

Tragedy (#23)

by Ron Banuk

3 February 2010

How does the Christian contend with tragedy or crisis (psychiatric emergency) in his life? This is a subject that I as a prison chaplain shudder to write, because it implies that I who have not lived through your grief propose to know what you should do. On the contrary, it is only you with the help of the Holy Spirit who will know exactly what is necessary for your situation. My thoughts sometimes drift to an old woman weeping at the death of her husband. How could I console her? I could not say “I know how you feel,” because I have never lost a spouse. My response might be “I’m sorry; I can’t imagine how you feel¹.”

Just because we espouse clean living and love the Lord does not mean that the demons of tragedy cannot enter our lives. Psychiatrists have attempted to scale and normalize typical crises on the Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) shown in the Appendix. From my own experience, I have listed a number of tragedies that could enter our lives. They are included below:

1. Loss of a child for a parent
2. Loss of a parent for a child
3. Loss of a spouse through death or divorce
4. Loss of one’s job
5. Loss of one’s home
6. Bankruptcy (not “declared” but actual)
7. Prison sentence for a cleric, professional, officer, politician
8. Incapacitating accident ending athletic ability, beauty, intelligence, or power
9. Terminal medical condition
10. Pain: relentless, hopeless, excruciating, and unbearable
11. Raped: denigrated and broken in spirit to the point of suicide
12. New gang member with a contract to kill
13. Flunking out of a school or class that changes your career objectives
14. Your only son uses hormones and an operation to change gender
15. Committing an unforgivable sin:
 - a. Killing the mother of the child you love
 - b. Running over your child with the car in negligence
 - c. Having sexual relations with a parent
 - d. Indirectly responsible for a death
 - e. Clergyman caught in adultery
 - f. Making a financial investment that devastates your family

- g. Destroying your life-long reputation

Who can be affected by tragedy?

As a chaplain, I have seen all of the above. One might be tempted to interject that the above could not happen to a Christian. Many of the above have happened to Christians and from all of the above, people have come to the Lord. All of the above crises are survivable—even combinations of the above. But you might add, that as the victim you would never forgive the perpetrator of one or more of the above tragedies. That may be true. The perpetrator may not always be forgiven by his victim or family, but God will always forgive. There is no sin today that God is unwilling to forgive. To the victim, the failure to forgive a perpetrator that asks for forgiveness will result in unanswered prayers and a bitter life. The prayer Jesus taught the apostles has the verse: *forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Can we ward off tragedy?

There is no sin that God will not forgive, and since he is omnipotent, there is no tragedy or crisis that he cannot rescue us from.

*O Lord my God
I cried to You for help,
and You did heal me. (Psalm 30:2).*

After tragedy strikes, and realization of the implications sinks in, you will either be too distraught to either concentrate or go in deep prayer to the Lord. So, the question that should now be posed is “Why wait for tragedy to go in prayer to the Lord?” Why shut the barn door after the horse has been stolen? Pray now while you are in good health, good spirits, and good fortune to ward off attacks from Satan, someone’s random rage, or misfortune in general; and continue to function unimpeded as a soldier for Christ. Be all prayed up, as the expression goes, so that if tragedy does strike, and it may, you will be ready to respond to a trial sent by the Lord. When tragedy does strike the Christian, the following verse from Scripture may not be immediately understood, but will always be true:

*And we know that God causes **a**all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are **b**called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).*

Crisis and Opportunity

The Mandarin Chinese word *weiji* (way-gee) can mean crisis or opportunity. Apparently, the modern school of psychiatry has seized upon this word to show that every crisis (psychiatric emergency) can have a dual outcome with one for personal betterment. Christianity has always used the concept of trials to show that they are either sent to chastise us for backsliding (*For this reason, many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep—1 Cor 11:30.*) or to refine the soldiers of Christ by eliminating the dross:

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4

In the throes of tragedy, you will not be feeling joy. Job did not, but when the dust had settled and his cattle and children were returned two-fold, he did consider it a joy. And this is borne out in the NT by Romans 8:28 where we “know” that in the long run, it will be for the good even though we may not see that when the fur is flying.

Historic Examples of Tragedy Survivors

The history books are filled with stories of both Christians and non-Christians facing tragedy and enduring or winning out against overwhelming odds. These short stories, then, become the lectionary for instruction.

