

ASSURANCE IN THE MIDST OF UNCERTAINTY



THE DAY THE COUNTRY FELL DOWN (SEPT 11, 2001)

Today, the United States was rocked by terrorism. By the end of the day, thousands were dead and two of the country's most notable structures were either damaged or destroyed. I stood in shock as I watched on TV while the World Trade Center collapsed right before my eyes. Some speculate that this terrorist attack will forever change our country. But I don't know. Sure those who lost loved ones will always bear the scars. But will America settle back into its routine within a few months? Will we continue to quickly hustle through the day missing life in the process? Sometimes we need moments that will cause us to slow down and fall to our knees.

**Has God allowed
this attack to wake up America?
America — the great giant —
sleeps firmly in the slumber
of success and pleasure.**

We have strayed so far from the Lord. Our hearts are full of self with no room for God or others. We slaughter the

helpless (unborn) everyday in the name of convenience. Even among the 'religious' people of the day, we desecrate the Lord's name with our selfish focus and our lifeless worship. We desire the blessings without following the Lord in obedience. We sing songs of praise and adoration while our hearts are far from God.

Jesus, restore America. Call us back to Your loving arms. May we hear Your call and find refuge in You, not in our economy or safe borders. As people look for answers, may they find them at the cross. We are a blessed people. We have wasted Your precious gifts. May we no longer wallow in our sin. Thank You for Your grace. My heart leaps with joy, for Your love has been made perfect in our weakness. As I cling to the cross, You are glorified. Let me stop and seek you. Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Only You can save. Awaken me to the truth! Awaken America to the truth!

BUT I DON'T WANT TO GO TO NINEVAH!

The sluggish economy has hit the entire publishing industry very hard, including my family's business. We are blessed to be doing as well as we have been. Yet, our new publishing ventures, which fall directly under my authority, have struggled. My ego has taken a beating, and my toil has produced little tangible benefit. We closed down one magazine at the end of 2001. We have had to scratch plans to take over a second industrial publication. And we have to publish six instead of nine issues this year of the new magazine.

By most business analysis, I would be considered a big publishing failure. True, we are in one of the worst ad economies in the history of publishing. But these problems, failures and losses have crushed my confidence. I have found myself asking if I am suffering due to disobedience to God's direction. Am I out of God's will? Am I like Jonah, running

away from God's plan? Am I causing the entire ship (the family business) to be put in jeopardy due to my stubbornness? This explanation would in one hand make me feel better about my own abilities, but it would also sadden me because I love my job and the family business.

My good friend Pastor Don has helped me process the myriad of feelings, thoughts and questions flowing through my head. He asked a simple question, "Has God told you to go somewhere else and do something other than your current course?" I thought for a moment and said, "No!" Don then pointed out the obvious. He said that I could not be like Jonah in this case because he disobeyed a direct order from God.

But if I am not Jonah, why is this happening to my family business? Indeed, God has allowed this challenge because He is sovereign. He may be trying to remove my confidence in my abilities and seek Him more. God may be testing my faith in Him to provide. I don't know why. But I hope that I learn the lesson fast so things can return to normal. But what if God is trying to teach me patience and endurance?

Come to think of it, the company may never return to the high level of profitability that it experienced in the late '90s. God may be redefining my idea of what success is. God may be slowing down our growth so I have more time to focus on Him. Testing, trials and uncertainty sure can be tough.

**Although I have given my life to God,
I don't always like
what He allows me to go through.
But is God any less God
in a time of bankruptcy
as a period of financial prosperity?**

Of course not! God deserves praise in the bad times and the good times. The Lord may be testing me to see if I truly

love Him. Or do I only love God when things are going well? What does it mean for things to be going well on this earth when God looks at the world with an eternal perspective? There are so many questions. And I have so few answers. The only thing I know is that God is sovereign. He loves me and will one day give me a great inheritance. All I can do is enjoy his sweet presence, hear his voice and obey.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

*“The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing”
(Zephaniah 3:17).*

TO SKI OR NOT TO SKI... THAT IS THE QUESTION.

One of the most burdensome lies entangling Christians today is the idea that our lives are divided into compartments. Some activities are thought to be ‘Christian’ while others are believed to be secular, outside of the care or jurisdiction of God. Although very few ever admit this is how they live, it has become the norm even among some die-hard Christians. Because the carnal mind lacks understanding, we tend to chop life up into little pieces. The major divisions are work, family, religion, play, health, entertainment, education, ministry and self. Frequently, we learn this pattern as a child from our parents or others. Then we simply mimic it in our own lives. Even some mature Christians divide their lives into compartments. But are we tricking ourselves?

