

How I made it through it all, so far...*

A young friend of mine--very, very close--who knows about my history and personal challenges, asked me a few months ago "how I made it through it all" (especially the frequent bouts with depression and futility)...He is a Christian, challenged by somewhat similar "adversaries" at times...This is what I wrote for him in late 1999, and perhaps it might be useful to some of you, with the same issues and feelings...[Posted Feb/2K]

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IMPORTANT NOTE: The below was written and posted only a month or so before the [unexpected death of my precious daughter Britt](#). Without having this foundation in place, weathering that experience would have been much, much more difficult...
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How I made it through it all, so far...

(I tried to get as 'concrete' and detailed as I could in this--for the exact methods I used to deal with these issues...)

1. I guess the first point was the most important--I put all my 'eggs' in one Basket--Jesus

My experiences with the world (from at least the 7th grade, and probably from kindergarten--I can remember some of those life-changing experiences) were that it couldn't be trusted, and that it didn't value me at all...when I found out (in college) that Jesus did, though, and that he always accepted me and never laughed at me and never made fun of my social-stupidity and never teased me and never put me down, I knew I had my first really safe friend...and over the years, I always ran to Jesus first...I talked to him about every aspect of my life, my confusion, my fears, my depression, my burdens...through reading his word, thinking about him, talking with him and asking questions of him through each day, I drew strength...and he gave me strength inside to 'get through'...this was the basis, for me, for staying alive each day...

2. The "quiet times with God" each morning were where I gathered my strength for the day

...it had to be away from all the voices that could hurt me, and the voices that needed me to be a perfect provider and wise man and billions of other things I had never been, that I had no training in, that I had no knowledge of, that I had never experienced in any significant way in *my* life, that I had no hope of succeeding in (unless Jesus did some out-of-the-ordinary stuff for me)...and so each morning I had to meet with Him for me to read in his word about his love, his acceptance, and his involvement in my screwed up life...and this had to be alone, so I could let my "guard down"...[the guard is always up, around all people of this world...it, to this day, expects to be made fun of, or embarrassed by, or trivialized, or vilified by, or emotionally bullied by, or looked down on by others...and it will likely stay up, for affirmation is so quickly outrun by some innocent teasing remark, or by a slightly-less-than-enthusiastic non- verbal response when people see me, or some sense of failing someone else's expectations--an exceptionally common experience in my life, especially in the social arena.]

This strength was mediated in a couple of ways:

- a. The major way was through reading the bible all the way through each year, talking to God about the verses and questions I had as I read through it (remember, I could do this aloud, since I was alone). God speaks to us (primarily) through his written word, and his voice gives power and strength to our hearts. I made sure that I interacted with it, at least some, by underlining and circling words and drawing lines between connections in the text that I saw.
- b. A second way was in prayer...when I talked to him, I prayed upward with open eyes and conversationally...I didn't do the knees/eyes closed things...He was a Person, and I needed Him in my life *to be that* (and not some authority figure that could hurt me, shame me, expect me to know things I didn't, expect me to be things I wasn't, expect me to have skills they didn't give/teach me)
- c. Starting in 1989, during the pre-divorce, I started journaling (which I wish I had done in the previous decades, because it opened up a new dimension in my interaction with God). Proverbs 3.6 says "*acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will direct your paths*" ...I really wanted him to direct my paths, because that was one of the main incentives for me to become a Christian in the first place: my paths were all fouled up, because I was trying to direct them--without any knowledge, skills, training, wisdom, guidance as to how to live...I had no teacher/guide/parent that taught me this...in my journal, I rehearse each day all the previous day's events and feelings and tell him my interpretation of those, admit any mistakes and ask for help, and ask him for insight into the significance of those events and feelings...sometimes I get insight about those after a few days, but I know the interaction brings God more into my life than without it.

These quiet times gave me enough self-confidence, buoyancy, and peace of heart to start into the day...the strength generally wore off during the day, and I could often feel myself drying up by late afternoon...but it was a major factor in getting me through each day and actually getting life lived for my little family...

