

ON THE ROAD WITH PASTOR RICK...

This past month, this year for that matter, has been some ride. It's been busy, even hectic, that's nothing new. Add to hectic the heartache of losing your spiritual father (David Wilkerson) and the stress of losing our director at His Place, to a perfectly reasonable situation, but a loss nonetheless. Glen had to leave to take care of pressing financial needs in his family. Glen Ward was with us 7 years as our director and my friend. I miss him. Other changes loom on our ministry horizon, again, all good, but nonetheless stressful, unnerving, a pain in the...heart. In 30 years of ministry I've never been through a season like this. It's been difficult, at times distressing, but through it all my Lord has been faithful. In fact, in the midst of everything, I've never felt such a calm peace. Over and over the Lord has reminded me that He's in control, even when things seem out of control. I recently told a friend who asked how I was doing that I was, "Pleasantly confused." I can't figure out exactly what God is up to, but I know He's the one who's up.

It's easy to say you trust in God when you seem to hold all the Aces, but what about when life deals you a crummy hand? I can tell you for sure, from experience, you can still trust Him, even when you're dealt a handful of deuces. In fact, that's when you should trust Him all the more. When you've got all the Aces or when everything is seemingly under control is when things are about to get out of hand. You can't control your life, much less the lives of those around you. Those things are best left in His hands, nail scarred hands. Hands that have held the universe together can handle the chaos of our lives.

I speak from experience. Like I said in the beginning of this message, I've had a tough year. Just when it seemed like it couldn't get any worse, the bottom fell out. Last week, on Friday, June 3, I received a call from His Place. Mr. John Jenkins informed me a young man in our program had just been found unconscious in the bathroom with a needle in his arm. I knew the boy. I know his family. They are my friends, close friends. I began to pray, frantically. I had a high school group of kids with me at the time. The boy in our bathroom was only a few years older than the students standing with me. He could've easily passed as a peer. All I could do was pray.

This time my prayers were not enough. Mr. John called me back within minutes. The paramedics were there...the young man didn't make it. He was just 23 years old. I have sons his age. I had just talked with him the day before. He seemed to have turned a tough corner. He seemed so much better than when he'd first come into His Place seven weeks earlier. He seemed to be coming alive. And now he was dead.

I am not sure I can explain to you what I felt as I drove back to His Place. I can't explain because I don't entirely remember. I guess I was in shock. I've been involved in recovery/rehabilitation ministry for over 30 years. We've had a live-in home for over 25 years that has ministered to hundreds upon hundreds of men, maybe more. This was the first man ever to die on-site, within 15-20 steps of the chapel. And he was just a kid. How could a boy, the same age as my own sons hurt so bad, be wounded so deep as to stick a needle in his arm while other men were in prayer only steps away? How? Why? I can't answer those questions and God wouldn't.

While driving to His Place that morning all I could think was, "Lord, is it worth it?" Some pains hurt deep.

When I got to His Place my men and staff were waiting in our little sitting area, just outside the bathroom where only an hour earlier a man died. Seeing those men, looking at the door that hid death's dark shadow undid me. For a time all I could do was weep. My tears only became sobs. When I finally could speak, all I could ask was the question undoing my heart.

I looked at each of my men in the eye and pleaded, "Somebody here better tell me it's worth it, worth this hurt and grief, worth these tears...somebody better tell me because I'm broken and I don't know how to put the pieces back together again. I don't know if I even want to..."

