

## How The Bible Sustained Me In The Dark

I was in the hospital umbilically attached to my bag of cancer-killing chemicals on an IV pole. It takes anywhere from thirty minutes to several hours to empty one of those bags into your blood stream. It's always been my habit to bring a book wherever I go, but even more so since spending three or four lifetimes in hospital waiting rooms, examination rooms, and chemo rooms (more attractively known as "Infusion Centers"). Another off-and-on habit of mine as been to memorize Scripture from sheets of handwritten passages folded to pocket size. Especially during the first year or two of my dark days, the Spirit pointed out a bunch of passages that were spot on applicable to my trials and how to get through them. So, in addition to books, I carried to the hospital and everywhere I went a sheet of these passages to memorize and meditate on. Of all the things the Lord used to sustain me in those years, this practice is among the top five: God's personal presence, Bob and Jean, my precious kids, my faithful friends, and the Word.

Anyway, I had my sheet of passages in one hand – tattered from living in my back right pocket – the other arm was occupied with needles, tubes, tape – always lots of tape, which when removed hurt as much as the needles and tubes. The nurse came to check on me, saw the worn handwritten paper in my hand and asked, "*What's that, a love letter?*"

"No," then I paused and thought better of it, and said, "*Umm, yeah. It's a love letter --- a love letter from God.*" I paused again, this time for effect, it was more of a planned pause. Remember, I've been a preacher for a long time and was taught the power of the pause. During the pause his brow furrowed and his head tilted like my lab's used to when she was puzzled. "*These are passages from the Bible, God's love letter, that I'm meditating on.*"

This guy works with cancer-riddled people and everyday he sees desperate souls reaching for anything that will bring them comfort and hope. These range from good luck charms to religious trinkets and artifacts. I'm sure, as a good health care professional, he's always supportive of whatever works for the sufferer. He smiled and with a nod of approval went about his rounds.

I don't know what you think of the Bible, but for me, since I got acquainted with Jesus, he has communicated to me through its pages over and over. I'm a big believer in it and it's power to guide, comfort, convict, empower, train, reveal, teach. Sometimes it seems like he put things in there just for me, to remind me how much he loves me and how I can love him back if I choose to.

A suffering friend of mine, a former pastor who lost his wife to cancer, told me he doesn't read the Bible anymore because he already knows what it says. I told him that's like not talking to your best friend because you've had enough conversations in the past or not going to the doctor because you've been before. The Bible is like food to me. You can miss a meal and survive, but if you quit eating you'll die.

I love the Bible and can't imagine my life without it. God talks to me through it and I wouldn't like living without hearing his voice.

*The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. Ecclesiastes 12:11*

There were countless passages that *goaded* me to listen to the Lord and kept me *nailed* down to truth when life was its toughest. Of them I've selected these particular *goads and nails*. Not intending to unpack each one exhaustively, I'll share one or two ways each one helped me make my way in the dark.

I've put some of my comments in first person form – from God to me. I'm not implying, unless otherwise specified, that I "heard" these specific words. But it's the gist of these things that jumped off the pages of the Bible and seemed quite personally intended for me at a time I needed to hear his voice most.

### **DON'T GIVE UP!**

- **James 1:2-4** *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*
- **James 1:12** *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*
- **James 5:10-11** *Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

Early on in my dark place I began to realize that the tunnel I was in was quite possibly interminable. "Divorce" and "cancer" are words with long-term implications to be sure. They don't get wished away, so I was going to have to learn to endure. This is what the Spirit impressed on me from this passage and several others of this same theme.

Like bookends – at the onset and the end of his letter – James encouraged us to "persevere." Maybe his main theme was perseverance, and everything in between was to tell us how to go about it. That's a meditation for another time.

***"Persevere! Don't give up. If you endure you're a blessed person. You'll be like Job, who didn't cave in when darkness enveloped him, and you'll see what I intend to 'finally bring about.' I'm full of compassion and mercy. I have plenty to spare for you. Don't give up!"***

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### **HEY, "LOSER," TRUST ME**

**Job 13:15**

*Though He slay me, yet will I trust him.*

Besides Psalms, Job was my favorite book on which to muse while inside the deepest section of the tunnel.