I remember reading the passages in Exodus 34:

*"And it came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. 30 So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, **behold, the skin of his face shone**, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. 32 And afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that the Lord had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. 34 But whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, 35 **the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone**. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.*

And learning that if I would spend time with God, listening to His Word, and talking over my issues with Him, that somehow His strength and peace and health would rub off on me...and that was my experience. (For the Christian, on this side of the Cross, the glory is inside, in the spirit--2 Cor 3)

The few times I missed these were obvious to me...I had to go on in strength of will alone and was stressed and choked by anxiety and fear long before lunch...

The previous night had often ended in deep sense of failure (either from verbal comments to that effect from my partner, or from my emotional drained-state at even the slightest of 'human' tasks) and/or disparagement, or deep sense of inadequacy, so these few minutes with someone who loved me and accepted me and cherished me fed my hungry soul, and patched up my broken and flayed little-heart inside...

3. I also learned an important lesson from Jesus about other-centeredness...

When things would get really, really bad, so much so that I could not suppress them (with my almost-inhuman strength to do so), I learned to get my eyes off myself and focus on the needs of others...Jesus had said something about not seeking your own happiness, but the happiness of others, and He worded it in terms of not seeking your own life: "*Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, and whoever loses it shall preserve it.*" (Luke 17.33)...

..and other passages made the same point, especially Paul in Philippians 2.4: "*do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others*"...so I developed a trigger reflex for whenever I got pretty heavy into a pity-party for myself, then I would look outward to find someone I could help...it might be extra prayer for them, or calling them up and cheering them up, or taking time with them if they felt bad...because of my schedule, this was often with my children and sometimes with other students...and when I lived as Jesus lived (helping others, in the face of the inevitable Cross and harassed at every side by enemies), I felt better, and the Spirit grew the fruits of the spirit in my life

(Gal 5:22: "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*")...

4. A very special case of the above was in how I placed my priorities between His wishes for my life and MY wishes for my life.

The verse I learned this from was Matt 6.30f:

*So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'*³² *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.*³³ ***But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.***³⁴ *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Jesus' point here is that we should be looking after God's values *first*, and that in the process, He will look after ours. The way I understood this verse was that I should focus my thoughts and energies to advancing His cause (via growing as a Christian, helping other Christians, and helping "outsiders"), and NOT worry about my needs, my happiness, my dreams, my aspirations, even my expectations of what He would give me(!). The message of Jesus was clear (from above) that if I focused on "gaining/saving my life", then I would "lose it"--but that if I focused on **God's** "needs", then He would focus on **mine**.

So, I learned to stop trying to focus on improving my 'feelings' of self-esteem (even though I didn't call it that back then--it was more feelings of decay or twistedness), on 'feeling more comfortable around others' and the like--and started focusing on learning the bible and God well enough to help others. I would have to just 'bite it back' (at least temporarily) and 'suppress the fear' and 'ignore the pain' and just get the job done--be it work, family, school, parenting, church stuff. [If I had realized that I could have taken advantage of God-given Christian counselors, I could have probably enjoyed those years more.] Over the intervening decades, of course, He has done more with my life (for Him) that I could have imagined and in the process has grown inside me a SECOND VOICE--one that senses my worth and contribution to the universe and to good--to speak up when the OLDER VOICE *still* accuses me of inadequacy, superficiality, uselessness, abandonment, and rejection...but now I know the difference, that one is out-of-date(!) and that the other has been developing, and *is being demonstrated*, over time...He was right--what I have needed, He is growing in my life...[There are other areas that He has changed, some of which I knew needing changing and some I did not anticipate.]

Since my particular gifts and talents were oriented toward His believers (e.g., teaching), my actions in seeking His kingdom involved being active with other Christians (e.g., teaching bible studies). Some gifts are perhaps more outward focused (e.g., evangelism and perhaps some of 'mercy').

[I also learned from that verse a lesson you apparently have just learned too--that of focusing on **today's** issues, *instead of tomorrow's*...We are given strength and ability for today only; we will get tomorrow's rations in the morning...Remember that section you told me about in *The Screwtape Letters*?]

5. This point naturally calls to mind a related pillar of my life--the "sow to the Spirit" principle...

Left to myself, I tend to despair and inaction...my feelings of depression, hopelessness, and terror of failure and ridicule are my natural state. If I am not able, at any given moment, to either:

1. Suppress them by detaching my cognitive life from my emotional state [putting me into what I call 'frozen concentrate' or "Terminator" mode--when all emotions are frozen and put in concentrated batches into the freezer, for later thawing and experiencing--a less healthy way to deal with them, of course] or;
2. Outshout them with positive emotions like the love, joy, peace of the fruits of the Spirit...

