

The Trials Of Job

By [Tim Russ](#)

(Job 3:25-26 NIV) What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. {26} I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."

I didn't grow up in church and most of what Christians call normal was almost like falling into an alien civilization to me. So very much of it was nonsense at first. The more I studied the less I knew. "That's normal," they would say cheerfully. This confusing dichotomy eventually did work itself into a clarity that I could understand, though I still think the church in general needs an entire course in English and communication. ☺

One of the most impressive stories I read in the Bible was that of the trials of Job. I admired his tenacity of praying for his children. I knew that I was not as faithful as Job and could never have such a testimony. After all, I could barely function as a "good Christian" most of the time. I could relate to Job's fear of losing his children, though. Having grown up in a family that was so dysfunctional that to this day none of us speak made the importance of family a high priority in my life.

As I was meditating and praying one day in 1993 (15 years into my Christian walk) God asked me a question that absolutely shattered my spirit. "Tim if I were to bring one of your children home, how would you handle it?" I had known God long enough to know that whenever he asks a question there is a good reason. You see, God knows everything. The question was not for his benefit, but for mine.

"I don't know, Lord." I sat there. I waited in silence and dread for whatever he might say next. Several minutes passed and he still had not spoken.

"My life is yours, Lord. All I own is yours. All I am or will be is yours. And the children you gave me are yours." I paused, stillness filled the air.

"Please, Lord, do not ask me this question." Though I hoped I had heard incorrectly every part of me could feel his presence. Everything I was bristled in anxiety as I awaited his voice.

"Tim, I am going to be bringing one of your children home."

I shuddered. I wept. I wanted to believe that I was just being dramatic, that I really hadn't heard God's voice, that Satan was deceiving me. "This isn't God!" I stood up and walked away from my prayer and meditation time.

I was the father of three boys and a girl. Our family, with all its normal family problems, was the best family in the universe, as far as I was concerned. Why would God want to take one of my kids? I spent weeks going over it in my mind. Reasoning with myself. Telling myself that I had good kids and that there was no reason for this to happen. I knew I must have misunderstood God.

I went back to the Lord to prove to myself that I had misunderstood or had been deceived by Satan. "Lord, I know I didn't hear you right or that I was listening to my own confusion or that Satan was deceiving me before. You didn't say you were going to allow one of my children to die, did you?" I sat there for nearly five minutes in silence.

One of the things I learned when I became a Christian is that God isn't the president of Christianity. He wasn't elected. He can't be impeached. He is the King. We Americans do not deal well with that concept. But I knew that when I spoke to my King that way and got no reply I had embarrassed myself before my Lord and Master. "Father," my voice began to tremble, "Father, please don't let this be real."

God remained silent on the issue. I allowed myself the freedom of thinking that I had most probably been confused or deceived. But to be safe I began praying for all my children regularly. I begged, I pleaded the blood of Jesus, I rebuked the enemy.

I had no way of knowing which child, if any, was in danger so I continued to keep each of them before the throne. I wish I could say that I was faithful like Job. But as time passed I began to relax somewhat. I didn't pray daily but I prayed regularly.

I saw no reason to bother my wife with all this because I wasn't really sure that I had heard God correctly. Besides, she was a mother and she would worry needlessly. So I trudged on bearing a "possible" piece of information from God and praying. It became somewhat of a habit to pray for their protection. Watching the calendar of events in their lives so I could pray for specific details on their trips, during sporting events, swimming outings, etc.

As the children began passing through their teenage years our oldest son, Ben, began exhibiting disturbing patterns of behavior. His friends changed. His eating habits, his church attendance, his language and many other things about him changed. The more we spoke with him about this, the more belligerent he became. Eventually, things became so bad that he began having encounters with law enforcement and we even had to ask him to leave our home.

Our problems with him didn't cease. Even from outside our home he caused us a great deal of pain. His negative influence began to filter over to our second son, Michael. We eventually discovered that both of them were doing drugs. Even with the help of court ordered drug treatment for Michael it seemed that nothing would change the drastic direction their lives had taken.

