that particular day was found in Exodus 20:21 which says, "Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was."

In my reading of the devotional for that day it stated;

"Do not be afraid to enter the cloud that is settling down on your life. God is in it. The other side is radiant with His glory. When you seem loneliest and most forsaken, God is nigh. He is in the dark cloud."

The devotion shared a short story that I could relate with. This is what it said;

"As Dr. C stood on a high peak of the Rocky Mountains watching a storm raging below him, an eagle came up through the clouds and soared away toward the sun, and the water upon him glistened in the sunlight like diamonds. Had it not been for the storm he might have

remained in the valley. The sorrows of life cause us to rise toward God."

On the side of the devotional I scribbled these thoughts; *"It's so hard to be patient at times, Lord. I feel lonely and forsaken but I **must** trust God. I will believe God, not my circumstances. 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 says, "So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."*

I then added a side note which said, *"I made the bed in 1 and ½ minutes."* I'm not counting these days. The only thing I'm counting now is the fact that I have more than one bed to make!

March 15

This day I read from Isaiah 41:14-15 which said, "Fear not, thou worm of Jacob---I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth." In the devotional reading they told of the contrast between the worm and the threshing instrument. The worm was delicate, bruised by a stone and crushed beneath an instrument with teeth that can break and not be broken. God can convert the one into another.

When I was at Mary Freebed Rehabilitation Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I was doing my morning devotional on February 14 and God led me to Isaiah 41. He talked about the lowly worm and immediately I could relate. I began to cry and literally felt like the delicate, bruised worm that He talked about.

He went on further in the chapter and talked about the strength He would soon give. He can take a man or a

nation that feels like a worm and give them the strength they need to make a mark in history!

I read the following within the devotional;

“And so the ‘worm’ may take heart. The mighty God can make us stronger than our circumstances. He can bend them all to our good. In God’s strength, we can make them all pay tribute to our souls... Christ is building His kingdom with earth’s broken things. Men want only the strong, the successful, the victorious, the unbroken, in building their kingdoms, but God is the God of the unsuccessful, of those who have failed.”

I truly believe that the church in general feels this way toward some. They seem to have forgotten the “forgotten.” James 2:1-5 says, “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here's a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?”

I wrote in my journal for that day, *“Lord, I feel like the worm. I know in Your time, that You will make me strong. You are the God of the unsuccessful and **You** will make me successful again!!”*

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the

things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” I knew that only God would get the credit for my remarkable recovery!

March 16

The devotion for the day was about a woman who apparently was accustomed to having her own way in life. Many of us are like that woman. We selfishly do our own thing, until God humbles us and puts us on our backs like He did me. She was in a terrible accident, which crippled her for life, and became an embittered person. We can become bitter or better when trials come into our lives.

Because of her accident, she was visited by a missionary. He told her a parable of the canyon. *“At first,”* he said, *“there were no canyons, but only the broad open prairie.”* He went on to tell her of the discussion that the Master and the prairie had. The prairie wanted to know why there were only grasses that grew there. The Master wanted to know why the prairie hadn’t grown flowers. *“‘Master I have no seeds,’ said the prairie.”* So the Master spoke to the birds and they carried seeds of every kind to the prairie and soon the prairie bloomed with crocuses and roses, buffalo beans, yellow crowfoot and the wild sunflowers.

Then the Master came for a visit and was pleased to see all the beautiful flowers that had grown in the prairie. But he missed the flowers that he loved the best of all and asked the prairie where the dematis, the columbine, sweet violets and the wild flowers were.

Again he spoke to the birds and they carried seeds and scattered them into the prairie. But when the Master came and visited the prairie, he couldn’t find the flowers that he loved the best. The prairie cried and said, *“Oh Master, I cannot keep the flowers, for the winds sweep fiercely, and*

the sun beats upon my breast, and they wither up and fly away.”

Then the Master spoke to the lightening. With one swift blow, it brought heavy torrents of wind and rain. Soon the river poured its waters through the cleft and carried down deep black mold.

Once more the birds carried seeds and strewed them in the canyon. After a long time, the rough rocks were covered with mosses and trailing vines and soon all the crevices were hung with clematis and columbine. Great elms, balsams and cedar trees clustered the prairie. Everywhere the violets, wildflowers, and maidenhair grew and bloomed until the canyon became the favorite place for rest, peace, and joy for the Master.

Then the missionary said to the woman, *“The fruit- I’ll read ‘flowers’- of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness- and some of these grow only in the canyon.”* She asked him which flowers were canyon flowers. He answered her with, *“Gentleness, meekness, longsuffering; but though the others, love, joy and peace, bloom in the open, yet never with so rich a bloom and so sweet a perfume as in the canyon.”*

Like the woman in the story, I wondered if there were any flowers in my canyon. I wrote in my journal, *“Lord, may the fruits of the Spirit grow in me through my **canyon** experience.”* Someday those flowers will bloom and they’ll leave an aroma that will be pleasing to the Master.