Fear

Until fear is cast out, you will not be delivered from your crisis.

It was the summer of 1975, and Bill Coonce, the 6-foot-8-inch center for the Fairbanks Nanooks had landed a choice summer job on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline project². He found himself in a remote location far from Prospect Creek Camp carving a valley within a mountain for soil extraction to be used on the highway. The technique of carving out the core of a mountain was ingenious and was used to camouflage the ravages of soil extraction. From the outside, it was just another mountain.

Bill was gazing down into a 15-foot-deep pit that held gravel for a 100-yard-long conveyor belt. It was empty now and the eight-inch holes in the 12-foot-long reciprocating grate were plain to see. Anything going into those holes like a branch of small rock would be ground up and deposited onto the conveyor belt and dumped onto a 100-foot-high cone of soil a hundred yards away. The driver of a huge CAT 994D with a 40-yard scoop just dumped the first of three loads

onto the grate. After dumping his third load, the former pit had become a mound of gravel 10-foot high. The driver then retired the wheel loader to excavate fresh gravel while the conveyor operator fired up the noisy vibrator. When the conveyor was rattling, there was so much noise that all communication was by hand signals, and right now, there was no one to signal to.

Bill's job as the third man in the isolated crew was the most dangerous. He had either to crawl into pit and attach a chain to a large rock that did not go through the grate or pre-empt that dangerous task by picking it off the mound before it settled. And right now, there was a basketball-sized stone sitting like a cherry on an ice cream cone. So, he climbed to the top of the 10-foot pile and rolled the stone off to the side as he had done many times before and then proceeded to trudge back down. But this time was different. He was stuck up to his calves in tenacious soil. The more he tugged, the more it became apparent he could not extract himself. Now he was up to his thighs and the mound was receding into the pit. Soon he would be below ground level, out of sight, and in the grinding jaws of death. His fears turned to panic when he saw that the driver was not returning, and the conveyor operator was also out of sight. A painful death was imminent. His boots and broken legs would soon be traveling up the conveyor belt in bloody pieces. Terror gripped and froze his mind. All his planning for a life after college was abruptly shattered. This was it and how ignominious. He now felt the crux of his fate.

He ceased struggling because it was useless, and almost immediately, a strange calm swept over him. He looked around one last time and found himself admiring the landscape, the skyline formed by the volcano-like silhouette, the escarpment surrounding the valley, the blue sky, and the serenity of the moment despite the rattle of the conveyor line and reciprocating machinery. He was self-conscious of what he was doing as though he were looking down at himself. Was he crazy? Why the overpowering suffusion of love for Klondike surroundings at a time like this? Is this how one leaves the world? Then, in a manner that cannot be explained to this day, he simply stepped out of the gravel as easily "as stepping out of a bathtub of water," to use his own words. He walked over to the steel wall and sat down with his back to the wall staring into space. Slowly realization crept through his cranium and into his heart: God had saved him.

What happened to Bill, can happen to you. Fear is sin. Eleven times in Scripture, God has said: *neither fear nor be dismayed*. While you are in fear, you are overtly saying that you do not believe that God had the power to save you. God will not answer because to do so would be a sin and that he cannot do. John, the apostle Jesus loved, said: *There is no fear in love; perfect love casts out fear* (1 Jn 4:8). This love restores faith and opens the channels to the grace God wants to bestow on you.

Forgiveness

Hate will inflame injustice. Forgiveness will extinguish it.

A woman in Palmdale, California was sexually assaulted. Months later after the physical wounds had healed her emotional wounds caused a concatenation of contraindicating symptoms. This is called PTSD syndrome. As a diabetic she now began to suffer from wide swings in blood sugar levels. Grand mal seizures occurred almost daily. Nightmares from the attack haunted her to the point of sleep deprivation. She lapsed into a coma twice, swallowed her tongue on another occasion, and stopped breathing for a frightening period. Her family was as desperate as she was for a cure. After a counseling session by a good friend of mine, Bob Nicholson and his wife, she became able to forgive the two men responsible for her initial trauma and rid herself of the fear she harbored by trusting in the healing stripes earned by Jesus Christ. She finally began to improve.

