

success *IN* suffering

*SEARCHING FOR SIGNIFICANCE AND
FINDING MEANING IN TIMES OF PAIN*



J O S H W E B B

S U C C E S S
in
S U F F E R I N G

by

J O S H W E B B

T O M Y
F A M I L Y A N D F R I E N D S

I have faced some challenges in my life but none so devastating as the news I had a brain tumor I received in 2021. To my wife, Kristy. I didn't understand what true marriage was all about until I saw you suffer alongside me and take care of me with no thought to yourself. I love you. To my boys, Ethan, Garrett and Emory. You got to witness first-hand what it is like to see your dad at his weakest and watch as God brought him through it. Never forget what God did. To Ryan Williams. You were a close friend before my surgery and became a brother when you came and took care of me in the hospital. To my friends from H.e.R.B. You reached out, and we reminisced about old times when I needed to. God blessed me with you. To the people of my church. You helped me with meals and money throughout my recovery. God provided for us through your love. To my mom and dad and sisters. You gave me hope when I needed someone to talk to. You gave me a steady voice when I needed it most. To the Garretts. You showed me kindness above what I expected. Even before I was trying to be part of the family. You showed me I am. I love you and thank you. To my extended family. I know we got used to not talking as much because of the distance. This experience has brought us closer together and I am grateful for you. God, you have forever changed me through this experience and I now know you to be good, where before I just hoped. I love you and you all.



And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” ‘

Luke 12:16-21

W A K I N G F R O M S U R G E R Y

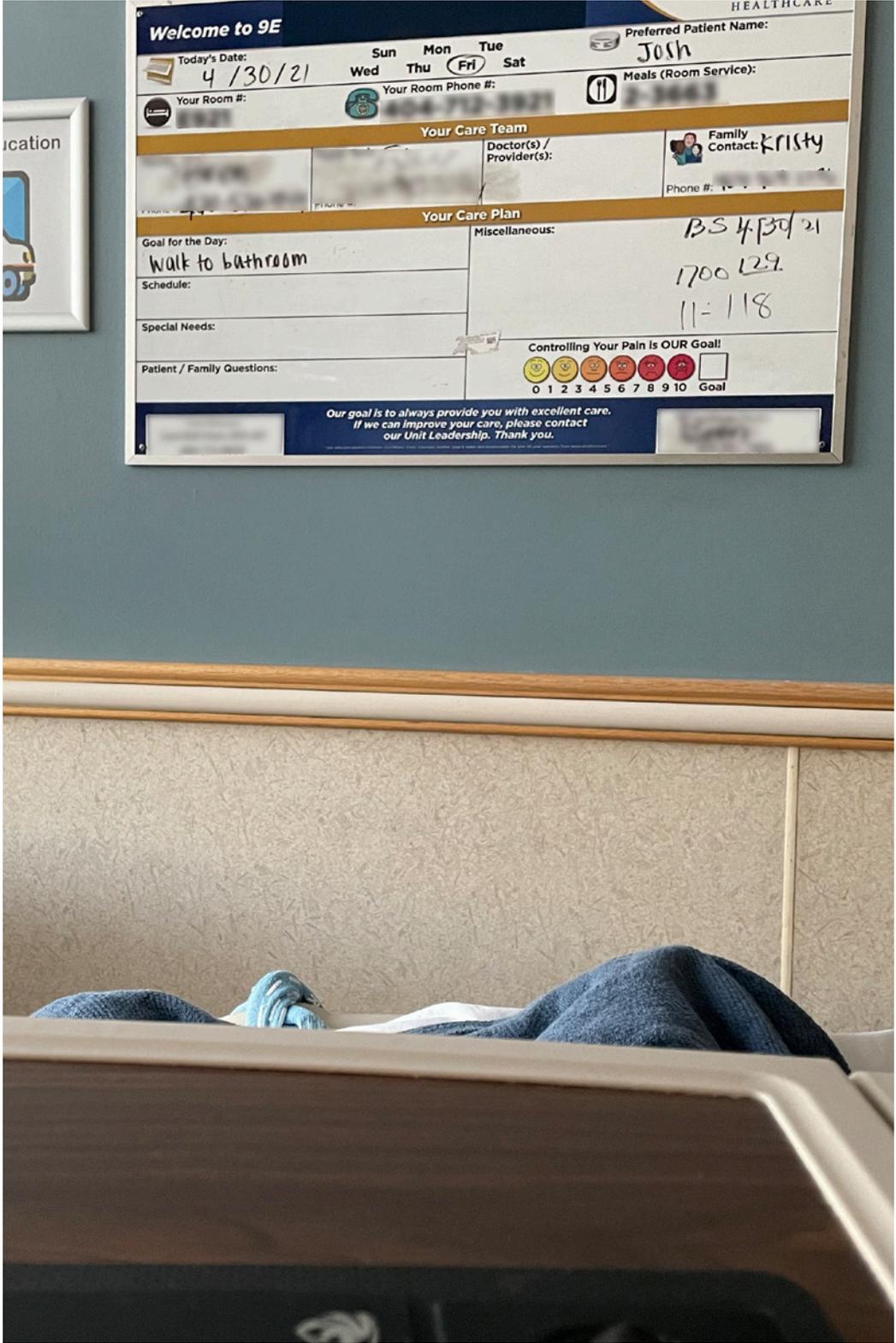
Waking up, I was being rolled into a room. I vaguely heard a nurse say, “that has never happened to me before.” I think I woke up faster than expected. They picked me up off the gurney and onto a bed where the anesthesiologist said, “Mr. Webb! Can you hear me? You are being brought to the ICU recovery room. What is your name?” I had to think for a moment. Yes, I was Josh and I’m in the hospital. As I started speaking, I realized I can’t hear out of my right ear and I can’t feel the right side of my face. I said, “I am Josh Webb.” Only it wasn’t my voice. I heard a mumbled, distorted voice. I realized I was talking funny, and I panicked. How will I make money? I was a marketer. Will I ever lead worship again? I used to sing and lost my hearing. Will my wife still find me attractive when she sees my face? This is not the future I imagined for us.

I do not intend this book to be a story of how one man faced overwhelming odds to overcome them by going to the Olympics. Though those are inspiring. This is not a book about how our failures and disappointments lead to success. Though that is true, it is a book about my experience of suffering, my pur-

suit of significance and what I imagined my life to be versus what God wants it to be. This is a book about empathy and surrender and how it all points to Jesus.

This is when I would think you would close the book. But hear me out. I am not claiming to understand your suffering, and I have never lost a child, fought in a war, starved, divorced, lived outdoors or experienced a crime against myself or someone in my family. I have never experienced those things and I don't want to. Everyone's suffering is uniquely their own. If you or a loved one have experienced suffering, let me say I'm sorry. If you have never been through significant suffering, you will. The question is when. What will you do now and will you be ready for it when it comes?

I once heard Dave Ramsey say on the radio, "Having a testimony is great, getting one is a pain in the butt." When someone experiences major suffering, it sends them away from God or towards Him. This is my experience of how and why my sufferings pushed me towards God and the things that seemed so important were not as important as I thought. 'But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:31-33



Welcome to 9E

HEALTHCARE

Today's Date: **4/30/21**

Sun Mon Tue
Wed Thu **Fri** Sat

Preferred Patient Name: **Josh**

Your Room #: **8887**

Your Room Phone #: **404-712-3927**

Meals (Room Service): **7-3663**

Your Care Team

Doctor(s) / Provider(s):

Family Contact: **Kristy**

Phone #: **404-712-3927**

Your Care Plan

Goal for the Day: **walk to bathroom**

Miscellaneous: **BS 4/30/21
1700 L29
11-118**

Schedule:

Special Needs:

Patient / Family Questions:

Controlling Your Pain is OUR Goal!



Our goal is to always provide you with excellent care. If we can improve your care, please contact our Unit Leadership. Thank you.

Education

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Matthew 6:25-34

T H E P U R S U I T O F S I G N I F I C A N C E

I have always been a significance seeker, and I always felt I was meant to do something important with my life. Lots of people feel this way, I think. That's why they pursue acting, singing, or being the CEO of a company. Maybe they will invent a technology or medicine that changes the world or they will be an author or fly to space. Maybe we will be the MVP of a pro team and be admired all over the world. I don't know why we would want this, but some imagine themselves as the President of the United States. Whatever it is, we have bought a narrative that claims that if we achieve, we will have the life we always dreamed of. The spouse, the 2.5 kids, the houses in a couple states and not have to work real hard. The life that we have been working so hard to achieve will not satisfy us.