I had to face this issue up close after a skiing trip with a few close friends. The next day, I met with Pastor Don. I talked to him about how it was difficult for me to figure out what God wants me to do in certain gray areas where the Bible does not lay out specific direction. Sometimes things are clear. Yet all too often the only thing that I hear is silence. The

Word offers little solace in seeking the proper path because it does not directly cover the specific situation. Is doing this or that a sin? Would God want me to spend my time doing something else? Is this God's will for my life right now? Questions can flood over me like a tsunami.

Pastor Don made a crucial point by asking a series of questions about my trip. He asked, "Why did you go skiing yesterday?" I responded that I love to go skiing. I had the money and the time. Some of my good friends were going. I went and had a good time. He then asked, "Did you pray about the trip before going?" I said, "No, I just went." He asked, "How do you know this was in God's will if you did not ask Him?" I stammered around for about a minute. Finally, I broke down and admitted my shallowness and tendency to do my own thing. My words were something like, "I stink. I am so stupid sometimes; I am so unworthy of God's love. I should have been locked in my room praying all day long instead of skiing. I should have given the money I spent skiing to the poor and not wasted it on my own enjoyment."

My friend kept on asking questions to the point that I was confused and ready to admit it. Pastor Don comforted me. He said that I was getting all worked up about nothing. My friend helped me to see the following — There is nothing in the Bible prohibiting winter sports. I broke no law. I enjoyed the beauty of God's creation. The entire day Jesus had a blast skiing along side me. I even spent some time praying while on the ski lifts and sang worship songs while jetting down the slope.

For years, I have tried to divide my life into Christian and secular activities. But this is a false line of demarcation. As a Christian, Christ lives in me. A true companion, Jesus never leaves me nor forsakes me.

**There are no compartments to life.
Jesus permeates all;
Christ constantly resides in me.**

I am made alive by Christ's blood. Unless the Bible prohibits my activities or the Lord expressly tells me not to do something, I can act in faith without fear or having to look over my shoulder. I am no more a Christian while praying in my room than when I am skiing down the mountain at 30 mph. I do not need to apologize for going skiing. In Christian liberty, I can enjoy God's provision and rest. I am free in Christ. But for some reason, I felt that I had to justify my actions to my mentor and the Lord.

Christ seeks to give us life to the fullest extent possible. Sometimes that means enjoying the slopes on a beautiful day. On other occasions that means sacrificing something for the cause of Christ, maybe even my life.

Lord, help me to walk daily in Your love and to enjoy Your blessings. May my heart be glad and rejoice in all situations. May I moment by moment be guided by Your hand and submit to Your will. I open my ears to hear Your voice. May I enjoy the blessings that You have given me with a free conscience. I am free in You. Tear down the walls constructed in my life; it all belongs to You. May I no longer have Christian or secular activities. I want everything that I do to be done to Your glory. Rend my heart and fill me with Your peace. May I realize Your hand in all situations. For You, who give me life, also call me to die.

YOU ARE THERE

Weighed down by all of life's cares,
I feel alone and have no rest.

Burdened by sin and the fear of others' expectations,
 I dare not look up and ask for Your favor.
 Despite my wicked past and present, You are there.

With arms opened wide Your Spirit calls me.
 You long to hide me in the shadows of Your wings.
 I do not understand Your pardon and acceptance;
 Yet I cling tight to Your love for that is all I can do.
 In the times of repentance, You are there.

As I look into the sky,
 I ponder Your amazing love.
 The stars declare Your glory;
 You are robed in majesty.
 I marvel at Your power and am amazed at Your mercy.
 In the times of wonder, You are there.

No matter where I go or what I do,
 You are there — desiring for me to return.
 For Your love extends beyond the highest mountain,
 It penetrates the very depth of my soul.
 In the dark times and moments of jubilee, You are there.

Your love is like no other;
 Only you can make me whole.
 At the foot of the cross I find restoration.
 Throughout my life, You are there.

HEARING VOICES

We live in a world full of confusion. From Madison Avenue marketing to longstanding religious beliefs to unwritten rules of socially acceptable behavior, the lines of right and wrong have become blurred. The masses suffer from a sea of opinions ranging from those clamoring for no

limitations to legalists demanding order. Everybody has a different idea of what it means to live a happy, successful life. Yet most of these center around satisfying our own cravings and desires.

Even in the Church, it can be difficult to find the right path. A question as basic as, 'Does God ordain one perfect will for each of our lives that is unique to our personality, skills and surroundings,' can bring a swarm of differing opinions. Some proclaim ultimate free will while others point to a sovereign God directing the step of man. Increasingly, I find myself swamped by a glut of talking heads.