March 17

My journal reading for the day was Matthew 2:13 which says, “Be thou there till I bring thee word.” It talked about the importance of waiting on God. I read that patience and trust in the dullness of the routine of life would be the best preparation for the task that God would someday call me

to. I wrote in my journal for that day; *“I know that you’ll send me soon Lord. Although it may appear otherwise, you’ll send me in your time!”*

Later on that day, we went to a regional high school basketball game that my oldest son was playing in. It was against a rival team and we hoped to see them win. In the last minute of the game, my son stole the ball and passed it to one of his teammates who scored and was fouled. He missed the free-throw, got the rebound, and then put up a shot. When he missed it, the other team grabbed the rebound and drove the length of the court for a lay-up with hardly any time remaining. We threw up a long shot which missed and lost the game by one point!

As both teams exited the court, one of the fans from the other team yelled something out to my son. He tried to keep going, but another fan got in his face and said something else. My son charged the opposing team’s bleachers. I was horrified. Usually, my kids were better losers than that.

Later on, I found out that somebody had yelled something derogatory about me to my son. He was defending me, along with several other players on the team. The school didn’t say a word to him or the other players. They knew that it was a miracle that I was even able to make it to the game.

As I went to bed that night, I grabbed my journal and this is what I wrote; *“We lost by only one point. How many lose by only ‘one point’ for eternity? (Matthew 7-21:23)”*

Further down the column, I scribbled down something that God had impressed upon me as soon as I was conscious in the hospital. I had a strong sense of family and that my kids were wonderful. I’ve always had that, but this was unusually different. I knew that God was going to use them. This is what I wrote. *“My son stood up for me. Isn’t that great? God will use him someday, I know it. I have **good** kids.”*

March 18

My reading for that day was Mark 15:3 which said, “He answered nothing.” It wasn’t talking about how God was silent when answering prayer. It’s talking about how the Savior didn’t utter a word or try to vindicate himself when he was being maligned by His enemies. He stood in the “Power of Stillness.”

The devotional went on to state;

“There is a silence that lets God work for us, and holds our peace, the stillness that ceases from its contriving and its self-vindication, and its expedients of wisdom and forethought, and lets God provide and answer the cruel blow, in His own unfailing faithful love.”

Little did I know at the time, but months later, I would have to put this verse into practice. One thing is for sure, when you are following Jesus Christ you will also make enemies. I wrote in my journal, *“Lord, help me to hold my peace. There will be enemies I know, that will utter lies. Help me to believe what you have told me. You said, ‘You will be healed 125%.’”*

When I was in Mary Freebed, we met several people that were Christians who were in there for therapy. One young man that was almost killed in a car accident wanted to pray for me. He prayed that God would heal me 125%. At the time it seemed almost laughable. I took his prayer as a word from the Lord and I have believed it ever since. God is good!

March 19

It was a quiet day. I wrote in my journal, *“Lord, I’m doing so much better. I trust you to make me better.”* (As I write

this, sitting here almost three years later, I can testify to the world that He has healed me!)

March 20

My reading for the day was in 2 Corinthians 6:10 which read, “As sorrowful, yet rejoicing.” Just because we’re Christians doesn’t mean we’re exempt from suffering.

There’s a gospel out there today, that doesn’t want to preach suffering. Romans 8:16-18 says, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” The Bible makes itself very clear when it says that if we share in His sufferings, we’ll also share in His glory.

The reading stated that the *“noblest psalms were the outcome of the profoundest agony of soul.”* As I read that, I could relate with David when he wrote in Psalms 6:3-6, “My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long? Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love. No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave? I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.”

That also was the Psalm that I read to my brother who died of cancer 23 years earlier. My brother was a new believer and had great difficulty praising God during his illness. He did, however, have a sense of humor that carried him through some of the darkest hours.

I wrote in my journal, *“I can relate with what the writer has written. I’m so glad that I praised God during my darkest hour! I know what it’s like to be still and trust*

God.” I literally had to be still and trust God. I couldn’t walk very well and slept the majority of the day. God has a way of getting your attention!

March 21

Today’s devotional dealt with believing and anticipating that which God has spoken to us. The verse for the day was Matthew 9:29 which says, “According to your faith be it unto you.”

The author said;

“Let us remember that no earthly circumstances can hinder the fulfillment of His Word if we look steadfastly at the immutability of that Word and not at the uncertainty of this ever-changing world.”

I wrote, *“Thanks be to God. He will do it in His own timing!”* I had an expectancy that God was going to use this for His glory. I continued to wait.

March 22

My reading for the day took me into Acts 7:30-34 which said, "After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down

to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.”

That seemed like a long time in preparation for a great mission for Moses. Just because there is a delay doesn't mean that God isn't working behind the scenes, getting everything ready.

Many times in history you see a great wait for a great work. Jesus was 30 years old when His ministry began. Luke 2:52 says, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” While He was waiting, He was growing.

As I read my journal that day, I couldn't help but meditate on these words;

“God is never in a hurry but spends years with those He expects to greatly use. He never thinks the days of preparation are too long or dull. The hardest ingredient in suffering is often time.”

This is what I wrote; *“Lord, help me to remember that you're still working when it seems slow. I want to be ready when it's time. Help me to learn while I can. I feel like a caterpillar, but I know someday I will fly. You are faithful.”* I felt like the “lowly worm” that God talked about in Isaiah 41.

The caterpillar, with its limited mobility, has to go through the metamorphosis process to become a butterfly that lives about two weeks. If the caterpillar is helped through the process, especially in the struggle of the cocoon, the butterfly dies. The struggle to break out is what develops the strength in its wings needed to fly.