I was not good at sports. I knew that because I tried. They usually picked me last or I didn't know what I was doing. One time in seventh grade, I made the middle school basketball team. My guess is they needed more players. I was sitting on the bench, where I normally sat, as my mind wandered about how I would dunk when I had the chance. I was short and couldn't dunk. We

were winning, and it was the fourth quarter. We had like two minutes left and I heard the coach say, “Webb, go on in.” I was surprised and very excited to show the crowd of parents, cheerleaders and the coach what they had been benching. The ball was passed, and I stole it. Yes! Now that I had it, I would dribble down the court and fantastically make that layup. I ran. Noone was even close to me as I was so fast. I laid it up, and it went in. All that practice had paid off. I looked at the crowd, the team, the coach. I had shot it in the wrong goal. The buzzer went off, and I sank as I realized what happened. Everybody was telling me I was going the wrong way, but my focus was on pursuing glory.

‘And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.

' And those servants went out onto the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen." ‘

- Matthew 22:1-14

Everything we need to know is in the Bible. Even as someone who has known Jesus since he was 13, I still ran with the ball to the wrong goal, even though the Bible is screaming at me to go the other way. This life is not about work or even passion. It is about living how Jesus did, completely dependent on God the Father for our every need and being connected to Him enough to make a move when He is saying it.

Am I saying that we should have no ambition? No, I am writing this on a MacBook, on my porch that hard-working people built and living because a brain surgeon went to school and learned a bunch of stuff. What I am saying is that ambition, when not guided by the spirit of God, which takes the Bible, prayer and connection to the Church, will lead to you inevitably serving yourself, which is the wrong goal.

About that same time, I realized I could sing when my friends tried to be “Boyz to Men” on the side of the road one day. Boyz to Men were... nevermind. If you know, then you know. I was actually good. Makes sense. I come from a musical family where both of my parents could sing and my dad could play the guitar. I finally found my thing. I sang in school and learned how to play the guitar. By seventh grade, my friend Jeremy and I won the talent show singing “Teenager in Love” acapella. Small note: I was introduced to the previous year’s winner, Kristy. She would grow up to be my wife. Ok back to it.

That same friend invited me to church that year. I didn’t want to go but went with him once and stayed for the girls. That summer was the first time I heard Jesus was more than just my spiritual friend that keeps my parents from killing me when I did something bad. It went from my brain to my heart that I needed a savior to cover me from the impossible task of trying to be good. He was it. I prayed in my bunk at camp that Jesus would be my savior and committed to following him right there.

I went to high school and took those talents with me. The drama teacher scooped me up, and I was the first freshman to play Elvis in “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.” I found myself with friends that had the same values as me and we started a band. Kristy and I played opposite each other throughout high school. I was Danny, she was Sandy, I was Nathan, she was Miss Adelaide etc in Guys and Dolls.

I always had a girlfriend and realized early that playing the guitar, singing and being the lead in plays would bring the girls. I went from one to the other. They started impressed, but then saw me and were less enchanted. I usually saw the signs and broke up with them and moved on to another. Growing up, I somehow believed that people loved my performance and not the real me. I was only as good as the last thing I did, and it stuck. I used relationships to measure my worth and because I wasn't getting married, I wasn't worth a lot.

I didn't do that well in school. I barely graduated and didn't have a plan for college. I had a knack for websites and honed my skill in interactive design. Which had come into its own the last few years. I became very good at explaining the story of why I didn't go to college. "The industry was changing so much, what could they teach me?" The truth is that I had convinced myself that I was more talented than book smart and so I saw education as something to overcome rather than to use to my advantage.

I got a job at a bus company that bought me every book I could ask for, and I transformed from the music guy to the marketing guy. Still not Josh, but a new talent I could hide behind.

I worked at the bus company for a couple of years and married my last and final girlfriend. Kristy, the only one who didn't care that I could sing because she could, too. She loved me for me and she was a good one I needed to claim before someone else did.

We moved to Atlanta after I was let go from my job because of the effects of 9/11. Felt what it was like to be poor for a little while when I got an interview at an ad agency. The interview went well, and they asked me to do a quick test, which I nailed, and I was in. I got to work for big brands like IBM, National Geographic and Royal Caribbean on cool interactive websites. Got to use my talents, and I got paid fairly for it. I loved it.

I moved up the ladder until I became the Art Director there. The projects got bigger, and the risks had more at stake. I remember we had just launched this project for UPS in partnership with the Martin Agency. It was a huge campaign that involved a Super Bowl commercial. We did the interactive, and I was the Art Director. We threw a big party. The star showed up and the agency president gave me the microphone and said “it’s your show.” I made a couple of jokes, people laughed, and I thanked everyone. I posed for some photos and I felt at that moment like I had made it.

As with most things, there were more projects. We had our first child, Ethan. I got promoted to more difficult clients. I did not become the Creative Director I dreamed of and did not make that campaign that they teach about in Ad schools. I became dissatisfied, more empty than ever, and started looking for something more meaningful. As for that agency? It shut down after twenty years and the owner lives in L.A.

Looking back, I was always longing for significance because I was fearful. I wasn't the kind that says; I matter because I sing, play, shoot or impress. Most of us are, even if we say we don't care. We are created to worship and most of us want it to be ourselves, because if we don't, then who are we? Of course, we don't admit it, but that is what we want to see. We ourselves lifted high with everyone admiring how great, achieving, or even good we are. That is why we pursue idols like careers, money, fame or even relationships in order to fill a hole that is in our heart.

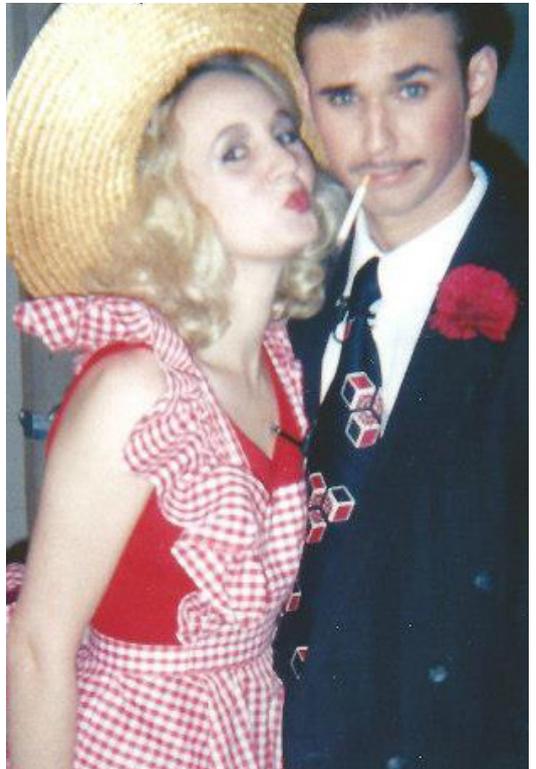
In the Garden of Eden, the snake tells Eve that if she eats from the apple, she will be like God. We still make that same mistake. Trying to achieve our way to the top so we can be like God, but we fall tremendously short and end up just collecting things and telling other people how we did it. We idolize people that seem to have achieved them, not knowing what their lives are like.

When we achieve it, it's amazing for a second and then it leaves us empty and disappointed. The only thing that can fill that void is Jesus Christ Himself. He knows the real you and loves the real you. But that means we have to die to ourselves. Something that is very hard to do, and He knows it.

LESSON LEARNED



When I place my trust in any created thing, I will
come up empty and disappointed



If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

Philippians 3:4-8

E A R N I N G G O D ' S L O V E T H R O U G H G O O D

Once I got the chance to work with the American Cancer Society. It was an exceptional experience, and I loved building something that I perceived as more than a show or a ticket. I wanted to help people. God gave me a vision. Thus started a vision of an agency that would help causes tell their story. I wrote the business plan and was crying when I finished it. I felt God needed to get this done, and He needed me to do it.