Hope

Set your heart to a goal, and you will accomplish it³.

This amazing story begins in 1822 when General William Ashley placed an ad in the Missouri Gazette and Public Adviser for a corps of 100 men to “ascend the Missouri” as fur traders. Among those responding was the soon-to-be famous mountain man, Jedediah Smith (1799-1831). But our concern is with Hugh Glass (1780-1833) who established himself early on as a hard-working fur trapper. Hugh was traveling with a band of 13 men led by Andrew Henry near the forks of the Grand River in present day Perkins County, South Dakota. While scouting alone for game he surprised a Grizzly mother bear with two cubs.

The attack began so fast, his flint-lock rifle went flying from his hands as the enraged bear picked him up and threw him to the ground. Hugh went for his knife and inflicted much damage to the bear by stabbing her repeatedly while enduring savagely raking wounds from the bear. Two of his trapping partners, Bridger and Fitzgerald, arrived in time to put the bear down with firearms. In the aftermath, Hugh Glass lay unconscious and in such bad condition that Bridger and Fitzgerald were posted by Andrew Henry to bury him when he died. So they dug a hole and when he still did not revive after a day, they left, rejoined the group, and reported him dead.

When Glass came to, his pain was excruciating. One leg was broken, claw lacerations covered his whole body, and part of his back had flesh torn away exposing bare ribs. He was bleeding and covered with a bear skin, but his rifle, knife, and equipment were gone. Most people would have welcomed death at this point and given up the fight because the nearest settlement was Fort Kiowa over 200 miles south east and the local Indians were hostile. But there was something that sparked survival for the nearly helpless trapper. We do not know if it was the anger from

being abandoned or the desire to live out his God-given life. It is not even known if he was a Christian. But he did resolve to dress his wounds and crawl 200 miles to Fort Kiowa.

When gangrene set into his back, he crawled to a rotting stump and let the maggots fester in his open wounds. He made a splint for his leg and determined to crawl south and swim over six streams until he reached the Cheyenne River. That much took him six weeks. In that period, he survived on wild berries, roots, and once by driving off two wolves who were feasting on a slaughtered buffalo calf. Upon reaching the river, he made a raft drifted past Thunder Butte, received help from two friendly Indians who sewed a bear hide to his back to cover his ribs, and finally arrived at Fort Kiowa.

After a long recuperation, he tracked down Bridger, but did not kill him because he was only 17 years old. Later he found Fitzgerald, but couldn't kill him because he was in the Army and the penalty for killing a soldier was death. But at least, he did get his rifle back.

In 1971 a movie entitled *Man in the Wilderness* starring Richard Harris and John Huston portrayed this odyssey. If nothing else, the story shows that where many a weaker man could succumb to lesser trials, a stronger man's mind and will could drive him to an otherwise impossible goal. As a Christian, however, your goal should be aligned with God's will. The psalmist writes: *Unless the Lord builds the house; they labor in vain who build it* (Ps 127:1).

Blind

Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will thrill and rejoice (Is 60:5)

Being told that you are going blind is traumatic. But knowing that it will also lead to death is even worse. So it was with mountain man Joseph Dickson (1775-1844) who had once been with Lewis and Clark on the Missouri River in 1804. It was different now, for Joe was wintering alone in Yellowstone. Snow was everywhere and he had been ardently searching for game. Now the ubiquitous search began to take its toll. He was snow blinded. In simpler terms, his cornea was sunburned and because of his persistence in keeping his eyes open to the end, it would probably be irreversible. Unbelief, realization, shock, then hopelessness each had their play. He could not wander more than a few steps from his campsite without becoming lost. The end would be agonizing and humbling. Joe's thoughts turned to the Alphabet Book or New England Primer he studied from in the primary grades. It began with A: *In Adam's fall, We sinned all*. Then B: *Thy life to mend, This Book attend*. And finally Z: *Zaccheus did climb the tree, His Lord to see*. Then he himself climbed that tree, and as his thoughts turned to the Lord, he remembered a poultice that could be made from the bark of a local tree. It slowly took effect, and his sight returned along with a rekindled faith in the Lord. After returning to civilization, he professed his faith as a Christian and became a Methodist.

