



JARS OF CLAY

(Formerly Treasures in Jars of Clay)

Volume 01, Issue 02
(July/August 2002)

(Isaiah 64:8)

A newsletter for all church leaders and members,
who live with and without disability and/or chronic illness

A Grace Note from Lois

Living by God's precious gift of grace

The Mystery of Suffering

Just when I'm getting over one illness another one strikes. This time over-whelming fatigue and dizziness filled my days. Combined with a brain that refuses to work (otherwise called brain fog), I cry out with the psalmist "How long, O Lord!" (Psalms 6:3).

At times like this, I really do not feel like reading my Bible or praying. I tend to keep my suffering all to myself. If I could crawl into a hole somewhere and leave the world behind, I would. What I need the most, I shun. Does this sound familiar to you? I know intellectually that God is sovereignly in control of it all, but what I really need to know is that He still loves and cares for me.

Lessons From the Book of Job

Eugene Peterson, in his introduction to his paraphrase of the book of Job,¹ writes about our innate dislike of the subject of suffering.

Peterson explains that Job did not acquiesce to his suffering. He took his complaint to the Boss—his Creator, presenting God with "searching questions and bold protests."¹

Job is very real in his reaction to suffering, but at the same time is godly in his reaction. On one hand, Job expresses all those hard and terrible feelings I would love to express, if I had the guts. And he also expresses godly things I'm just not up to expressing as yet. I'm not original — check out the apostle Paul in Romans 7:15-20.

At the end of the book of Job, God does not explain why He goaded Satan or why He gave him permission to bring such overwhelming suffering into every aspect of Job's life.

In the end, God gives us a glimpse of who He is. God gave Himself to Job in the midst of his suffering. It is important to remember that He gives Himself to us in the midst of our suffering.

Peterson writes, "Suffering is a mystery,

and Job comes to respect the mystery."¹ I'm getting there, slowly but surely.

So — how are you doing with the vast unsearchable mystery of suffering?

Remember... "Grace grows best in winter." (Samuel Rutherford) +

"Instead of continuing to focus on preventing suffering—which we simply won't be very successful at anyway—perhaps we should begin entering the suffering, participating insofar as we are able—entering the mystery and looking around for God. In other words, we need to quit feeling sorry for people who suffer and instead look up to them, learn from them, and—if they will let us—join them in protest and prayer. Pity can be nearsighted and condescending; shared suffering can be dignifying and life-changing."¹

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: Job (Led by Suffering to the Heart of God)*, Navpress, 1996.



Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

(Psalm 139:14)

The medical facts to consider

Coping with Limitations: The Grief Process

“You know, I didn't believe you when you started talking about that grief process stuff,” Paula² quietly told me.

Sometime in the early 1980s I had shared with my support group my awareness that the grief process applies to any type of loss, not just the death of a loved one. I encouraged Paula to continue.

“I've been bitter lately!” Paula looked surprised. “I couldn't believe it at first! Then I remembered what you had said about the grief process.”

“Great!” Then I added, “Just don't stay stuck there.” I had learned after ten+ years of disability, at that point, that I had to wallow in those feelings for a while in order to work through them to get to the other side. In the 1970s I discovered my need to work through the grief process every time my limitations increased (meaning a loss of capabilities or function - whether it was temporarily or permanently).

Grief over any loss is similar to the process

originally outlined by Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her book, *On Death and Dying*.

The Grief Process Itself

Although **not a linear process**, grieving over any loss may include:

- ▶ **Denial** (“Oh, it's nothing. If I ignore it, it'll go away.” Or “There's nothing wrong, I'm just lazy,” only to understand later that I'm in pain, which explains why I don't feel like doing anything.)
- ▶ **Bartering** (“If I do what the doctors tell me precisely and/or pray real hard and confess all my sins, then I'll get better, right Lord?”)
- ▶ **Anger, rage, resentment** (aimed at God, other people and even ourselves; “Why me?!” etc. Joni Eareckson Tada points out that when we cry out to God we can do it in either of two ways: shaking a **closed fist** at Him, demanding that God restore our loss or make things right, or lifting up **open hands** toward Him, seeking what God wants out of

our situation, asking Him how we are to respond.)

- ▶ **Bitterness, despair** (“The doctors keep on telling me that there's no reason for the pain, that it's all in my head, and I might as well get back to work. But I know better. I know the pain is real! But there is nothing I can do to get the help I need!”)
- ▶ **Acceptance** (which looks like contentment with whatever situation and/or limitation God has given us. Dr. Cheryl Sanfaçon, a Christian psychiatrist notes that acceptance is an **active** day-by-day process. Acceptance is entirely different from resignation, which is **passive**, in which we give up, disguising our anger.)