My wife heard the vision and asked me to pay off our debt first. So, with great motivation, we did. We paid off \$25,000 in 6 months and then I was off to the races. I started in my basement and built my website. Nonprofits seemed to come out of the woodwork. I felt exhilarated as the checks would come in just in time for the bills. I worked on medical causes, churches, mission organizations and more. It was a long-awaited answer to prayer. I was being given a chance to use my talents to help humanitarian causes for God.

Soon, I had more work than I had time. I hired my first designer, and we moved from the basement to a shabby workspace next to the train. The kind where people asked if we were in the train station when we were on the phone. We fixed it up and

before long, I hired my first actual employee. A smart guy who came in to help with sales and operations.

Everything is exciting when you are building, and it works. You put paint on the walls, buy some new furniture and start practicing the story you will say on your pitches. I included a lot of my former experience because it worked well. I told of the big brands and being called away to help the humans. It was mostly true, except for the part where God called me away. I was miserable and begged God for years to let me “work” for Him. He either gave in or allowed me to see what life was like when I try to earn His love through good. Probably the latter.

Good. That was the thing that God needed me to do. Did people have problems? Yes. Why shouldn't I be the one to help the causes helping the people? This was not bad, except that I thought by helping people, God would love me more. No, I never said that, but I felt it. I was trying to earn God's love because deep down I thought He would see the real me and be unsatisfied with who I was. I was right. It's just that God didn't care about my performance, he cared about my heart. I see now that I did some good, but did it on my own. Another way to perform. We had another boy and life went on.

Fast forward, and we have five employees and a few interns. I did over one hundred strategy sessions and we earned over a

million in revenue. We had hired a talented team and moved into a swanky place in an architect's building. Recognizing the pattern? I remember one of the clients came to visit on a busy day when everyone was there. I remember him saying "Wow! You're growing." and I said "Yeah, you would be too, if you paid for them to be here." I was stressed and as well as my team. We were growing but kept having to find clients to feed the beast we had created. I even made my operations guy a partner, so he wouldn't leave when he was spent. Rookie error.

We were looking for some relief, so what did we do? We started thinking of new ideas. Ideas that would make us feel significant again. We started advising seminars. Like we knew what we were talking about. We started believing our own advice and tried our hand at other entrepreneurial ventures. We hired a president, and we decided that our first business had worked. God had given me something, and I took complete credit for it. I forgot why I originally created it and thought I was a success. Sure, a humble one that never would have said I did it without God, but I thought it. You could see it in how I spent my money and what I didn't give to. That's when it happened.

It would come to be known as our "single point of failure". We had one and only one programmer for websites. And we had six websites we were building. The guy's wife suddenly had gone into very premature birth. He came to us and told us about the

situation. He didn't know what was going to happen and needed the month off. Depending on what happened, he might have to quit. He was scared, rightly so. I wanted to be in the position to help. In fact, I should have been. But I took some poor advice and didn't treat the business the same as I treated our personal finances. It was too simple, they said. We took out a line of credit and it included our personal residence, which my wife didn't realize. He quit and went freelance. We didn't help at all. A point that was one of many business failures. By the way, he is ok and his family seems to be fine. He doesn't say much to me.

It started a domino effect of problems. We had to hire companies to take over the programming work at twice the cost. To cover the cash, we had to find new clients, which were not there. We skipped pay cycles and didn't pay ourselves. My partner and I tried not to take salaries until we were profitable again. Eventually, we were out of money and the other clients we had were finishing up projects. We went from one million in revenue to \$70,000 in debt and \$30,000 in vendor bills.

It crushed me. Sitting at a cafe with the remaining team and dividing the equipment, I was so upset I couldn't even say anything. I listened as the guys decided what to do and left without saying a word. It was a hard time for everyone and an enormous failure in leadership. As I said, I did some splendid work but forgot why I was doing it and who it was for and got distracted.

2nd Samuel, tells the story of David, who was God's chosen king of Israel. He had killed a giant, slew many armies and the Bible Says was a man after God's own heart. In one battle, David stayed back, even though he normally led his troops into battle. He went to his roof and saw a woman bathing on another roof. No, the moral of the story is to not take a bath on your roof. Though you probably shouldn't. David was very attracted to her and had her brought to him. He had sex with her, which I guess he could cause he was the king, and in real soap opera fashion, she became pregnant, When her husband had returned, he told him to lay with his wife as a reward but he wouldn't because his men were at battle. So instead, he sent him back to the battle and told them to put him on the front lines. He died in battle. When it came time to build a great temple for God. God wouldn't let David because of what he did.

Sin can distract even the best of us. We mean to do good and we get distracted by the things on this Earth. One thing I find incredible is that the one of the children of David and Bathsheba was Solomon, considered being the wisest man that ever lived and the builder of the temple. If you follow the line, it was his line that led directly to Jesus. God made essential good out of David's sin. Does God give us great things? Yes. Does He take them away to teach us something important? Yes, I believe so.

I worked off the clients I owed work to and wound the business up, which can be harder than making it. In God's mercy, my church brought me on as Creative Director and another company allowed me to work for them every Friday. I worked for two years to pay off the debt from that business. God allowed me to ask for something and work it off in love. I see Him in every bit of it now. Some said that the business was not a failure. I think the entire business was not, but it's not around anymore. And no matter how I spin it, God used that failure for His glory. So I would look at Him for my significance and the one who gives and takes away.

That church was an amazing place to heal, but even though I had just been through an important trial, I continued to prove my worth to that church team. It was embedded in me that I had to earn my way into God's graces. I had to help everyone I could, be a great man of God and work for Him to be righteous. I didn't understand that no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't meet the requirement He had. God is holy. He doesn't need our success or leadership. He doesn't need us to run a ministry. He is God and He can do anything He wants. Saying He needs anything is just another way to make ourselves seem more important. Like my pastor always says, there is nothing you can do that will make Him love you any more or love you any less.

It had been four years at the church and I had a feeling my time there was up. When I started, the creative team was moving to their next stage of life. The Video Director was becoming the Middle School Pastor, The Project Manager was going home. The Graphic Designer had her third bout with cancer that would claim her life and the Worship Leader, that hired me, was being promoted to the Executive Pastor. I had a lot of work to help rebuild. Eventually, we did and had a great team and I got bored. I can't remember how many times I pulled out my experience, but they never seemed to care. They didn't know the companies or the personalities I worked with and the vocabulary I picked up was like speaking Chinese. I created decks and strategic models that they got bored with. I was searching for significance again, even though I was working at a church. I picked up one very important value. "People Before Projects". I didn't get that before I got there, but having to care for people and having that be such an important part of the culture has stuck with me. To this day, a person with need can always interrupt a project. All the efficiency books might tell you otherwise, but I believe Jesus led this way. I came up with a job I thought would satisfy me. It was a development position at a church where I accomplished the projects I imagined in the community. I think they gave it to me to be nice and because they partly wanted it, even though it wasn't their core mission. We had a strategy retreat that I thought I should lead, and it escalated. In the end, me and the Executive Pastor, who I should mention was a mentor of mine for twenty years

who also married my wife and me, had it out. I left. Sure, there was fault on both sides, but where was the peace? Where was the patience? I left because I was trying to earn success and significance and couldn't find it in business or in ministry. I felt even more like a failure. My friend seemed to have rejected me and I felt lost, hurt and not even sure I believed in God anymore.

I was lost. I didn't know who I was anymore. Was I a singer, a marketer, or was I a minister? I was depressed because I had put my identity in what I could do. In one of his sermons, John Piper, a well-known theologian and seminary teacher said "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.." God wasn't looking for my good or work in the church, He wanted me. He wanted me not because of anything I could do but because He made me and wanted me to simply be in who he is.

My last year at the church, I was the most I had ever weighed and didn't feel good about myself. What was helping rebuild the team turned into getting in the way and I looked elsewhere, where I could feel important. I had a trainer friend that part-timed at the church. One morning, I sent him a text that read "I was ready." I traded him marketing coaching for physical coaching and I started on my workout journey.

He worked out of a gym and I met him there. It was so intimidating. Guys with six-packs were lifting immense weights and throwing them down while women who were almost as big

as the guys were climbing ropes. “They could kill me!” I thought.

I met with my friend and we started slow. That is to say, I moved faster than I ever have for longer than I have ever moved. I did this for months while not eating anything with sugar in it. I was hooked and saw the results. Turns out when you exercise every day and eat less food, you will lose weight. This was great!