In that moment of being placed in the cocoon of God's choosing, I too had limited mobility. It would prove to be a metamorphosis type of experience in my life. If it had been any other way, the testimony contained in this book

wouldn't have been written. God knows exactly what He's doing.

March 23

I could tell by my handwriting and the comments I made in my journal that this particular day wasn't an easy one for me. The reading didn't seem to apply to my struggle, and if it did, I didn't seem to notice.

I wrote, *"We must continue to persevere, even though you're tired. Sometimes you wonder if the trial you are in will produce a butterfly. It's literally day by day."*

Further down the column I added a side note about something that must have really been on my mind at the time. I wrote *"I will drive!"*

March 24

My Bible reading for the day started in Genesis 32:9-11 which says, "Then Jacob prayed, 'O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives,' I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children.'"

The point that was being made was where Jacob prayed and said, "O Lord who said to me." In my journal, something caught my eye as I was reading. Mrs. Cowman said;

“Our Christian life hinges on one thing, and that is taking God at His word, believing that He really means exactly what He says, and accepting the very words in which He reveals His goodness and grace.”

In my journal writing for the day, I reminded God what He had told me in the hospital. *“God, you said you’d heal me 125%. I’m looking at the end result!”* Now, almost three years later, I’m close to 100%. I believe the other 25% will happen when Tim and I go around and speak of the wonderful power of Jesus! We will go.

March 25

My Bible reading for the day was from Hebrews 11:6. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

My journal started out with the sentence, *“The faith for desperate days.”* It went on to list some of the problems that great men of God faced.

Remember the promise that God gave to Abraham and Sarah, a couple as good as dead? He would make their descendants as numerous as the stars in heaven, or the grains of sand on the seashore.

Think of poor Noah. Out of obedience, he was building an ark for those who believed that God was going to flood the earth. He was building a place of protection by faith.

Think of how God parted the Red Sea and made a way of escape for the Israelites when they left Egypt and were trapped by their enemies. Go over the history of Nehemiah, Daniel, Hosea and Habakkuk. The Bible is filled with seemingly desperate days that His children experienced.

My journal had a part of a song that went along with the reading for this particular day that I highlighted.

“When obstacles and trials seem like prison walls to be, I do the little I can do, and leave the rest to Thee. And when there seems no chance, no change, from grief can set me free; hope finds its strength in helplessness and calmly waits for Thee.”

I wrote, *“It’s true. Like prison walls to be, I do the little I can do, and leave the rest to Thee. Oh, I try to solve it myself but I must leave it to God.”* Desperation is better than despair.

March 26

Once again my Bible reading brought me to Genesis where I read about the promises God had given to Abraham. It made me think of an annual conference I had just attended. I work with teen mothers and their infants and the conference is always a wealth of information.

My colleague picked me up at home. Thankfully, I brought my cane. Because it hadn’t been that long since my stroke, my balance wasn’t the best yet, especially in a crowd of people. Tim wasn’t sure about my going because of the great fatigue I would have to endure, but I decided to go.

A large hotel holds this early childhood conference every year. Thousands of people come to it. At the main desk we asked for a wheelchair. They had very few, and the deposit was \$50. They had an escort that had to wheel you around the entire time, and after you were done, the hotel would give you back \$25. I couldn’t believe what handicapped people had to endure.

One of the sessions that we chose was down the road from the hotel. We decided to walk. As we began, it started to rain. I steadily grew more tired as I walked. Finally, I looked at my friend and began to cry. I just couldn't do it. People pushed themselves through the crowded sidewalk, and didn't seem to notice or even care that I was struggling.

Immediately, I remembered the years before at the conference. I was capable, independent, and full of energy and life. Now, I was this handicapped, dependent, and tired person, just trying to hold on to my sanity.

I realized for the first time, that I had to grieve for the person that I once was. It hit me that I was different! My speech was different, my walking was different, my thoughts were different, and my circumstances were different. Everything was now different.

I finished out the conference that day, only to find that I was totally exhausted. I did read my journal that day and was impressed with a statement that I read. This is what I wrote; *"It was so hard to go to a conference with thousands of women, only to be limited. I now feel how someone else feels with limitations. It's very humbling. But what the writer of this day's devotion said is true. "All you can apprehend in the vision of faith is your own." I wrote down that "I will speak to thousands of women because God has something to tell them."*

As I sat with over a thousand women at the conference, I knew that God would use me to share with them what they really needed to hear; that God loved them.

March 27

I was still exhausted from the day before and was starting to deal with some depression. I never really struggled with it before. My oldest daughter dealt with

depression six years before. She described it as feeling like a wet and heavy blanket had been thrown over top of you.

As a mother I could give medicine when she was sick, and take her to the hospital when she was injured, but I didn't know how to handle depression. A band-aid wouldn't work anymore. I felt responsible and helpless. The only thing I could do was pray.

Romans 8:18 was my Bible reading for the day. I love that verse. It says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

My journal shared a true story that was truly touching. It talked about a very wealthy and influential man who was blinded in an accident at the age of ten.

In spite of his blindness, he met a girl and fell in love. Without ever seeing her, only touching her delicate face, he decided upon marriage.

