

The Collapse & Great Trials

After 8 years of vibrant, life-changing, fruitful ministry, without warning, I collapsed with a sudden onset of extreme nausea, vertigo, fatigue, and excruciating, piercing pain. Within minutes, I went from totally healthy to utterly ill and debilitated. Bedridden, house-bound, and out of commission, this season lasted for years. Everything stopped, leaving me with countless questions for God. It was like going back to Christianity 101. How do we handle something like this? Why do things like this happen? Can anything good come from it?

Restoration & Revival

“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” Philippians 1:12-14

I couldn't stand for more than 3 minutes. Due to extreme nausea and vertigo, it was years before I could drive again. Talking on the phone was too exhausting, and it took hours to recover from taking a shower. Many nights I was so fatigued, I seriously thought I would not wake up the next morning. To be honest, many mornings I didn't want to wake up again. I'd go to bed with my Bible on my chest, ready to meet the Lord.

Time passed and I was eventually given the general diagnosis of Fibromyalgia / Chronic Fatigue. These conditions are very real, but they are also individualized. There seems to be no standard treatment and no known cure—apart from Jesus Christ.

It took over 3 years for me to raise my arms above my shoulders or turn my head completely, without excruciating pain; all the while, no one could tell me why.

I lost my job, stopped all ministries, and discontinued volunteering. No more counseling, church, social activities, prayer groups, or corporate worship. It was an extremely confusing time, during which I was stripped of everything, incapable of doing what I had defined as life and living

My days were long and depressing, full of perpetual nausea, pain and fatigue. Everything seemed dark, dim, and hopeless. A future with healing looked impossible.

I knew God was with me. I knew He loved me. I knew He was still a good God. But I couldn't base this knowledge on my feelings: I didn't see His presence, didn't feel loved, and didn't sense His goodness. I had to rely solely on the Word of God—nothing else was left to uphold me. I found myself at a crossroad: would I believe Him based on feelings, or on faith in His Word?

By His grace, I can gratefully report that somehow, despite myself, God gave me the determination to run *to* Him rather than *from* Him. The blessings from suffering come only if our chains are ‘in Christ’ – if we press into God through it all. Otherwise, we suffer in vain. It’s like a wasted opportunity if we don’t run to Jesus in the pain.

I don’t know about you, but I’d seen enough of Satan’s destructions, to turn away from God. I guess I just didn’t want to give the enemy that satisfaction.

Intriguingly, even more than praying for healing, Jesus led me to pray that I not miss one speck of what God had for me in the midst of the nightmare. I figured, if I had to go through it, then I may as well get as much Jesus out of it as possible.

God gives us a choice in our suffering: run to Him, embrace Him, and trust Him, or be bitter, angry, rebellious, and stubborn.

It’s our choice. He’s given us all we need to walk victoriously.

“...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue...” 2 Peter 1:3

I asked every question you can think of asking in the midst of intense pain. Guess what? He answered every single one. But I had to ask- and wait- and listen- and be ok with not getting all the answers or fully understanding when they came.

I had to be ok with God being God, and me not.

I remember having to admit early on that I was angry God hadn’t healed me. I knew He could, so why didn’t He? Do you know the answer He gave me? Naaman. So, I re-read the account of this man in history, found in 2 Kings 5:1-15.

- Naaman was a Syrian commander who was great and honorable. He had led Syria to conquer Israel.
- He was known as a mighty man of valor, but he had leprosy.
- Through the beautiful hand of God, Naaman was encouraged to go see Elisha so he could be healed. (I encourage you to read the chapter in its entirety, to appreciate additional details.) Here are verses 9-12:

⁹ Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha’s house. ¹⁰ And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.” ¹¹ But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, “Indeed, I said to myself, ‘He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.’ ¹² Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage.

I could relate with Naaman. There were times I was furious.

An unbelieving Syrian officer knew enough about the God of Israel to know that He could heal him with a single word. Me too! All the more!

What was with the Jordan? And why seven times? He wanted to be healed instantaneously, and he wanted it to be done in his way, in his timing. Me too! Can you relate? *But God is God, and we are not.*

So, how did Naaman's healing come? His servants convinced him to just go and do what God had instructed: dip in the Jordan seven times. He finally did. He did it God's way, and He was healed. Completely. And then He declared,

“Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel...” Let's do it God's way.

Another section of Scripture God used to teach me through suffering was Job. While I will not take time here to share those insights, I'll summarize briefly:

- There is much more going on behind the heavenly curtain than we can see this side of eternity.
- There is always something we do not know, and it's safe to conclude that there will always be more we don't know than what we do know.
- No matter how close we are to Jesus, there's always more to learn.
- A critical key to both spiritual and physical healing is *repentance*.