...then I live in morale-squalor all the time ... What this means for me is that I must **constantly be developing** the fruits of the Spirit, in order to drown out the fruits of my particular morbidity... Romans 6 and Galatians 5-6 are where I learned that **if** I sow to the Spirit, **then** reap life (through time) and that I can wither up some of the fruits of my old-nature by not feeding/sowing to it...

Galatians 6.7 pointed out that experience of aspects of eternal life is possible **now**, by investing in spiritual activities, thoughts, communities, ethical decisions, etc:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Romans 6.21 made the same point:

"What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The way this works is simply how I spend my **thought** life...the more I think on the good things about God, his heart, his habits, his beauty, the beauty in nature, the beauty in the human virtues (like compassion and integrity), the beauty of a healthy family, etc [cf. "*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things*" (Philp 4.8)]. , the more good fruit I grow...

The Book is fairly clear on this and shows how to do this practically...Romans 12.1-2 ["**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.**"] uses the '*be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*'...when I first began studying this passage, it was pointed out to me (1) the differences between 'conformed' and 'transformed'; and (2) that this was a 'mind' issue...

- **The first piece--"conformed"** was likened to the a clay-mold, that the world was trying to fit me into...I knew the difference (enough) between the world's standards and Jesus' view of how to live...I also had a vague notion of how the world bombards our mind constantly with messages about wealth, power, fame, pleasure, me-centeredness, selfish ambition, dominion/authority, quest for social status superiority, and appearance...and I knew (even then) that **Jesus taught the opposite** as goals: wealth *of spirit and generosity*; love and forgiveness and gentleness *as power* for healing and transformation; pleasing God *instead of* seeking human glory; pleasantness and beauty and virtue and peace and joy and fulfillment, *instead of* pleasure; other-centeredness *instead of* self-centeredness; aspiring to be better for God, more beneficial for others, and helping others to be more successful, *rather than* selfishly ambitious; serving others *rather than* ruling others; quest for more authentic human relationships, *rather than* social status and superiority to others; beauty of spirit, of action, and gracefulness of speech, *rather than* physical appearance...I had to develop a reflex action that 'judged with disapproval' any ad or message or incentive or enticement or argument from the world that tried to convince me that *its* values were the only *real* values...

- And with **'transformed'** I saw something I personally *had control over*...I didn't have much control over the messages I received from the world each day, but I COULD control how much 'mind transformation' I got per day...I understood this to mean a 'change from within' of perspective, a shift from MY/the world's perspective about something, to God's perspective on it...the changing of my head, of course, would be done by paying attention to God's word, as read in the bible, as taught by others, and as reflected upon by myself...so, each morning before I read the bible passage of the day, I would start with this simple prayer: "change me through your word, Lord"...I tried bible memory several different times in my life, and that seemed to help this too...The goal of this study was to find in scripture God's perspective on something, and then **consciously try to adopt that as my own**...try to 'apply' that perspective the next time the world approached me with a counter-message.

I also have developed from that period a somewhat mystical view of the bible...that it has a power, once it gets inside your head, to change your thinking subconsciously...I knew early on that everything you put in your head changes your thinking *somewhat* (with the obvious implication not to fill your head with crap), so it made tons of sense to pack as much of the Word in as possible...and I understood this to be simple bible *reading*, not bible *study per se*...

I personally experienced at many, many times in my life, the power of the Word to pull me through...There were so many times that my heart was bleeding, shattering, being crushed, being shredded, and the only thing that would grow the peace back and give me strength to go on, was the reading of the bible (mostly psalms and the NT letters)...I learned to just *read*--not study, not reflect on it, not memorize--but just pour it in as fast as my eyes could cross the lines...it didn't matter about wandering minds or not being able to remember the previous verse because of the pain...He just used that food to feed my soul back to equilibrium...[cf. I Peter 2.2: "*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation*" and Hebrew 5.12: "*In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!*"]

And transformation was like this...I read and asked God questions...I prayed that he transform my mind through this cognitive input...I could control how much I read, and the more I read, the more peace and balance and strength I had...

