

Going Over the Edge

Dear Friend,

Life has a way of suddenly pushing us over the edge until we feel like screaming, “The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.”(Ps 116:3) For me this going-over-the-edge involved discovering that my wife Penny’s breast cancer had reappeared in the form of tumors in her brain.

Going over the edge in life may be the sudden loss of a job, a home, a loved one or anything that can destroy all hope for the future. Chuck Swindoll describes this going-over-the-edge as “anything that drains your tank of joy—something you cannot change, something you are not responsible for, something you are unable to control, something (or someone) that frightens and torments you, agitates you, keeps you awake when you should be asleep.”

When the bottom seems to be dropping out of life and we find ourselves going over the edge, God-talk disassociated from the tragic events at hand (the present reality) only makes the problem worse. It is not theories or talk that is needed, but an awakening to the fact that God is present in the most hopeless of circumstances and situations. For this reason Paul declared, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms.”(Eph.1:17-20)

Experiencing this power is what Eugene Peterson refers to as “formation by resurrection.” He points out in his book Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places that the word **fear** is used six times in the resurrection accounts found in the four gospels. Two of those references are to fear described as terror. The other four are related to the fear-of-the-Lord.

“Fear-of-the-Lord is the cultivated awareness of the ‘more and other’ that the presence or revelation of God introduces into our lives: I am not the center of my existence; I am not the sum-total of what matters; I don’t know what will happen next. Fear-of-the-

Lord keeps us on our toes in the play of creation, keeps our eyes open—something is going on here and I don't want to miss it. Fear-of-the-Lord prevents us from thinking we know it all and therefore from closing our minds or perceptions off from what is new. Fear-of-the-Lord prevents us from acting presumptuously and therefore destroying or violating some aspect of beauty or truth or goodness that we didn't recognize or didn't understand. No matter how much we travel throughout the creation, no matter how many pictures we take of its flowers and mountains, no matter how much knowledge we acquire, if we fail to cultivate wonder we risk missing the very heart of what is going on.”

Without this sense of wonder toward life, we will give up the will to go on living. It is the Holy Spirit who awakens this resurrection wonder within us. Disciples (followers of Christ) who are on the front lines of service will either find themselves burned out or giving up when life pushes them over the edge unless the joy and wonder of life is awakened within them daily. Acts 13:52 states, “The disciples were continually filled with (controlled by) joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Eugene Peterson goes on to describe this sense of wonder in life by stating:

“Without wonder the motivational energies for living will get dominated by anxiety and guilt. Anxiety and guilt restrict; they close us in on ourselves; they isolate us in feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness; they reduce us to ourselves at our worst. Instead of being formed by the Spirit that hovered over the waters and raised Jesus from the dead, we are malformed into lives of moral work alcoholism or pious athleticism. Wonder is natural and spontaneous to us all. When we were children we were in a constant state of wonder—the world was new, tumbling in on us in profusion. We staggered through each day fondling, looking, and tasting. Words were wondrous. Running was wondrous. Touch, taste, sound. We lived in a world of wonders. We became Christians and found to our delight that all this is confirmed in Genesis and John (and so many other places), and we realized that the wonder is deep and eternal, that we are part of a creation that is ‘very good.’”

Whether it be cancer victims, homeless people, or anyone facing on-going daily “over-the-edge” problems, it is critical that the sense of wonder toward life is not lost. May we be awakened to the wonders and treasures that exist even in the darkest events of life! Leslie D. Weatherhead refers to this as the “treasures of darkness” when he states “like all men, I love and prefer the sunny uplands of experience, when health, happiness, and success abound, but I have learned far more about God, life, and myself in the darkness of fear and failure than I have ever learned in the sunshine. There are such things as the treasures of darkness. The darkness, thank God, passes. But what one learns in the darkness, one possesses forever.”

I am certain there are times when we have all felt abandoned in the darkness and were not able to see the treasures that were being created. Noah must have felt

abandoned as he worked year after year, building an ark without any sight of rain. I know Abraham must have felt that life had little wonder and no treasures as he waited for a promised son for 25 years. Hannah must have felt abandoned as she went to Shiloh, year after year, begging for a child. Paul felt alone with a thorn in the flesh as he pleaded with God for a physical healing that did not occur. Even Jesus Himself cried in Matt 27:46, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

How do we keep going in the midst of darkness and uncertainty as life pushes us over the edge? Direction for such steadfastness is given in Heb.12:2, 3. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

When we are pushed over the edge into the darkness, the tendency is to just want the healing, the deliverance, and the fulfillment of the promise. Yes, God heals, delivers and fulfills His promises, but He also desires to give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. (Eph.1:17) Such wisdom and revelation are the treasures that await us in the darkness. As we receive our miracle, let us not miss the treasures that accompany such miraculous deliverance. The knowledge that these treasures are being developed during this season of trouble enable us to hope, "And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us." (Romans 5:5) Noah, Abraham, Hannah, Paul and many others throughout the Scriptures show us how critical it is to not give up but to remain steadfast, knowing that God has not abandoned us and will bring forth His treasures at the designated "season" in our lives.

In Psalm 116, where we read earlier in verse 3, "The cords of death entangled me the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow," the following assurance is found in verses 4-9. "Then I called on the name of the Lord: 'O Lord, save me!' The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the simple hearted; when I was in great need, He saved me. Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you. For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living."

If circumstances are pushing you over the edge, remember you don't have to give up. Instead you can walk before the Lord in the land of the living. This is

possible as you move from the fear of those circumstances, which are pushing you over the edge into the fear-of the-Lord. This involves the daily discovering that the Lord God is gracious, righteous, full of compassion and protects you in every situation.

Surrendering to the reality that God has delivered your soul from death through the resurrection of Jesus Christ enables you to be awakened to the wonder that each day brings. This wonder is all around you from the rising of the sun, to the sights and sounds of creation, your brothers and sisters in Christ and the special purpose God has for you. As resurrection formation takes place within you, you are free to become aware that treasures exist even in the darkness. The truth that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28) is a truth which frees you to rest in the reality that **He will catch you in His everlasting arms** even when you find yourself pushed over the edge. It is in this reality, burned deep within your soul, that you also will be able to declare along with me, “Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you. For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of living,”(Ps.116:7-9)

Yours in Christ’s service,

Larry Rice