The only problem was what I started looking for. I talked about weight loss, what I was eating and exercising all the time. I posted about it on my social media. It was my new identity. Why? Because it made me feel like I was winning. I lost 40 lbs and was in the best shape of my life. I looked at the mirror all the time to make sure I was staying in shape and checked the scale every morning. My wife loved the new me and she did for a while, but it made her feel bad about herself. It had the opposite effect I thought it would have on our marriage.

I can hear it now. So I should choose to be unhealthy. No, I don't believe so, but just like singing, business and tons of other things, we are looking for something that proves we are winning at the game of life. We post pictures on social media of a great vacation, of our workout routine, of our house projects because we want to show people we matter and are doing great. Meanwhile, we are barely keeping it together and if we are, we are building a house of cards that could fall at any minute.

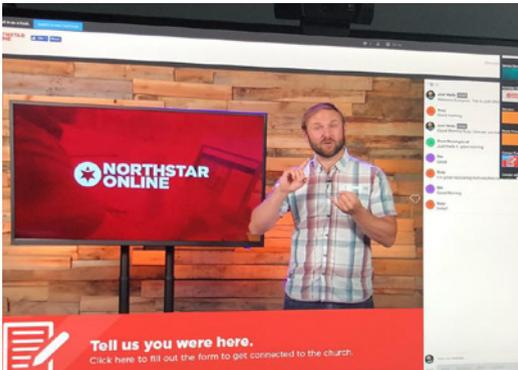
Wanna lose weight? Then you should. Wanna make more money and save for retirement? Then do it. Goals are great, but they can lead you to believe that you did it. You made it happen. When someone is on their deathbed, they don't think about their 401k. They don't think about their stuff. They just think about their life, their family and how God, the universe, etc think about it all.

“Before embarking, Steve Jobs didn't make a keynote about his death. He looked at his sister Patty, then for a long time at his children, then at his life's partner, Laurene, and then over their shoulders past them,” she continued. “Steve's last words were: ‘Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh, wow.’” Maybe he said that about his family and maybe he said that about the experience. He certainly didn't believe in God. I wonder if, after the life of work, he faced moving on and didn't have an iPhone to do it with.

LESSON LEARNED



“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” - John Piper



Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer! O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah, But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

Psalm 4:1-3

REDEEMING THE PORCH

At my house in Northwest Atlanta, we have a nice front porch. It's exactly how you imagine and one of the reasons we bought the house sixteen years ago. I never really went out there. But there was no escaping my growing family of now three boys and a wife that knew I was hurting but didn't know what to do for me. I just sat out there. I sat in the dark and stared off into space. Why did this all happen? I worked for many Christian denominations that seemed to believe different things. Assemblies of God, Southern Baptists, Lutherans. Even worse, I didn't like what I saw when I got to the top of organizations. I had worked for a very healthy church, but I felt let down. I was mad and not even sure I believed what I had since I was thirteen.

Sitting turned to drinking. I sat with a bottle of wine and just tuned out for hours. I did this until I started telling God how mad I was that He was letting this happen. If He was so real, then why did He not seem to bless me. Maybe He was just pretend? I yelled at him and complained for a while because I didn't know what else to do.

One night, my best friend Ryan joined me on the porch. We talked, and I told him I was struggling with faith. I prayed and read the Bible but got nothing from it. He said, “maybe you need to hear sound teaching from people that believe.” Ryan told me to listen to the sermons of a bunch of teachers, and rediscover if I believe. He even showed me a podcast that had atheists’ debate with Christians. I was in. It was better than the sulking I was doing.

I listened to teachers like R. C. Sproul, Matt Chandler, and Tim Keller. I listened to sermons that weren’t telling me about how to live a significant life, but about sin. That since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden that we have had a problem. We wanted to be like God but couldn’t because we were not holy. I heard teachers talk about who God was. A God that loved us and wanted us to follow the law He gave Moses, but we kept breaking it. We were dying under a mountain of unholy debt we could do nothing about, and it was going to crush us. I heard the Gospel again. I heard God sent His Son to be the perfect sacrifice for that debt and paid it with His life. Not only did He die, but He rose to life and defeated death so that I could live free and blameless in front of a holy God.

My prayers went from mad to questioning to praise. God redeemed the porch and my faith. I went from being burned out on the Church to remember why I gave my life to Him in the first

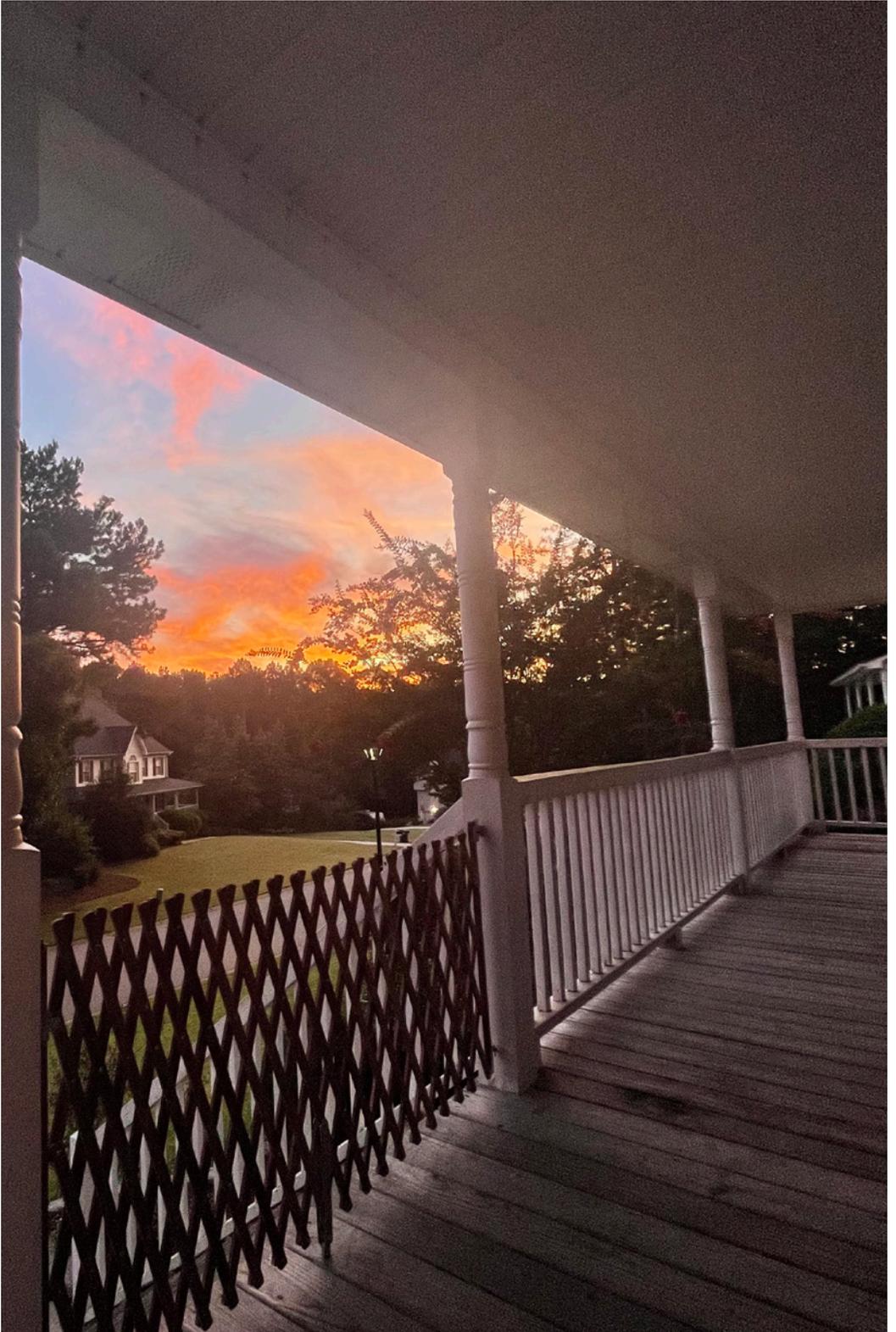
place. In my heart, I knew it was the truth, and I was convinced. I learned Satan was lying to me in the same way he lied to Adam and Eve in the garden. He convinced me that God needed me and that I was more significant than I was. That I was special. I pursued importance and was left disappointed until I was bitter. Satan knew he couldn't defeat Jesus, but he could make Josh feel defeated and maybe even reject the truth.

