



By David Christensen

*“... through the fire would I learn
'Thou'rt God,' when I can't understand.”¹*

I have been there and so have many of you. We look down to see mud. We look up to murky darkness. The walls threaten to entomb us in the bondage of our self-pity. We see no way out – no hope, no escape. Feelings are numb. We don't even have the energy to panic. Nothing matters anymore. God seems distant – the soul abandoned. Confusion reigns. Lethargy dominates. The mind wanders. The “how” and the “why” are beyond our comprehension. It is the soul's pit, the spirit's prison.

John Bunyan's Slough named Despond has sucked many a Christian into its muck. The Apostle Paul was there in Macedonia when he wrote: *Our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within* (2 Cor. 7:5).² The prophet Jeremiah was there many times. He complained that God was unfaithful to him. *Why has my pain been perpetual and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you indeed be to me like a deceptive stream with water that is unreliable?* (Jer. 15:18) Jeremiah had heard the whispers of gossip and suspected that his friends were waiting for him to slip so they could denounce him publicly. He accused God of deceiving him by leading him into this ministry (Jer. 20:7). He complained: *Cursed be the day when I was born; let the day not be blessed when my mother bore me!* (Jer. 20:14) Job cursed the day he was born too. *Let the day perish on which I was to be born, ... May that day be darkness; Let not God above care for it, nor let light shine on it. Let darkness and black gloom claim it; Let a cloud settle on it; Let the blackness of the day terrify it.* (Job 3:4-5). The prophet Elijah running for his life sat down under a tree and prayed that he might die. *It is enough* he said. *Now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.* (1 Kings 19:4). Jonah complained when God did not do what he wanted God to do. *Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.* (Jonah 4:3).

Samuel Logan Brengle was a great leader of the Salvation Army who touched many with his powerful writings about holy living, but he often fell into the pit of despair. In a letter, Brengle wrote, “My nerves were ragged, frazzled, exhausted. And such gloom and depression fell upon me as I have never known, although depression is an old acquaintance of mine.”³ The great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon fell into the pit many times in his life. He tells his students, “Causeless depression cannot be reasoned with, nor can David's harp charm it away by sweet discourings. As well fight with the mist as with this shapeless, undefinable, yet all-beclouding

hopelessness. . . . The iron bolt which so mysteriously fastens the door of hope and holds our spirits in gloomy prison needs a heavenly hand to push it back.”⁴

The Psalmist David understood the pit as well as anyone. His psalms describe the view from the pit in poignant detail. In Psalm 40:2, David pictures himself in a slimy pit. The Hebrew says a *pit of roaring*. Ancient pits were often dug to hold water in times of drought. A shaft was dug into the soft stone to create a cistern. The pit was shaped much like a bottle with a narrow top and a stone cap.⁵ These cisterns were also used as holding tanks for prisoners (Genesis 37:20-29; Isaiah 24:22; Jeremiah 38:6-13) because their steep, slimy smooth sides made escape impossible. Water filled the bottom, and sometimes streams of water flowed nearby. David is in such a pit here. Confusion and fear surround him. He flounders helplessly trying to claw his way out while the roaring sounds of raging waters fill his heart with terror.

David uses a different Hebrew word to describe his pit in Psalm 103:4. One Hebrew dictionary defines this word as “a mass of organic putrid liquid matter as a water-like body.”⁶ Many ancient pits were used as graves, so this word became synonymous with the corruption and decay of organic matter which filled the bottoms of these pits. David feels like he has been plunged into the pollution of an ancient grave – an emotional slime pit.

Job used this same Hebrew word to describe his complaint before the tribunal of God. Job’s classic argument is founded on the premise that he is innocent and God is treating him unjustly. He complains that *If I should wash myself with snow and cleanse my hands with lye, yet you would plunge me into the pit, and my own clothes would abhor me.* (Job 9:30-31) He laments that he has no courtroom in which to present his case against God. (Job 9:33-10:2) Job knew that God was sovereign. He understood that nothing happens to us outside of God’s control (Job 1:21). Therefore, he felt that the hand of God dealt his misfortunes. He had served God faithfully so why should he deserve God’s punishment?

I have felt like Job myself and, as a pastor, I have listened to many others who have expressed similar feelings. Our sense of human justice tells us that we deserve God’s benefits package as fair compensation for our faithful service. Suffering, trouble, conflict and problems should not plague God’s saints. We view Christianity as a business proposition. God should protect us from pain if He expects us to do His bidding. When our experiences do not match our expectations, we spiral into despair. We fall into the slime pit. The whine of self-pity binds our souls with the chains of misery. As long as we wallow in the Slough named Despond, we will never know release from the pit. Our view will be forever limited by the walls of our pit.

We must come to understand that the pit was not meant to be permanent. In John Bunyan’s classic allegory, Christian is only temporarily in the pit. Yet there is another character in the story who never escapes the pit although he leaves the Slough of Despond. His name is Mr. Fearing. Everything frightened and discouraged him. He too fell into the pit and escaped but continually lived in despair. Bunyan writes, “he had, I think, a Slough of Despond in his mind, a slough that he carried everywhere with him, or else he could never have been as he was.”⁷ We become like Mr. Fearing if we carry the pit with us through life. The pit is the place of beginning. The pit is the place where the soul’s deep thirst meets the soul’s great Savior (Psalm 42:1-3). God designed the pit to lead us to Himself. We must learn to release the poison that pollutes our souls and find

the renewal that comes only from God if we are to escape the pit. How are we to do this? What is the process of release and renewal that we must follow?

IDENTIFY THE NATURE OF THE PIT.