The time passed with more tears. Not a man in that room had dry eyes. Then Greg Boyd, the manager of our thrift store and a graduate of His Place, looked at me and sobbed a different type of cry. With the most honest, pained expression he said, "Was it worth it for me?" Greg had come to the very room we now sat in 6 years ago as a meth addict. He was lost, confused, angry and addicted. He was fresh out of jail and headed to hell. Six years later he has a job. He sings in our church's praise band. More important than any of that, Greg's relationship with his father and The Father has been restored. Greg Boyd is a saved man. When he looked at me and spoke those words something happened in my heart, deep, deep, DEEP in my heart. Looking at Greg, and all those men I knew that despite my pain, despite any and all pain, it was worth it. Even as Greg's words hung in that room I heard another voice I know well, the voice of my Lord. He whispered, "Rick, welcome to my world. Feel a bit of My pain. This my son, is what I feel every day. This is what I felt on the cross. It was for this boy I died. It is for your tears I too once wept. I CRIED..." Don't you think for a second that Jesus cried out on the cross due to pain. No way, He had already been beaten, scourged, beaten again, and all that without so much as a single sob. His "cry" on the cross wasn't for His pain, but for ours. His last tear was our first heart broken sob. O, yes my Lord cries. He weeps for me and He weeps with me.





I heard Him, as clear as I heard Greg, I heard Him. And I know my choice was made, had been made the day I bowed my knee. His calling is without repentance and He had called me to love hurting, broken, dying people. Even when they die in my ministry's bathroom with a needle in their arm. My life and my life's bread is that which is broken. I knew then and I know now, I will drink the Cup.

Other men spoke up after Greg. Chief, my 6'7" mohawked, African-American son said, "Pastor Rick, what about me? I wouldn't be here, a college student, without His Place."

Carlos, a wonderful kind, Hispanic man who graduated from His Place was also there with his boss who teaches Bible Study at His Place. Carlos added his voice to the others. "Where would I be if you weren't here?"

John Jenkins, Mr. John, who's been with us 11 years, wept and proclaimed, "It is worth it. It is worth it."

Mr. Sledge, 78 years wise said, "This is our calling. This is our life. Even if it involves death. Even if it kills us. THIS IS OUR LIFE."

Other men, some in our program, some Board members, some just friends joined in with one accord. With a teary eyed one accord, "No matter what, it's worth it." This is ministry, more so than sermons no one listens to and songs we just mouth. Ministry isn't a Sunday morning performance. Ministry is real life. The Apostle Paul didn't compare our Christian walk to being on a picnic, he compared it to being in a war.

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2 Timothy 2:3)

Good soldiers smell the smoke and taste the blood. Good soldiers get wounded. Good soldiers watch their friends die. Good soldiers march with death constantly beside them. Sometimes it gets inside them.

One of the men who had been through our program at His Place reminded us all, "This is a war!" We're on the front lines. We take hits. We get wounded. We see death. It's no game. This is war."

It's war for all of us. You don't have to work at a rehab to know you're in a battle. We all face an enemy who is in this for keeps. He comes to "Steal, kill and destroy." (John 10:10)

You don't get a pass. You can't "tap out." We're in this for keeps. Praise God, He is the One who does the keeping.

*You, LORD, will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked. Psalm 12:7*

*The LORD will keep you from all harm he will watch over your life. (Psalm 121:7)*

*He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:8)*

*You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. (Isaiah 26:3)*

*To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy. (Jude 1:24)*

I could feel His touch through the veil of tears that cold, dark day the boy died. I can't explain it. Somehow He was there with me. Somehow He shared my suffering. It's important to know He didn't take my pain away, that would've only trivialized my trauma and minimalized the pain. I understand that He had seen the greater hurt, the very dying of a young man who hurt so bad as to try to numb his pain with the push of a syringe. I realized my Lord was feeling the pain of every man in that room. Each man was hurting and my God accepted their pain, invited it. Such is redemption. Grace would have it no other way.

An eerie epiphany came over me as I realized, "This is just another day at the office for God." He feels the unfiltered pain of a billion men slowly dying every day.

The pain of a lonely old man dying all alone,

He feels it.

The pain of a beaten, battered wife, betrayed by her husband.

He feels it.

The pain of a frightened child, abandoned by an equally frightened teenage mom

He feels it.

Your pain, \_\_\_\_\_, (fill in the blank with whatever hurts you)

He feels it.