Since that time, God has taught me so much. I learned how the Old Testament pointed to Jesus and why I needed a savior. I continue to learn. Now I have the truth to stand on and I don't have to be somebody because I died with Jesus Christ and am raised to life in Him.

LESSON LEARNED



Satan uses disappointment as seeds of doubt of His
goodness and even His existence



Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

John 16:32-33

2 0 2 0

After I left, I built a small roster of startups I would be the fractional Chief Marketing Officer. I decided I'm done building something large and trying to be special. I would just work for kind people and enjoy my life. God blessed me financially and for a while, I made more money than I ever have. Then 2020 hit.

My family had just come back from a camping trip and was very sick with the flu the week before. My kids were starting soccer, so I took them to get some pads and soccer balls. When I came back, something felt wrong. I had some pain on my side on the camping trip, but I thought it was the bad mattress. I took a deep breath and it hurt. In fact, I couldn't take a deep breath. I was breathing very fast. I thought, "man this is some bad gas." Seriously, what a man thing to think.

My wife was coming home from work, and I called her. I told her "I am having pain when I breathe." Of course, being the wife, she told me to call an ambulance, which I would not do. I just knew I was going to make a big deal of this and the E.R. doctor would tell me it was gas and to go home.

She got home and my friends came over and took the kids. We live close to a hospital, so she drove me there after I lost the argument of just taking me to urgent care. We got to the emergency room, and they performed some tests as the pain got worse. Finally, they gave me a C.T. scan. The E.R. doc came into the room and said, “Well, It’s a good thing your wife made you come in, you have a Pulmonary Embolism on your left lung. We need to get you admitted right away.”

This was a shock. Up to this point in my 39 years, the worst thing that had happened to me was the flu that I seemed to get every year despite always getting a shot. In fact, I hadn’t been to the doctor in so long that they cancelled that he was my doctor. They wheeled me to a room and put me on blood thinners, which I am still on today.

I almost died that night. For many people, this would be a wake-up call. I was aware of what Jesus did for me and accepted the truth, but was still pursuing the things of this world. Fame, money and now the leisurely life that goes with living the freelance lifestyle. I was reading the Bible but at the same time reading “the 4 hour work week.” That showed how you could create a life that allowed you to travel and have the lifestyle you want while not working like crazy.

I laid in that hospital bed, annoyed, and worked. I didn't learn a thing from that experience. It was just a thing that happened. When I came home from the hospital, I couldn't really do much without getting winded. Which was weird because I was in the best shape of my life.

We started hearing about many people in Europe getting sick, and it may have come from China. We now know this as Coronavirus or COVID. Within weeks, people were not just getting sick but dying from it. It spread from Europe and China to the United States and the World. We were told to stay home. We were shocked again. I remember me and my wife sitting on the couch, and we put on streaming footage from Hawaii. And we just sat there watching it in silence.

We were in a full-blown pandemic. Businesses were shutting down and you couldn't find things like toilet paper. The president was trying to take charge of the situation, but it was something they had never dealt with before, so it was very confusing and divisive. We didn't know what was really happening or who to trust. Our pastor's father-in-law died in the hospital, like thousands of others, with a case of COVID.

Like millions of others, we were forced to teach our young boys how to use video conferencing, which made work almost impossible. All the boys' sports were cancelled. Where other peo-

ple were enjoying slowing down, our entire family was tired of each other and arguing.

As all this was going on, a cop put his knee on a black man's neck and he died, causing a huge riot. It was the first of many riots and looting and divided the country even more than it was. No one could agree on masks, the flag, racism, everything. Not to mention, it was an election year and after an embarrassing debate between the candidates, Biden won and people stormed the capital building. It felt like it was the end of the world. We even bought storm shelter items to be ready if it went down. A little embarrassing, but we wanted to be ready.

We ended the year on Christmas Eve. We loaded up the cars and tried to head down to our parents. I got sick and went to the med stop. An overworked doctor said, "Well, you have it. Go home and try to get over it." Do you feel the exhaustion through the pages? We packed up all the Christmas gifts and drove the three hours home and stayed there, sick, until after New Year. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

I remember my grandmother saying that they thought world war II was the end of the world and that Hitler was the anti-christ. I can understand why she would think that. They had all the right ingredients. Someone evil, people that were fighting and suffering. So where was God when this all happened? I am

not sure why God allows what he allows. He is God and I am not. My perspective is so small. It's like when I used to bathe my children and they felt like they were being drowned. They cried and slapped, but I knew they needed to be cleansed. They just didn't understand. I don't want to underplay the horror that was 2020 or what we go through in suffering. It was extremely hard and the after-effects felt now as we heal, but when a bad thing happens, we can look at God and walk away or we can look at God and cry, allowing Him to carry our burdens for us.

The biggest illusion that was shattered for me in 2020 was the illusion that I had any kind of control. There is a Batman movie that was made by Christopher Nolan, where a crooked businessman is trying to control a situation that is not going according to plan. He says "Stay here, I'm in charge." Bane puts his large hand on his shoulder and says in a menacing voice, "Do you feel in charge?" We are in control of very little and for the first time in a long time, we were feeling it.

L E S S O N L E A R N E D



I am not in control and God always has been



And Peter answered him, “Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Matthew 14:28-32

I T S N O T A T U M O R !

I had just bought a car. That is how you know something bad is about to happen. I was coming back from the dealership when I got the call. Well, let me rewind a bit. Two months before, I was at Home Depot getting some paint. Suddenly, I started seeing honeycomb and I couldn't make out anything. It lasted about ten seconds and it freaked me out. An intense migraine followed it. I have only had one migraine in my entire life. So this was unusual. I drove home (though I probably shouldn't have) and it began. What caused the migraine? I continued to have them off and on and a new symptom started showing up. I was getting double vision randomly, and it was blinding. My doctor was concerned that I was just getting migraines at 39. He prescribed an MRI and I left the office.

I went along with my normal life, but the pain was getting worse. I had to wear an ice cap, and I was taking Tylenol every hour. This didn't feel like COVID headaches or a sinus headache. It was the worst pain I'd ever felt.

The day of the MRI came, and I decided it might be my eyes. Maybe I just needed glasses. So I got my eyes checked, and they did a nifty retinal scan. When they tested my sight, it was 20/20. Nothing was wrong, but there was something that concerned the eye doctor. He said that the nerves in my right eye were very swollen as if something was pushing on them. He was very concerned and said, “I’m no neurologist but I think you need an MRI today.” I told him I was getting one later that day and I left very concerned.

Later that day, I got my MRI. The technicians were very nice and got me ready. I laid there in that cage and experienced the MRI noises that are as bad as people say. Looking back on it, they weren’t allowed to say anything and there was no missing it. It was right there. That must have been really hard. I can even hear the conversation they must have had that night. “I scanned a patient that had something huge. He has a journey ahead of him” Fast forward back to my doctor, calling me. He said, “I’m afraid you have an Acoustic Neuroma. It’s a non-cancerous tumor that forms from your ear canal and grows slowly against your brain. It was 3.4 cm and was pressing against my brain stem dramatically. That’s where the vision problems were coming from. I would need an operation to remove it.

I couldn’t speak. I got it together and said, “Do you mean brain surgery?” He said, “Well, more like adjacent brain surgery,

but yes. I have a consultation with a neurosurgeon at Emory,” I said “ok,” and he let me go.

In shock, I called my wife and told her the news, like I was telling her we needed milk. I later found out after she hung up, she broke down crying and her friends had to bring her to her feet. I made my next call. My best friend Ryan, who had just recovered from cancer the year before and been through bouts of radiation. He lived down the road and said he would be right over. He was there before my wife was and we hugged and I finally cried. My wife arrived, and we all cried together. I couldn't believe it. A brain tumor.

I looked it up online and it was fairly serious. Turns out they just happen and grow slowly. In fact, it had probably been growing for 10 years. To think that it was growing through the time at my agency, through the business closing, through the church and just now was producing symptoms.