I must name my pit. There is power in the naming process for to name my pit I must first examine my pit and in examining my pit I come to understand the two selves who inhabit the pit. God and I both inhabit the pit but in very different ways. The pit imprisons me, and God transcends the pit while still with me in the pit. I say only “two” people inhabit the pit because, even though I may have dragged others into my problems, nobody else truly lives in my pit, experiencing my pain. Some would say that the tormentor of our souls – the accuser of the believers – also inhabits the pit. No. Satan has access to the pit only as God grants him access. The book of Job teaches us this concept (Job 1:8-12). The tormentor of our souls lifts off the lid of the pit to scream his taunts at us as we sink deeper into the mire, but only God resides in the pit with us. The enemy of our souls may manipulate our circumstances to throw us into the pit but only within the limits of God’s purpose.

Ultimately, every pit is fully known only to two people – God and self. The way out of the pit begins when I can understand God and self. This knowledge is what Klaus Issler called “double knowledge” – knowing self is part of knowing God and knowing God is part of knowing self.⁸ It is in the pit that we open ourselves up to God’s purifying eyes, and it is in the pit that we learn of God’s renewing grace (Psalm 139:23-24). John Calvin introduced his framework for all theology by writing: “Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God. ... Without knowledge of God, there is no knowledge of self.”⁹ The philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote in 1662, “Knowing God without knowing our wretchedness leads to pride. Knowing our wretchedness without knowing God leads to despair.”¹⁰ There are two selves in the pit, but only one can leave on His own – God. We are prisoners of the pit. He is Lord of the pit. God designed the pit to teach me His truths. So I must name my pit before I can leave my pit.

THE PIT OF FEAR

David is running for his life (1 Samuel 21 - 22). King Saul is trying to kill him. David leaves his best friend, Jonathan. Fearing for the safety of his loved ones, he takes his immediate family members to live in the nearby country of Moab. His wife, Michal, remains in the custody of her father, King Saul. David is cut off from his family and friends. Fear drives his life now. Fear is a powerful force that can eat away a person’s soul bringing despair and triggering strange longings. The Philistines control David’s hometown of Bethlehem now. David craves a drink of water but not just any water. He craves a drink from the well at Bethlehem. When we are in the pit of fear we crave what we cannot have. Pleasant memories of times long ago crash into our fear mongered minds. When we had it, we gave it little value. Now that we cannot have it we give it value far above its real worth. It is not that David didn’t have good water. It is that he wants precisely what he cannot have. The pit of Fear does that to us. Three of David’s men sneak into the city, dip into the well and carry the precious drops back to David seeking to pick up his spirits. David is so overwhelmed by this simple act of loyalty that he pours the water out without drinking a drop. He realizes that his despair is threatening the lives of others (2 Samuel 23:13-17) and he is ashamed of his despair.

We too fall into the pit of fear. We fear the loss of a job or career. We fear the death of a child through cancer. We fear the loss of a spouse through divorce. There are times when we face our fears of death or catastrophic illness. We may experience panic at the threat of losing possessions or relationships. These fears are real and powerful. Fear paralyzes the soul. We become incapacitated, incapable of taking the initiative. We retreat into our shells. We slide into despair. We crave old securities and flee new experiences.

We echo David's words¹¹ written out of fear – written in faith - words like *All day long they distort my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil. They attack, they lurk, they watch my steps, ... You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle.*" (56:5-6, 8) But David also points us in the right direction by faith. He writes: *When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?* (56:3-4)

THE PIT OF BURNOUT

“Burnout” has connotations usually connected with being overworked and emotionally drained leading to physiological problems. I do not use the term here in such a clinical sense but rather in a spiritual sense. I am writing of a soul weariness that drags down our energy and a relational bitterness that invades our minds. We become obsessed with the trivial but cannot concentrate on the vital. Loneliness tears down our resolve especially under relentless threats and the sting of false accusations. Spiritual battles lead to battle fatigue. Spiritual burnout does not come from being overworked as much as it comes from wounds inflicted on the soul through conflict and criticism. If we have been fighting the enemy alone without the support of mature friends or too long without spiritual renewal, we face the danger of spiritual burnout leaving us spiritually, mentally and emotionally drained. Leaders are especially vulnerable to spiritual burnout. They may not lack physical energy, but the inner drive of the soul is gone. Self-doubt dominates the mind leaving little stomach for the spiritual fight ahead. I have talked with many who have left the ministry - casualties of the spiritual war we all fight. It is the battle of burnout.

David has been busy in the wilderness (1 Samuel 23:1-18). His band of men has grown to 600. When the Philistines attack the village of Keilah, God tells David to take his fighting force and defend the village. David wins a decisive victory, inflicting heavy losses on the Philistines and saving the people of Keilah. How do they repay his courage? They report his presence to King Saul and David with his men must withdraw to the wilderness once again. Falsely accused by the very people he has helped, David becomes discouraged. Many spiritual leaders know the pain of having the people you help become your accusers in times of trouble. Ingratitude, false accusations, and disloyalty combined with weary loneliness breed spiritual burnout. God sends David's good friend Jonathan, Saul's son, to encourage David in the desert. Jonathan helps David *find strength in God* (1 Samuel 23:16). Thank God for replenishers. Spiritual burnout needs someone to help replenish the fire that once burned bright in our souls. God often uses a friend to come alongside us and rekindle that passion. Strength returns. The soul discovers a new resolve.

THE PIT OF REJECTION

Rejection and replacement are two of our most common fears in life. To be rejected is to be spurned as unworthy. To be replaced is to be expendable and devalued. If I am replaceable, then I am insignificant. I have seen grown men cry after being terminated in a job, replaced by someone else as the company downsizes or restructures. As I listen to their feelings, I realize it is not the loss of money nor even the loss of the job itself that hurts as much as the bitter sense of rejection they feel. Rejection strikes at the inner psyche, the personal self-image we carefully cultivate not so much for others as for ourselves. Replacement threatens our self-identity. The bitterness that I have seen in divorce is often directly connected to the sense of rejection and replacement that people feel. To be replaced by another woman is to be devalued as a wife. Harsh and hateful words are screamed out in pain. I have seen outwardly successful adults who are still scarred by the rejection they felt from parents during childhood. Often adults are driven to succeed still craving the acceptance they never felt from a father or mother. Rejection has long tentacles in life.