Sometimes there's no other way to put it, "Life can be rough." I'm not complaining, how could I with friends who have cancer or children with cancer. My "rough times" have little weight when I think about the burden of two wonderful ministry friends who lost their homes to foreclosure within the past month. I was able to visit with one of those friends right before he had to move out. He was putting the last load in the truck. We stood in his now empty garage to pray and say good-bye. It was "rough" enough standing there with his teenage sons who were trying to be strong; boys with the weight of a world turned upside down on their shoulders. I remember that type of weight from my own childhood.





It didn't feel good then to bear it or now to watch another with such a burden buckling them. I tell you, "It's *rough*." And as if watching boys bearing grown up burdens wasn't "*rough*" enough, as I turned to leave their once happy home, I noticed the child-like scribbling of their little sister's goodbye note to their home, "Dear House,..." It was undoing to my soul.

Another friend, a childhood buddy of mine is struggling through a genuinely '*rough*' place. His wife has bulbar onset Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), Lou Gehrig's disease. Within one year, this vibrant, talkative mother of four has been relegated to a walker. She's lost her voice. A voice that used to sing. I can still hear her joking, laughing and talking about Jesus, but it's just an echo. She can't talk anymore. She's a warrior, but her wounds are real. It's "*rough*".

Last week I took my three sons to visit their former wrestling coach. What a man he has been. A decorated Vietnam War veteran. Hero of many a battle (though as a true hero, he never talked about it). An All American wrestler, alternate to the U.S. Olympic Team. A missionary to Morocco. He speaks fluent Arabic. He served our Lord in the Muslim world where his life was literally on the line every day.

When we walked in to see him last week he was in a hospital bed in a back bedroom of the house, dying from a brain tumor. He clenched his fists and pumped them in a struggled cheer when he saw my sons, "My boys, my boys!", he hoarsely proclaimed. To see his joy, mingled with the pain of cancer and the realization he would never see my boys wrestle for him again, well...it was "*rough*". To be perfectly honest it was a kick in the gut/I can't cry anymore "*rough*". I went home and told Kim, "Does captain Woodrow Call have to bury everyone?" (see Lonesome Dove, all-time best cowboy movie for reference).

My experiences are not unique. I know many of you go through similar struggles everyday. I talk with my friends who read this very newsletter, may be reading it right now, who are facing unbelievable seemingly unbearable circumstances in their lives. Life can be *rough*. Your life may be *rough*. If it's not, hang in there, your *rough* times are coming. Even the television preachers who always talk about health and wealth go through tough times. Why do you think they always want your money? Payments on Lear jets and McMansions can become burdensome. Their life has the same twists and turns yours does; they just edit out the tears.

If you've ever felt the sting of death or the pain of a dark night, you're not alone. The Bible is filled with men and women who shared such hurt.

- How do you think Adam felt hiding in the shadows?
- What must've Noah felt as the world washed away before his eyes?
- Can you imagine Samson's shame, to be led away by men he once bested by the dozen?
- What did Moses feel as he ran from all he knew?
- Do you think memories of giants slain helped ease David's shame when he rose from his friend's wife or later looked at his friend's grave?
- Jeremiah's tears were real.
- Joseph's prison was cold.
- Job's despair seemed without end.
- When the world turned dark at noonday even Jesus felt it's chill.

I read of a priest who once told a man struggling with his own brokenness, "I don't trust a man without a limp." Life can leave all of us with a "limp". Jacob who wrestled with an angel and was left with a "limp." He was also left with a new name.

You don't get a blue ribbon without washing a few pigs. Life gets dirty. It gets nasty. Even in the Bible "Kings" follow "Chronicles". You have to live something worth chronicling before you get a crown.


History too is filled with examples of men and women who endured "*rough*" at times before they inherited any blessing.

- William Carey's wife went insane on the mission field.
- Amy Carmichael lived without the mate she'd always dreamed of finding.
- Charles Spurgeon suffered depression.
- D.L. Moody battled obesity and numerous health problems.
- David Livingstone wandered lost and alone for years.