Mental Trauma

*The righteous cry and the Lord hears,
And delivers them out of their troubles. (Ps 34:17)*

Chapel services were over that afternoon in the reception yard of the prison. The dozen newly incarcerated were led out of chapel back behind a 10-foot chain-link fence to join 200 other inmates waiting for yard recall and the subsequent search before entry into their cell block. “Father”, a voice cried, “can I talk to you?” I wear a black suit jacket in the winter, white suit jacket in the summer, and carry a Bible, so they usually recognize me as a religious or psychiatrist. “I’m the Christian chaplain.” I said. Do you want to talk? They’re recalling now so we only have a minute.

The young man was very excited. His eyes darted here and there never fixing his gaze long enough to digest his sensory input. He spoke fast in a broken train of thought. “I have to speak to someone,” he said. I’m going crazy. I don’t understand what is happening. The new prisoner looked like he was on the verge of a panic attack; and in fact, manifest many of those symptoms. As his story unfolded, I realized it was not the first time I had heard a story like his. The young man found himself in prison for a felony. His father, whom he was not that close to had died a year ago, but within the last month his uncle who raised him and his brother just died. This was his only family. Then successively, he lost his job, house, car, a budding relationship with a new girl, and his savings. He knew no one in prison and had nobody he could write to and didn’t know what was going to happen next. He was almost in shock and tried hard to control himself while talking with me. His SRRS was probably at 300. [30% chance of illness is score is 150 and 80% chance if 300.]

I tried to give significance to the words of the psalmist:

*The cords of Sheol surrounded me;
The snares of death confronted me.
In my distress I called upon the LORD,
And cried to my God for help; (Ps 18:5-6)*

The words of the Lord began to take effect; he calmed down. At least, I thought, he would get through the night without a breakdown and come to realize that the Lord Jesus Christ wanted him as a friend; and that he remained as the true shepherd in search of all whom the Father had given him especially when his earthly father and guardian had died. Sometimes, just talking to a person who cares can be enough to keep a person’s head above the turgid waters of life. He must have been transferred immediately after that encounter, for I never saw him again, but my prayers went with him.

Husband Dies

Yahweh Jireh—The Lord Will Provide

When the Revolutionary War ended, Mrs. Jameson⁴, a wealthy woman from N.Y.C. and Edward Jameson, a soldier from the war, sold their estate and headed West with a seven-month-old child to seek their fortune with many other Western Immigrants doing at that time. When they reached the swollen Alleghany⁵ River in what is now western Pennsylvania, they tied up their oxen and cattle and put all their clothing and gear onto a makeshift raft made from logs. Turbulent waves aided by a swift current broke their raft in two before they reached midstream. Edward Jameson was pulled under by a group of logs lashed together with rope and never resurfaced. Mrs. Jameson managed to both hold onto her baby and paddle back to the riverbank from where they started but one mile downstream. She then moored the damaged raft, walked a mile upstream to reclaim the team of oxen, drove back to the raft, and hauled the luggage to dry land.

Holding her infant to her still damp clothing, she collapsed in the cart and only then began to realize the implications of the tragedy. Her dreams of a thriving homestead for the newlyweds had vanished in the time it takes a man to drown. She was 30 miles from the nearest settlement, a distance she did not want to traverse because of the savages in the area. Since they had also chosen to cross an untraveled section of the Alleghany midway between two crossing points, it was unlikely that travelers would pass by. But she was in a densely forested area and the riverbank had bushes that would screen and Indians passing by, so she decided to camp there until help arrived. Putting her tears aside, she had much planning and work to do if she and her baby boy were to survive.

The food chest was good for eight months and that could be supplemented with deer, rabbit, turkey, and quail if she could remember what she learned when accompanying her former husband during a hunt. A shotgun with powder and shot had survived the wreck. There was fishing tackle for trout in the many brooks acting as tributaries and it was the month of May, so she could plant a garden. She built a hut from branches thatched with swamp grass for her kitchen about a hundred feet from the river. The cart with its canvas covering continued as her bed.

One day six Indian canoes searched her riverbank, but spotted nothing amiss and luckily the baby was sleeping. The following day, she moved her settlement further from the river and began planting a half-acre of corn. The new location was home to a den of rattlesnakes. She cleared them all out—one by one up to five a day. At night wolves often howled around her cart. One even put its paws on the canvas top, but Mrs. Jameson rapped it on the snout with a stick.