Risk is part of life. We cannot live without risking rejection. The sweaty-palmed boy who asks the pretty girl for a date is risking rejection as is the salesman who makes cold calls. Relationships struggle with the fear of rejection. Once we have felt rejection's sting, we are less likely to risk again. We pull back. We shield ourselves. We become defensive and lash out at others. We may complain and blame the company, society or a spouse for our pain while rationalizing our failure in the process.

David felt the sting of rejection (1 Samuel 29-30). He has been hounded for so long by Saul that he takes his 600 men over to their common enemy the Philistines. David struck a bargain with the devil for a few moments of peace from Saul. His plan backfired. David and his men return home only to find that the Amalekites have taken all the families captive while burning the city to the ground. It is a devastating blow. David has failed as a leader. He knows it, and the men know it. He rolled the political dice and lost. Bitter tears flow in this pit of failure. We read: *Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep* (1 Sam. 30:4). Rejection rises out of failure. David has failed as a leader. He never consulted God for direction in this Philistine matter. He followed the path of political expediency. Now he and his men are paying a heavy price for David's failure as a spiritual leader. The bitter tears turn quickly to blame in the pit of rejection. David is distressed as he realized his men *spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters* (1 Sam. 30:6).

Failure often generates rejection. We have failed in some way, and this failure results in rejection. If we are honest we know that we didn't just lose our job by chance; we failed to produce on the job in the way we should have produced. If we are honest, we realize that we failed as a spouse contributing to the failure of the marriage. Rejection begins with failure. The only way out of the pit of rejection is to purify the soul by acknowledging the failure. Sadly our common response in the pit of rejection is to complain and complaining only leads to further rejection. The cycle of failure and rejection continues as we complain and blame.

Henri Nouwen, writing about the elder son and his self-righteous condemning spirit in the story of the Prodigal son, said: "Complaining is self-perpetuating and counterproductive. ... A complainer is hard to live with, and very few people know how to respond to the complaints made

by a self-rejecting person. The tragedy is that, often, the complaint, once expressed, leads to that which is most feared: further rejection.”¹² We tend to blame and complain in the pit of rejection, and the result is further rejection. We must learn to accept our share of responsibility for whatever failure precipitated the rejection before we can understand the pit. Spouses must accept responsibility for each share in the failed marriage. Workers must accept responsibility each one for his/her share in the failed career. Complaining and blaming only increase the withdrawal and the rejection.

Many years ago, as a teenager, I read a book that became my spiritual tutor in the basics of spiritual growth. Miles Stanford wrote in that book these words that I have had to learn again and again over the years in the pits of my life. “One of God’s most effective means in the process is failure. So many believers are simply frantic over the fact of failure in their lives, and they will go to all lengths in trying to hide it, ignore it, or rationalize it. And all the time they are resisting the main instrument in the Father’s hand for conforming us to the image of His Son!”¹³ The pit is intended to purify.

David didn’t complain or blame. He turned to the Lord in the bottom of his pit, and he *strengthened himself in the Lord his God* (1 Sam. 30:6). This time David consults God in prayer and God directs him to lead the men in a rescue attack on the Amalekites. David’s men, in turn, stop blaming David and follow his leadership in the attack. They gain a great victory over the Amalekites and recover their families and great possessions. Some of the men were too weak to take part in the attack, and when they rejoin the others, there is some complaining that they have failed. The men who won the victory want to reject the men who stayed behind, but David will have none of it. David insists that all share in the victory equally so that there is no withdrawing, blaming and rejecting. The pit of rejection is conquered when we learn to deal with failure properly.

THE PIT OF GRIEF

David has only been resting for two days after returning from his daring rescue of the families taken hostage by the Amalekites who raided Ziklag. David had felt the sting of failure and rejection as the people bitterly resented his leadership. Within three days after winning the hearts of the people back, he faces terrible grief at the death of Jonathan his dear friend (2 Samuel 1:1-2). David writes in his lament; *I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women.* (2 Sam. 1:26).

Death traumatizes the soul of the living. Grief is one of the deepest pits. For all our often helpful understanding of the stages of grieving there is no one immune from the sting of grief. Expecting the death of a loved one does not mitigate the hurt we feel in that death. Knowledge about the process does not minimize the pain of the loss. We can empathize with David’s words in his psalms of lament. *My heart has been smitten like grass and has withered away. Indeed, I forget to eat my bread. Because of the loudness of my groaning my bones cling to my flesh. ... I lie awake, I have become like a lonely bird on a housetop. ... I have eaten ashes like bread and mingled my drink with weeping* (Psalm 102:4-9 cf. Ps. 6:6, 13:1-2, 77:2-4).

The simple graveside service was over. There were only a few people present. I had been called in to perform this ministry for a family from another state and did not know any of them. I had respectfully stepped to one side to allow the family members some privacy when the sister suddenly screamed and threw herself on the marker. Sobbing uncontrollably she screamed, "He's gone. He's gone. I don't know where he is, but he is gone." Everyone else stood in a state of shock, so I stepped forward, knelt and put my arm around this stranger so wrapped in her grief. She turned to me and said, "Why? Why did he have to go?" I could only offer her God's love and comfort. I prayed with her, but I could not assuage her grief.

I have sat at the bedsides of the dying. I have offered a sip of water, a word of love, a prayer. I have watched a man take his last shuddering breath, and I have turned to offer comfort to the grieving widow. I have looked into the eyes of a parent who has lost a child and offered my sympathy. Several times in my ministry I have arrived at the home before the funeral director and sat with the dazed spouse trying to make sense of the moment. To love only to be separated from the one you love traumatizes the soul as few other experiences do. Death is a deep pit, and as I sit by the pit, it is ever obvious that I cannot enter that pit with the one who feels the loss. Only God can enter that pit, and only God can lift the soul out.