The second point was about the **renewal of the 'mind'**--it was NOT about behavior or habits or emotions (which we have surprisingly little control over)...but it was about my mind: perspectives, attitudes, thought patterns, and what I considered valuable and important in life...I learned that God starts on the inside, in changing the universe...

I remember being 20 years old and noticing Proverbs 4.23ff...how it started with the inside and worked its way out (thoughts, words, inputs, actions):

*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.
Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.
Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm.
Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.*

There was also a principle that I learned here that had to do with "direct proportion"--my experience of 'true life' from the inside would be "directly proportional" to the amount of time I spent thinking about God's perspective and His word. Somehow the more I lived in "His worldview" and interaction with Him, the more my insides/attitudes/emotions would reflect His inner peace, robustness, and resilience (and the fruit of the Spirit). Paul had told Timothy:

*Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. 14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. 15 Take pains with these things; **be absorbed** in them, so that your progress may be evident to all.*

Being "absorbed" in spiritual thinking and activities would produce spiritual "progress" that would be obvious *not just to* Timothy, but to those around him.

But the "sow to the Spirit" principle was not *just* about thinking, and this meant that I could make 'investments' and 'plantings' during *other* times of my life than just when I was studying the bible or thinking about the bible...I could make progress by helping others...doing nice things for others, encouraging others, giving praise to others where warranted, expressing sympathy for others, meeting with them for bible study, taking a stand for truth and/or compassion, and just communicating acceptance to others --all these would grow my insides and increase my inside health in the process...[God seemed to build the system so that by ignoring our own needs/life and focusing on the needs of others, we in the process 'get our life' back also...as we saw above.]

6. This sowing principle turned out to involve a spiral--the more I sowed, the more I grew, and the more I grew, the more I could sow...

It was generally sin that would interrupt the growth process (bringing death and despair into my thoughts, and hopelessness and discouragement into my morale), and the more I grew, the more I was able to say 'no' to the 'invitation' to sin...so, it was a spiral opportunity...but the spiral worked both ways, of course, in that if I chose to sin, I was weakened inside and saying 'no' to sin the next time was *just a little more difficult*...this spiral thing was supposed to be an awesome blessing for us, allowing us to grow to incredible heights of self-control, altruism, nobility of soul, virtue, loyalty, celebration--but, like most of the great things God built into the system, it can be aimed the other way and do the damage that we see throughout human history...

So, the more often I involved God in my thought life (and any actions based upon that thought life), the stronger and healthier I would get...I would ask God in my heart about every little thing in my life...'Lord, look at that--what an odd sight...this is how I understand that...what do you think?' or 'Lord, did I just say the right thing? was I supposed to do XYZ instead" and the such like...I didn't get audible responses, of course, but over time some of the responses became obvious in the patterns of my life, in relationship to others and situations...

7. Fortunately, the sin-aspect of the spiral could be minimized by the good-aspect of the spiral:

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

They were mutually exclusive and exhaustive...the more time I spent sowing good, the less "time" I had to sow evil...

8. These sowing and these transforming principles required me to start some serious bible study...

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would learn how to please God ("*walk as children of light* ⁹ (*for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth , trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*")...and that is what I wanted...I wanted to please the One who loved me and who accepted me so freely (the only one I was really safe with)...so I had to learn what He said...

I did not trust my conscience to be an accurate guide as to what was right, but my conscience was what was always beating me up about my inadequacies)...I had to start studying the bible, because the bible itself described itself as food...being an obsessive-compulsive (especially then!), of course, I had already begun serious bible study, but now I had to be sure that I wasn't just learning *the facts* in the bible stories or the bible letters, but rather *what those facts implied* for what I could do to please God and sow to the Spirit.

Part of this involved developing a healthy sense of self-doubt, especially about my motives (often below my conscious level):

All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the Lord weighs the motives. (Prov 16.2)

The import of this verse was clear--I could assume (and often rationalize) that I was 'doing everything right', but God would be looking deeper into why I was making the individual choices (e.g., how many were for purely selfish reasons, how many were mixed, how many were for others). I had to learn to ask God more and more about insight into my motives. This was a healthy form of self-critical doubt that would result in greater levels of thoughtfulness to others and in avoiding 'well-disguised' selfishness.