Somewhere along the line, depression may come along, like an unwanted houseguest. (I will write more about depression in another issue.)

In the midst of our suffering, our worst enemy is isolation and silence. When we are having a rough time, we

² Not her real name

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 need loving, caring people to help us. But we need to **allow other people to minister to us** – easier said than done. For some of us it's really difficult letting people know that we are having a hard time until it is all over. Each of us needs other people who will actively listen to us. This is a precious gift (discussed more fully in the next section, **One Body... Many Members**).

I usually start feeling better spiritually when I start reading my Bible and praying again. Although I may begin doing it out of obedience, somewhere along the line I begin to look forward to these times spent with God.

What do I do when nothing seems to help? I've learned that only God can change my heart and the way I am feeling and thinking. A situation like this happened last year. No matter what I did I was still in a "blue" mood. So I prayed, asking God to change my attitude. I asked Him to change the way I was feeling. I didn't "work" at it. I didn't have to change my mind by myself. I just waited, watched and looked around. We have to remember that it is important that we **wait** on God during these times. (I know my tendency is to jump ahead of him.)

God used a number of different means to work a

change in me. I know that it had to be His Holy Spirit within me who worked it all out. I'm learning.

Dr. Sanfaçon recommended Dan Allender's book *The Healing Path* to me when she reviewed this article for accuracy. (I will discuss Allender's book more fully in the next issue.) Cheryl reminds us that God is interested in conforming us to the image of His Son, not in making us happy. Allender points out that God uses this valley of suffering to draw us to Himself.

Q: How about you? How do you cope when things get tough? †



One Body... Many Members

(1 Corinthians 12:27)

Serving one another in the Body of Christ

The Gift of Listening

"Sufferers attract fixers the way road-kill attracts vultures."¹

Often, we do not know what to say or do for someone who is going through a rough time. More often than not we are prone to say things that are unhelpful or even hurtful. (I must confess to have said the wrong thing many times—I have much to learn, too!)

What can we say to help someone who needs our comfort? Nothing!

Examples from Job

One of the best examples we see in Scripture concerns Job's friends—of what to say and do—and what not to say and do. Initially Job's friends gave him what he needed the most—their silent presence. (How many of us would sit silently with a friend for seven days?!)

Job's friends blew it when they opened their mouths in an attempt to respond to Job's protests and complaints against God. Peterson points out

that it is the "quick fix people"¹ who do not understand people who are suffering.

What ministers most in times of crisis and long-term illness is our loving presence and unconditional active listening, without questioning what the person has or has not tried, or coming up with instant solutions, or reciting unhelpful Bible babble.

What we have to realize is that we "cannot fix

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things, get rid of them or
make them better.”¹

Points to remember

Peterson cites several points to remember as we seek to minister to our hurting friends and loved ones:

- ▶ No matter how well we may know our friends, “we don't really understand the full nature of our friend's problems.”¹
- ▶ Our friends may not want our advice. What they need is the freedom to vent their feelings without being

judged or condemned.

- ▶ We must look at our heart to see our attitude in the situation before us. Job's friends gave “answers without personal relationship, intellect without intimacy...Job rages against this secularized wisdom that has lost touch with the living realities of God.”¹
- ▶ In response to this mentality from his friends, Job “rejects the kind of advice and teaching that has God all figured out and provides glib explanations for every

circumstance.”¹

- ▶ There can be no easy answers to suffering, as much as we would prefer there be easy solutions.

We see that Job refuses to curse God but his suffering is never really explained and we are not given any instruction “in how to live in order to avoid suffering.”¹ We have to remember that we can't put God in a nice, neat box.

So what can we do for our friends? Give them the precious gifts of our silent presence and actively listen to them. †



Equipping the Saints

(Psalm 139:14)

Resources to grow on and minister

This issue we'll look at a few of the ministries available to us:



Joni and Friends

P.O. Box 3333
Agoura Hills, CA 91376
(818) 707-5664
FAX: (818) 707-2391
TTY: (818) 707-9707
www.joniandfriends.org

In its 22nd year, Joni and Friends (JAF—the disability outreach of Joni Eareckson Tada), is dedicated to extending the love and message of Christ

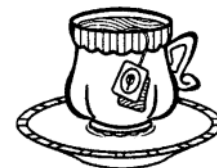
to people who are affected by disability, including disabled people, family members, and friends.