Horatius Bonar called bereavement "the sharpest arrow in the quiver of God. ... By it, He is making room for Himself in hearts that had been filled with other objects and engrossed with other loves."¹⁴ I have no doubt he is right although it is small comfort when I am in the pit. I know that every pit is designed by God's hand to shape the soul for Himself, but I am not able to find comfort in that truth while still in the pit. We see and understand these transcendent truths only after God lifts us from the pit. Grief purifies but it is a caustic cleanser of the human soul.

THE PIT OF GUILT

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic exploration of human guilt in colonial New England, the Rev. Mr. Arthur Dimmesdale takes from his secret closet a bloody scourge to whip himself for his sin during his late night vigils as he wastes away from his guilt. "He thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify himself."¹⁵ David must have understood that guilt when confronted by Nathan the prophet over his sin of adultery and murder especially as his child was dying. David *lay all night on the ground* (2 Sam. 12:16) for seven days, refusing all food. His secret was exposed. The wound in his soul so carefully covered was ripped open so that his eyes could see his sin in all its dark reality. The pit of guilt is the pit of self-torture. He pleads with God through long nights of fasting for the life of his child condemned to death by David's sin. David knew the pit of guilt. *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is every before me. Against you, you only, I have sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you are justified when you speak and blameless when you judge.* (Psalm 51:3-4)

Guilt is intended to produce shame.¹⁶ There are two kinds of shame that guilt produces. There is godly shame, and there is worldly shame. The Apostle Paul wrote: *For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.* (2 Cor. 7:10) The difference is in the outcome. Guilt has a purpose. We will see that godly guilt is meant to lead us to God. The shame we feel for sin is right. We should feel ashamed of sin, and if not then our callousness to sin is proof of our hardness

toward God. Godly guilt is painful, but the pain is God's scalpel cutting into the soul to remove the cancer of sin. As John Piper writes, "the pain ought to be there but it ought not to stay there."¹⁷ Godly guilt leads us back to God and His grace for salvation.

Worldly sorrow tortures the soul with the scourge of Dimmesdale. Worldly guilt refuses to accept grace. Worldly shame insists on paying for the sin or rationalizing the sin away. Both are forms of pride. Pride says, "I made this mess, so I'll fix this mess." The result is death by spiritual asphyxiation. The more we try to fix it the worse it gets. Pride says, "It's not so bad. Others have done worse. I can lock it up in a secret closet and throw away the key. Let's move on and leave the past behind." Such guilt condemns the soul to a slow death for guilt never goes away on its own. Guilt always rises again unless crucified by grace. Sooner or later the closet is opened, and the guilt comes rushing back more powerful than ever.

Guilt must be released, or it will poison the soul. Little "guilts" can pile up in life until the soul is drowning in a sea of regrets. Guilt leads to a sense of unworthiness so that the guilty party cannot even accept the forgiveness of God. "I am not worthy of it," says the guilt tortured soul yet by denying grace the guilty dooms his soul to remain in the pit. Guilt's only antidote is grace. We must release to grace the guilt of our sin. We must let it go for the more we cling to and nurse our guilt, wallowing in its seductive misery the more we slowly choke on our own bile. If we release our guilt and renew our souls, then we will experience godly guilt. The outcome proves God's grace (2 Cor. 7:11). The evidence of godly guilt is in the response we show toward sin.

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation. The pit of guilt should lead to the joy of salvation. This is the process we will explore in the pages ahead. Godly guilt humbles the soul to accept grace. David understood that process and released his guilt to God's grace. *I acknowledge my sin to you, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord', and you forgave the guilt of my sin.* (Psalm 32:5)

THE PIT OF BETRAYAL

Trust is the glue that binds our relationships. Once trust is broken, the relationship is shattered. Without trust, any close relationship is over until trust can be rebuilt. Yet even as the relationship ends the soul longs for the loved one. There is an empty hole in the soul. David, on the death of his betraying son Absalom, grieved his loss in the pit of betrayal. *The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And thus he said as he walked, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, son!* (2 Sam. 18:33)

The story of Absalom is the story of betrayal. A father and a son, a king and a nation, politics, and war, murder and lust, all combine to form a complex set of relationships. Absalom, a favored son of David, kills his brother Amnon because Amnon raped Absalom's sister Tamar. Absalom flees to a neighboring country for asylum. However, David, as father and king, yearns for his son Absalom despite his sin. Joab, David's most trusted advisor, sees this yearning and conspires to get Absalom back. He tricks David into agreeing to allow Absalom back into the kingdom although not into the palace. So Absalom manipulates Joab into gaining an audience with his father the king and David welcomes his son back into the palace. How does Absalom

repay this fatherly trust? He uses his handsome appearance; his personal charisma and his royal perks to undermine David's authority as king with his subjects. More and more people are attracted to Absalom. They find him winsome and helpful in their various causes and complaints. Absalom leads many people to distrust David by insinuating that he fails them as a leader. The end result is that Absalom leads a coup against his father. David and his loyal men run for their lives once again, this time from his own son who has betrayed him. Eventually, David's men defeat Absalom in battle and restore David to the throne. Absalom is killed, in a stroke of poetic justice, while hanging from a tree by his handsome hair. Pride drove him to betray his own father and pride killed him in the end.

