

Drawn To Him...

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." John 12:32

Having received The LORD Jesus Christ as my personal LORD and Savior over fifty years ago, I find it overwhelming to verbalize how my journey of following Christ by Grace through Faith alone. There are so many *blessings...dramatic interventions by the Holy Spirit...trials...dry, desert-silence...overwhelming despair and struggling times*, which this testimony of God's faithfulness in my life could easily develop into a doctoral dissertation and still not include His personal touch in full. *Yet I am not as spiritually as far along as I have hoped to be by now.*

I gratefully remember my first exposures to Christ at about 5 or 6 years of age, as my mother daily read to me from two volumes of Scripture, O.T. / N.T., illustrated pictorially as the comic strips in the Sunday newspaper. Those images stuck in my mind vividly. My wife and I have used those same volumes, ragged, dog-eared, and torn in many places, to our own children. Little did I know at that time that my mother had committed me, as did Hanna, to pray for me to someday enter the ministry. She never mentioned it until God clearly called me to enter seminary to train for full time service of Him at 27 years of age.

I had the privilege of attending the first Billy Graham Crusade in Columbus, Ohio as a youngster. Seeing Billy in person, preach the Word so powerfully, having watched his many crusades on our black and white TV, softened my heart. The LORD was silently preparing me for the perfect moment. *I received Him in my soul and became spiritually alive, re-born, and baptized in the Holy Spirit* some time before I was 10 years old. I even recommitted that decision in writing at age 13 in the back of a small copy of the Gospel of John. The sensitivity God gave me for others along with my own selfish awareness exposed me to suffering with Him through the cruelty and ridicule of young people and adults throughout high school and college. *Honesty, I did not like this pain of depending only on Him*, and periodically circumstances and fleshly weaknesses provoked me to rage and struggle with Him as did Jacob and many of the Psalmists. *It did not seem fair*, yet I was hooked like a fish and had no real alternative place to go since *He was and is the only source of eternal life*. I needed to put my trust in the Holiness and Goodness of His character no matter what the circumstances or overwhelming painful, dark emotions in my soul.

In uncanny ways, my life in Christ has paralleled Jeremiah's life in Lamentations 3, learning to live a life of *passionate paradox* in pursuit of Him. The Apostle Paul has taught me that it is *our life hidden in His giving us power through our weaknesses*, and that relationship with Jesus is our primary goal toward maturity and *not our religiosity*. In Timothy, Paul instructs to persevere in teaching/living/internalizing the Word even in our frail, non-eloquent, flesh whether counseling with daily pastoral-people problems or confronting false prophets in aggressive spiritual warfare. Just in my short lifetime I have observed and been caught up in the whirlwind of cultural disintegration of significant evil magnitudes. The secular and religious culture has degenerated from "traditional to modernism & rationalism (which has failed) to post-modernism (which distrusts modernism) to anti-Semitic & anti-Christian mindsets (persecution). Unfortunately, or at least Biblically predictable, the Christian community has allowed and these false

teachings to pollute the church universal, hence diluting the Gospel message and Great Commission. *Who is adequate for these things?*

Little did I know the courage required to be a Christ-follower. This reality disrupted my life early on when I began to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it and to teach His statutes & ordinances...to examine the deep waters of the soul and it's fallen structure of self-protection, demandingness for control of my world & even my deep rooted passion against God Himself. Oswald Chambers said, "*The core of all sin is the suspicion that God is not good.*" This is the spirit-flesh war within the soul of all believers. Paul, in Romans 7 talked of this struggle in his own life.

This struggle with God in regular warfare & surrender within has taught me that, although unpleasant, *it is the path of passionate pursuit of Him.* Moreover, when *I choose to lament & listen with Him, the paradox* of all paradoxes of His love & grace transforms (metamorphous) my soul to Christ-likeness with deep *JOY & HOPE.* It is during these times of pain, self-contempt & other-centered contempt, that ***His still quiet voice*** reminds me that over 50 years ago I sincerely prayed the prayer of Jabez (1 Chronicles 4:10), and it was ***my passionate choice.*** *To be "poor in spirit" means to be spiritually bankrupt.*

Now, I must choose to trust in His character even in the most difficult of circumstances & pain He allows me to experience. *I am constrained by His love* for me in view of my depraved soul, to acknowledge that I have been bought with a price and a substitutionary death by the very suffering sacrifice and blood of the Holy God. I do not belong to myself, but as Paul said "...a slave unto righteousness" and realize that *The LORD is under no obligation to respond to my demands.* Surprised by His Grace, He invites me to delight myself in Him, so that He can grant me the desires of my heart. *Again, who is adequate for these things? I have tasted and seen that the LORD is good.*

As I presently choose to *walk this path of brokenness,* God performs surgery without anesthesia, when I hold still long enough, and I am disrupted and motivated to tear down my fallen structure of sin and the passion to be, to connect in relationship and to give is released toward others. Whether I am teaching, shepherding, or counseling / discipling others I am aware of my inadequacies and inability to change anyone at any depth of their soul. I am simply a tool of clay to be used by Christ to disrupt core level wrong assumptions of others, and to *provide the permission for them to lament* (as do I), and the *safe context to think through those issues to find God.*

Only Christ heals the abused, wounded, and broken heart. I know, because He has brought me a long way from a self-righteous, arrogant, demanding engineer by training, to a humbled & learning to be an increasingly humble, servant of Christ for His glory to lead others to Him. Still, as Dr. Graham says, the first question I want to ask of the LORD, "Why did HE choose me? *Serving Him has intensified the passion within to find God; "rest" is released to others and empowers my life to connect in genuine koinonia in community.*

Because He Lives I can face tomorrow,

"Bud"

Howard L. Downing

Rev. 11/07/2017; 01/15/2015