Shortly before their wedding, he visited with some doctors that gave him hope that he would see again. After submitting to some treatments by experts, the final test would come on his wedding day.

With his eyes still bandaged with gauze, he arrived at the church with his father and doctor. All the guests arrived and the ceremony was about to begin. The bride entered the sanctuary on the arm of her father. She was so moved, she could hardly speak. Would her lover finally see her face that so many others had admired?

As she and her father approached the altar, she noticed that there was somebody else besides her groom and his father. The groom's father stood there with his son to help balance him and the doctor that had been seeing him for his eyes stood there and unwrapped the last bandage.

Did he see anything? Yes! They looked into each others eyes for the first time. "At last," she said. "At last!" he echoed. What great joy they must have felt. As Christians,

we'll experience the same type of feeling when we shall see our Heavenly Groom face-to-face.

I wrote in my journal that *"someday, I will look in the eyes of Jesus. Until then, I'll keep on believing His promise."* I went on to say, *"Today was a **very hard day**. Tim took me outside for a walk."* I couldn't go upon what I saw, or how I felt. I needed to simply believe Romans 8:18.

March 28

My Bible reading for the day was found in Joshua. Chapter three described when the priests, who carried the ark of the Lord, placed the soles of their feet in the Jordan River and the waters stopped flowing. God did not divide the waters until they obeyed.

I'm sure the people there with the priests were thinking to themselves, and hoping, that the priests wouldn't get carried off with the ark and the current of the river. God's desire is for us to step out in faith and carry His message to the unsaved world, but the current, or obstacles, within the world and our hearts keep us from obeying His word.

In Mark 16:15 Jesus commanded His disciples to *"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."* That's for us too.

My journal writing had nothing to do with what I read, but it was about my oldest daughter Melissa. She had dated a boy for five years, and we thought that perhaps she would marry him someday.

I wrote *"Today, Melissa told me that her boyfriend broke up with her. Melissa, like me, has to, by faith, keep going. God has someone special for her. Keep on Melissa!"*

Today, Melissa is happily married to a fine Christian man with two children. God is so good.

March 29

My Bible reading for the day was found in Matthew 6:29 which says, "Consider the lilies how they grow." I was still concerned about my daughter Melissa and the reading in my journal brought me comfort. I'd like to share it with you in its entirety. It said:

"'I need oil,' said an ancient monk; so he planted an olive sapling. 'Lord,' he prayed, 'it needs rain that its tender roots may drink and swell. Send gentle showers.' And the Lord sent gentle showers. 'Lord,' prayed the monk, 'my tree needs sun. Send sun, I pray Thee.' And the sun shone, gilding the dripping clouds. 'Now frost, my Lord, to brace its tissues,' cried the monk. And behold, the little tree stood sparkling with frost, but at evening it died.

Then the monk sought the cell of a brother monk, and told his strange experience. 'I too, planted a little tree,' he said. 'See, it thrives well! But I entrust my tree to its God. He who made it knows better what it needs than a man like me. I laid no condition. I fixed not ways or storms or sunshine, wind, rain or frost. Thou hast made it and Thou dost know.'"

After reading this I knew in my heart, that God knew exactly what Melissa needed. I wrote "*Lord, please give Melissa what she needs. I'm like the monk and the tree. You love her more than I do.*"

Further down the page I wrote next to a P.S. and a star, "*I got to drive with Tim today. It was not scary at all.*" One step at a time.

March 30

My Bible reading today was found in Isaiah 50:11. It says, "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." Mrs. Cowman states;

"What a solemn warning to those who walk in darkness and yet who try to help themselves out into the light. They are represented as kindling a fire, and compassing themselves with sparks. What does this mean?"

Why, it means that when we are in darkness the temptation is to find a way without trusting in the Lord and relying upon Him. Instead of letting Him help us out, we try to help ourselves out."

It's very tempting when you're experiencing difficult, dark days, to try and get yourself out. We often seek the advice of family, friends, even our church family without first going to the Lord.

Job's friends certainly didn't give him Godly council. That should be a warning to us all. We need to be careful when we're asked for our advice. Perhaps, God has that person in a dark time, to get his or her attention and prove to them that He alone is their deliverance.

In one paragraph I have marked that we shouldn't try to get out of a dark place, except in God's time and in God's way. The time of darkness is used to teach us a necessary lesson.

I knew that this time of my life was indeed a dark place in which God was teaching me a tremendous lesson that I would need later. Premature deliverance, like in birth, could cause difficulties and even change the course that God had planned for me.

I wrote in my journal, *“Thank you God for what you are doing in my life, my daughter’s life, the church, in Tyler’s life (one of my two son’s) etc. I **will** trust you and **will not** get out of the dark place until I’m told to. Help me!”*

March 31

Matthew 14:24 says, *“The wind was contrary.”* What an applicable Bible reading this was. I read a paragraph in my journal that I could say Amen to. It read, *“Jesus Christ is no security against the storms, but He is perfect security in storms. He has never promised you an easy passage, only a safe landing.”*

In my journal I wrote, *“I love the last paragraph.”* This had now become experiential knowledge for me. Down toward the bottom of the page I wrote, *“Today has been a good day.”* Thank the Lord for simple things like “good days”!