Betrayal breeds hard consequences because it undermines our confidence. When someone we love betrays us, it tears at the foundation of our souls. The confidence we once had is gone, replaced by the fear that we will be betrayed again. It is hard to lead when consumed with self-doubt and tormented by fear. It is easy to become suspicious of all we once trusted. The betrayed one looks around and wonders who he can trust given the attacks and the disclosures from ones he once trusted. David expressed the feelings of betrayal in these poignant words. *And when he comes to see me, he speaks falsehood; his heart gathers wickedness to itself; when he goes outside, he tells it. All who hate me whisper together against me; ... Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me* (Psalm 41:6-9)

The depth of the pit after betrayal is directly proportional to the height of the trust before betrayal - the higher the trust, the deeper the pit. David had trusted Absalom, and when we trust someone, we are vulnerable to betrayal of that trust. Psalm 42 is another lament song composed by the Sons of Korah. There are many speculations about the background to this psalm. The Sons of Korah were Levites who were temple singers. They were the Hebrew choir. The traditional speculation is that Psalm 42 was composed by one the choir members who accompanied King David when he fled from Absalom. The people had rebelled against him, and his own son dethroned him. It was a time for remembering broken relationships as he was driven from family and country. So this Levite observed King David standing on a hill outside the land of Israel, across the Jordan River, looking back at the land he had left behind and lamenting. *My tears have been my food day and night, ... these things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with the voice of joy and thanksgiving.* (Psalm 42:3-4) The Levite goes on to write in verse 7 that his depression was like the waves of the ocean breaking over his soul. Wave after wave of emotion overwhelmed his soul with despair and drove him deeper under the waves of depression. Cut off from his country and his family he could only fall deeper into despair.

Love is founded on trust. Without trust, there is no love. There are few feelings as painful as the feeling of betrayal for it means that one you trusted chose to violate you and in that act abused your love. To be violated tears at the fabric of the soul. To be used by one you trusted destroys your inner man. To love someone and to find that he will violate your love is demeaning – it denigrates and shatters us inside where no one else sees. The wounds of betrayal are so deep that they often mark the person for years. The betrayed person finds it difficult to trust again and therefore to love again. Intimacy is impossible because to love again means to trust again making the soul vulnerable again. A risk the betrayed one is often unwilling to take.

The pit of betrayal is deep and dark. The way out is through the process of release and renew. We must release to God the feelings of betrayal and renew our trust in God first before we are ready to risk trusting others again. Psalm 42 points the way out of the pit with the repeated refrain: *Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him.* (Psalm 42:5,11)

ACKNOWLEDGE THE PIT AS THE PLACE OF GOD'S CHOICE.

Slowly the soul awakes to searing pain. We try to staunch the flow, assuage the hurt but we cannot. Many work to bury the feelings deep in the inner recesses of the soul. Pack it inside a box and close the closet door. Ignore it, and it will go away. But it never does. Sooner or later we have to deal with the pain for the door gets opened or the pain surfaces. So we anesthetize ourselves. The objective is to keep the pain away. Numb it. Try not to feel again. There are many anesthetics available for soul pain. Work is a common anesthetic. Bury ourselves in careers and responsibilities, so we don't have time to feel. Drugs or alcohol numb the pain too. Hobbies and recreational activities can remove the pain from the mind for a moment. Sex works, provided we make sure that it remains casual and avoid any intimacy. As a pastor, I have talked with many men who anesthetize their pain through pornography - the impersonal counterfeit to true intimacy. All of these methods are intended to accomplish one objective. Avoid the pain.

All of these methods are doomed to fail because we must feel the pain to find any healing for the soul. The surgeon's scalpel must cut to cure. We must feel to heal. Pain can be the first sign that healing has begun in the soul. If we avoid the pain, we avoid the process that God designs for healing our soul's deepest needs. God wants to purify our souls through the pain. God wants to teach us greater spiritual lessons through the pits. Elisabeth Elliot wrote, "The deepest lessons come out of the deepest waters and the hottest fires."¹⁸ There are lessons to learn and sinful tendencies to cure that only can happen in the pits of life. Pain itself is not the purpose. Pain is the instrument God uses to accomplish His purpose in our lives.

We must acknowledge the pit as the place of God's choice before healing can begin in our souls. I say, "acknowledge" not "accept" for I do not mean to suggest some spiritual fatalism. To acknowledge the pit is to "admit it to be true, to confess"¹⁹ the pit as real. Denial never works. Truth brings freedom. However, we must acknowledge the pit not just as real but as the place of God's choice for us at this moment in time. The word acknowledge also means "to recognize the authority or claims of" someone. We must recognize the authority of God in our pit. We must recognize the claims of God on our lives in the bottom of the pit. It is not enough to acknowledge the pit if all we do is try to pull ourselves up and out of the pit without ever acknowledging the God of the pit. When we acknowledge the God of the pit, then we begin to understand the purpose behind the pit, and we can learn the lessons of the pit that heal the pain we feel in the pit.

There are three possibilities for understanding God when we sit in the pit. First, God is sovereign but aloof. He is a spectator in human affairs. He could intervene but chooses to let us struggle on by ourselves. God is powerful but uncaring. Second, God is not sovereign, but He loves us in our pit. God cares but God is powerless. God did not cause the pit, but He feels our pain. He empathizes with our circumstances, but He can do nothing about them other than offer

consolation. Third, God is sovereign and He can, and will, lift us from the pit. God superintends the pit. If God is sovereign, then we are in the pit by God's will.

If the first possibility is true, then I have no hope. I live in a cold world, and the pit has no purpose. If the second possibility is true, then I feel His love but must work my own way out of the pit for God is a fellow pit dweller. He may be a stronger pit dweller, and His strength is encouraging, even helpful. Maybe God has been in this pit before so that He can show me the way out, but if He didn't create the pit, He cannot control the pit. If the third possibility is true, then I feel irritated that God put me here, but ultimately, I have hope that He can get me out. If God is the pit creator, then God is the pit controller. I may not like the fact that He designs pits for His people. I may fight that notion as unfair much like my child claims that dad is unfair to send her to her room. However, I now have hope. God can remove what God has caused. The sovereignty of God is the only true hope for the person sitting in the pit. His power is the start of my answer as I sit in the pit.