Pick almost any issue, and there are plenty of people willing to tell their opinion. What's worse, I read the Bible and get confused. For example, God spent a considerable amount of time in the Old Testament calling His people out of the pagan culture around them. God commanded them to slaughter entire nations in the effort to preserve the righteousness of Israel. Yet in the New Testament, Jesus does the exact opposite by hanging out with known sinners including prostitutes, tax collectors and other despicable 'scum.' The Lord commissions His followers to go into the world and to make disciples. In the New Testament, James wrote, "Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4). James encouraged the early Church to submit to God and flee from the temptations of the devil. The apostle John carries this even further. He wrote, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15). Paul mentioned how bad company corrupts good character. He said that the Christians were endangering themselves every day by associating with people advocating false doctrine and a sinful lifestyle.

If Jesus walked the streets of our cities today, He would hang out among the 'sinners' of society. Jesus would be found

in coffee shops, bars and clubs. He would attend private parties with known sinners just like he did in the New Testament. He would be found talking with the homeless and winos in city parks. Jesus was always in the world but not of the world. He knew where to draw the line and how to meet people where they lived. Yet I find this concept difficult to grasp. How can I go to clubs and not sin? What about the lust caused by watching women in tight outfits dance to the beat? What about the allure of alcohol and the tranquility of a light buzz?

**If I must be around non-Christians
to witness to them,
how can I shield my life
from the temptations around me?
In the past,
the world has done
a much better job of influencing me to sin
then I have influencing it for Christ.**

My reaction tends to be to run away from the world. As a result, I have very few non-Christian friends. I find myself clinging to holy safety zones. In doing so, am I putting my light under a basket?

All the while, I know that God generously gives wisdom to those who ask for it in faith. Others are double-minded; the wind and the waves will toss them from here to there. But I will stand steadfast in God's truth. I will dare to take Jesus to the streets. Today, Jesus can be seen through His imprint on the lives of His people. If I try to completely isolate myself from the world, I will end up keeping God all to myself. How does this glorify God and fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)? It doesn't.

The key to living holy in this world is to hold onto Christ with both hands. Never let go, not even for one second.

Walking in the world will force me to let God have complete control of my life - body, soul and mind. Either this test pushes me closer to Christ or farther away from Him. The Word calls Christians to walk in this world as if we wear a Jesus coat, which protects and insulates us from temptation while revealing the true character of God. Do you live the Great Commission everyday? When you're out in the world, do you wear a Jesus coat? Or do you only put it on for church services? Does the world see the love of Christ in your life?

No matter your past, if you desire to love others as Jesus has loved you, pray the following prayer. Confess your sin and forget it. Cling to the strong arm of God. Let Him work His will through your life. Jesus will do what is impossible for you to do on your own strength.

Father, help me to know Your path. Give me wisdom in reading Your Word and discerning Your way for me. I want to walk in faith as Jesus did. I am confused. I cannot grasp Your ways on my own. I need the Spirit to guide me into all truth. I want Your light to shine through me to all men. Be glorified in my life. Direct me to the lost; those You want me to love and serve. I will go. Equip me for all that I may face. I want to know Your voice and listen to You alone. Thank You for Your steadfast love and mercy. Amen.

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE — STRUGGLING WITH PAIN

While visiting a friend's house, I saw a portrait of peace through pain. My friend's father (Wendell) suffers from MS and his condition appears to be getting worse. Able to walk only short distances, Wendell struggles with pain everyday. My friend's house has been designed for wheel chair accessibility. Wendell uses the wheelchair some to get around the house. A once avid outdoor enthusiast and hiker, Wendell

fights daily against a disease attacking his body. Without a miracle, Wendell eventually may be confined to a wheelchair.

But you would never know about Wendell's pain by looking at his face. Beaming with the joy of the Lord, he loves to talk about Jesus, the Church, books, architecture, finance and guns. Wendell never once talked negatively about his condition or the 'raw' deal dealt him by life.

My legs work fine, but I always seem to find some 'reason' to complain. Wendell's peace in the middle of the storm convicted me of how short-sighted my vision tends to be. I don't believe that Wendell has accepted his condition. I am sure that he would rather be healed. Focused on things of eternal significance, Wendell trusts God. He realizes that his present sufferings are nothing compared to glory that awaits him in heaven. He longs for a day when he will receive a new, incorruptible body and be with the Lord face to face.

All too often, I shallowly focus on the here and now. Having never experienced the depth of Wendell's condition, it is hard to relate. Just maybe his sickness is a blessing because it requires him to be more dependent on God. It gives him a unique perspective. Through great trial, he can draw closer to the Lord and look toward His return with a greater expectancy than most.

Father, I long to have Wendell's vision and strength. Help me to see beyond the temporal and have a heavenly perspective. May I praise You in the good and bad times. Longing for Your return, may I trust You in all things. Be glorified in my life. Amen.