I like to think of Job as the Bible's "Biggest Loser." He *lost* a lot of stuff in a little time (his kids, his servants, his health...). If you've read the book, you know that he experienced emotional pendulum swings of intercontinental proportion. One moment he declared, "*I know my Redeemer lives,*" at another he moaned, "*I wish I were never born.*"

Sometimes what Job said appears wild, impulsive, and even theologically inaccurate. Yet God called him "*my servant Job*" and said that he "*spoke of him what was right*" in contrast to his three friends (Job 42:7). God never saw Job as anything but "his servant." Even though he struggled and protested, he was still God's servant. Not that everything he said was perfect, but it seems that God took everything (including Job's pain-induced mood swings) into account. Even though he was wrong in some of his assumptions and conclusions, God saw his heart, knew his pain, and called him "right"! Knowing that God isn't expecting that I dot all my I's and cross all my T's liberates me. He looks on my heart and considers the circumstances of my life when evaluating my words, even the ones I shouted at him in Bob's truck.

For my money, this is Job's most profound faith statement in the entire poem. "*I will trust him even if he is deliberately destroying me. He may well be slowly doing me in, but I'll trust him.*"

I wouldn't be so surprised if he had said, "Though he slay me, yet will I serve him – or – yet will I obey him." Even if he were malevolent in the way he treats us, serving and obeying him is a no-brainer, he's big and he's God. To do what God says is advisable, if for no other reason than to just stay on his "good side." But in this one gush of faith, Job was willing – even if God were trying to destroy him – to trust him.

That's another level of faith than most people seem to have. We tend to trust him only when and if he treats us kindly and takes good care of us. Our faith in him is often predicated on what we consider is his good treatment of us. If he fails to do what we want him to do for us our faith wanes. But Job's faith – at least on that day – was rooted in God and his character in spite of appearances.

*"Your character might be obscured in mystery just now. I may not understand the way you're acting at the moment, but I trust you."*

***"It might seem to you that I'm trying to destroy you, and even though that's not true, trust me as though I were. Trust me even when it seems like I'm doing the opposite of what you think is best for you. Trust me when you can't see me working on your behalf and when everything in you wants to run away."***

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**TRUST ME, FORGIVE, AND LEAVE THE JUDGING TO ME**

### **Psalm 37:3-9**

- 3 *Trust in the LORD and do good;  
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.*
- 4 *Delight yourself in the LORD  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.*
- 5 *Commit your way to the LORD;  
trust in him and he will do this:*
- 6 *He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn,  
the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.*
- 7 *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;  
do not fret when men succeed in their ways,  
when they carry out their wicked schemes.*
- 8 *Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;  
do not fret—it leads only to evil.*
- 9 *For evil men will be cut off,  
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.*

I camped in the Psalms (David's Poetic Diary Set To Music) for many months. The poems legitimized my sufferings yet challenged my self-centeredness. This one in particular built a protective hedge around me and helped me make better choices than my lower person wanted to make during my divorce. This Psalm was God speaking directly to my fears, hurts, bitterness, and desires for revenge.

***“Don’t do anything stupid. If you trust yourself instead of me, you’ll only make things worse for yourself and everyone around you. Many of my fallen soldiers have damaged, if not destroyed, their own legacies by finding their own pseudo-pastures. They chose to medicate themselves rather than meditate on me.***

***“I’ve given you a land in which to dwell and a pasture that’s safe. Don’t leave that land to venture out to find your own plastic pasture.***

***“Don’t let your anger at your betrayers imprison you or lure you to do bad things.***

***“Forgive. It unhooks you from the people who are making their own bad choices. Otherwise they drag you through the mud and muck and destroy your life.***

***“I’ll take care of my own world. You don’t need to help me punish evil. Forgive and live on.”***

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### **THE ROD, THE STAFF, AND THE ODDLY PLACED TABLE**

#### **Psalm 23**

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters.  
He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me;  
Your rod and your staff they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil.  
My cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Almost everyone has heard this Psalm, at least at funerals. During my scariest times I frantically repeated it over and over in my mind, and sometimes out loud – the most memorable of which was when I was being rushed to the hospital in an ambulance with an allergic reaction to a cancer medication.

Though every verse of the poem counseled me at various angst-filled moments, the middle stanza was the part to which I was drawn most often.