The Bible teaches us that God is sovereign. *Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.* (Psalm 115:3). The afflictions we feel are not by chance. God told Isaiah, *I am ... the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.* (Isaiah 45:7). Human catastrophe with all its suffering does not happen outside the superintending power of God. *If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?* (Amos 3:6) Jeremiah writing as he watched the atrocities of the Babylonian conquerors destroying his city and taking his people captive said, *Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?* (Lamentations 3:37-38) The Bible does not ascribe metaphysical evil to God for God cannot even be tempted by evil much less tempt others to do evil (James 1:13). Man sins but God superintends every sinful decision into His overall plan. So, every manmade disaster comes with God designed boundaries. Every catastrophe is shaped by God's hands.

The pits now have purposes. God superintends our pits to teach us His lessons. We must acknowledge the pit as the place of God's choice no matter what the situation or we will never experience the life God wants for us outside the pit. All pits are by God's design for God's people. I do not mean that all our actions that set us up to fall into the pits are God's fault. That would be sheer fatalism. God is not at fault for our bad or sinful choices. We are responsible beings following our own strongest desires to our own good or bitter ends. The choices we make lead to the pits, but the pits are not caused by the choices. The pits are the consequences of our choices but not the determined results. Some pits are God's chastening response to our sinful choices. God creates the pits to purify our choices, to cleanse our souls. Some pits are God's plan for our spiritual development. God creates these pits to deepen our dependency on Him.

All pits are God's pits, and we must acknowledge His sovereign purpose in the pits to enjoy His rescue from the pits. The psalmist wrote: *It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn your statutes.* (Psalm 119:71) And again: *I know, O Lord, that your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.* (Psalm 119:75) There is a divine purpose behind the pit that we need to recognize if we are to learn the lessons of the pit. The purpose is always good even if the pit itself is not (Romans 8:28).

Jeremiah experienced the pit when Judah was taken into captivity by the invading Babylonians and Jerusalem burned to the ground, men, women, and children killed or chained by ruthless soldiers. He was a righteous prophet who could have bitterly complained that he did not deserve this pit dug by the hand of God because of the sinfulness of the people who rejected his message. He didn't complain. Jeremiah acknowledged God in the pit. He wrote: *For the Lord will not reject forever, for if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men.* (Lamentations 3:31-33) Jeremiah points to hope even as he acknowledges the affliction as coming from God for if the pain comes from God, then the healing will too. The character of God gives us hope in the pit.

Job, who suffered the results of a wager between God and the devil, still worshiped God and said: *Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.* (Job 1:21). The editorial comment that follows tells the theological point. *Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.* (Job 1:22) Here is a man who suffered the death of his seven children and the loss of his entire business empire through no wrong doing or even unwise choices on his part. If there were ever any man who could have blamed God for his misfortune, it would have been Job. But he did not. He acknowledged God when He could not understand God's ways. When Job's wife told him to *curse God and die*, Job rebuked her. He called her a foolish woman and said, *Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?* (Job 2:10) Some might think Job was wrong in saying this, but the Scripture immediately corrects that notion by saying, *In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.* (Job 2:10).

Purity is the first purpose for the pit. J. Oswald Sanders wrote, "God does not waste suffering, nor does He discipline out of caprice. If He plough, it is because He purposes a crop."²⁰ God disciplines those He loves like a Father disciplines His children (Hebrews 12:6). There is a purpose behind the pain. We do not like the discipline, but God designed the pain to produce righteousness. Hebrews 12:11 says, *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.* When I was going through some deep waters in my life a fellow pastor who had recently been through hard times himself encouraged me by saying, "Dave, remember purity comes through pain." I have never forgotten that admonition. He cited 1 Peter 4:1-2 which teaches us this principle. *Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.*

Pain strips us of our sinful self-interest more effectively than any other tool in God's training program. When the distractions of life are swept away, we face God as we really are - no masks and no facades. God uses suffering to purify the desires that feed our actions. Our actions have roots deep in our souls (Matthew 7:17-20; James 3:11-12). What we do comes from the inner desires that drive our deeds. These roots must be cleansed if our actions are to change. Nothing works to get at the roots better than pain. So God uses the pit to purify the roots of sin in our souls. He shuts us up in the pit until we see ourselves as God sees us. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead*

me in the everlasting way. (Psalm 139-23-24) God disciplines us as a loving Father so that we might learn to *share His holiness* (Hebrews 12:10). The verb was used of a farmer receiving his share of the crops at harvest time, but in this verse, we do not earn the holiness. We receive the holiness that is God's to give. We receive a share of God's holiness through God's discipline for God must root out the unholiness that fills our lives before we can receive the holiness He wants to give us. The instrument that God uses to refine us to receive His holiness is the instrument of pain. God does not design our circumstances to make us happy but to make us holy.

The 16th-century Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross, called it “the dark night of the soul” as he described those periods of spiritual dryness that envelope God's people. God seems distant. We have no spiritual vitality. The soul seems sterile. We feel cut off from others who offer to help. An inner restlessness controls our thoughts. We are in the pit. John of the Cross exhorted believers to embrace this pit as the place of God's choosing. He spoke of the purifying process that takes place in the pit. God strips us of external results and internal supports. Richard Foster clarified for our modern thoughts this double purification process.²¹ God strips us of our dependence on external results by removing our careers, our accomplishments, our goals and our honors. We worked hard and built up businesses or ministries, but these now have lost their luster. We wake up to the fact that they no longer satisfy as God purifies us from our obsession with external success. Then God strips us of our internal supports. God threatens the roots deep in our souls. His stripping is the most painful purification. The inner supports we have relied on through life are now doubted. We suspect our motivations and our closest relationships. We had developed a certain self-perception that we relied on in life, and now this very perception of ourselves is threatened. We had developed certain perceptions of God that grounded our faith, and even these perceptions of God are now suspected as unreliable. God is purifying our understanding of both God and self in the bottom of the pit.