I have definitely not done this perfectly, and I still need to be reminded of these truths on a regular basis. But as I did seek God in my suffering, I found I could say with Paul in Philippians 1, “I want you to know, brethren, these things that happened to me turned out for the furtherance of the gospel...”

Would you like to know how He did that?

During the first 9 weeks of sickness, while I was bedridden, it wasn't just the pain and physical misery that was terrible. It was equally as much the fact that the Word of God was burning within me, and I couldn't get up and go out to speak it. I'd been doing that work for 8 years, and the sudden halt was more than I could bear.

Then God rushed in and did the unexpected. At my weakest point, He compelled me to start writing. It was an overwhelming urge. I laid on my back and began to write, and wrote, and kept on writing. Through blood sweat and tears, God squeezed out of me 3 books in 3 months.

Without promoting these books, within one year, over 300 copies were used in three countries: United States, Ireland, and Russia. The following year, more were used in South America and Romania.

Indeed, what happened to me was used by God to further the gospel! And it was all God's doing. Despite me. I find it intriguing that Psalm 23 says "He makes me lie down in green pastures."

- I'd never have left my job unless I'd been made to lie down.
- I'd never have begun a writing ministry that is thriving today, if I hadn't been forced to shut my mouth.
- I'm still seeing God further the gospel today, like a domino effect, dating all the way back to the collapse.

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not glorifying disease or suffering. We don't need to go out and find difficulties; life is full of them without our efforts! But as struggles come, if we seek the Lord and give Him glory, He is faithful to meet us in the pain. As a result, what the enemy means for evil, God works for good.

For the following years, through my suffering with 'chains in Christ,' I witnessed the Holy Spirit continue to further the gospel, as Philippians 1 declares, 'to the whole palace guard,' to 'all the rest,' and to the 'brethren'. Here are some ways He did that:

- With all ministry and work removed, I was left to grapple with and grasp my true identity as a daughter of the King, to a depth I hadn't understood before.
- God took me to a more meaningful depth of praise.
- I learned that our loving Heavenly Father prunes those who are fruitful, so that we bear more fruit (John 15)
- He wove deep within me a comfort that I still draw from today, to extend that same comfort to others (2 Corinthians 1)
- He trained me to walk daily with an attitude of repentance before our holy God
- Years later, I'm still provoked to thank Him as I do things I may have complained about before: I get to empty the dishwasher! I can mop the floor! I have a bathroom with running water, and it's a privilege to take care of it.
- Godly suffering stretched my faith, burned away sin, convicted me of pride, taught me the maturity of rest, and revealed the beauty of being still before the Lord.
- He taught me to wait, be flexible, and be patient with myself.
- If we run to Him, He'll strip us of our independence and grant us the gift of joyfully, freely depending on our Daddy to take care of things.
- This experience enriched my intimacy with Him, took me deeper in obedience and godly contentment, encouraged me not to despise the day of small things, and taught me to appreciate an 'audience of one.'
- I learned I can indeed 'clear the calendar' if we really have to.

"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him..." Philippians 3:7-9a

When we come to the Lord in the midst of difficulty, He presents us with the option to make a trade with Him. I'll warn you: it's an unfair trade. *We get the better end of the deal.* Philippians 3 says to count all things loss, so that we can gain Christ and be found in Him. I testify to this truth. The Lord took all I counted as loss, and in return, I gained Christ. There may not be much better than that on earth.

As the years passed, my physical symptoms have gradually lessened. This defies the pronouncement the medical community has made about my diagnoses. On my wedding day over twelve years ago, I'd say I was 30% healed. Today, I'd say I'm 80% healed.

Gradual healing makes me think of the ten lepers who encountered Jesus.

Then as Jesus entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. Luke 17:12-14

And so it was, *as they went*, they were cleansed. *As they went*, they were cleansed. One step of obedience after another, *as they kept walking*, with each step, another spot of leprosy disappeared. I did many, many physical 'treatments' over the years. Some helped, others didn't. The greatest improvement, though, has come through the process of taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. One thought after the other, as I go through my days.

No, I don't believe my thoughts created the illness, but I do think it's possible our thoughts can hinder healing. Through "unhealed disease," I've learned much about the connection between mind and body, between spirit and soul. Even science has proven that our bodies physically express stress, anxiety, fear, and other brain activity. This is profound, and it simply echoes what the Lord has already told us:

"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Proverbs 23:7a

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." Luke 6:45

Which brings me to where I am today: learning how to walk every hour, every minute, choosing to glorify God with every thought. Yup, I've still got far to go, but Jesus is with me, and He's an amazing Best Friend. All glory be to Him!

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ..." 2 Corinthians 10:4-5