

LIFE: A LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP

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I was in a women's group once when a young woman spoke up, angrily informing us that if we had her life we wouldn't be sitting there laughing and talking about how "blessed" we were. Her pain was evident as she shared how she and her husband had wanted children but were giving up after five miscarriages and a life-threatening tubal pregnancy. I thought at the time what an unfair accusation that was since she couldn't see the hurts and wounds life had dealt the others in the group. Yet, when we're hurting, it's hard not to feel alone.

Don't take life personally, because it happens to everyone. Something I've realized as I've gotten older is that life, for everyone, is hard. I mean really hard. I don't know of anyone that hasn't, at some point, dealt with heartaches, stress, and problems. As I was paying for something today at Wal-Mart the checkout girl told me that while yesterday was payday she had less than two dollars in her pocket to last until the next payday. Later, at Kroger, the woman by us at the self-checkout had lost her money and was panicking. I heard today about a woman who has to have her eye removed long enough to clean out the problem behind it.

Up until a year ago I would have said that I've led a great life, blessed and content. But about a year ago someone who's known me all my life said, "You've had a really hard life, Brenda." I was stunned; I would never have perceived my life as being hard. My first response was, "No I haven't!"

Then I started looking back over my life from an outside point of view, and I realized that we have had our share of hard times. We started our married life running a full-time ministry with no income, and seasons of struggling financially have dogged our path much more than we would have chosen. I've had a miscarriage, but one out of four people do. We've been through Chris's three broken legs (involving long hospital stays and multiple surgeries), Jessie's broken collarbone, and Jeremy's broken wrist, not to mention how many times they've been stitched up.

When Jeremy was three we left home for a few weeks and everything we had was stolen, leaving an empty shell of a house. Once, when the company Terry worked

for was bought out, we had to move from our home into a two-room apartment. When the children were younger we had our own business (a family fun center) that was thriving but couldn't financially make a fast enough comeback, and after a year we had to shut it down (we had birthday parties booked two years in advance when we closed the doors).

I could tell more but everyone has lived through troubles, and just to clear the slate God does NOT make bad things happen to you. Life in a fallen world is already crammed full of stress, heartache, and problems, He certainly doesn't need to add to them for us to learn whatever lessons we perceive He is trying to teach us. **What he does do is use what is already in our lives to take us to a place of looking to Him and living the adventure.**

Through our problems Terry and I quickly discovered some things that made all the difference. The first thing we learned was to abandon our natural perspective and look at our life through God's perspective. That takes away the tunnel vision of focusing on our problems and lets us see the bigger picture. *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, (Eph 2:6).*

We learned that through everything God is hurting and crying with us. He cares about every tiny detail of our lives. We are not alone.

We've learned that life was meant to be an adventure, and we want to be dancing together through it with God. No matter what it brings He can use it to be exciting and purposeful. We can always dance—on the good *and* the bad.

If we will allow Him to, God will use the negative things in our lives to bring positive results. Even when life looks like it's falling apart, most of the time (though you may feel bruised and battered), you can see from the other side that you're in a better place.

It is amazing to me how many times He has turned our ashes into a great adventure that was better than what we had to begin with. It doesn't mean that we don't care, it's an attitude, an expectation that we're walking with God. As I look back at our life I can say in all honesty that it has been wonderful. Yes, I get discouraged, and I have my share of pity parties. I had a pity party this week when our home was flooded, and it's been a mess. It wasn't just that, but at the same time Terry's

laptop screen crashed, and the next morning his glasses broke. At that point I began to feel some sympathy with Job.

Let me tell you some of the ways God has helped us ride out the adventure of our lives. During the time prior to moving into the two-room apartment, our oldest son Jeremy had moved into his own place, leaving a giant hole in our lives. We wanted anything "fun" to include him, which wasn't realistic or fair to our other two children, and we all seemed to spend our free time in our own rooms (my "office" was in our bedroom). I prayed that God would bring us back together as a family.

We moved into the two rooms, and around job hunting Terry helped me teach the kids (ages 12 and 14). We would lay in bed at night all in one room and watch TV, laughing and talking. We felt like the Waltons as we said good night to each other from our beds. We learned that life takes very little to be happy and content. We each had one drawer in the chest for clothes, and one shelf on a bookshelf for personal belongings. We looked out over Main Street at old-fashioned lampposts and hanging baskets of flowers. We walked Main Street at midnight, ate mulberries from the tree in the park, and did schoolwork at the spring. God took what could have been terrible and turned it into a great time. I can now say from experience that if four people live and homeschool together in two rooms, they will definitely become a closer family. The kids still talk about those days.