Each of these men and women suffered. They suffered greatly. No one who studies their lives can deny nor diminish the "*rough places*" they served in nor the "*rough places*" their hearts had to endure. To sugarcoat their struggle would be tantamount to putting icing on the last morsel of a starving man. It wouldn't work. It wouldn't matter. And I'm convinced none of the men and women mentioned would want you to think their lives didn't include "*rough times*". Neither should we forget their "*rough times*" were not unending or their struggles in vain. Tears may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning.

Each of those men and women mentioned died a hero. The testimony of their lives is legendary. The fruit of





their labor, and of their struggle lives on. We are fruit of their plantings, plantings often laid in pain and watered with tears. Today they've joined the Hebrews 11 Hall of Fame. These are those who, "experienced mocking's and scourging's, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of who the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains, holes and caves and holes in the ground (Hebrews 11:36-38).

Agree with me? That would suffice as "rough"?

Well, your struggles are *rough* too.

Maybe you haven't been scourged physically-but to feel the caustic criticism of a friend, is that not a "scourge"?

Perhaps you haven't been in prison, probably no one reading this has ever been in "chains"-but many of you know the chains of addiction and the prison a house can become when you or someone you know struggles with a life-controlling problem?

Is such not a "chain" a "prison"?

None of us have been "stoned" physically (the other kind doesn't count)-but like Bob Dylan told us in 1966:

*"Well, they'll stone ya when you're trying to be so good*

*They'll stone ya just a-like they said they would*

*They'll stone ya when you're tryin' to get home*

*They'll stone ya when you're there all alone*

*But I would not feel so all alone*

*Everybody must get stoned."*

Certainly no one reading this has been "sawn in two", but some of you have been separated from people you love. That can feel like your heart has been sawn in two.

Like Hebrews' roll call, many of us, all of us have been tempted. No doubt we have felt the pain of temptation's lure and the greater pain of temptation's success, our failures.

We have not been "put to death with swords" but we have been stabled it the back by friends. We have been assaulted with words that "cut". There can be pain that comes without a weapon yet hurts as bad as if we've been pierced through.

"Destitute, afflicted, ill-treated," these we can identify with. Some of you reading this face similar circumstances right now. If you feel "destitute, afflicted, ill-treated"...congratulations! Hebrews' author tells us such people are "those who the world is not worthy." You feel like your life is a failure, but God sees you as Heaven's hero.

There is a race to run before you get a medal. And like all great races, our's has a "wall", a "heartbreak hill" to run through. Run on!

David Brainard was a hero. David Brainard's name resides in books. He was a missionary to the American Indians when there weren't any missionaries. He sought to reach a people most would rather had gone away. His piety is now legend. But David Brainard did not always consider himself a hero. In fact, he never did. David Brainard tended to be sickly and frail. He suffered from tuberculosis and was prone to melancholy. In his journals he once noted, "I feel that I am one part demon and one part wild animal." Bruce Carroll later used this thought (and numerous Biblical entries) a song I really like. "Shadow and Light". Youtube it and take a listen. Think of David Brainard when you do. Think of me. Listen with a mirror in front of you.

His journal reveals this entry in 1747, "Here am I, send me; send me to the ends of the earth; send me to the *rough*, the savage pagans of the wilderness; send me from all that is called comfort on earth; send me even to death itself..." Later that year David Brainard died (in the home of another preacher, Jonathan Edwards). He was only 29 years old. Hindsight proved him faithful, and fruitful.

"Send me to the *rough*", David Brainard prayed. God answered that prayer.

My life has been "*rough*" at times this year. I'm no super-hero. I admit my heartache. I also admit that God has done a great healing in my life. It still hurts at times. There is a healing greater than health. The greater grace is to understand God will never take you to a place He hasn't been to Himself. He goes there with you. His grace is sufficient. To finally realize that the burdens you bear are in fact a blessing is to comprehend earth's limp is heaven's dance.

Limping on to Victory,

*Rick*

You can listen to some of Pastor Rick's Sermons online at [www.harvestevangelism.org](http://www.harvestevangelism.org).