*Your rod and your staff they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

***“Like a lamb you’re not equipped to survive the dark-shadowed valley without my help. You should appreciate how I use my rod to keep you in line with a slight tap and to thump wolves that would devour you. I use my staff to rescue you when you’re fallen or hurt or stuck. Trust me to use the crook of it to pull you out of this jam you’re in.***

***“It may seem strange to you that in the midst of your enemies I choose to feed you. Eating a meal in your dark place, encircled by the luminescent yellow eyes of demons is counterintuitive – to be sure. Sit, trust me, and eat.”***

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## **PEACE WHILE YOU WAIT**

### **Philippians 4:6-7**

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God and the peace of God that passes understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

As a pastor, I think I quoted this well-known passage to fellow strugglers more than any other. When I needed help, these words infused serenity into my own troubled mind. I rehearsed this one often in particularly perplexing moments.

The day we live in could be thought of as the day of delays. There’s a day coming when there will be no more delays, but that’s not today – at least not so far today. I’m learning to expect delays, but make the best of the time while I’m waiting and to trust him to help me wait in peace.

***“Instead of worrying about how you’re going to survive this madness, ask me for help. Even before you see anything resembling an answer to your requests, assume that I’m working, and be thankful. While you’re waiting – peace!***

***“If I delay or deny your requests it means that they fall under the category of things I intend to ‘work together for good.’ When I don’t fix what’s broken, realize that I have a plan to mold the broken pieces into something even better.***

***“My peace is preferable to your efforts to use reason to understand the pit you’re in. It’s better than you stressing out to figure it out. All you do is work yourself into an anxious fit. Let me do what I do, and --- be at peace!”***

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## **WORSHIP WHILE YOU WAIT**

### **Psalm 57**

- 4 I am in the midst of lions;  
I lie among ravenous beasts—  
men whose teeth are spears and arrows,  
whose tongues are sharp swords.*
- 5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;  
let your glory be over all the earth.*
- 6 They spread a net for my feet—  
I was bowed down in distress.  
They dug a pit in my path—  
but they have fallen into it themselves.  
Selah*
- 7 My heart is steadfast, O God,  
my heart is steadfast;  
I will sing and make music.*
- 8 Awake, my soul!  
Awake, harp and lyre!  
I will awaken the dawn.*
- 9 I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations;  
I will sing of you among the peoples.*
- 10 For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;  
your faithfulness reaches to the skies.*
- 11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;  
let your glory be over all the earth.*

The images of *lions and beasts, evil people with spears, arrows, and swords* graphically depicted how I felt at the time. Demons and the people they inhabited wanted me defeated, if not dead. His prescription for resisting darkness like this is worship. I’m not talking about praising God so I’d get my way or so my trials disappear, but a heartfelt and sincere worship for the privilege of it.

***“I know your life is awful right now, but I want to remind that my faithful love for you exceeds the height of heaven. Choose steadfastly to acknowledge how glorious I am. Align yourself with what I’m like and how I’ve arranged the universe with me on the highest chair. Even in your tragic situation, wrest your soul to worship me. Worship me whether in a cave or in a palace, in the dark of night or in the light of day. I’m the same either way. Worship me.”***

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## **SEE THE BIG PICTURE**

### **2 Corinthians 4:17-18**

*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.*

I’ve loved the fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians for many years, especially for the encouragement it’s given me during difficult moments as a spiritual leader. It begins and ends with the testimony, *“We don’t lose heart.”* Everything in between is pretty much all about how not to *lose heart*, how to endure, how to persevere in the midst of a tumult all around you and in you.

It was entirely fortuitous that this chapter was on my radar during my radiation treatments. The daily appointments spanned over three weeks during which they bolted me to the radiation table! (I tell the story in, “Don’t read this if you’re claustrophobic.”) Rehearsing the last three verses of the chapter boosted me while I lay there motionless getting radiation shot into my vertebra – and believe me – I needed all the encouragement I could get.