April 1

My Bible reading for the day took me to Job 13:15 which says, *“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face.”* It also took me to 2 Timothy 1:12, *“For I know whom I have believed.”*

I’ve always loved poetry. In this journal reading, I would like to share with you a portion of a poem that I read. It said;

“I will not doubt, though all my ships at sea come drifting home with broken masts and sails, I will believe the Hand which never fails. From seeming evil worketh good for me, and though I weep because those sails are tattered, still

will I cry, while my best hopes lie shattered; I trust in Thee.”

My body was tattered and my best hopes were shattered. I couldn't play with my new daughter that we had adopted from China a couple of months before my stroke. In fact, we were just getting reacquainted.

Our plans for the future were on hold. All I could do was quietly wait and trust. In my journal I wrote, *“It's so hard but you have to do it. It's hard to trust God when you have really tough times. 2 Timothy 1:12 is good; ‘For I know whom I have believed.’”*

April 2

My Bible reading for the day was Exodus 16:10. “They looked. And behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.” The reading encouraged us to look for the silver lining in the clouds instead of the dismal gray in the middle. It told us never to yield to discouragement no matter how it seems, and warned us that a discouraged soul is helpless and prey for the devil.

Have you ever noticed that Satan loves to attack you when you're helpless and vulnerable? I literally felt an evil presence in the hospital after I had my stroke. It was the second day after surgery and I wasn't even fully conscious (Tim shared this with me).

I felt evil and the presence of God at the same time. Satan was trying to take my life. Praise God that He was there with me all the time! God got the victory.

Satan continuously tries to get our focus off the Lord and to instead look at our circumstances. In my journal I wrote, *“We must look upward.”*

April 3

Today's verse was Isaiah 24:15. It says, "Glorify ye the Lord in the fires." In my journal I read the following comment;

"Mark the little word 'in'! We are to honor Him in the trial-in that which is an affliction indeed and though there have been cases where God did not let His saints feel the fire, yet, ordinarily, fire hurts.

But just here we are to glorify Him by our perfect faith in His goodness and love that has permitted all this to come upon us.

And more than that, we are to believe that out of this is coming something more for His praise than could have come but for this fiery trial.

We can only go through some fires with a large faith; little faith will fail. We must have the victory in the furnace."

In my journal I wrote, "Lord I feel stronger and better every day. I'm thankful you don't keep us in the fire forever." We must understand that God uses the fire in our lives, to burn off the dross and make us more like Him. I'm learning to endure the fire, while at the same time looking for His deliverance. He is so faithful.

April 4

Today's word was found in 2 Kings 6:17 which says, "Elisha prayed, and said, Lord I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see."

I wrote, "Lord, may I never get discouraged enough to quit. I feel like it sometimes. I know you have something

good right around the corner.” Don’t go by what you see, or how you feel. Stand firm on God’s word. He never lies!

April 5

My Bible reading for the day was 2 Kings 4:4. “Thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons.” Sometimes God has us shut the door to the outside world so that we can be alone with Him. In my case, I had a stroke and was a shut-in for months.

Sometimes, people lose their job and have to depend on God for their provision. Some lose loved ones and have to trust God that all things do truly work together for good.

Many times religious people like to believe that nothing “bad” will ever happen to them. They like to be the Lord of their own lives and like to calculate almost everything that will happen.

They often judge those of us who have trials as though God is dealing with us for some type of sin, allowing Satan the opportunity to mess with us. In some cases that may be true. On the other hand, the fiery trials we go through that are misinterpreted as attacks from the enemy could actually be God’s way of conforming us to the likeness of His Son.

1 Peter 4:12-13 is a good verse that I have tried to memorize. It says, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” That can be a hard word to accept if we don’t fully trust the Lord.

In my journal I wrote, *“It’s true about most religious people. They can almost calculate what God will do. It’s being flat on your back and shut alone with Him that will*

change everything.” As the devotion said, “In the sorest trials, God often makes the sweetest discoveries of Himself.”

April 6

In my Bible I read for that day from Habakkuk 2:1. “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the town, and will watch to see what he will say to me.” I was reminded that there was no waiting on God for help, and there was no help from God, without watchful expectation.

As the devotion stated concerning the receiving of strength and defense from the Lord; *“He whose expectation does not lead him to be on the alert for its coming will get but little. Watch for God in the events of your life.”*

I wrote, *“God, I will wait for your promise of 125%. I claim that!”* Not only was I going to be 125%, but I was convinced that God was going to visit our little town as well. Come quickly Lord Jesus.

April 7

I read in Isaiah 30:7, “Their strength is to sit still.” Sitting still was not my nature. In fact, sitting at all made me feel guilty. I was a busy mother of five children. I had no time to sit. There were always things to do and places to go.

The devotion stated that quiet tension isn’t trust. Some of the worst people to live with are passive aggressive. They’re quietly wreaking havoc behind the scenes. They manipulate with their quietness. Quiet tension is simply suppressed anxiety.

I thought of myself when I read in my journal;

“A time of great emergency had risen in my life, when every part of my being seemed to throb with anxiety, and when the necessity for immediate and vigorous action seemed overpowering; and yet circumstances were such that I could do nothing, and the person who could, would not stir.”