In September of that year, two households of emigrants came floating down the river in a flatboat. Mrs. Jameson signaled them. They docked, were impressed with the terrain, and decided to settle in that area. The new community of 15 had 5 men 4 women and 6 children. Mrs. Jameson married a backwoodsman and had many children by him. She was always known as the “Mother of the Alleghany Settlement”.

There is a time for mourning and a time for action. The ratio is about one tenth of one percent for mourning and 99.9% for action. Reverse the two and your life will be filled with depression.

As soldiers for Christ, we may mourn after the fight with principalities, but then must make plans for the next battle.

Wife Dies and Poverty

Stay focused on the goal, and no trial will distract you or bring you down.

Bob Nichelson born in Fargo, North Dakota in 1928, married Carol in 1950. It was she who made him listen to a minister on the radio who led him to the Lord in 1958 when he was born again. Carol was there when he began preaching as an American Lutheran lay pastor and she was by his side when demons were cast from a woman whose famous story was told by Glenna Henderson in *My Name is Legion*. She supported him when he traveled around the world with evangelist A. Herbert Mjourn and later when his own speaking tours took him to many countries in the world. She was the scribe for his famous tract, *Perfect Love Casts Out Fear*, his newsletter, and many of the miracles God worked at his hand. She was always there to share in the poverty they could never escape during their marriage. Her death after 44 years of marriage brought him devastation. While still in mourning and poverty, he humbly had to request \$500 from a Canadian Full Gospel Business Fellowship chapter leader so that he could inter his wife.

In Bob's words, the mourning over his wife only lasted a few days, because he immediately resumed his former stride in his ministry for Jesus Christ. Three years later, he married Donna Roebuck. Donna, like Carol, supported his ministry, but she brought something into Bob's life that had never been there before—wealth. So the rewards from our heavenly Father are not confined to the afterlife.

Note: For the full story of Bob Nichelson, see *God Immanent*.

Abandoned as a Child

Pent-up hate only hurts the victim.

On the west coast of Wales, in the city of Cardigan, Bob Nichelson had just finished speaking on forgiveness with liberation from resentment, bitterness, anger, and hatred when a 70-year-old man approached and gave his testimony. Sixty years earlier, his parents had told him they were going on a trip. What they did not tell the young boy, however, was that he would be left at a foster home¹ never to see his parents again. For sixty years this man harbored a resentment in him that kept him in a straitjacket. Only now was he free. Jesus had reached into his life.

Bob's gift of spiritual healing can sublimate the fear of man and the fear of things into the fear of God. When this happens, a physical healing is often the unexpected result.

¹ Foster Home. This story is not unique in the sense that many young children in Great Britain were given up to a community home because the parents were too poor to maintain their upkeep. What is unique is his learned forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ.

Unwanted Child

Not every group will want or appreciate you, but God always will.

One hundred and fifty miles north of London, a 60-year-old church secretary had known since her earliest memories that her mother never wanted her. This pained thought was never more than a breath away from her. It enclosed her in an impervious glassine shell. After her emotional healing, she told Bob Nichelson: “Now I can love other people!”

Oedipus Complex

*For my life is spent with sorrow
And my years with sighing;
My strength has failed because of my iniquity,
And my body has wasted away. Ps 31:10*

The Sunday sermon at the Immigration and Naturalization Detention Center was over. The sermon was on Hell and the practice of sin. This is not a sermon you hear often from the pulpit today, but it went over well and a few of the detainees asked me for the notes to my sermon. After answering a few questions, a thin young man with a distraught demeanor appeared at my side. He spoke very softly, so I had to listen closely. “Is it really true that God will forgive all sins? Aren’t there some sins that cannot be forgiven?” he said almost fearfully. “God will forgive all sins that you repent of and ask forgiveness for”, I replied. “I can’t believe that he will ever forgive my sin” he replied, “and I surely cannot forgive myself.” Usually I do not ask a prisoner what he has done to get here, or what sin he is having trouble with, but I made an exception here. “Well, tell me,” I said, “what is it you think God cannot forgive you?” “I was drunk,” he said, “and had sex with my mother.”