***“Don’t waste these sorrows. Live from the inside out. Try not to let your outward condition determine your inward disposition. Even if and when your body fails you and drags you down, your spirit may buoy itself.***

***“I’m the only one who can grow something good in bad soil. I can see to it that when one part of you is flagging, another is fortified. When you look in the mirror and see your outside deteriorating, remember my daily renewal of your inside that is not so obvious to the eye.***

***Your afflictions won’t, by themselves, make you a better person. Without my participation they’ll make you a bitter person. You have a role to play. Decide to look for me and for my help and I will rush to support your inside person.***

***“Your troubles may not seem ‘light or momentary,’ but remember that there is a place that lasts longer and is more substantial than the place you now live. By envisioning my place of splendor and substance, exercise your faith muscle.***

***“Your grief and your sickness won’t last forever, but your life in me will. For every glance at the temporal, gaze at the eternal. Wait for me like a dog left in the car watching intently for his master to return. Though your eyes are prone to wander, try to fix them on things worthy of a long and pensive gaze.”***

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## **ENDURE DIFFICULTY AND EMBRACE DISCIPLINE**

### **Hebrews 12:9-13**

*...submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.*

God is raising kids – us. We need discipline – what he uses most to develop it in us is hardship. Honestly, I’m not always fond of this program. While I really do want “*righteousness and peace*,” I can have a serious aversion to some of his methods of getting me there.

This passage gives me two reasons to “*suffer well*.” The first reason is that I’ll get better if I do. He disciplines us for our *good*. It’s painful, but it produces something good. Suffering itself doesn’t make me a better person; it’s suffering well that makes me a better son to my Father.

The second reason to suffer well is that others will get better by watching me. We all have someone watching. Life has already “lamed” them. They’re our friends and our family, and we don’t want them to be “*disabled but rather healed*.” These two paraphrases elucidate.

*“Take a new grip with your tired hands, stand firm on your shaky legs, and mark out a straight smooth path for your feet so that those who follow you, though weak and lame will not fall and hurt themselves, but become strong.”... The Living Bible*

*“Clear the path for long distance runners so that no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in a hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out. And run for it!” The Message Bible*

Other runners who are right on our tail trust that we know where the heck we’re going. They watch where we step so they can carefully place their feet in the same spots. If we handle our troubles with whining and self-pity, to their own loss, so will they. And we will have led them to that loss. But, if we gratefully embrace the Father’s training, they will follow our example and be *healed* rather than *disabled*.

***I see you in the jaws of darkness, and I urge you to respond to your trials in such a way as to become a better person. Pick yourself up the best you can and don’t let these things get you down. It’ll make you better and those who are watching you will become better too. Life has already lamed them; don’t disable them further. Run your race in such a way that others will win!***

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## **DON'T BRING YOUR OWN MATCHES!**

### **Isaiah 50:10-12**

*10 Who among you fears the LORD  
and obeys the word of his servant?  
Let him who walks in the dark,  
who has no light,  
trust in the name of the LORD  
and rely on his God.*

*11 But now, all you who light fires  
and provide yourselves with flaming torches,  
go, walk in the light of your fires  
and of the torches you have set ablaze.  
This is what you shall receive from my hand:  
You will lie down in torment.*

Evidently, darkness is not just reserved for the disobedient. When I “fear the Lord and obey the word of his servant” I still have to sometimes “walk in the dark” and rely on God to guide me through it.

But there are those, who, instead of trusting God in their dark place, try to create their own light. They bring to their darkness a man-made light. They carry their own matches.

When I insist on making my own light I force God’s hand to let me go my own way and to say to me: *“Go! Live in your own light then, if that’s what you want. Go ahead and give your will a try. Let me know how it works out for you.”*

“You’ll lie down in torment.” Whoa! Those who haven’t trusted him in a trial will all be tormented in hell? No. That’s not what I get from this. When we don’t trust him in difficulty we will be tormented in bed! I think he’s talking about the mental anguish that inevitably comes in the night when, after lighting our own fires, we lay down to sleep, to try to sleep. We bring torment on ourselves when we try to fix things ourselves. The darkness doesn’t go away as we’d hoped, and our anxiety, instead of thinning, thickens.

When I can’t sleep at night because of worry and anxiety it’s often because I’m worried that my own torch will go out. And of course, it *will* go out, it won’t be enough. But if I *“trust in the name of the Lord and rely on my God,”* then I’ll be able to lie down and sleep, knowing it’s all in his capable hands. Even when I lie down with things still very much unresolved, unfixed, still broken; it’s not torment but peace that prevails. I may not be able to see where I’m going, but I know who’s going there with me.