I wrote in my journal, *“I’m thankful that now, I’m really knowing God in a different way. I really do have inward stillness. I can’t do what I once did. Sometimes I want to scream but I must trust God instead.”*

April 8

Today my Bible reading led me to 2 Corinthians 12:10. “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” I read in my journal, that the literal translation of the verse meant “without strength.” When I am without strength, than am I dynamite.

Further down the page, it told about a well-known blind preacher that was from Scotland. His name was George Matheson. He said;

“My God, I have never thanked Thee for my thorn. I have thanked Thee a thousand times for my roses, but not once for my thorn. I have been looking forward to a world where I shall get compensation for my cross; but I have never thought of my cross as itself a present glory.

Teach me the glory of my cross; teach me the value of my thorn. Show me that I have climbed to Thee by the path of pain. Show me that my tears have made a rainbow.”

As I read this that particular day, I remember crying. This is what I wrote; *“God, I have often asked, ‘God, why me?’ Not in a bad sense, but why did you choose Mary to have you? Why me? You could have chosen someone else. You chose me! May I thank God for my thorns as well as my roses.”*

April 9

Today there were two Bible verses listed in the devotional. The first was Genesis 42:36 which says, “Their father Jacob said to them, ‘You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!’”

In the second, which was Romans 8:28, Paul states, “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?”

The journal reading today was about how God brings power into your life. The question is how is this power that many people desire produced within our lives?

Using the example of trolley engines, something commonly seen when this devotional was written in the early 1900’s, Mrs. Cowman describes how the electricity required to power them was produced.

A friend told her it was *“by the revolution of those wheels and the friction they produce. The rubbing creates the electric current.*

And so, when God wants to bring more power into your life, He brings more pressure. Like most people, I wish there could be an easier way.

After reading this I wrote; *“We all want power but we don’t want the pressure. Tim has said that God uses the pressure and heat of a heavenly iron to remove our*

wrinkles. This happens through the Holy Spirit's refining fire.

A spot (sin) in our lives is washed out, or cleansed, when we apply the word of God. It's what the Bible refers to as the washing of water with the word. When Jesus returns, it will be for His pure and spotless Bride."

Ephesians 5:25-27 puts it this way; "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

April 10

I read today from Job 10:2 which says, "I will say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me." Sometimes, God allows certain trials in our lives to develop our faith. Some have told me that I have a gift of faith. I believe this gift has been developed under severe pressure and testing, but God isn't finished.

Some pray for great faith. They're really praying for hardships and great trials. You don't know if you have great faith until it's tested. God trains all of His soldiers through periods of great testing.

In His conforming process He might take us through valleys, up mountains, through the desert, into storms, and even through deep waters, but He promises to "never leave us or forsake us." I can personally testify that this is true. His living presence gave me much strength during the times when I needed Him the most.

The devotion entry for today said;

"Hope itself is like a star; not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity, and only to be discovered in the night of

adversity. Afflictions are often the black folds in which God doth set the jewels of His children's graces, to make them shine the better."

I wrote in my journal; "Lord, at times it would be easy to throw in the towel but we must depend on your grace to carry us through the storm. We **must** trust you."

April 11

In my devotion for the day I read the following;

"Our Lord is constantly taking us into the dark, that He may tell us things. Into the dark of the shadowed home, where bereavement has drawn the blinds; into the dark of the lonely, desolate life, where some infirmity closes us in from the light and stir of life; into the dark of some crushing sorrow and disappointment."

My Bible reading brought me to Matthew 10:27 which says, "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."

Today, as I'm writing this book, that verse gives me hope. Everything that God has told us in the dark days since I had my stroke is to be spoken of and proclaimed for all to hear. He is faithful!

In my journal I wrote; "Great men of God have suffered a lot. Why do we judge suffering? Why do we think if we suffer, we have extraordinary sins?"

The devotional stated;

"We are not meant to always linger in the dark, or stay in the closet; presently we shall be summoned to take our place in the rush and storm of life; and when that moment comes, we are to speak and proclaim what we have learned."

I pray that Tim and I will be found faithful in proclaiming the great and mighty things that He has done in our lives.

April 12

My Bible reading for the day was Luke 4:1-2; “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.”

It really encourages me to know that, even though Jesus was full of the Holy Ghost, He was still tempted. Satan loves to tempt us when we’re weak and vulnerable. He constantly waits for an “opportune time” to lead us astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3).

In my devotional there was a quote by Archbishop Leighton which said;

“Extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment of extraordinary sins, but sometimes the trial of extraordinary graces. God hath many sharp-cutting instruments, and rough files for the polishing of His jewels; and those He especially loves, and means to make the most resplendent, He hath oftenest His tools upon.”

After reading this particular paragraph, I wrote in my journal that *“I liked what I put in parenthesis (the journal reading above). It sums up what I’m going through.”*

April 13

Today’s verse was Ezekiel 3:22 which says, “The hand of the LORD was upon me there, and he said to me, ‘Get

up and go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you.” The theme for the devotion was waiting on God.

