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Hope for Those Who Hurt

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THE ULTIMATE TREASURE

A PUBLICATION OF DAVE DRAVECKY'S OUTREACH OF HOPE

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*A higher standard.
A higher purpose.*

I WILL GIVE
YOU THE
TREASURES OF
DARKNESS...
SO THAT YOU
MAY KNOW
THAT I AM
THE LORD,
THE GOD
OF ISRAEL.

ISAIAH 45:3

WELCOME

Dear Friends,

I am thrilled to be sharing this issue of *The Encourager* with you because the most precious treasure Dave and I found during our time of adversity and pain was the discovery that our relationship with God was real.

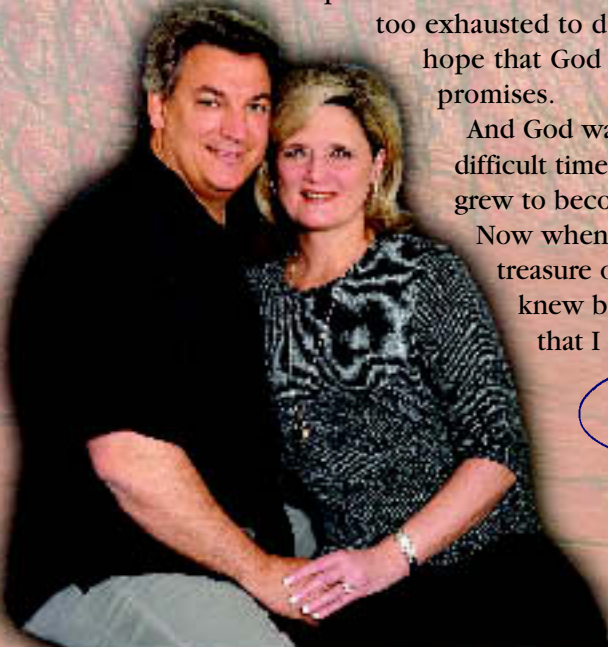
The amazing thing about that discovery is that if you had asked me at the time if I felt God's presence, I would have said, "Absolutely not!" During those terrible, dark days, I would have told you that God was nowhere to be found. I could not feel His presence in any way, shape, or form. And yet, at no other time in my life has He spoken to me more clearly or given me more reason to trust Him!

How is this possible? Well, I know it isn't easy to understand, so that is what we want to share with you through this issue. It is full of the experiences and wisdom of people who found themselves buried in the darkness of suffering and discovered in their relationship with God an immeasurable treasure!

Although we tend to think that suffering will cause us to turn away from God, the truth is, it often causes us to realize how very much we need Him. When I became utterly desperate, I finally entrusted myself to God and gave up trying to figure out and manage my life. I did not choose that path because I had a great revelation or exercised a great step of faith. I chose it because I was too weak and too exhausted to do anything but cling to the hope that God would be true to His promises.

And God was faithful. Through that difficult time, my relationship with Him grew to become a magnificent treasure.

Now when I face adversity, I have the treasure of knowing—in a way I never knew before—that God is real and that I can trust Him completely.



Jan Dauchy

FINDING THE ULTIMATE TREASURE

Lucy grew up without a father and lost her mother to cancer when she was a teenager, so family was extremely important to her. When she and her husband had children, they worked hard to provide a safe, nurturing, family atmosphere. As committed Christians, they attended church regularly and also enjoyed the support of a close-knit, extended family that shared their faith. Of course Lucy and her husband knew they weren't perfect parents, but family was their top priority and they did their best to provide a strong, loving foundation on which their children could build their lives.

That's why Lucy was utterly devastated when her daughter decided to turn her back on her faith and walk away from her family. Lucy had always believed she would never experience deeper pain than what she had felt when her mother died, but she was wrong. Her daughter's choice to pursue what Lucy knew would be a self-destructive way of life sent Lucy reeling.

For two years, Lucy was driven to figure out why her daughter had made such a destructive choice. "I wanted answers," Lucy explains. "I was her mother. I felt responsible. I needed to take care of it, to fix it. I was so paralyzed by fear and anguish, so desperate to get to the bottom of what had happened, that it was almost as if I couldn't take a deep breath."