“What has she said to you since?” I questioned. “I don’t know if she was aware of it,” he said. “She was very drunk.” I told him that if she didn’t bring the subject up with him, then it was between him and God and that he must go in prayer immediately asking forgiveness. We prayed quickly because the room was nearly empty now and the guard wanted everyone out. The prisoner seemed relieved as we parted, but, in this case, I never had the opportunity to follow up in counseling.

Gang Member

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other (Mt 6:24).

This incident happened after a sermon at the Immigration and Naturalization Detention Center. From nearly a hundred voluntary attendees for the Sunday sermon, a number had raised their hand to confess Jesus Christ as their savior publicly. Following the sermon and while the bulk of the group were filing out a young man who was born again spoke to my Spanish interpreter with great joy in his eyes. “I had two hits,” he said, “now I don’t have any.” I don’t know if his tasks were inside or outside of the prison system, but they were now in the past and he was greatly relieved.

I have seen other cases where the pressure of the first contract was not the critical one. One story told by Arthur Blessitt⁶ is of a hitman for the Mafia who froze during his eighth contract and fought off two other accomplices to escape. Another hitman for the IDF had dozens of kills before he decided to repent. In still another case, I have heard the sworn testimony of a man who spent his entire career as a contract killer for a secret organization before coming to the Lord. Only God knows when enough is enough.

Being a gang member gives a Christian two masters. At some point, he must decide between the two. It can also be like slavery in that the person is either 1) is forced to do something against his will, or 2) his controller makes illicit gain from his actions. Forced will and illicit gain have defined slavery through the ages. In this sense, slavery, despite its official prohibition, is alive and well.

Loss of a Son

Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness (Mt 7:23).

I had just walked through the parking lot and was crossing the pedestrian path leading to the Visitors’ Center when a man approached me. “Are you the chaplain?” he asked. We talked. The man and his family were severely depressed. Their only son was now in prison for the first time. Furthermore, he blamed the father for being here even it was though his actions alone. And then, there was one other thing. Through hormones and a sex-change operation, his son was no longer a son.

There are “sissies” in the prison system—men that dress and act like women, but this young man had gone as far as hormone shots and medical science would allow. After visiting him, I had to admit, he had the appearance of beautiful young woman. In the few moments we spoke, I could see repressed anger in his body language. He was defiant and repellent to any Biblical

instruction. I did not press the point, and had the distinct feeling of just being there looking across a chasm at a distant soul. We parted. My prayers were all I could offer.

Isolated, but Fearless

I am with you, declares the Lord

Many people, even those in big cities, entombed in housing tenements and apartment complexes are afraid of being alone, afraid of strangers, and afraid of answering the knock on the door. Consider the story from the pioneering days of this country.

It was just after the War Between the States, when an Englishman paid an Indian guide to take him deep into the isolated Montana Territory. They traveled two days without seeing anyone and were reined up on a spur of the Rocky Mountains just as the sun was beginning to set. With the mountains at his back, the rocky panorama before him was majestic, pristine, and without any hint of man, when suddenly the sharp eyes of his guide caught sight of a faint light in the ravine below. Intrigued, the traveler mounted up, descended the steep slope and arrived in the dark at a cabin made from deadwood.

Whoever was inside heard the clop-clop of their hooves, the scuffing of their boots, and the knock on the door. But without hesitation, the door swung open revealing a perhaps 50-year-old woman with a six-month baby in one arm. She looked at both of them and then invited them in. Her man was away panning for gold and would not be home for another day. Her cabin had two rooms, the kitchen area where they stood and the bedroom from which five children exited to see the first human contacts in 18 months.

She sat them on wooden blocks and told the guests her story. Coming from a wealthy family in central New York, she had been here now for four years and was 30 years of age. She and her man were planning to build a saw mill and house in a settlement. Her man could pan \$10 of gold dust in one day, which was approximately two weeks wages and they had already banked \$5000. So their dreams were imminent. As a frontier woman, her tasks were various. They had been attacked by Indians three times. Each event was life threatening. Her man killed ten wolves that attacked their newly built cabin at night while she killed six. They defended their children from bear and rattle snakes. She tended to the corn and potatoes after he tilled. She tended to the cows and the horse, read and taught the children Bible verses, and did home schooling for the older ones. Once she rode thirty miles to the nearest settlement for medicine when her man was in fever.