JAF's objective is to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of this group of people in practical ways.

Joni and Friends is committed to recruiting, training and motivating a new generation of people with disabilities to become leaders in their churches and communities. In addition, they seek to equip and mobilize churches to carry out the work of disability ministry. JAF

does this by providing churches with effective programs, training and materials.

JAF has a newsletter which is in type and Braille. Call (800) 523-5777 to order.



Rest Ministries

P.O. Box 502886
San Diego, CA 92150
(619) 237-1698
E-mail: rest@ixpres.com
www.restministries.org

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Rest Ministries is dedicated to educating churches on chronic illness and assisting people in starting HopeKeepers groups in their churches for people who live with illness or pain. They currently have over 160 groups across the United States and beyond.

They also provide leadership materials for Christian-based disability support groups.

Rest Ministries' website offers a number of resources including books and Bible studies. They have a support group that works by e-mail, and a daily devotional sent by e-

mail, a printed newsletter available by subscription and, the same newsletter available by e-mail or on their website in .pdf format (Adobe Acrobat Reader).



Grace Ministry

A ministry of Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, PA (See the church logo and information at the bottom of page 6.)
www.tenth.org/ministries

Grace Ministry started as a support group of people who live with disability and/or chronic illness in September 1995

within Tenth Church. Since then they have sponsored several Adult Bible School classes and two conferences, and act as advocates for people with disabilities and chronic illness within Tenth Church.

Grace Ministry is currently making people more aware of the need for an elevator to enable people, who find stairs difficult, to more fully participate in church activities. A separate Deaf Ministry started in 2000. This year, the founder of Grace, Lois A. Denier, started this newsletter, which is also available in .pdf format on the website for Tenth Presbyterian Church. †

Announcements

Pass the word along!

1. National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week Campaign

September 23-29, 2002

San Diego (July, 2002)
More than 1 in 3 Americans has a chronic condition, and despite what we may assume, 60% of those who live with daily illness or pain are between the ages of 18 and 64. The majority of chronic illness is invisible. Nine million of these people are survivors of the invisible chronic illness of cancer, suffering

the side effects of cancer treatment.

September 23-29, 2002 is National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week. The theme is "But You Look So Good!" This major public awareness campaign is sponsored by Rest Ministries.

"Living with an illness that is invisible to those around us can often have a more devastating affect on our emotional health than the physical pain," explains Lisa Copen, 33, founder of Rest Ministries, who lives with rheumatoid arthritis

and fibromyalgia. "Friends and family of those with chronic illness care a great deal about what their loved ones are going through, but oftentimes the invisibility of the illness sets up an environment for misunderstandings and even doubt about the validity of the illness. We hope to increase awareness of how many people 'look great' but are hurting deeply."

Outreach includes the distribution of literature, *When a Friend Has a*

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Chronic Illness: What to Say, How to Help.

Resources include *But You Look So Good: A Guide to Understanding and Encouraging People With Chronic, Debilitating Illness and Pain*. Churches across the U.S. will be participating by having people share testimonies about living with illness. Bumper stickers and other promotional items are available. Special chat guests will be online.

For a complete list of events and resources visit www.invisibleillness.com or call 888-751-7378.

"The feeling of knowing that one's illness and pain is acknowledged can have a great impact on how a person copes with living with illness," says Copen.

"We hope that by recognizing people with illness, who rarely feel as good as they look, they will begin to feel better understood, leading them to a more invigorating life!"

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2. **Jars of Clay newsletter is now available on-line at Tenth's web-site** (www.tenth.org). Just click on the Ministries section and then click on Grace. Each edition is in .pdf format and requires the Adobe Acrobat Reader to be on your computer, which you can obtain for free at: www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readermain.html †

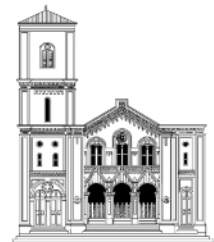
To be placed on our mailing list please fill in below, then cut out and forward to me at: Lois A. Denier, 236 Drexel Avenue, Lansdowne, PA 19050

Name:	Address:
For e-mail/internet Jars of Clay newsletter—your e-mail please:	

Jars of Clay is part of the writing ministry of Lois A. Denier, with permission from Grace Ministry and with oversight from Tenth Presbyterian Church.

Any questions, comments, problems or feedback are greatly appreciated!

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Grace Grows Best in Winter ~Samuel Rutherford