Driven by guilt, distress and fear, Lucy forged ahead to figure it all out. "I totally left God out of my search. I knew He would answer my prayers for my daughter, but I didn't think He would answer them in the way I wanted them answered. So I just sort of steamed ahead and left God in the dust."

Lucy didn't stop praying, reading her Bible or attending church, although she admits those activities became less meaningful to her. She continued to go through the motions of her faith, but she couldn't connect with the God of her faith. She vividly remembers how disturbing it was to talk with a hurting friend who needed encouragement during that time. Even as Lucy read words of comfort from the Bible to her friend, they sounded to her own ears like "raindrops on a tin roof." For Lucy, those words provided no comfort. Instead, they felt empty—even annoying.

Lucy continued her pursuit for answers until it literally wore her out. "I found myself trapped in a long, dark, tunnel. I was trying to analyze why and how all of this happened, but I was unable to find any answers, and that frustrated me so much. It seemed that there was no way out. I finally realized I could not do this on my own." Then, just when she felt the darkness would

YOU DON'T HAVE THE
TRUTH UNTIL YOU
BRING GOD INTO THE
EQUATION.

RON MEHL

overwhelm her, her daughter called and the lights went out completely. Their conversation pushed her over the edge. Lucy felt as if she had been “slammed into a brick wall.” She went to her bedroom and threw herself on the bed. Totally desperate, she cried out to God, “I can’t do this anymore. I don’t have the strength!”

Moments later, to her surprise, Lucy heard the Lord speak clearly to her heart: “I’m all you need. I am enough.”

“I knew it had to be God,” Lucy explains, “because no one else was there. It felt like God’s voice because I never would have thought or said that myself. It’s like you hear something all of your life, and then, all of a sudden, God speaks to your heart and you get it! It finally makes sense.”

That’s when Lucy realized that God had never left her side during the whole ordeal. Instead, she had left Him. So with great relief she said out loud, “Okay, God, I believe you are enough.”

Lucy got up from the bed, but her body and heart still felt heavy. “I had no strength. I was so depleted. I thought to myself, *How am I supposed to remember that God is enough?* That’s when the idea came to me to go to my closet and get a big box. Somehow I knew I was supposed to carry that

WHY DO YOU SAY...

*“My way is hidden from the LORD;
my cause is disregarded by my God”?*

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

*The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.*

*He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.*

*Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;*

*but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.*

*They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not faint.*

Isaiah 40:27-31

box with me. I didn't understand why, but I knew God was using it to teach me something."

Although the box was empty, it was large and cumbersome to carry around. "It was so awkward to carry that I couldn't do much, but I didn't let go of it for anything—not to comb my hair or fix a meal. I kept thinking, *This is so stupid! It's a pain to carry this big, bulky box everywhere. Why do I feel led to do this?* Despite those thoughts, I was trying to listen to God, so I carried that box around with me for four hours!

"I knew that carrying the box represented some kind of lesson from God, so finally I stopped my mental protest and just listened. Once I was quiet, I heard God speak to my heart again, 'The box is your daughter and all of the questions you have been carrying around. This is what is sapping your strength.'"

Lucy got it. She knew what she needed to do next. "Dear Lord," she prayed, "I gave my daughter to You when she was an infant, and I'm giving her back to You today. I don't need the burden of carrying this box any longer." She then took the box to a hallway closet and set it down inside.

"I wanted the box to be in a place where I could look at it whenever I needed a reminder that God is enough, that He alone is capable of carrying this burden."

After Lucy set the box in the closet, something unexpected happened. "When I placed the box in the closet and closed the door, I felt God's presence with me! It was just as if He put His arm around me then walked away with me. For the first time, I felt God had met me where I was. That encounter showed me just how powerful He is. I felt that there had been a great darkness inside me, but when God showed up, hope replaced my anguish."