The Englishman⁷ took notes for the journal he was writing, declined Mrs. James Manning's further hospitalities, and left with his guide into the night.

I know the above can be true. Ten miles from my ranch up Cotton Wood Creek off Broken Arrow Road is a 160-acre off-grid ranch called JB Cattle in the Tehachapi Mountains of Kern County. Jeremy has sometimes been called California's last cowboy and his wife, Brandie, except for the Indian attacks, has done most of the above. This self-reliance is rare today, but was typical in the settlement of this country. And yet, most people facing such events would label them tragedies. If it were not for hope, these difficulties could appear to be tragedies or life-changing events for the worse.

Finance

Matters beyond your control are not a cause to worry, but to pray.

Asking a prisoner if he is married is like asking a trick question. Their initial hesitation at responding is usually followed by a response like "kind of", or "maybe", or "I was", or "not now", or "I've got a serious girlfriend", or "we don't talk". The answer to the question of children is more direct, but sometimes followed by "that I know of". This young man had been here for six months and had almost a year of time left on his sentence at 85%. He had two children and they were being cared for by his girlfriend. But she had been forging his name on checks and had withdrawn \$1500 the previous month and \$1000 this month. The distraught prisoner was afraid to open his mail now especially when it bore the return address of his bank. He would soon be broke and there was nothing he could do about it. He assumed that she was doing this for child support, but it was not part of their agreement. Not being able to communicate with her, the bank, or his children gave him a feeling of helplessness. The chaplain is not allowed to intervene by making phone calls or delivering messages in any instance. Our intermediary is Jesus Christ himself and that is what I gave to this man as we talked through the vent cracks on the sides of the steel door. "If there is one thing you learn in prison", a man once told me, "it is patience." The reason is that almost nothing happens on schedule and when something does come to fruition, it almost seems by chance. With God being for us, however, all chance becomes a venue for God's will. This was a turning point in that man's life and since he had been born again earlier in life, it became a time of repentance from backsliding spurred by a hard lesson. And the outcome was guaranteed by Romans 8:28: *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.*

Setback

Our God is a God on many chances.

I had received a chaplain request for counseling and was looking in the cell block for my man. "He's over there," said the guard. All I saw was an old man in underpants mopping the floor

furiously in the corner. “Where,” I responded. “That’s him with the mop.” I couldn’t believe it. After finishing his job, he went to the central exposed wash basin, stripped, washed down then came over to the stainless steel counseling table. He extended a wet hand and apologized saying: I didn’t want to come over here without washing and there are no towels.

After sitting down he said that the young kids today don’t want to work and he couldn’t stand idly by seeing them play with the mop. So he did the mopping himself to get it done right. He was almost 70, very sharp, energetic, and feisty. In fact, that is what landed him in here—getting into a fistfight with another man. It was his first felony. He had all his notes in an accordion binder and knew every place to write to for aid or inmate assistance. Not that he needed it, because this man owned seven houses and was a multi-millionaire. While in prison, he had decided to open up a coast-to-coast restaurant chain upon release, and with his profits, help parolees. He liked talking to me so much he submitted another counseling request. He reminded me a lot of the feisty radio talk show host, writer, philanthropist, and millionaire Don Imus (b 1940).

This man, a born-again Christian, refused to let a prison sentence get him down, for he still had hopes and aspirations that would be a benefit to other people.

Summary

No matter how bad the tragedy is at your doorstep, somebody else has already faced it and survived. Some, because of their superabounding hope, even without the help of God. But then you must ask: *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul* (Mk 8:36)? So if the godless can survive, how much more so the Christian! For the Christian, no trial will be without reward (Rom 8:28) or beyond his ability to endure (1 Cor 10:13).

From these 15 stories, we have learned:

- 1) God will not answer when we are in fear, because fear is a sin and a symptom of our unbelief.
- 2) While the physical wounds of an assault may heal, the mental wounds will persist until forgiveness is found.
- 3) Sheer hope spurred a man to crawl and raft 200 miles to safety with a broken leg and gouged back through hostile territory. Our hope should be in God’s grace.
- 4) Snow blindness while hunting alone should have resulted in this man’s death. But his prayer was answered.
- 5) A new prisoner who just lost everything in life sought God and was given solace.