***“Darkness comes. You can’t avoid it. But when it does, don’t try to extinguish it with devices of your own. You’ll find that your own fires only make the darkness scarier. Try trusting me in the dark. Someday, maybe soon, my sun will rise and vacuum up every molecule of darkness. Until then, when you can’t see, rely on me. I can.”***

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## **BE BRAVE AND LET GOD DO WHAT HE THINKS IS GOOD**

*Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The LORD will do what is good in his sight.* 1 Chronicles 19:13

Recently a friend of mine quoted this small passage in passing, and I pounced on it like it was a \$1000 bill that someone unwittingly put out with the recycling. It speaks to the challenge of trusting God for something that he may or may not give me in the end. It answers the question, “Why should I go to the trouble to trust God and live responsibly if he’s not going to give me what I’m working and trusting for?”

Like Joab and his army were fighting their enemies, I’m fighting cancer. I don’t know if I’m going to win the battle and see God heal me or not. All I know is that I’m supposed to “be strong and fight bravely.” My part is to do *my part* faithfully. It’s my responsibility to courageously wield my own sword and resist my enemy. I can’t do God’s job for him and he won’t do mine for me, so I’ll try to fight bravely.

There’s nothing surprising about what Joab said to his brother so far. It’s what he said *next* that was revolutionary to me: “*The Lord will do what is good in his sight.*”

I know what *my* job is – to be strong and fight bravely. *God’s* job, on the other hand, is to do *what is good in his sight*. The problem is, what’s good in his sight might not always be what’s good in mine. He and I don’t always agree about what is *good*. And guess whose opinion (of what is good) actually matters!

The Bible says a couple of other things about what is *good*: “No *good thing* will he withhold from them who walk uprightly...” That’s one of those super promises in the Bible. In another place it says that God “works all things together for *good* to those who love him...” Another super promise. But then Jesus said, “There’s none *good* but God.” In other words, God is going to do *what is good* in his sight, but since we’re not good, we wouldn’t know good if it slapped us in the face!

Joab made it clear that God would do what was good *in his own sight*, and not necessarily in theirs. All they knew to do was to be strong and fight bravely. They could do that. That was *their* job. *God’s* job, on the other hand, was to be involved in the outcome. And if they did their part, God would do his and see that things turned out “*good in his sight.*”

I only know what I *like*, what’s comfortable for me, what’s “good” in *my sight*. For me, that would be total healing from cancer, a good long healthy life with many grandchildren (I hope my kids are listening), and many opportunities to serve Jesus fruitfully. That seems “good” to me. But since I’m not in charge of “good,” I’ll have to trust him to do his job well and make good out of bad every chance he gets.

I do still tell him what I think he ought to do – about this and that. It seems impossible to withhold the urge. But I usually include a postscript of something like, “But feel free to go ahead and do what is good in *your* sight” – as though he needed my permission.

***Everything you know to do, do that. It’s not just for yourself that you fight, it’s for the benefit of others. But remember that how it all comes out is in my***

***hands, and I will determine what is the best outcome based on what I think is good. I am good and I know best about what good is. You're not qualified. You're not good in yourself, as am I, and so you aren't able to make this determination yourself. Do your part with courage and let me do mine with wisdom.***

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## **TAKE THE TESTS, THEN GO ON BREAK**

### **Psalm 66:10-12**

*10 For you, O God, tested us;  
you refined us like silver.*

*11 You brought us into prison  
and laid burdens on our backs.*

*12 You let men ride over our heads;  
we went through fire and water,  
but you brought us to a place of abundance.*

I liked college a lot. What I didn't like were the tests. The term papers were okay, but the tests! *Acquiring* the knowledge was one thing, but being *accountable* for it on an exam was another. The only good thing about a test was when you finished the last question, placed it on the professor's desk, and staggered out of the classroom. The worst of them were the dreaded finals, especially the comprehensive ones, where they expected you to remember stuff way back the first day of class. By the end of the semester I couldn't even remember being in that class, let alone stuff that was said that day. The only good thing about finals was that the break. Vacation gives you something to look forward to. Always in the back of my mind when preparing for the tests was sleeping late, lying on the beach, and taking a road trip. *"The break is coming. I can do this. Today I pay, tomorrow I play!"* Spring, summer – made no difference to me. I was ready for anything they called a "break."