God showed Lucy in a clear, simple way that she couldn't possibly carry the burden of her daughter's choices. She simply wasn't strong enough. But after she encountered God in the darkness, she knew she could trust Him to carry that burden for her. Whenever she's tempted to pick up the burden again, she goes back to the closet and remembers.

To protect the privacy of her family, Lucy's name has been changed.

THE PAINS, THE
HEARTACHES, THE
LOSSES OF OUR LIVES
CAN BECOME THE ALTAR
ON WHICH WE OFFER
UP TO GOD ALL THE
THINGS THAT KEEP US
RELYING ON OUR OWN
STRENGTH. IT IS THEN
THAT GOD CAN TRULY
DO A NEW WORK IN US
AND SHOW US HIMSELF
IN WAYS WE HAVE
NEVER SEEN BEFORE.

VERDELL DAVIS

A TREASURE OF HOPE

Months have passed since Lucy put her big, bulky box in her hall closet. It is still there. Whenever Lucy has a new prayer request for her daughter, she writes it down on a piece of paper, opens the closet, and places the request into the box. This symbolic gesture reminds Lucy that as she continues to pray for her daughter, God is the one who carries the burden. It is Lucy's visual expression of faith that the same powerful God who met her on that terrible, dark day when she could do no more is still working in her daughter's life.

Lucy has come to believe that "in every journey, regardless of whether it's physical, emotional or spiritual, there's a period of silence when God is teaching us something. I think that's why God gives us treasures in the darkness. They point us back to Him, back to the One who is our hope for the future.

"God has brought me such a long way from the day I placed that box in the closet," Lucy explains. "Our whole relationship with God is based on faith, but until that faith moves from our head into our heart, we will wrestle in the darkness. And even when faith becomes firmly planted in our heart, we will still experience ups and downs. That is part of the reason I continue to put my requests in the box. That simple action helps me have hope for the future in the midst of the darkness."

With a sparkle in her eye and conviction in her voice, Lucy adds, "My personal experience in the darkness made faith come alive in my heart. Sure I had to walk through the darkness, but there I found something greater than I ever imagined. I found God!" And that, she will say to anyone who will listen, truly is the ultimate treasure.

WE ARE OBSESSED
WITH SPEED...
THE QUICK FIX,
THE SHORTCUT,
THE ON-THE-SPOT
SOLUTION... THAT
WILL INSTANTLY
RESOLVE ALL
PROBLEMS, REMOVE
ALL TEMPTATION, AND
RELEASE US FROM ALL
GROWING PAINS.
BUT REAL MATURITY
IS NEVER
THE RESULT
OF A SINGLE
EXPERIENCE...
GROWTH IS
GRADUAL.

RICK WARREN

CHOOSING THE TREASURE OF SURRENDER

Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. — ISAIAH 50:10

Pastor Ron Mehl was intimately familiar with the landscape of suffering. For 22 years, he lived in the shadowlands of a long-term cancer battle. For at least 15 of those years, he was in chemotherapy, and for the last decade of his life, his entire body ached as if he had a terrible case of the flu. Despite this deep physical trial, Ron lived a full life as a dedicated pastor, worldwide speaker and author of more than a dozen books. In one of the last books he wrote, Ron shared his secret to navigating the landscape of suffering and finding treasure there as well.

The great key in all of life is to surrender to God. The best and most appropriate thing you can ever do is turn to the Lord with all your heart. If it takes some set of overwhelming circumstances to push you into His arms, then count those circumstances as your friends....

Surrendering is a good idea when you are facing dark and hopeless times. But always surrender to God, not to the circumstances.

There is a very big difference.

It's one thing to sigh and shrug your shoulders and say, "Well, there's nothing I can do," and it's another thing altogether to surrender your situation to the Lord who loves you. When you surrender your life and your circumstances to God, everything changes.

ALWAYS SURRENDER
TO GOD, NOT
TO THE
CIRCUMSTANCES.

RON MEHL

Yielding to His will and His plan is step number one. Once that is done, you can begin to ask Him some questions as you pray. Perhaps you might say something like this: "God, what do You see?" In other words, "How does this situation look from Your vantage point? Please help me to find Your perspective on my situation."