9. To keep this spiral "working for me," (and for outrunning depression and paralysis caused by fear), I had to learn how to reduce the downside-effects of sinful choices, and increase my "chances" of staying on the upside (e.g., resisting temptation to sin and negativism).

There were two specific lessons I learned here:

- a. The downside causal chain could be 'snipped' in mid-flow by a 'reset' with God. This had two aspects:
- Choosing to 'kill the chain' [Romans 8:12: "*So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but **if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**"]...making a however feeble choice to try to avoid that in the future (be it behavior, thoughts, choices, values), to try to stop "it from reproducing"*
 - Doing a reset with the Father, admitting the problem, my failure therein, and agreeing with Him that this was "**not a good idea**" (and was destructive at some level, too)...this is what the bible calls "confession" (literally "agree with") in 1 John 1:9: "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"...it is not working up some 'sorrow' or 'shame feelings', but just honesty with a good-hearted God that "okay, you were right--you told me so"...and then forgetting about it (not wallowing in the guilt and failure) and going back to trying to grow and help others...
- b. Trying to maximize the time I spent in the 'upside' swing, meant learning how *to minimize the number of times I 'fell'* from that into sin...I have learned that temptation cannot be resisted easily when it is 'felt' to be close, but that distance can sometimes be 'manufactured'. There are three tactics I use here:
- I learned that temptation was more like a seduction, than a simple "shopping experience"...the book of James describes the temptation-sin-death cycle in these terms:

"but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."(James 1.14f)

There is a "physical proximity and pull", followed by "enticing", followed by intimacy (resulting in conception of a joint product!), followed by birth of actual 'sin', and if sin stays alive long enough, it produces a child called 'death' (i.e., destructive consequences of various types, intensities, and duration).

There are several obvious points of failure in this process:

- You could not get close enough to temptation [but this is not as controllable in the world, but does apply in some areas--don't go places in thought or deed where you KNOW you are 'at risk'],
- You could leave as soon as the 'enticing' sales/seduction pitch begins [a practical way of getting up the impulse to run away is to visualize the consequences of failure--if you had made this mistake before, you can yell 'too expensive' and run away mentally to some other place]; and

- You could leave without finishing the act of intimacy act [in other words, as you find yourself in the process of sinning (in thought, word, deed, or omission), you make a **very quick choice** (no deliberation--it is too late for that!) and run away from the place (mental or physical), hopefully to some safe place with warm distractions and comforts...

[Once the sin is born, of course, all you can do is "kill it" by confession and making up for any damage that results from not "killing it" quickly enough to STOP the damage/death from starting.]

- Say "yes" to Jesus **early** and **frequently**, as this process starts up...Some sins are simple events--rash words, hasty responses, harsh tones and looks--but some are longer processes, involving 'planning' and provision [c.f. "*Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature*"...Romans 12.14]...the way I use this, is when I have felt my self "slipping" or "weakening", I start talking to God about the situation! I verbally say **out loud** "I choose Jesus" often, and try to start mini-spirals in the other direction-- gathering strength in the process...I have to repeat this step often, while I figure a way to get 'away' from the situation...but I have to keep at it...
- Develop distance by psychologically "detaching" from the experience...this can be done by 'judging' (which is holding the experience out at arm's length, analyzing it, and then agreeing with God that it is wrong/destructive, and not in your mutual best interests)...this movement from 'feeling' to 'thinking' will often move you from the 'flesh' to the 'spirit' (but this is not a hard and fast connection--the body is not evil, only some 'tendencies' within it), and maybe provide enough breathing room for you to run away...

10. The spiral and sowing the Spirit were day-to-day practices, and things that I could work on. But since I was always being bombarded by hassles and semi- attacks (often imagined, probably, but they did just as much damage to a guy with a fearful heart) from the outside, I needed a quick way in each crisis to try to maintain.