When disoriented in my dark tunnel I asked the Lord if it was a "test." He answered with Scripture, which boiled down to, *"Of course this is a test. Your whole life here is a test. Everything in this world is the test. The break comes later."*

That's not to say that we have no abundance here in this place of the test. Jesus promised "abundant life" in this life – the abundance of his presence while taking our tests. Sure, we get breaks along the way, weekends, springs and summers. But there's an Abundance – with a capital "A" – that's coming after the final Finals, when we graduate to the next place, the better place. That's when all the tests have been taken and we live in the perpetual party.

However, in this place, God's tests *evaluate us* and *improve us* at the same time. They show us where we are and inspire us to go forward. His tests may start out easy, but they progress to greater difficulty as we mature. But the break that's coming gives us something to look forward to. We can endure this place, because we know we can rest later – and party!

If any part of this passage were to show up in one of those promise boxes – you know, those small boxes of business card-sized cards with Bible promises on them – it would be the part about the "place of abundance." We're big on abundance, but small on tests – to say nothing

of refining, prison, burdens, scorching fire, and drowning water. But this seems to be God's way. Abundance comes after scarcity. The test, then the break.

I realized that when I try to make this place the vacation instead of the time of testing, I get disappointed, if not discouraged. Since it means that we no longer believe the illusions we once held on to, being "disillusioned," is a good thing. Expecting that this world – the world that Jesus told us would be "trouble" – is a test-less vacation is an illusion. Better to be *disillusioned* of such fantasies.

If I think this place is where all my dreams – especially my American dreams – come true, I'll be bummed when they don't. It's like sending a young soldier to the battlefield and telling him it's the "best place on earth."

It helps me to remember this while standing in the dead-of-night-darkness that the sun will eventually rise. "*Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning.*" The tests will all be taken and *The Forever Vacation* will follow. It won't always be like it is today. I'm going to a place where there is no cancer, no divorce, no sadness. I can make it through these tests till then.

***Yes, you're being tested. That's what I do to help you be the best you, you can be. I'm not trying to flunk you or crush you. My goal is to give you a better idea of where you need to improve and how much you need me to help you make those improvements. Don't be discouraged with what you see in yourself. Keep at it and let me at your weak areas. I made you and I can remake you as much as you let me. Today – the test, tomorrow – the vacation.***

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## **PASS IT ON TO THE NEXT GENERATION, OLD MAN**

### **Psalm 71:17-21**

17 *Since my youth, O God, you have taught me,  
and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.*

18 *Even when I am old and gray,  
do not forsake me, O God,  
till I declare your power to the next generation,  
your might to all who are to come.*

21 *Though you have made me see troubles,  
many and bitter, you will restore my life again;  
from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.  
You will increase my honor and comfort me once again.*

I don't feel finished yet. What keeps me running is that I haven't crossed the finished line. I think I still have some things to do. I only have two items on my bucket list. The first is to be a grandpa. This is not in my control, so I pray and give subtle hints. (Are you reading this, Kids?). OK, not so subtle.

The only other thing on my list is to finish my assignment – the one God gave me. While that assignment has several facets, my highest aspiration is to impart to the next generation what

I've learned from serving God in my generation. When I walk into a room full of people, I tend to cut a path to the youngest adults. It's not that I don't like old people – like me – but I'm always thinking of making an investment in someone who has the greatest chance of living long enough to do the most good with it. I love the elderly, but if they're not likely to last longer than their unripe bananas, I'd rather invest what I have in those who have the energy and longevity to use it for the longest span.

Like David, "since my youth," God has *"taught me"* a lot of stuff, and I've tried to *"declared his righteousness"* the best way I knew how. But *"now I'm old and gray,"* – I have little but gray these days – and I'm asking him to sustain me until I've completed my assignment to *"proclaim his righteousness to the next generation."* I can tell that I haven't completed it because I'm still breathing.

In these recent years he has *"made me see troubles, many and bitter,"* and as did David, I trust that he will *"restore my life and bring me up from the depths"* so that I can finish the task to which he's called me.