Ron Mehl, *A Prayer That Moves Heaven, Comfort and Hope for Life's Most Difficult Moments*, Multnomah Publishing, © 2002, Sisters, OR. Used by permission.

Available online, www.OutreachOfHope.org or place an order by calling 800-295-5880.

The second question you might ask is, “God, what are You going to do?”

Third, you might ask, “God what should I be doing?”

In other words, “God I don’t know what’s going on here. I know what I see, but I want to look to You. So I’m asking You for wisdom to let me see these things as they truly are.”

When I’m facing a trial or a difficult circumstance, I find that I need a refresher course on God. I need to remind myself about the parting of the Red Sea. I need to remember about the manna from heaven, how Jesus healed the blind man, and how He stilled the storm with a single word.

I give myself a quick refresher course on God and His blessings to me, and that helps me surrender to Him... not to my circumstances.

WHAT IS TRUE SURRENDER?

Surrender to God in the midst of difficult circumstances is the way to find peace, but sometimes we are confused about what true surrender entails. If we think surrender is simply resigning ourselves to what we cannot change, peace will most certainly evade us. Peace lies in acceptance, not in resignation. Perhaps Creath Davis’ poem will help clarify the important difference between resignation and acceptance.

Resignation is surrender to fate.
Acceptance is surrender to God.

Resignation lies down quietly in an empty universe.
Acceptance rises up to meet the God who fills that universe with purpose and destiny.

Resignation says, “I can’t.”
Acceptance says, “God can.”

Resignation paralyzes the life process.
Acceptance releases the process for its greatest creativity.

Resignation says, “It’s all over for me.”
Acceptance asks, “Now that I am here, what’s next, Lord?”

Resignation says, “What a waste.”
Acceptance says, “In what redemptive way will you use this mess, Lord?”

Resignation says, “I am alone.”
Acceptance says, “I belong to you, O God.”

From *Lord, If I Ever Needed You, It’s Now!* by Creath Davis, quoted in *Riches Stored in Secret Places* by Verdell Davis, ©1994, W. Publishing, A Division of Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN. All rights reserved.

The Treasures of Darkness

4 CD SET



"In your darkest moments, God reveals the deepest truths." JAN DRAVECKY

When Jan Dravecky descended into the valley of suffering, everything she believed about herself and God was challenged and changed for the better. In the darkness of that valley Jan discovered unchangeable Biblical truths that set her free, truths about suffering, grief, anger, control, fear, personal boundaries and the faithfulness of God. If you are hurting, Jan's story, shared in this four CD series, will give you hope and encourage you to look for your own treasures—even in the darkness. **Price: \$ 20.00**

Finding Joy in Suffering

How can joy and suffering be in the same sentence? How can a good God allow suffering? Is depression the result of personal sin? Why does it sometimes feel like God has abandoned us in our suffering? Jan Dravecky provides Biblical insight and answers to these questions and more in this one hour exploration of the often misunderstood topic of suffering. **Price: \$ 10.00**



Order at www.OutreachOfHope.org or 800-295-5880

FOR THE JOURNEY

GOD IS DOING A GREATER WORK IN US AND THAT CAN ONLY COME AS WE LEARN TO TRUST HIM NO MATTER HOW DARK THE DAYS AND SLEEPLESS THE NIGHTS.

AND IT IS ONLY AS WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH THE DARKNESS WITH HIM
THAT WHAT WE KNOW WITH OUR HEADS SLIDES DOWN INTO OUR HEARTS,
AND OUR HEARTS NO LONGER DEMAND ANSWERS.

VERDELL DAVIS



THERE ARE CERTAINLY DIFFICULT AND CHALLENGING FACTS
YOU AND I NEED TO DEAL WITH . . . BUT THERE IS ALSO THE TRUTH.
AND IF YOU DON'T TAKE GOD INTO ACCOUNT, YOU MAY HAVE THE FACTS,
BUT YOU WILL NOT HAVE THE TRUTH.