As Mrs. Cowman stated, *“Did you ever hear of anyone being much used for Christ who did not have some special waiting time, some complete upset of all his or her plans first?”*

Paul was sent out to the desert for a few years. Noah had to wait over 100 years. Abraham and Sarah had to wait for a son. Moses had to wander in the desert for forty years. The Bible tells us of many people who had to wait. It’s hard to wait, especially when you’ve waited for a long time and you know you’ve heard a word from the Lord.

In my journal I wrote, *“Today I must rest in more ways than one. I wonder if now is the, ‘Great and mighty work for you to do.’ If I can trust Him with my life, than I can trust Him with my finances. Sometimes it’s hard to rest.”*

One day while praying when I was younger, I received a word from the Lord concerning future ministry for Tim and I. He told me that He had a “great and mighty work” for us to do. I don’t tell you that to toot my own horn. We’ve waited for that promise for many years, often questioning God as to what exactly it is and when it will happen. We believe the testimony of my stroke will play a major part in its fulfillment. In the meantime, we must continue faithfully with whatever the Lord calls us to.

As I now read what I had written on this day, I’m reminded that God has taken care of us all the time. Today is my birthday (December 14). We have \$200.00 to our name, bills are piling up, and Christmas is 2 weeks away. I’m reminded of what I wrote in my journal, *“If I can trust Him with my life, than I can trust Him with my finances.”* God is good.

April 15

I read in my Bible today from Psalm 119:42. It says, “I trust in thy word.” As I read my devotion for the day, I was reminded, and still am, that true faith is not dependent on feelings, outward appearances, or impressions. True faith is resting on God’s promises. “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). If you can see it then no faith is required.

I read how trials are food of faith. Why is it that we shrink back from trials? The Bible is filled with people who had to endure various trials and hardships. We often read of the saints before us that endured hardships. I’m reminded of George Mueller who ran an orphanage in England and who was responsible for hundreds of orphans. He was doing the work of the Lord.

Often, he would sit down to eat without any food on the table to feed them. Because he knew the Lord our Provider, he could trust that God would feed them. He prayed and the dinner was never more than 30 minutes late.

Concerning the trials of his faith, Mueller was quoted in my devotional, saying, “I will wait and see what good God will do to me by it, assured He will do it. Thus we shall bear an honorable testimony before the world, and thus we shall strengthen the hands of others.”

When you’re familiar with God and His ways, you can wait patiently and be assured “He will do it,” in whatever circumstance you may now find yourself in. I wrote in my journal; *“Right now, I will wait and see what good God will do to me by it (meaning, through my stroke). I am not mistrusting God at all. I would like to see what God will do.”*

I am now walking, talking, writing, and waiting. I’m waiting for the promise that God will visit my town as well. I wait by faith.

April 16

I read in my Bible today Hebrews 11:8. “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.” My devotion for the day stated;

“Whither he went, he knew not; it was enough for him to know that he went with God. He leant not so much upon the promises as upon the Promiser. He looked not on the difficulties of his lot, but on the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, who had designed to appoint his course, and would certainly vindicate Himself. O glorious faith! This is Thy work, these are Thy possibilities; contentment to sail with sealed orders, because of unwavering confidence in the wisdom of the Lord High Admiral; willingness to rise up, leave all, and follow Christ, because of the glad assurance that earth’s best cannot bear comparison with heaven’s least.”

At the time, I didn’t know where God was taking us. I still don’t fully know yet, although I’m that much closer and have a better idea. This journey hasn’t been easy. As I sit here this morning writing, I’m reminded of the things I wrote and the feelings that I had, and it makes me weep.

Financially, we’re worse off and yet our bills have been paid. Spiritually, we’ve learned so much about God and His provision for our lives. He has blessed us and shown us His ways. He has given us new friends and a Christian family that loves us.

I read something further on in the devotion for this day that had become so true in our journey, and most likely every other person’s journey when following Christ. In regards to our setting out on any venture of faith;

“Tear into smallest pieces any itinerary for the journey which your imagination may have drawn up. Nothing will fall out as you expect. Your guide will keep to no beaten path. He will lead you by a way such as you never dreamed your eyes would look upon. He knows no fear and He expects you to fear nothing while He is with you.”

Wow, was this so true! By faith you learn to hang on, trusting that your Guide, the Lord, knows what He is doing and where He is leading, even though it seems to make no sense at times whatsoever.

The following poem by Annie Porter Johnson within the devotion really touched me that day. It said;

*“The day had gone; alone and weak
I groped my way within a bleak and sunless land.
The path that led into the light
I could not find! In that dark night
God took my hand.
He led me that I might not stray,
And brought me by a new, safe way
I had not known.
By waters still, through pastures green,
I followed Him- the path was clean
Of briar and stone.
The heavy darkness lost its strength,
my waiting eyes beheld at length
The streaking dawn.
On, safely on, through sunrise glow
I walked, my hand in His, and lo,
the night had gone.”*

I wrote in my journal, *“The last two verses say, ‘the night had gone.’ I think it disappears in time. Tim got laid off today. We’ll see what God will do.”*

Further down in my journal I put a star by something I wrote. It said, *"I can whistle now."* One more simple step forward had been taken.

April 17

My Bible reading for the day was found in Job 12:9. "The hand of the Lord hath wrought this." I read in my journal about the most magnificent diamond found in history. It was presented to the King of England. The King had it sent to Amsterdam to be cut by an expert lapidary. He took the diamond and began striking it with his instrument.