It seemed almost as if these two hellions lived for nothing other than the joy of seeing pain in my eyes each time they would flaunt their sin. All the years I had worked and prayed and taught them bible appeared to be a wasted effort.

I even began wondering if somehow I had completely failed as a father to them. Somehow, I reasoned, I must have sinned or done something very wrong for this to happen to my sons. I kept considering Eli the priest and his two wicked sons. Was I like Eli? Was I failing to discipline my sons, letting them run wild? I just didn't know.

The problems started small and slowly escalated. Ben started having problems when he was 13 years old and he was now 19. I had prayed. I had talked to him. I had asked others to pray with him. I had gone to counseling with him. Nothing worked.

As a final act of desperation I told him that he had to leave our home. I hoped that if life kicked him in the teeth he might change. Frankly, I had run out of options and was just tired of trying to work with him. Mike was still under age and we had to work with the court and a drug rehab program dealing with him. I just couldn't deal with the tag team twins of evil any longer.

In the spring of 1996 I got a phone call from Ben. He had made some bad financial decisions and was in a hopeless mess that left him homeless. He had turned to his friends who suddenly just couldn't help him.

While he had money and a place for them to party he was the hit of the town but just like the prodigal son parable they were no real friends when he needed a friend. Hope sprouted within me as I heard myself agreeing to allow him to move back into our home. Fathers are sometimes unreasonable optimists in matters such as this.

It was one of the best decisions I ever made in my life. Oh, he wasn't a changed person. He still had many of the problems but you could see it in his eyes and hear it in his voice. He had come to realize that family was important and he was becoming a man who realized that just maybe mom and dad had something to teach him after all.

Our relationship began healing and I was nearly drunk with rejoicing. I kept waiting for this miracle to touch Mike. Maybe rehab will be the trick to turn the tide, I thought to myself. The healing of our relationship followed an exponential curve.

During the next six months hurts were so healed and trust was so restored that we began planning to set up a business as partners. Both of us were looking forward to spending time together working with computers. I was in heaven.

One night in July Ben came home while I was alone and told me that he wanted to talk with me about some serious things. I had seen this demeanor before with him. I assumed that he was in trouble with the law. His tone was so serious that I prepared to hear something like, "I've robbed a bank and they're going to catch me soon."

"Dad, the Holy Spirit has been talking to me this week. He has been convicting me of the sin in my life. I have repented and asked God to forgive me of them but I felt that it was important to tell someone who could keep me accountable and keep me on the path I've chosen to serve God." I nearly fell out of my chair. Relief and joy battled for control of my heart as I nodded one of those fatherly "I know exactly what you mean, son" kind of nods without saying a word.

"I need to give you a list of all the things that I've done and it isn't going to be easy to listen to. Some of the things I'm going to tell you aren't the types of things that a son tells his dad." He was right. I was shocked.

You would think that with all the problems I had encountered with him I would have been prepared for the things he shared. I wasn't. He poured out his heart to me in a brutal honesty that forced me to realize that this was no mere jaunt on the repentance trail. He had truly been touched by God and had experienced a life change in his spirit.

We talked for nearly an hour and a half. He asked biblical questions about how to deal with certain things and asked for fatherly advice. We made a covenant to work together to be faithful to our Lord. I shared some brutally honest sins and problems that were in my life and asked that he make me accountable as well. For the first time in my life I spoke to my son as a Christian man.

It was a quiet night about a week later. Kids were getting off work. The wife was coming home from her second shift job. I was in a somewhat jovial mood. I was spending some time on IRC, relaxing and joking with those who told me that "it was about time I started to relax a bit".

My oldest son Benjamin had just gotten off work and he and my second son Michael were rushing off, yet again, to pick up a friend and have a good time. Although it was nearly midnight I didn't give it much thought. Ben was 19, nearly 20 and Mike had turned 18 the month before. So I didn't get up to say goodbye. Just a quick, "We'll be back later, Dad" from Ben and my usual grunt of "Ok, I'll see you later."