RON MEHL



GREAT SOULS ARE GROWN THROUGH STRUGGLES AND STORMS
AND SEASONS OF SUFFERING. BE PATIENT WITH THE PROCESS.

RICK WARREN



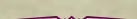
WE NEED TO PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT WE ARE LEARNING ABOUT GOD IN THE
DARKNESS BECAUSE THE DARKNESS IS WHERE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM
IS TESTED. THE DARKNESS IS WHERE WE LEARN THE TRUTH
THAT GOD WILL BE FAITHFUL.

JAN DRAVECKY



PERHAPS THE GREATEST MYSTERY IN SUFFERING IS HOW IT CAN BRING A PERSON
INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN A STATE OF WORSHIP, FULL OF WONDER,
LOVE AND PRAISE. SUFFERING DOES NOT INEVITABLY DO THAT,
BUT IT DOES IT FAR MORE THAN WE WOULD EXPECT.

EUGENE PETERSON



LISTENING BECOMES AN INCREDIBLY VALUABLE ASSET IN THE DARKNESS.

WHEN I COULDN'T SEE WHERE I WAS GOING,
MY EARS BECAME MUCH MORE ATTUNED TO HIS VOICE.

JUDI HARRISON

TREASURE HUNT

*Lord, it is so dark down here in the depths.
We can't see you as clearly.
Or is it just the opposite?
Can you better show us yourself
in all your glory when there is less glitter?
There is no glitter down here, Lord.
We so long for the pain to be gone,
for the lessons to be learned,
for the light to shine brightly again.*

Verdell Davis

In this, the final issue of “The Treasures of Darkness” series, we are displaying some of the rich gems that treasure seekers discovered in their relationship with God.

THE TREASURE OF DISCOVERING GOD'S CHARACTER

The long, dark days of suffering that Michelle Dacus* endured enabled her to “see the different faces of the Lord. I saw His faithfulness and His sufficiency. I experienced how He gives you strength to keep going. I found that He is good, even when life doesn’t make sense. I learned that He is sovereign and in control—it’s an endless list! Before I experienced the darkness, I knew these things only in my head. Now I know them in my heart.”

My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.
Job 42:5

THE TREASURE OF DRAWING CLOSER TO GOD

When Jan Dravecky walked into the darkness of depression, she had questions and doubts about God and His promises. At times she couldn’t see, feel, or hear Him. But she continued to seek Him by reading His Word, and she walked out of the darkness with a different perspective. “I got to know God in a totally different way. I learned that He was true to His promises and that I could trust Him completely.”

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
Psalms 34:18

THE TREASURE OF DEPENDING ON GOD

Joanie Thompson’s* suffering revealed something about the dependent faith of a little child that she had never known before. “I had to become more childlike, more in a place of need, more in a place of not being the grown-up.” When she found herself incapable of understanding or having words to express herself in her suffering, she realized “There’s something extremely safe about being like a child and giving up all of the grown-up answers and notions of who God is or why we suffer.”

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9

THE TREASURE OF GOD'S STRENGTH

Several months after the amputation of his pitching arm, former Major League player Dave Dravecky hit bottom. The difficult adjustment to living with one arm, relentless phantom pain plus family and ministry commitments had completely depleted Dave's strength. While speaking to a crowd of 500 men, Dave admitted his exhaustion. "While I was spilling out the truth about how drained I felt, God started filling me up. I went out of there charged up instead of wiped out."

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:10

THE TREASURE OF GLORIFYING GOD

It is one thing to tell the world that God is great, that He is sufficient and that He can help you endure whatever trials you may face; it is another thing to live it out. Quadriplegic Joni Eareckson Tada explains one way our suffering can bring glory to God: "In the middle of our pain and our torment the unbelieving world can look at us and say, 'Good grief, your God must be great to inspire that kind of loyalty.'"

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.

"Teacher," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind?"

Was it a result of his own sins or those of his parents?"

"It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered.

"He was born blind so the power of God could be seen in him."