The way I did this was to use a combination of two Psalms, in which the author was tormented, taunted, or tearful:

First, Psalm 43 (parts):

*Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation;
rescue me from deceitful and wicked men.
You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?
Why are you **downcast**, O my soul? Why **so disturbed** within me?
Put your **hope in God**, for I will **yet** praise him, my Savior and my God.*

What I learned from this was to **take a longer-view** than just of the present. In other of the state of "downcast" and "so disturbed". And in the process of trusting Him, I had some peace of heart *mixed in with* the disquiet.

Then, Psalm 62 (and others):

*Trust in Him at all times, O people; **Pour out your heart before Him**; God is a refuge for us. Arise, cry aloud in the night, at the beginning of the night watches;*

***Pour out your heart like water** before the presence of the Lord; (Lam 2)
My tears have been my food day and night,
While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*

*These things I remember, and **I pour out my soul within me.** (Ps 42)*

From this I learned to "lay it all out on the table" before Him. Tell him all the anguish and fears and terrors and discouragement and hurt feelings and anxiety and self-loathing that might be tearing me up at any given moment. A "refuge" is a place of safety, where no one fires upon you--and only He has been that for me (and us humans). Sometimes--when it was really bad--I wrote it down in prayer form to Him..."Lord, I am terrified, despairing...I think X...I feel Y...Why is Z?"...

11. Related to this, was a symbolic action someone taught me early on. I Peter 5:6-7 reads thus:

*"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, **7 casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.**"*

What the teacher had us do was to

- (a) humble ourselves before the Lord in prayer [i.e. try to identify elements of arrogance or inappropriate pride in our attitudes toward God or others--NOT some false dishonesty about who we were!]; and then
- (b) write down all our anxieties (great or small) on a small slip of paper. Then, we would tell the Lord in silent prayer that we are "throwing these burdens onto His back", followed by an act of either burning the paper or ripping it to tiny shreds (symbolically getting them away from us). I still do this a couple of times a year (I did it about two months ago, actually).

12. What resulted from this, over time, was my awareness of the developing 'new me'.
[Paul calls it the "new man" or the "new creation".]

This "me" was focused on serving others, on not being arrogant or angry, on giving until it hurts (without being selfishly co-dependent, though!), on not insisting on its way, on being humble, open, and dependent on God, and on trying to choose His way instead of my way daily. The characteristics of this "me" are described in scripture as forms of Christlikeness (what He is trying to do in us all):

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him (Col 3.8f)

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col 3.12f)

[Indeed, back in college they taught us to give ourselves this test from I Corinthians 13. First, read the passage substituting the word "Jesus" for "love"; then, go back through it a second time, substituting your name for "love" in the passage--and grade yourself on a scale of 1 to 10... Here is the passage:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.]

Now, this 'new me' co-exists with the 'old me' in this body! So, sometimes I am thankful and sometimes "less so" (smile). Sometimes I am compassionate in heart toward others, and sometimes I am cold. Sometimes I am humble, and sometimes I am prideful and/or arrogant. Sometimes I bear with others, and sometimes I feel malice toward others.

But when I first started, all I had was pain and fear and slander and coldness/deadness...now I live most of my conscious life in gentle love for others, kindness, peace, thoughtfulness for others, sharing, and trying to help people...I often feel the anguish of the past, and often still 'go there' in my heart and feelings. Indeed, the slightest little thing (real or imagined) can trigger those feelings of fear and despair and worthlessness--**but I don't stay there very long anymore**, for the other 'me' which is filled with life and resiliency by hanging out with God and His Word, always re-asserts itself! I may be down for a couple of days (especially if there is a physical burn-out component with it), but I will not stay there [cf. Prov 24.16]--I will pour out my heart in the Quiet Times of those mornings, and I will feed the 'new man' and it will grow strong enough to "take the driver's seat" again...

13. As I look back on this from today's vantage point [1999], I am struck by the almost 'mechanical' nature of some of that early practice, but I understand now (as a parent) how "mechanical" it must look to learn how to tie shoes, or button a shirt, or to use a knife and fork, or even the entire process of socialization of the young child...

The process was always undergirded, though, by the sheer joy of my experience of His love, His acceptance, His delight and interest in little me, and the companionship that I felt with Him through those years and decades...

(more to follow, I am sure...it just takes a while to step this far back from your life...)

Love, your friend, me

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***Taken from <https://gmmx.org/ctt/howimadeit.html> at the Christian Thinktank (cttx.org)**