Purity leads to dependency on God. God wants to remove the supports and the successes of our lives so that we will come to depend on Him completely. He wants to teach us His absolute reliability. He wants to teach us to trust Him with everything we hold dear. The most treasured people and possessions are turned over to God. We learn that God can be trusted when no one else can. We only learn these lessons in the pit when everyone and everything else we have come to trust has been removed. It is God and self – alone in the pit. Elisabeth Elliot wrote, “The deepest lessons come out of the deepest waters and the hottest fires.”²²

March 25, 1951, was “Black Easter” for Arthur and Wilda Matthews and their two-year-old daughter Lilah. In January of that year, China Inland Mission had given the orders to evacuate over 600 missionaries and 284 children from Communist China. The Matthews had made plans to leave the country giving away all their clothes, belongings and provisions to the Chinese Christians. Then hopes were dashed. Arthur had unknowingly offended a Communist official who revoked their exit permits and placed them under arrest. They were attending their last worship service with the little Chinese church before they would not be allowed any more contact. The worship leader asked the tiny fellowship to sing, “He Lives” and Wilda realized that she could not sing that familiar hymn as her doubts about God's will overwhelmed her soul. Why was God allowing this to happen? She faced the classic question of “second causes.” When a believer makes a mistake, does God allow Satan to tease and torment the believer? Do these circumstances come from God or Satan? Who is in control of the pit?

The Matthews would be the last missionaries to leave Communist China after enduring two years of imprisonment. During that time they suffered deprivation, cold, starvation and isolation living under house arrest at 9,500 feet above sea level in the mountains of China. Arthur would sit outside the home making coal balls to burn in the stove to keep his family warm. He would gather coal dust and leaves off the ground and mix it with sheep dung, molding it into balls that could be burned like coal. Was this God's will for His faithful servants? Or had God abandoned them to evil forces in this world? During that imprisonment, Arthur penned these words by faith in God.

In the center of the circle of the will of God I stand,
There can be no second causes; all must come from His own hand,
When dark clouds obscure the vision, and my way I may not see,
I will trust Him in the darkness, for I know He pilots me.

In the center of the circle of the will of God, I stand,
Though the circumstances round me show small trace of His skilled hand,
Yet in darkness as in daylight, in the gloom as sunshine fair,
I will trust Him for His presence, for I know He's always near!²³

Isobel Kuhn, a fellow missionary with the former China Inland Mission, told the story of the Matthews in her book *Green Leaf in Drought*. The title of Kuhn's book comes from Jeremiah 17:7-8 because the deep pit led to the renewed dependence of these godly missionaries on Him who is absolutely reliable.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For He will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green.

Jeremiah goes on to remind us in verse 9, *The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?* We do not even know ourselves. We are experts at self-deception, deluding ourselves with false perceptions. Only God really knows us as we truly are. The pit is God's purifying process as He tests us and refines us. *I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.* (Jer. 17:10) The pit is the place where God searches our souls; purges our desires and leads us to greater dependence on His strength. We learn to trust in God when the burdens of this life are beyond our capacity to handle (2 Cor. 1:8-9).

Dependency leads to intimacy. It is not automatic but axiomatic. Some who experience God's stripping process turn away from God. Others turn to God as God desires. God's goal is not to drive us away but to draw us closer to Himself. The pit is intended to turn us to God, but we must acknowledge the pit as the place of God's choice to find God in the pit. Klaus Issler explains this principle.

It is important to note that this journey into darkness, into the desert, into the abyss is at God's own choosing. By extending such an invitation, God considers us ready

for a new and deeper level of intimacy with him. By means of such periods of dryness, God purifies our faith, and in the process he dislodges what we hold dear, including our false and fixed ideas about God. Paradoxically, God desires to draw us closer to himself by being temporarily distant and hidden.²⁴

God weans us from our self-interest by stripping us of our self-supports. Independence takes us away from God. Dependence on others takes away from God. God may take away our closest, most reliable supports to teach us to depend on Him. But God is not just interested in teaching dependence. He has a greater goal. He wants us to find our intimacy with Him first. We turn to God in dependence and in turning to God we grow closer to God. Jesus taught *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God* (Mt. 5:8). Jonathan Edwards, the Puritan pastor, explained what it means to “see God.” “God will, as it were, immediately discover himself to their minds, so that the understanding shall behold the glory and the love of God, as a man beholds the countenance of a friend.”²⁵ The soul “sees” God in spiritual communion. We cannot see God in a close relationship until His stripping work purifies our hearts.

Moses experienced this intimate communion with God. After the people had sinned by worshipping the golden calf, God purified the nation through suffering. During this time when God was stripping the people literally and figuratively of their idols (Exodus 33:6), Moses pitched the tent of meeting outside the encampment of the Israelites and all who sought God would come to the tent outside the encampment. *The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.* (Exodus 33:11) Moses was not “seeing” God’s face with the eye of the body but with the eye of the soul. He enjoyed a spiritual intimacy with God for God is spirit (John 4:24). Later, on the mountain, Moses is given a vision of God’s glory that did not include God’s face for God says that no man can see His face and live (Exodus 33:20). Moses spoke with God face to face in the tent at the foot of the mountain, but Moses could not see God’s face in all God’s glory on top of the mountain. The problem is not the power of the optic nerve to process the information. The problem is the purity of the soul to reach an even deeper level of intimacy with God. God had purified Moses to speak with him as a friend on earth, but an even fuller intimacy with God required complete refinement awaiting final glorification in heaven.

The Apostle Paul, one of God’s scholars in the school of suffering, explained that we suffer to find more satisfaction in God than in self. We count all things but loss compared to knowing Christ (Phil. 3:7-11). We learn to know Christ through the stripping process of loss. Joni Eareckson Tada, a modern student in the school of suffering, speaks to us from the pulpit of her wheelchair, “suffering does more than make us want to go to heaven. It prepares us to meet God when we get there.”²⁶ Many a saint has testified that they experienced the greatest intimacy with God during the times of deepest suffering. When all is lost except God, we learn to thirst for God. It was in the pit that the Psalmist wrote these words: *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God* (Psalm 42:1-2).