God's provision has been awesome, and the miracles come when we're desperate. No, He doesn't promise that we'll never hurt financially, or that He will rescue us every time, but we have so many testimonies of His provision in times of great need. **It's SO important to write down what God does in your life in order to remember it when times get hard.** Like when Terry left early one morning for work and found \$965.00 fluttering around across the deserted parking lot. Or when everything we owned had been stolen, and we were sleeping without pillows on nothing but a bedspread on the carpet of our newly rented house. We'd spent our last few dollars on a sleeping bag for Jeremy, who was four years old at the time. As Terry drove to work one morning he was pleading with God for help, he couldn't bear to have me, pregnant with Jessie, sleeping on the floor. As he prayed, he saw something on the side of the interstate and stopped to pick it up. It was a brand new lounge chair pad, thick and long and still wrapped in plastic.

Losing everything was a valuable lesson for us to not let ourselves get too attached to stuff. No, and no again, God did NOT cause us to lose everything, it came from

living life in a fallen world. We had said for years that we wanted to be able to walk out and leave everything behind if God called us to something, and now we can. Our hearts are no longer attached to what we own.

One cold January Sunday during a financial dry spell (the company Terry had worked for had gone under), we were desperate for money. Being a Sunday we couldn't even hope for something in the mail. We'd eaten supper, when out of the darkness someone knocked on our back door. To our surprise it was a man who had attended our yard sale the previous November, wanting to know if we still had the nail gun, and by the time he left we had \$150.00 in our hands.

There was the time when we had recently moved to Louisville and were struggling to make ends meet. It was about seven o'clock in the evening and we'd not had supper because the cupboard was bare. As we watched TV to distract from our rumbling stomachs there was a knock on the door. On the floor outside our door were seven bags of groceries. We never did know who brought them.

One morning as Terry lay in bed he told God, "We HAVE to have \$750.00 today, we are desperate, please help us." At 10:30 that morning some friends called, saying that God had told them to give us their tax return, and they had \$750.00 in cash for us.

Years ago it was hard to give up the business we'd poured everything into, and it was hard to understand what God was doing. However, in hindsight we could see what happened and how not to repeat that mistake. The day we closed the doors for good and Terry turned out the lights, God spoke clearly, promising that He was going to bring something else up out of those ashes that would reach from coast to coast, and that we were still walking in our destiny.

Another morning Terry prayed about the \$300.00 we had to have, and this time when the phone rang it was a man we hadn't talked to in three years. Terry had once loaned him \$300.00 for a computer program, and he wanted to repay it.

We have seen God's hand orchestrating our lives through so many "disasters" that we've learned to just watch in expectation to see what cool thing God is doing next, how He will turn each situation into another exciting adventure.

Attitude is everything. Real life is everywhere, and how we allow it to affect us

makes all the difference. We must learn to keep our perspective coming from out of the third heaven, instead of the tunnel vision that problems and stresses bring. We can choose life or we can choose death. **Life is believing God's hand is moving for us even when it doesn't look like it.** Death is choosing to give in to the fears. Life is choosing to watch God's adventure playing out before our eyes, while death is losing our focus of walking out our destiny. Life is laughing and holding on to God for dear life as you go over the top of the roller coaster, death is cowering as you expect more disasters. It sounds like a "well duh" to choose life instead of death, but we, as humans, tend to daily choose death.

This week Terry's titanium glasses frames broke. That was a huge blow, as we aren't in a position to go out and buy another pair, titanium or not. The place we took them wasn't even where he had bought them eight years ago, but we hoped they could weld them together, at least temporarily. Twenty-four hours later he had a new pair of titanium frames exactly like the old ones, costing us a total of twenty dollars. Yes, when his glasses broke our hearts sank. But once again we were reminded that God is all-knowing, and He cares tremendously for us. He loves to use real life to bless us, to show us that He *is* interested in every detail of our lives, and that what we perceive as negative can be used as just another step into His destiny.

Now, stop and look at the things in your life that look bleak, discouraging, stressful, and frightening, and then laugh out loud and say, "All right God, what have you got in mind? The adventure is on, let's go through it together!"