I found out that people that discover tumors under 2 cm use radiation to get rid of them or just monitor them. Mine, however, was just too big for that. We had to get it out. An ENT and neurologist would have to do a six-hour surgery where they drilled open my skull and ear canal. This would make me permanently deaf in the right ear. Then they would hollow out the tumor and begin the hard work of cutting from my connecting

facial nerves. This means I would most likely have facial paralysis. Will my wife still kiss me? My days of singing are over. Wow. I told my parents and family. They just listened. My dad had just had a brain problem that affected his balance and talking the years before, so I can't imagine what he thought.

I talked to a neurosurgeon, and it was serious, but not an emergency. It had been growing for years. So they scheduled the surgery for the end of the next month and I had to wait. Looking back, I think God gave me that month to not try to settle it myself but to wait on Him and figure out his character before going under the knife.

My wife and I became like teenagers again. I must have held her hand, and she kissed me more than we ever have. I hugged my boys and realized that I hadn't taught them all I have learned. It scared me. I used to have this list of things I wanted to accomplish before I was 40 and all I wanted to do now was hug and kiss my family.

I started digging in and praying why God would do this. What did I do to deserve this? Why would he allow this? Did he know? Did he cause it? I had a lot of well-meaning friends that said God would never do this. He is going to heal me. In fact, it can't be God because He is good, and that was not a good thing. This was a complicated belief. I read Job. In the Bible, he was

a man that loved God so much that Satan challenged God to make him turn through suffering. God allowed it (which says something right there) and Satan took everything from him. His wealth, his family, and his health. His friends said that he did something. When he came to God and yelled why he had done that, God did not respond the way you would think. He responded by telling Job that He was God and where was Job when He created everything? He responded with authority.

Before you think it is not fair for God to be like that. Think of what we deserve. I heard Tim Keller describe sin once as a person who gets married and cheats on his wife. If we love that person, we try not to do those things against them. God is like the husband that knows you cheated and loves you enough to forgive you, anyway. What's crazy is that we treat God like dirt and get upset when anything doesn't turn out like we think it should. We deserve the weight of our sin to destroy us, but Jesus took that justice for us because we could do nothing about it. That's fantastic news and shows that no matter what happens on Earth. It's nothing compared to how bad our sin is and the length Christ went to make it right. I often wonder why God gives us gifts at all because we end up living life as if we had anything to do with it and don't depend on him. Considering this, I concluded that God's character is good and even if something terrible happens, it's nothing compared to the good He has done for us on the cross and the good in store for us when the story is complete.

Why does God allow suffering? Why did Joseph's brothers send him into slavery and why did Paul get in not one but 3 shipwrecks and imprisoned? People lose children and live in pain. Why? Well, is it that God doesn't exist, which I think deep down we suspect isn't true, or do we question His character. We think God doesn't care. I think it is because "God is working all things for our good for those who love him." Not to provide us with a big house and nice car, but so that we can be Holy and that is something that took His own suffering to accomplish. There are things you learn in suffering that you just can't learn when things are great.

If you are going through a divorce, you've lost all your money, you are facing the death of a loved one, or facing death yourself. Jesus wants to use this to point to Himself. Not religiously, but because He is the only thing that can really satisfy. He is the thing you have been missing, and He wants you just desperate enough to reach out to Him.

Joseph, after experiencing tremendous suffering and being placed as Governor of Egypt, said to his family. "What you intended for evil, God intended for good." Not just in your life, but good in His kingdom. Don't pursue relationships, or money, or other things. These are all good earthly things, but they don't go with you to the end, where death lies. Instead, seek Jesus and you will find even suffering strengthens you. I say this knowing there

are some days you just cry. But God is there, ready to dry your eyes.

Horatio G. Spafford was a successful lawyer and businessman in Chicago with a lovely family - a wife, Anna, and five children. However, they were not strangers to tears and tragedy. Their young son died with pneumonia in 1871, and in that same year, they lost much of their business in the great Chicago fire. Yet, God, in His mercy and kindness, allowed the business to flourish once more.

On Nov. 21, 1873, the French ocean liner, Ville Du Havre, was crossing the Atlantic from the U.S. to Europe with 313 passengers on board. Among the passengers were Mrs Spafford and their four daughters. Although Mr Spafford had planned to go with his family, he found it necessary to stay in Chicago to help solve an unexpected business problem. He told his wife he would join her and their children in Europe a few days later. He planned to take another ship.

About four days into the crossing of the Atlantic, the Ville Du Harve collided with a powerful, iron-hulled Scottish ship, the Loch Earn. Suddenly, all of those on board were in grave danger. Anna hurriedly brought her four children to the deck. She knelt there with Annie, Margaret Lee, Bessie and Tanetta and prayed that God would spare them if that could be His will, or to make

them willing to endure whatever awaited them. Within approximately 12 minutes, the Ville Du Harve slipped beneath the dark waters of the Atlantic, carrying with it 226 of the passengers, including the four Spafford children.

A sailor, rowing a small boat over the spot where the ship went down, spotted a woman floating on a piece of the wreckage. It was Anna, still alive. He pulled her into the boat and another large vessel picked them up, which, nine days later, landed them in Cardiff, Wales. From there she wired her husband a message which began, "Saved alone, what shall I do?" Mr Spafford later framed the telegram and placed it in his office.

Another of the ship's survivors, Pastor Weiss, later recalled Anna saying, "God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. Someday I will understand why." Mr Spafford booked passage on the next available ship and left to join his grieving wife. With the ship about four days out, the captain called Spafford to his cabin and told him they were over the place where his children went down. According to Bertha Spafford Vester, a daughter born after the tragedy, Spafford wrote: "It Is Well With My Soul" while on this journey.

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Chorus:

It is well with my soul,

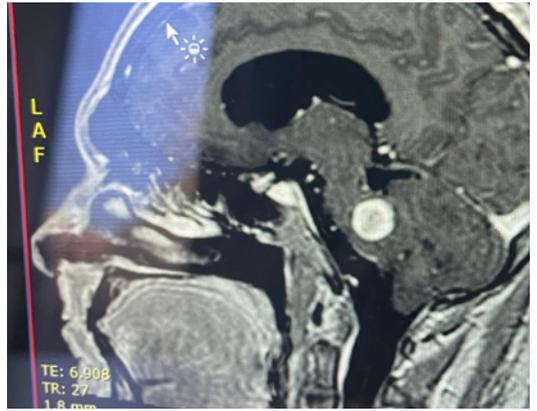
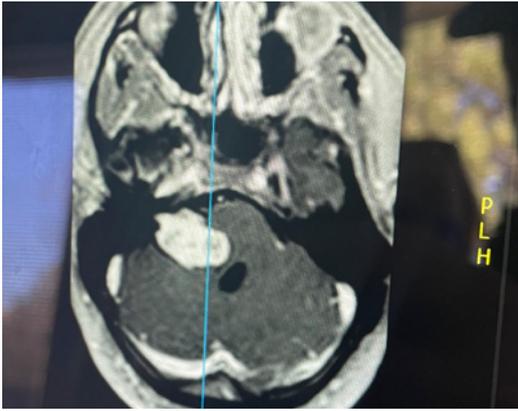
It is well, it is well with my soul

As I said, I played the guitar for years and was a worship leader. I told everyone on Facebook and recorded me singing the hymn “It is well with my soul.” I wanted them to know that God is good, even and especially in the bad times.

LESSON LEARNED



Sometimes God allows suffering to
point back to himself



But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 ESV

V U L N E R A B I L I T Y

I was ready for the surgery. I had visions of one day giving my wife a nice ring to replace the one I bought at 22. A bachelorette trip, where we got off of a seaplane off the coast of the Florida Keys was dashed, so I bought a new ring and re-proposed at a winery with all our friends. She said “yes.”

For my boys, I wrote them all the letters that contained lessons I meant to tell them over the years. I recorded them because some of them couldn't read yet. Their Nana got the privilege of letting them read it while I was in surgery. I was ready to have that surgery, even if it killed me.

The day of the surgery had come. I hadn't been driving all month and felt like a 12-year-old all over again. On top of that, I had been in my bed crying because the headaches hurt so badly. All my wife could do was hold me and tell me it was going to be alright.

We had been praying for two things. One, that God would loosen the tumor from my face. I was scared Kristy wouldn't find me attractive anymore and my career as a part-time teen model

would be over. Two, that Emory would allow visitors in to see their spouses. Something they had not allowed since COVID. We found out the day before that the rule had been lifted. Praise God! The night before, we had gotten a hotel next to the hospital and just spent the night holding each other and repeating “God was good” until we fell asleep. On the day of surgery, I was stoic, to say the least. I was ready to get it done. A nurse came and got me and I left my wife.