Kathy Bartalsky sat alone on the Ethiopian hillside looking at the wreckage of her husband’s helicopter. Fifteen months earlier she and her husband Steve had arrived in Ethiopia as missionaries. Her husband, a former Marine captain, was serving as a missionary pilot with “Helimission.” They had a beautiful baby boy named after his father. Life seemed idyllic. Yet God would lead her deep into the pit during those short months in Africa. Kathy suffered bouts of

malaria and the death of an adopted son named Colby. Then word came that her husband and a passenger had been killed when his helicopter crashed. The next days were a blur of emotions as she identified Steve's body in the hospital morgue and prepared for the funeral in the foreigner's cemetery on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. Four hundred people attended the funeral including many Ethiopian government officials and some of the personnel from the United States embassy. Later panic overwhelmed her, and she felt total desolation as she pondered life without her best friend. Three days after the crash she and the director of the mission, Ernie Tanner, flew to the crash site to see for themselves what had happened. Now she sat alone under the tree the helicopter had struck in the accident with billowy white clouds overhead and the African songbirds singing all around her. Why? God could have changed the situation. God could have protected Steve from this abrupt ending to his life of service. She writes:

“Sitting on the hillside where my husband met the Lord, peace flooded my soul, and I sang to God. I was no longer singing songs of sacrifice, but of praise. They were songs sung by a heart completely free to trust in God's eternal perspective.

The crash site was an end and a beginning. It was a place where I let go of my husband and willingly gave him to my Lord, and it was a place where life once again began to hold meaning.”²⁷

Despair and hope are opposite choices regarding how we see the future. Despair projects our present circumstances into the future. Despair looks at the future through the jaundiced eyes of our negative imagination. Despair imagines the future by painting the landscape with the colors of our current situation. Hope imagines the future by seeing God's possibilities for change. Hope turns to God for help. Hope is born in the pit. The pain is the beginning of hope and hope is the start of healing. Hope releases our pain to the Lord as we cry out to Him in the pit. Our cry in the pit leads to the renewal that David spoke about in Psalm 103. It is God *who pardons all your iniquities, who heals your diseases; who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; who satisfies your years with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle* (Psalm 103:3-5). Life rises out of death. Hope springs from the pit by God's redemption. Redemption is the setting free or releasing act of God. Renewal is the hope we have in God. We cry out for Him in the light of this hope. Our thirst drives our needs, but hope gives voice to our souls. When we cry out to God, we begin to see the pit through fresh eyes – the eyes of faith.

¹ Arthur Matthews, quoted by Isobel Kuhn, Green Leaf in Drought, (Littleton, CO. Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1948), p.53.

² All quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

³ You can read an excellent analysis of Brengle and others in David Seamands book, Healing for Damaged Emotions (Victor: Colorado Springs, CO. 2002), pp. 112-119.

⁴ Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p.163).

⁵ Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains, rob.

⁶ Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains, thv.

⁷ John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress (New York: Grossett and Dunlap) 6th stage.

⁸ Klaus Issler, Wasting Time with God (Downers Grove: Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 2001), p.147.

⁹ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol. 1, translator Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) pp. 35,37.

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- ¹⁰ Blaise Pascal, Pensees and other Writings, translator H. Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), fragment 225, p. 64 quoted by Klaus Issler, Wasting Time with God, p. 147. Issler has an helpful summary of this concept of double knowledge as it relates to relational intimacy with God.
- ¹¹ According to tradition these psalms were written during David's flight from Saul in the wilderness. They reflect both his fear and his faith.
- ¹² Henri Nouwen, The Return of the Prodigal Son (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 73.
- ¹³ Miles Stanford, Principles of Spiritual Growth (Lincoln, Nebraska; Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1966), p. 25.
- ¹⁴ Horatius Bonar, When God's Children Suffer (Chicago: Moody Press), p.54.
- ¹⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (New York: Bantam Books, 1965), p. 133.
- ¹⁶ I do not speak here of shame that is false or misplaced. False shame is shame that others heap upon us for failures (or even perceived failures) that are not sinful. Sin is supposed to produce shame or guilt but many are affected by a hyper sensitivity to guilt that leads to relationships controlled by shame. I do not speak of such false guilt or shame here but of guilt that comes from sin.
- ¹⁷ John Piper, The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers Inc., 1995), p.137.
- ¹⁸ Elisabeth Elliot, A Path through Suffering: Discovering the Relationship Between God's Mercy and our Pain (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Publications, 1990), p.127.
- ¹⁹ "Acknowledge" in Webster's New World College Dictionary 3rd edition edited by Victoria Neufeldt and David Guralnik (New York, New York: Macmillan Inc., 1997).
- ²⁰ J. Oswald Sanders, in the Foreword to Isobel Kuhn's Green Leaf in Drought, p. 3.
- ²¹ Richard Foster, Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), pp. 20-21. There is also a very helpful discussion in Klaus Issler Wasting Time with God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship with God (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp.143-147.
- ²² Elisabeth Elliot, A Path Through Suffering p. 127.
- ²³ Arthur Matthews, quoted by Isobel Kuhn, Green Leaf in Drought, p. 46.
- ²⁴ Klaus Issler, Wasting Time with God, pp. 146-147.
- ²⁵ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p.907 cited by R.C. Sproul, The Soul's Quest for God: Satisfying the Hunger for Spiritual Communion with God (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1992, reissue 2003), p.247, for a helpful discussion of this concept see pp. 238-250.
- ²⁶ Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Estes, A Step Further: Growing Closer to God through Hurt and Hardship (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001), p.181.
- ²⁷ Kathy Bartalsky, *An End and a Beginning*, Moody Monthly (April, 1990), p.56.