John 9:1-3 (NLT)

THE TREASURE OF HOLINESS

During the months she spent bedridden in extreme pain and completely dependent upon others, 19-year-old Michelle Dacus* became acutely aware that life wasn't about doing what she wanted to do or having her own way. Even at the time she recognized the refining process God was accomplishing in her life: "God was taking the sin out of my life, especially my selfishness and self-centeredness. And I was ready to get rid of it. It was huge to discover that I'm not the center of it all."

Since Jesus went through everything you're going through and more, learn to think like him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you'll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.

1 Peter 4:1-2 (MSG)

The "Treasure Hunt" series has been compiled in one booklet, available for \$3.00. To purchase, visit our online store www.OutreachOfHope.org or call the ministry 800-295-5880.

* Michelle's story was featured in the Summer 2004 issue of *The Encourager*.

* Joanie's story is featured on page 14 of this issue.

WHEN WE CAN'T FIND THE TREASURE

Joanie Thompson was well acquainted with the world of suffering and how God could make His presence known in the midst of it. Through her prayer ministry, she had seen God's love, peace and unmistakable presence touch the hearts of the broken women who had come to her for prayer. She marveled again and again at the unique way God would reveal Himself and meet the true need of each woman's wounded heart. He never failed to pierce the darkness of each woman's pain with the light of His love.

Many hurting women had walked out of Joanie's prayer room with a renewed sense of God's love, a healed heart and a treasured, personal experience with God's mercy.

Then Joanie became sick. Over a period of months, her health began

to deteriorate. Her breathing became labored. She tired easily and had no stamina. It was her turn to receive what she had often seen God provide for others.

For two years, Joanie suffered without knowing what was wrong with her. Exhaustion limited everything, even the amount of time she could spend with family and friends. Her prayer ministry had to be curtailed. Doctors eventually diagnosed her with a chronic lung disease, but there was little they could do to help. They could improve her lung function with steroids, but the severe migraines that resulted were almost worse than the disease. The doctors couldn't predict whether her condition would improve over time. But the worst part was that Joanie had prayed—as she had for so many others—for God to be near her in her time of darkness, yet God seemed distant and silent when she needed Him the most.

Joanie was not the first of God's children to question His promise to be “close to the brokenhearted” (Psalm 34:18). Job cried out to God, “Why do you hide your face?” (Job 13:24). King David pleaded with God, “Oh my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer” (Psalm 22:2). Such experiences have caused many of us to wonder why, if God wants to give us treasures in the darkness so we'll know that He is God, there are times when we just can't seem to find Him.

The knowledge that other people have felt alone in the darkness of their suffering can be consoling. After all, giants of the faith—even Jesus—have felt abandoned by God (Matthew 27:46). Perhaps the inability to “connect” with God is, at least for some of us, part of the journey rather than a random, isolated experience. But why does God allow His presence to be hidden from us when we need and long for it the most?

ALL MY LONGINGS LIE
OPEN BEFORE YOU,
O LORD; MY SIGHING IS
NOT HIDDEN FROM YOU.

PSALM 38:9

We may never understand the *why*, but there is good news in the unanswered question. Our struggle to connect with God is evidence that our relationship with Him truly matters. It is evidence that although our faith may be threatened by the harsh reality of suffering, it is far from dead. And when God is hidden by the darkness, we may realize

- How desperately we want and need Him (see Psalm 73:25).
- That every word of the Bible is true (see Mark 13:31).
- That we are being prepared for a greater ministry (see 2 Corinthians 2:3-6).
- That we have no source of true meaning and hope other than God (see John 6:67-69).
- That earth is not our true home. Our hearts long to be with God in heaven, in uninterrupted relationship with Him forever (see Psalm 84:1-10).
- That God is with us, and when we can't perceive Him we must learn to live by faith (see 1 Peter 1:6-7).

God never “showed up” in the way Joanie expected, but she did find treasure in her relationship with Him—treasure that can never be hidden.