- 6) A woman with an eight-month-old baby boy survived the death of her new husband in complete isolation from civilization and in hostile Indian country.
- 7) An evangelist survived the loss of his wife of 44 years and was given a surprising reward.
- 8) The hate he carried all his life for his abandonment by his unknown parents was suddenly banished when forgiveness was offered.
- 9) The rejected and almost dirty feeling of being an unwanted child was relieved with the grace of Jesus Christ.
- 10) A young detainee learned that having had sexual relations with his mother was not an unforgivable sin.
- 11) It is possible to leave a gang with the help of Jesus Christ. It is also possible for a contract killer to be saved.
- 12) There is something worse than losing a son to physical death.
- 13) The trials suffered by this frontier woman were met by faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:13; 1 Th 1:3, 5:8).
- 14) In addition to his incarceration and separation from his children, he was financially ruined.
- 15) A late-life prison sentence only spurs a millionaire on to doing God's will.

Appendix

Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale			
LIFE EVENT	MEAN VALUE		
1. Death of spouse	100	24. Trouble with in-laws	29
2. Divorce	73	25. Outstanding personal achievement	28
3. Marital separation from mate	65	26. Spouse beginning or ceasing work outside the home....	26
4. Detention in jail or other institution	63	27. Beginning or ceasing formal schooling	26
5. Death of a close family member	63	28. Major change in living conditions	25
6. Major personal injury or illness	53	29. Revision of personal habits (dress, manners)	24
7. Marriage	50	30. Trouble with the boss.....	23
8. Being fired at work	47	31. Major change in working hours or conditions	20
9. Marital reconciliation with mate	45	32. Change in residence.....	20
10. Retirement from work	45	33. Changing to a new school	20
11. Major change in health or behavior of a family member..	44	34. Major change in type and/or amount of recreation	19
12. Pregnancy.....	40	35. Major change in church activities	19
13. Sexual difficulties.....	39	36. Major change in social activities (dancing, movies)	18
14. Gaining a new family member through birth, adoption, older child moving in	39	37. Taking out a mortgage or loan for a lesser purchase (car, TV, freezer).....	17
15. Major business readjustment (merger, bankruptcy).....	39	38. Major change in sleeping habits.....	16
16. Major change in financial state	38	39. Major change in number of family get togethers	15
17. Death of a close friend	37	40. Major change in eating habits	15
18. Changing to a different line of work	36	41. Vacation	13
19. Major change in the number of arguments with spouse (regarding child-rearing, personal habits).....	35	42. Christmas	12
20. Taking out a mortgage or loan for a major purchase (e.g., home, business, etc.)	31	43. Minor violations of law (traffic tickets, disturbing the peace).....	11
21. Foreclosure on a mortgage or a loan	30	TOTALS.....	1466
22. Major change in responsibilities at work (promotion, demotion, lateral transfer).....	29	<i>Adapted From: Holmes, T. H., and Rahe, R. H. (1967). The Social Readjustment Rating Scale. Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 11, 213-218.</i>	
23. Son or daughter leaving home (marriage, college)	29	Figure 1	

¹ When I first wrote this paragraph, it was only an event I had lived only vicariously from a story on television. But the very morning I finished this manuscript, I heard the siren of a fire truck a mile distant in a remote area of this valley. I followed the dirt road for six miles and arrived at a scene where a 66 year-old half Navajo woman was wailing over her deceased Chitimacha husband. She had no neighbors, no family, and now no money.

² For the full story to Bill Coonce, see *God Immanent* story 17.

³ General George Patton said during WWII that there are three things a man must do to get what he wants: Plan, Work, and Pray.

⁴ Many times in early American history, only the husband's sir name comes down to us. Of the 19 wives on the Mayflower, 9 have unknown first or maiden names.

⁵ Modern spelling is Allegheny.

⁶ Arthur Blessitt (b 1940) carried a 12-ft 50-lb cross into 307 countries and federations over a span of 38 years.

⁷ *Frontier Women* by William W. Fowler reprinted from 1877