All prepped when I saw someone I had known before. Daniel, the Executive Pastor I had out with. He convinced the Emory staff he was a pastor, and they needed to let him in. He prayed for me and I went on to surgery. Needless to say that how we treated each other on that day was in the past.

They rolled me into a big operating room with what felt like twenty or so people. The neurosurgeon was one of them. He said, “Welcome to the Show. You’re the Star. Though I’m sure you don’t want to be.” They told me to count down from 20 and I was out.

I came to what felt like 6 minutes, but in reality, it had been 6 hours. They kept my wife updated and told her that the surgeon had access to the tumor, but it was very attached. He had a lot of work to do. Prayer number one was answered with a “No”.

I couldn't talk, hear on my right side, and the right side of my face was numb. On top of all that, I was very thirsty and my brain wouldn't tell my throat how to swallow yet. So I couldn't drink. That lasted the rest of the day until the next. I finally got something down, though it had to be very slick.

Kristy, my wife, could visit because they removed the rule of no visitors the day before my surgery. We had heard the horror stories of people going through trauma in the hospital with no loved ones. Prayer number two was answered. When my wife finally got there, I lost it. She was not supposed to spend the rest of her life taking care of me. I had to take care of her. I think when I sang that song I meant it, but I was ready to die. I was looking forward to seeing Christ at last. What I was not prepared for was the recovery and the weakness that I would come along with it. Kristy had to leave every day because of the new rules and I felt very alone. I was wondering if I could still work or if God was done with me? Kristy said every time she came back that "God's not done with me otherwise He would have taken me."

The Physical Training people came after a couple of days and it was the first time I had been out of bed. I was walking like a toddler. My balance was way off and I needed a walker. They put a belt around me as I went into the hallway and I saw a sign that said "Fall Risk."

Everything was hard now. Eating was really hard, and I needed to be shown how. I could finally walk to the bathroom with help. You don't know love or humility until your wife has to bathe you. Brushing my teeth and putting on clothes were all hard, and I needed help. Kristy and Ryan split the work of helping me in the hospital. I tell Ryan's wife, "If you are ever mad at Ryan, just picture him cutting my spaghetti and whatever you are mad about should go away.."

I thought I was only prideful with business. No, it was wrapped in everything. I spent my whole life learning simple skills like walking and now I was relearning them again. I felt the old me creep in. I will never be like I was. A marketing leader, an admired singer. All things that were exaggerated in my head. I heard God say "Good."

By the end of the week, I had improved a lot. I could go to the bathroom by myself, feed myself and get dressed. Even though it was hard, I could do it by myself. This kept me out of a rehab facility and I got to go home after a week.

This was a whole new set of problems. Our house has a lot of stairs and I was not great at them. In fact, it terrified me. My wife had all the same problems, but it was all on her now. That's not fair. She wasn't a nurse. Her attitude changed quickly, and she became a task master. Her mom came to help. I don't

know where I got it from, but I wanted to show that I was strong enough to take care of their daughter. I felt ashamed. Here I could barely take care of myself. To say it was humbling would be an understatement. Accepting real help from anyone can be, but if you don't, you will fall.

I was a guitar player and had been playing since I was 13. Something had me pick up my guitar and try, and I couldn't strum, I couldn't pick, and I sounded like a beginner. God had taken what made me me. I was a singer, guitar player, smart businessman and marketer. Now I was the guy who had the brain tumor.

One of the toughest things about having a paralyzed right face is eating. I can't feel it when I have pudding, rice, chicken etc on my face. And I mean in a big way. Everyone can see it but me. That's how Jesus is with sin. It's just sitting there. Sin is not just a list of rules, though there are tons. It means missing the mark of holiness and I miss the mark all the time. Another thing is saying exactly what I am thinking. You think I was bad before. I had a filter before, though a small one. Now I say what is in my heart and it's not always good. Sin can hide in your heart and only God's Holy Spirit can show it to you. The entire Old Testament shows us we can't live up to the Ten Commandments. If we do so, we do so in pride. That's why we needed Jesus so badly. He not only could see the sin but took the punishment for

it on the cross and still rose again to defeat it. He deserves to be worshipped because He is Holy and I'm not, but still He loves me and will wipe away my stuff. I don't like when I have food on my face and someone wipes it away. That is because it is embarrassing. It is always done in love and it is public, but even though I don't like it. I always end up clean. That is what Jesus does. He cleanses you. Sometimes it hurts, sometimes it is embarrassing, sometimes we can course-correct before people notice, other times we have to have others tell us before we see it.

A month had passed, and I had gotten much better. I was walking on my own and working with what clients stayed with me. We needed a weekend away. Kristy and I went to Helen, a little cheesy German town in the North Georgia mountains. We got a nice hotel, and I tried to vacation with my new disabilities. One day, Kristy had booked a massage. I explained to the masseuse that I had surgery and not to worry about hurting me. I laid down, and she started. It felt great. I was so tense, and she worked out everything in my back and neck. That is until she got to my scar. The surgery had left a huge scar from the right side of my neck and around my ear. I was self-conscious about anyone touching it and didn't even touch it much myself. I winced when she got to it and thought she would too, but she didn't. She rubbed that scar with the only thing I can call service. What I was ashamed and hurt by, she wasn't at all.

Sometimes when I enter a room, everyone stares for a second. Not to be mean, but to register what happened. Vulnerability is hard. Everyone is trying to make themselves look great and if there is a moment they can't cover their mistake or imperfection, they cover it with laughs or something that will make us look better. This past week I went to church and a volunteer event. I felt so exposed. Like I was laid bare. Sure, it was nothing like when I couldn't shower and Kristy had to wash for me or when I have food all over my face and someone has to tell me about it. But I was laid bare. Here I am, my identity held together by my talents now left with what felt like nothing. It took vulnerability to let these wonderful people love me.

I used to love swimming in big waves. We take for granted our ability to stand in things like waves or to swim over them. They kept knocking me over when I was in the ocean. I was getting frustrated and felt like everyone was looking at the guy who couldn't stand in the ocean (probably just me). My 13-year-old was jumping and swimming with them easily. I wanted to swim with the waves, so I asked my son if he would hold his father's hand as a big wave came. The wave came, and we swam, holding hands as we rode the wave that I couldn't by myself. Sometimes we just can't do stuff by ourselves. Sometimes we need to ask or accept the help of the community.

Be vulnerable. Be so vulnerable that you see yourself the way God does. A wretch that deserves death, but got pure love that sees us for who we are, and if we let Him, turns us into beautiful sons and daughters of the King.

LESSON LEARNED



God is strongest in our weakness
because we have to cling to Him



What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:18-21

**T H E R E I S A L W A Y S
S O M E T H I N G W O R S E**

When I first started my agency, I had time to travel with one of my clients as we got life-saving meals from Lubbock, Texas, to Lodwar, Kenya. I went to Texas to shoot the meals being made, then came the trip to Kenya. It was heartbreaking. These people had nothing and didn't know what they didn't have.

So that you understand their condition, I'll tell a quick story. When we had finished feeding a village all day, the elder was so thankful that he told us he was going to cook their only goat in honor of us, they asked my friend if he wanted to slaughter it, He for some reason said yes. He later told me that blood got all over his shoe and it was a horrible experience. Later, when the goat was cooked (no pun intended), some of the people came out with the goat cooked on a makeshift tray. They asked if I would have some. I didn't want to be rude. So I went in for a piece. I see in the background, the guys who go there all the time mouthing "No!". I grabbed one small piece and said "Its very good." They went every two months and never ate the food. Needless to say, my stomach was upset and I spent some time in a hut.

Another time I was in Haiti. We were in an orphanage where the only food these children had was in that school. They could be kidnapped and used for trafficking at any moment. That is their reality, and it is horrible. We went to the market just to show the conditions. Flies were everywhere and so was trash. They had no where to put the trash as noone would pick it up so it just stayed there. One day after I was back home, my wife was talking with me and said, you have spots all over your face. I was all orange and covered in spots. I went straight to my doctor, who had done alot of work in Haiti. He knew exactly what it was. It was called “Chikungunya” and was probably picked up in the market. You don’t get that in Wal-Mart.