When God seemed hidden from sight, Joanie learned that her faith rested on what God had already done, not on what He was doing in the present. She realized that Jesus died on a cross and rose again to prove the extent of His extravagant love for her. History confirms it. Scripture details it. So whether or not she could feel His nearness in her present suffering, she knew He was already with her. In time, Joanie quit wrestling with the “Why didn't He come?” question because, as she explains it, “He had already come. I realized that I still had the cross. Sometimes that is all we have, but it is enough.”

*Dear God,
I am desperate in this darkness.
Please speak to me through Your Word.
Open my eyes, unstop my ears, soften my heart,
so that I might see You in these pages,
bear Your voice speak these words
and be open to Your instruction.*

*Give me a hunger for Your Word.
Give me wisdom to understand it.
Guide my hands and my heart to a Scripture
that will light the path before me.
Lead to me to a quiet place and time
where Your words can sink into my heart
and transform the darkness inside.*

Amen.

For further help, consider reading the “When God is Silent” and “Dealing With Doubt” issues of *The Encourager*. Available online at www.OutreachOfHope.org or in print for \$2.00 each plus shipping, 800-295-5880.

NOT-SO-HIDDEN TREASURE

Sometimes You Just Need to Know Where to Look

Just because God doesn't show up in the way we want or expect him to doesn't mean He isn't with us in our darkness. Sometimes it is easier to see Him if we know where and how to look:

THROUGH OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

During his wife's extended battle with a degenerative illness, Rick Rood kept a journal in which he "recorded evidences of God's hand on our lives. During the next twenty years, I returned to this discipline many times. Today, this journal is one of my most precious possessions because it is full of the record of God's faithfulness to us."

But I'll take the hand of those who don't know the way, who can't see where they're going. I'll be a personal guide to them, directing them through unknown country. I'll be right there to show them what roads to take, make sure they don't fall into the ditch.

*These are the things I'll be doing for them—
sticking with them, not leaving them for a minute.*

Isaiah 42:16 (MSG)

THROUGH HIS PEOPLE

When we question where God is, we need look no further than the hands of those who have fed, encouraged and comforted us to see that He has been with us in the darkness all along. "Sometimes all you have is a person who touches you or brings you water," Joanie Thompson explains, "and that is Him."

Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it: if words, let it be God's words; if help, let it be God's hearty help. That way, God's bright presence will be evident in everything.

1 Peter 4:10-11 (MSG)

THROUGH HIS WORD

"When our pain blinded Dave and me to God's presence," Jan Dravecky shares, "the Bible assured us of His love." Another woman wrote, "So many times I needed God to give me direction, to speak hope into my broken heart. I didn't get the burning bush I wanted. Instead, God spoke to me through His Word."

If I had not loved your teachings, I would have died from my sufferings.

Psalms 119:92 (NCV)

SURPRISED IN THE DARKNESS by Kim Jones

I found God in the darkness. Or, to be more accurate, God found me— and I wasn't even looking for Him!

There's no doubt I was in a desperate situation. I had no answers and absolutely no escape. But because I was an atheist, it never occurred to me to look to God for solutions. My heart wavered between despair and desperation, but even more troubling was the fact that I couldn't get away from the gnawing sense that someone or something was trying to get my attention.

As it turns out, several friends had been praying for me. They weren't prayer giants. In fact, they were all new to their faith. They simply were asking God to somehow intervene and introduce Himself to their struggling friend. They not only prayed, but through their acts of kindness and genuine concern, they began to lovingly and gently show me a picture I had never seen before—a picture of who God was. (Unfortunately, a few other "friends" assaulted me with Bible verses and pointed out all of my shortcomings, which was a really bad idea that set me back a few months.)

In my more gracious and gentle friends, I saw something that was missing in my own life—something I wanted. But in my mind God didn't exist, so I couldn't understand that a relationship with Him was what set my friends apart. God understood my confusion, and in His mercy He tracked me down until I could deny Him no longer. His overwhelming love pursued me through the darkness until I could resist Him no longer.

