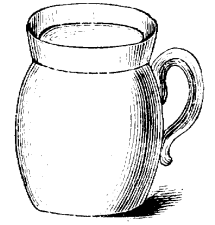


Treasures



March/April 2002 – Issue 1

in Jars of Clay

A Grace Note from Lois

(2 Corinthians 12:9 ESV)

On September 11, 2001 many of us watched our television sets or listened to our radios, transfixed by the horrifying vision that would forever change our lives. On that historic day suffering became visible to everyone.

People acted in heroic and compassionate ways, which I thought had gone long ago. I found myself grieving with families, co-workers, rescue workers and the surviving victims.

“This is suffering stalking a person down and ripping into his sanity. This is affliction spinning out of control.”¹

I have known for quite a while that there are no easy answers to this problem of suffering. But as a Christian I have a resource which can cast a piercing light into the darkness in which I must live -- the Bible, God’s Word. God communicates to me using the Scriptures and the work of His Holy Spirit in my heart.

God uses suffering in our life to mold us into the likeness of His Son. At times this is a painful process. But growth in maturity and character does not come easily.

God’s grace is in the midst of any horror, tenderly holding each of us, as we work our way through, giving us His grace and strength to carry on.

God’s grace is the primary subject of this newsletter. In coming issues I will explore the problem of suffering and where God’s grace comes in. Join me in this journey.

There are several sections to this newsletter, and each has a specific purpose:

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made will carry through on the thought that God has made each of us -- fearfully and wonderfully -- in ways we often don’t understand. This section will explore facts, statistics and general information about a number of different disabilities, chronic illnesses and limitations. Included will be information pertaining to accessibility and the accommodations available to people here at Tenth.

One Body...Many Members will explore the ways we can minister to one another as part of the Body of Christ. Each of us, able-bodied or disabled, has been given gifts, capabilities and talents which we are called to use to His glory.

Equipping the Saints will share some of the resources available to help us minister and grow in Christ. The purpose is to broaden our understanding of suffering, of God’s purposes in it, and of the comfort and grace He gives in the midst of it.

Lastly you are invited to participate in this newsletter with your own ideas, articles and comments. Remember, this is *your* newsletter.

My prayer is that you will be ministered to and edified by what you find here.

¹ *When God Weeps*, see page 4.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made



*"I praise you, for I am fearfully
And wonderfully made."
(Psalm 139:14 ESV)*

God made each of us the way we are for a reason. And living in a fallen world means that our bodies and minds are subject to some problems. It helps to understand what some of these problems are, which is what this section of *Treasures* will discuss.

Studies and surveys done by the Census Bureau tell us that 1 out of 5 Americans is disabled. That rate goes up to 2 out of 5 Americans for people who live with a chronic illness. Some people are classified as both disabled and chronically ill.

Statistics can be a little mind boggling, but they do tell us some interesting facts:

- ◆ The rates for disability and chronic illness increase as we age (as if we didn't know that?). The older we get the greater the chance we have of becoming a statistic--goes with the territory.
- ◆ More women are disabled than men.
- ◆ People with disabilities are usually more poorly educated, especially those born with a disability.
- ◆ It logically follows then that many people with disabilities are economically poor. Those forced to live on government disability and subsistence are on a low, fixed income.
- ◆ Families suffer in many ways when a member is born or becomes disabled.
- ◆ Couples where one becomes disabled somewhere during the marriage, have an 85% divorce rate.
- ◆ The ability to work depends on the limitations of the person.

Rather than talk about individual disorders or diseases, it may be easier to look at the limitations people may have. They can be broken down into several categories:

- ◆ Mobility limitations
- ◆ Hearing limitations
- ◆ Visual limitations
- ◆ Mental capacity limitations
- ◆ Mental/emotional functioning limitations

Guaranteed, if you live long enough, at sometime in our lives, everyone will experience some limitation physically and/or mentally. No one is exempt from suffering.

Sometimes suffering that goes with limitations is temporary--as the result of accident or injury. Those people who neither get better nor die, are left with more permanent limitations.

Some limitations are very visible. The visible disabilities usually have assistive devices such as canes, crutches, wheelchairs, or service dogs. Or they may have some type of obvious physical deformity.

Those with invisible disabilities may be a little harder to detect. Often these are people who "pass" as able-bodied. It's only as you get to know these people that you learn that they live with some type of chronic illness, disability or limitation.