50 first dates. It’s always been one of Kristy and I’s favorite comedies. Every time we watch it, we laugh a lot. You know that stupid Adam Sandler voice makes you laugh. It is a movie about a person who has a brain injury and can’t remember past a day. I know, I probably should watch that. There is a scene where they said it could be worse. Meet 10 second Tom. He only remembers 10 seconds when he forgets everything. I think it was supposed to make her feel thankful for the day she has. But who does Tom go to? Guess it doesn’t matter? Is there always someone who has it worse to look at?

There are lots of bad things that happen in the world. It doesn’t help you to know there are worse things. You may even

feel guilty about it. Don't. Your pain is your pain. Jesus already sees it. He can turn you into something better and more holy using what seemed like a bad thing. There are worse things. Things that break His heart. Help with those things, but know your pain has worth.

Paul said, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28 ESV

It doesn't mean that God is working towards things that feel good or that it means that you will even understand the suffering. But in the end, God is working for the good of His glory. You are a person who has broken God's law because you are not holy. Jesus died on the cross to take that punishment for you. Do you get that? That is what those according to my purpose mean. That is the Gospel. You deserve death and get life.

Happiness and Joy are not the same things. Happiness is that feeling you get when there is something pleasurable. Like when my kid laughs, or a pleasant breeze passes or I find out I don't owe as much taxes as I thought. Joy is something different, though. It is a hope that is present during the worst of times. We can cry and be joyful at the same time. Hope in Christ gives us this joy that is beyond understanding when things fall apart.

When Jesus went to Lazarus, he took his time. Lazarus's family was very sad and confused by his actions. Contrary to most of the movies, the scripture says that Jesus stoically looked at the tomb in which they had buried Lazarus. He wept tears of someone whose friend had died. He did this and then told, "Lazarus to come forth." Jesus is more interested in what happens after this life but has felt the same emotions that we do. He experienced pain and sadness and dealt with it in a holy way. There is always something worse, but that doesn't take away the grief that you may have and Christ can be there with you through it and can still give you life.

L E S S O N L E A R N E D



Happiness and joy are not the same things



Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ‘

Philippians 2:4-8

THE MAN WHO CAME TO MY HOUSE

The other day I was sitting on my back porch when a post came up as I was looking at my phone. We pick up junk. I had some junk and I don't know why I did, but I reached out to the guy and called him over. He lived in Powder Springs, which was about 30 minutes away.

When he came over, I told him where everything was and waited for him to get it. As he was getting out, I noticed he was having trouble carrying things that he shouldn't. He was walking funny, and I immediately knew that he had a serious injury. What I think was the Holy Spirit said, "Ask him what his injury is and pray for him." I thought "I will look stupid" and He answered, "How much stupider can you look?" Touché.

I let them finish and went up to the man. I said, "Were you born like this or did something happen?" He spoke, though it was hard to understand. "I was in a car accident in 2015. It damaged my spine, affecting my walking and speech. I told him it's really weird when your brain tells your body to do something and it won't do it. He slapped his leg and said, "Thank you, I have been

trying to explain that to my friends.” I asked if I could touch and pray for his spine and his friend watched suspiciously. I prayed God would take the pain away and he would bless Terrell. He said “Thank you” and they drove away. I may never see that man again and I don’t know what God did in his life, but I know he was sent to my house.

I was afraid that God was done with me. I was afraid of never being used by Him again. At that moment, I felt so empty that I could hear Him nudge me in a direction that helped others. Something my pastor says a lot is that God never wastes a story. You don’t understand how what you are going through could help someone else. How their prayers may be answered by the pain that you are going through now. It doesn’t mean it doesn’t hurt. It is because they know you have experienced great pain that helps them hear you. I’m afraid that if I hadn’t been through this, had a paralyzed face and knew what it was like to struggle to walk and picking things up, I might have just let that man pick up my junk. Unfortunately, we don’t know exactly what that person is going through. That’s why saying things like “I know what you are going through” can make someone angry or dismiss what you are saying. Usually, you can just love, serve them or simply cry with them.

Sometimes God uses suffering to empty us of ourselves and actually allows us to be used. I have very little pride now.

Not because I am so great, but because I feel as though I have nothing to be prideful about. When my wife says something I don't like, I remember when she showered me because I couldn't do it myself. When I think about the future, I don't assume I will be here. I may not and it doesn't scare me. I have been low enough and shown kindness in which I could do nothing in return. I understand just a little of what Paul meant when he wrote "To Live is Christ and To Die is Gain." as if he lived. He got to keep on preaching the Gospel and if he died, he got to see Christ in heaven. The world can't really hurt me because the worst thing that happens is I die and go be with my savior. Will I get scared sometimes, sure, but mostly I fear forgetting what God taught me in the suffering.

When Moses led the Jewish people out from Egypt, they saw God deliver them by opening the Red Sea and letting them walk through. When they were okay again, they worshipped a Golden Calf. They forgot. God gave them manna from above to feed them. They complained and forgot. They even forgot when down the road the one that was promised was there in their midst. I pray that I never forget in the good times what I learned in the bad.

L E S S O N L E A R N E D



God will use me despite my past to accomplish His
work and glorify Himself



Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die — but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ‘

Romans 5:1-8

I T ' S N O T
A L L B A D N E W S

So why do we pursue riches and happiness? Because it feels good for a while in a world that is full of suffering. People have always sought the money. Why do you think Jesus said, “It is easier for a man to fit through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get to heaven.” It is because money easily deceives. We don’t need God when we have riches and success and we usually choose it. We do that because deep down we want to be god and we want to be hoisted up and applauded for conquering the game of this world. We always have since the garden.

We have a disease inside us called sin, and it killed us long ago. Paul said in Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Sinners are dead and we don’t realise it. God knew this and spent the whole Old Testament showing how we couldn’t measure up to the holiness he was asking for. 16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. He died for us to pay the debt of our sin that we so desperately cling to.

He made us free to live in Him and not to fear. In this life, we will have trouble, pain, and strife. The difference is when you have Him to cling to and not your job, spouse, checking account or yes, even your health, you live free in Him. You are free to help others, tell them about the love you have discovered, and simply enjoy the life He gave you. Is it as simple as all that? No, our sin gets in the way and we yell, get offended, say something we shouldn't say or even worse. Jesus knows, and He died for it. Not so we could have a better car (Which I buy cars) or nicer house (Which I improve). He didn't die so you could impress your friends on Instagram (Which I post on) He died to cover your sin to a holy God.

Your suffering means something when it hurts. You shouldn't let it slide off your back or pretend it didn't happen. You can cry and shout and if you let Him, Jesus will take you in His arms and strengthen you. The kind of person He wants in His kingdom. A broken person who loves Him, and He died for.

Though I have spent many night crying, I'm really very thankful. I am extremely blessed. I saw someone with three missing limbs that was defending our country. I live in America, indoors. I don't starve. I had a brain tumor but it was treated where many can't be. My health insurance paid for most of it where it would break someone without it. I'm deaf in my right ear but many are completely deaf and struggle to communicate where

I am getting a hearing aid that was paid for by the community. I can't see very well out of my right eye where many are blind and unable to see the sunrise I saw this morning. The right side of my face is paralyzed but there are people who's whole body are and cannot care for themselves. My wife, kids, family and friends love me. Where many are surrounded by hate. Though we groan to live in a place without suffering, I recognize why. Hurt people hurt people and we don't quite get it when there is no one to blame. I am thankful that God doesn't give life based on what I did, cause I have participated in this world being the way it is and it is only God in me that does the good I allow Him. While we are here, help who you can and seek first the hope of heaven. Man, praise God even in the storm cause He is good even when it doesn't seem that way.

I have desperately wanted two opposing things. To be used by God, and to have everything the world provides. It wasn't til I lost much of it, that I got a glimpse of what scripture meant and was empty enough to hear when God talks to me. He says things in a whispering voice like "I love you". "I know you can't help it... I paid for it. "I know you are suffering, It will all be better one day.

The truth is hard to hear when it is drowned out by the distractions of this Earth. Sometimes, we go through something that makes us stop striving just enough to let it go to our heart.

L E S S O N L E A R N E D



When you see sin for what it is,
you live in gratefulness.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20 ESV