I know that everyone's journey from darkness to light, everyone's discovery of treasure, is different. God knows exactly what it will take to get our attention. Like a good Daddy, He'll pull out all the stops to make sure we don't miss Him, especially when we need Him most. That's where you, as a friend or loved one of someone who is wandering in the darkness of suffering, can make a difference. You can be the friend who is gracious and gentle in demonstrating the love of God. You can be the one who prays for your friend who is struggling to find God in the darkness.

ASKING GOD TO REVEAL HIS TREASURE

Whenever you pray for friends or loved ones who are struggling to find treasure in the darkness, you can ask God to:

- **Draw them to Himself.**

No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him (John 6:44).

- **Surround them with believers.**

So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his fields (Matthew 9:38 NLT).

- **Help them understand who God is.**

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better (Ephesians 1:17).

- **Give them a hunger for God.**

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Psalm 63:1).

TREASURE AT OUR FINGERTIPS

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105

Scripture is more than ink on paper. It is God's voice, His living Word, and it has the power to infuse our hearts with hope in a way nothing else can. Whenever our pain or circumstances blind us to God's presence, love, counsel and peace, we can still find Him in the pages of the Bible. His Word can light the way through the darkness. It is the treasure at our fingertips.

To give you a head start in discovering this treasure for yourself, we want to share with you some of the priceless gems uncovered by some of your fellow sojourners.

Rick Rood calls the Word of God, "a river of grace to my heart." Shortly after his wife was diagnosed with a debilitating illness, Rick found the following Scripture passage that became both a light for his path and instruction for the journey.

*Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you;
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.*

Psalm 55:22 (NASB)



Lucy MacIntosh sensed and feared the destructive power in the darkness she faced. During those desperate days, she clung to Jeremiah 29:11 because "this verse promised me that God's plans for good could not be destroyed. Since that time, this has become my life verse."

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11



After her injury, there were many times when Ruth Miller could not read Scripture. "I was so angry at God's lack of action," she explains, that "until I could handle reading Scripture, which came after about a year, every day I read just two verses: Psalm 31:14-15. These two verses gave me focus through my tears."

*But I trusted in thee, O LORD:
I said thou art my God. My times are in thy hand:
deliver me from the hand of mine enemies,
and from them that persecute me.*

Psalm 31:14-15 (KJV)



Joanie Thompson considers Isaiah 50:4 to be one of the most important verses in her life, especially during times of suffering. It gives her hope that God will use her suffering to alleviate the suffering of others.

*The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary.
He wakens me morning by morning,
wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.*

Isaiah 50:4



When she was too sick to read her Bible, Michelle Dacus posted 1 Peter 5:10-11 on her bathroom mirror and on her nightstand. “Those verses reminded me that God would do something powerful with my suffering. It gave me hope that my pain wouldn’t be wasted.”

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever.

1 Peter 5:10-11



“As Dave and I walked through the darkness” Jan Dravecky recalls, “the Bible became our lifeline, the compass that steered us through the confusion and doubts that are part of the darkness... The verse that comforted me most in my darkest days was John 10:27-29. Dave clung to 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, which later became the guiding verse for the Outreach of Hope.”

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

*My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all;
no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.*

John 10:27-29

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away,
yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*

*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us
an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.
For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

❖ SCRIPTURE ON SCRIPTURE ❖

Just in case you need a reminder of the treasure God provides for you through the Scriptures, consider the following examples of what the Bible says about itself.

This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has revived me.

Psalm 119:50 (NASB)

My soul weeps because of grief; strengthen me according to Your word.

Psalm 119:28 (NASB)

*Let my cry come right into your presence, God; provide me with the insight
that comes only from your Word.*

Psalm 119:169 (MSG)

*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through
endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

Romans 15:4

Ruth Miller quote from *Lessons From the Washing Machine, Living with Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy—Chronic Pain* by Ruth L.S. Miller, Pleasant Word, a division of WinePress Publishing, Enumclaw, WA.

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TELL EVERYONE
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THAT JESUS IS
THE ONLY
ANSWER...
THAT HIS LIGHT
IS MORE POWERFUL
THAN THE
DEEPEST
DARKNESS... THAT
THE REALITY
OF HIS PRESENCE
IS GREATER
THAN THE REALITY
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