Questions to think and pray about:

Do you live with some type of limitation?

Or do you know someone with a disability?

If so, in what categories would it be?

***"God is the only One who can unlock
sense out of suffering."***

- When God Weeps (see page 4)

One Body... Many Members



*“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”
(1 Corinthians 12:27 ESV)*

*“We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”
-2 Corinthians 4:7 ESV*

The treasure spoken of in this verse is the gospel, or good news, of Jesus Christ. For whatever reason He has, God has chosen to put the gospel into vessels that can be very fragile—our jars of clay.

I remember watching a real potter, turned minister, at a JAF Family Retreat in the Pocono Mountains. One night, as we were all assembled in the auditorium, the potter/pastor sat up on stage, at his wheel, “throwing pots” as they call it, of all shapes and sizes and uses. Each vessel was different from the next. Then he started talking about how some pots get chipped, cracked and broken, some more than others.

It’s the same way with us. And despite our chips and cracks, God calls us to glorify Him. And He has placed us among other pots and jars, each with a different function in this community which Christ has called the church.

The verse for this *One Body...Many Members* section is part of a great chapter in which the apostle Paul is writing about spiritual gifts and how the Body of Christ is made up of many members.

Some of the complaints I’ve heard from people who are disabled pertain to the church—that they are alone and isolated, and not made to feel like equal participants in church life.

Yet, in 1 Corinthians 12:21-26, the apostle Paul writes that one member of the body can’t say to another member that they aren’t needed.

Then, *“On the contrary, the parts of the body that*

seem to be weaker are indispensable.” (vs 22) And finally the apostle writes, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul writes in the same vein but goes a step further when he commands believers to love one another (12:9 & 10); to show respect and honor to one another (12:10); to contribute “to the needs of the saints” and to show hospitality (12:13); and finally, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” (12:15)

Teaching like this occurs throughout Paul’s writing. I suspect his own “thorn” taught him much. Saul (i.e., B.C. Paul) was pretty independent and self-sufficient. Obviously God providentially taught him a great deal about being dependent, especially on Him and other members of the church.

In this section of *Treasures* we will look at the various ways each of us (able-bodied and disabled) can minister to our fellow jars and pots in this local Body of Christ in which God has placed us.

Questions to Think and Pray About:

As you see some “weaker” members of Tenth, do you think of them as “indispensable?”

In what ways can you love, honor and respect our indispensable jars and pots?

“God always seems bigger to those who need him the most. And suffering is the tool he uses to help us need him more.”

- When God Weeps (see page 4)

Equipping the Saints



"For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God."
(Psalm 139:14 ESV)

"Our call to suffer comes from a God tender beyond description. If we do not cling to this through life's worst, we will misread everything and grow to hate him."

(When God Weeps)

In Christmas 1997 I was given a gift of a copy of *When God Weeps: Why Our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty*, by Joni Eareckson Tada and Steven Estes.

Next a member of Tenth's staff borrowed my copy when she took a course at Westminster Theological Seminary which required it. When she returned the book she included a note that Reformed Theological Seminary includes *When God Weeps* and other Joni and Friends (JAF)

materials in a new course they were offering called "Disabilities and the Church." (See RTS/Virtual on the web for this new course at www.rtsvirtual.org)

When God Weeps has a balanced (and Reformed) approach to this complex problem of suffering. I would recommend it to anyone struggling with this subject area. (Grace Ministry sponsored an Adult Bible School Class studying this book in 2000.)

When God Weeps, published by Zondervan, is available in hardback and paperback. Most Christian bookstores have it, or can order it for you. It is also available on-line through Christian Book Distributors or Amazon.com.

Opportunities to Participate

Have some answers to the questions at the end of some of the sections? Have any information about a particular disability you can share with us? Or maybe about the latest treatment or accommodations for a particular disorder? What kinds of things do you do to minister to other people? In what ways has God ministered to you? Has anyone ever ministered to you in a special way? How? What did they do or say that meant the most to you? Remember, nothing is too small or simple to consider. In what ways do you share

the good news of Jesus Christ with other people?

Please, write your answers down and send them to me by e-mail (ladenier@core.com) or snail-mail (236 Drexel Ave., Lansdowne, PA 19050). You may be part of a future *Treasures!* Please share with us!



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



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