For weeks the blow had been studied. Drawings and models had been made of the diamond. Its quality, lines and defects were all studied. The man who had been studying this gem was one of the most skillful lapidaries in the world.

Some would say that this blow the lapidary struck the diamond with would cause the precious stone to be ruined. But in fact, the opposite was true. When the diamond was cut in half, two magnificent stones appeared. The lapidary, with his skilled eye, saw what the hidden, uncut stone from the mine would one day become through his skilled touch.

That's how it is with us too. We're the most priceless jewel and the Lord is the most skilled lapidary in the universe. I often struggled with the fact that after my stroke I wasn't the person that I once was. I couldn't make the decisions that I previously did, I was much slower around the house, and found myself not as graceful walking as I was before. My house wasn't as clean as it used to be, and I just wasn't as independent as I had been. I had become a "cracked pot."

At one of my therapy sessions, I ran across a story that made me weep when I read it. This was exactly how I felt. This fits in perfectly with the verse I read in Job. I don't know who the author is, but it's entitled "Cracked Pots."

"A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream of the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." "Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?" "I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because of this crack in my side which causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all the work, and you don't get the full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path."

Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its

load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and took advantage of it.

I planted seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

Every time I read this story, I cry. I can relate with the "cracked pot" even now. Sure, I'm better at many things now than I was right after my stroke, but as of late I often wonder, "where would we be now if I hadn't had a stroke, and if Tim hadn't lost his job?"

I find myself apologizing to my children about not having enough money to get them certain things, like Christmas presents or gifts for my first grandchild, or a better wedding present for our oldest daughter's wedding. They assure me that it's all right, but they see the struggle. They too, like Tim and I, are waiting for God's deliverance.

Like the water bearer, Jesus is taking all of my tears and watering His flowers. He will present them to the Heavenly father in one huge bouquet. We believe that the souls that will be touched because of our faithfulness to His call will one day be like a heavenly bouquet of flowers presented to Him. The sweet aroma will be pleasing in the nostrils of Almighty God!

In my journal I wrote, "*God, I'll trust you when I wonder at times. You never make a mistake.*"

Some Final Thoughts

There are more journal entries that I could share, letting you know how God spoke to me in those early days after my stroke, but I just wanted to publicly reveal a portion of our journey, proclaiming His faithfulness towards my husband and I in order to encourage you. As the Lord promised Tim right before this all began, He has truly been with us “every step of the way.”

As I read back on how God used the stroke in my life to bring me closer to him, many emotions flood my mind. I remember the struggles that I faced filled with feelings of total despair. There were **many** days of stillness that went by.

Recovery for most is very slow. Unfortunately, some will never fully recover. Others are faced with death. What a wonderful assurance I had that no matter what the outcome might be, God had me in the palm of His hand and was taking care of me.

That assurance was given to me when I put my faith and trust in Him years ago. It's been both a delightful and difficult journey. Like the apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:12-13, “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

Like Paul, I learned that when I am weak, then I am strong. In 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10 Paul states, “But he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

I also learned that when it is the darkest, then God is the brightest. In Psalms 119:105 He promises to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Tim and I have seen His light illuminate the path of His choosing for us often. When in doubt, look for His light. He will faithfully guide you to a place that has been specifically prepared for you.

The most important lesson I learned in the school of suffering, however, was the importance of being still. Psalms 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” There were many, many days of forced stillness. Even now, because of physical limitations, there are some, but God is in the stillness.

We’re reminded of God’s stillness in the Psalms when we see Selah (Pause) in the middle of the chapters. I wonder what the writer was thinking? What about the stillness right before a terrible storm, or the time period before finding out test results you’ve been waiting for? Can anything touch our hearts like the power of stillness?

There truly is a “peace that passes all understanding” that will guard your heart and mind. It is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:6-7). He will often use the still times to get our attention. He wants us to focus our minds on Him rather than our situation. That is a discipline that must be learned over time.

The following poem by Alice Morttenson was given to me when I was recovering from my stroke. It reminds us that God speaks to us in our stillness. I pray that through it He speaks to you as well, reassuring you that He has not forgotten you.

He loves you very much. Let’s give him all our worries and concerns, believing that our afflictions are for but a moment in this lifetime. We have His promise that one day soon He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There

will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will pass away (Revelation 21:4).

I Needed the Quiet

*I needed the quiet, so he took me aside
Into the shadows where we could confide.
Away from the bustle where all the day long
I hurried and worried, when active and strong.*

*I needed the quiet, though at first I rebelled,
But gently, so gently, my cross He upheld.
He whispered so sweetly of spiritual things
Though weakened in body, my spirit took wings.
To heights never dreamed of when active and gay
He loved me so greatly, He drew me away.*

*I needed the quiet. No prison my bed,
But a beautiful valley of blessing instead.
A place to grow richer, in Jesus to hide
I needed the quiet, so he drew me aside.*

My sickness was a blessing. God has used it in so many ways, not only in my life, but in the lives of others. Whatever you're faced with my friend, God is faithful. There is a place in the deepest part of our soul, a place where if we're still and quiet before God, we will hear His reassuring voice say, "Peace, be still." God bless you.