I turned back to my playfulness on the chat channel with my friends. A few minutes later there was a phone message. We screen all our calls so my wife and I both clearly heard Mike screaming in the phone like a madman. There had been a car accident about 10 blocks from our home.

Ben had just signed the loan papers within the last two weeks. I knew he'd be sick at the mess he would have to go through with his first accident. I am the family calm guy. ☺ When things happen my wife generally gets excited, my older boys are ready to go to war (grin), and my younger ones relax and wait to see how I'll solve the problems.

I went into fix it mode. I began telling Christine, as I normally do, to expect the worst. Be prepared for a hospital stay or even a death. We dressed as quickly as possible and headed for the accident site.

There had been ambulance sirens sounding while we were on the phone with Mike. He was obviously shaken up. All we could get out of him was where the accident had taken place and the fact that Ben was unconscious. As we neared the scene I saw several police cars and an ambulance. A feeling of dread engulfed me as I noticed that nobody was working with the car, but several policemen were standing outside the ambulance.

"Honey, we shouldn't drive the car up to the scene. It looks like broken glass everywhere. The last thing we need is a flat tire." I tried to hold my voice steady. I felt numb at what I was suspecting. "Why don't you park over there," I said, pointing about half a block from the scene, "while I go see what the situation is?"

Christine agreed with my plan. I hopped out of the car and approached Ben's car. The closer I got the harder it became to think. I heard a police officer saying something to me. I don't remember what. I looked at him then turned away and approached a mangled mass of metal.

The car was nearly bent in two. The driver's door was completely inverted. I could not see Ben or Mike. "Isn't that odd! I don't remember Ben having his bedclothes in the car. I wonder why those sheets are in there. He should be doing his laundry at home." With that, my mind turned away from the reality that was presenting itself and I turned away as well, in search of my two oldest sons.

Christine had parked the car and was headed toward the site. Mike was in the ambulance, yelling. Someone guided me to him.

"I'm not going to the hospital until someone helps Ben!" He was in a rage of tears and fury. Stamping his feet, clenching his fists. When he saw me his eyes cried out to me, "Dad, help me, help me!"

I went into deep Dad mode and began to focus on resolving the problems. Mike had a gash in his forehead about 4 inches long. Although I could not see bone I knew it had been exposed. "Thank you Lord, " I thought, "the gash missed his left eye by less than an inch. It seems when he slammed his head, the nosepiece from his wire rim glasses had been turned into a plow, creating a furrow to plant pain.

I told Mike I'd be right back. He continued to yell and stamp his feet as I walked toward my wife. It was at this point that life became slow motion for me. Each step she took toward me became a thunderous approach of a menacing monster, though at the time I couldn't imagine why.

"Are they ok?" Her look was filled with fear, anticipation, horror and begging. Before I could answer she looked at the car, sitting about 40 feet away. "Oh my God. Oh my dear God." It was a muffled prayer.

"I don't know for sure. Mike is in the ambulance. They are trying to calm him down. Unless we can get him to the hospital we can't start working with Ben." Logic came to my rescue as I reasoned that they were waiting for the rescue squad to come and pull Ben out of the car. "Let's go talk to him."

I was grateful that God gave me a course of action. "Why did things feel so wrong?" I wondered.

I helped her into the ambulance. She is only 5 feet tall and the steps were nearly two feet high. "That is stupid. Why do they put those steps up so high?" I've always felt that things should make sense. Grumbling internally seems to help when things don't make sense.

"I'm not leaving until they help Ben. SOMEBODY NEEDS TO HELP BEN!!!" Mike was rapidly approaching incoherence. "If he's dead, I'm going to kill somebody!"

“Mike. MIKE!” I had to scream to get his attention. “Look, Mike, I’ve never lied to you before. They can’t start helping Ben until you allow them to take you to the hospital. The longer you take throwing a fit the longer it will be before they can help him. I’ll take care of Ben. Let them take care of you.”

It took several minutes but we finally convinced him to settle down enough to go to the hospital. We stepped out of the Ambulance and I guided Christine to a location behind the yellow police tape that had cordoned off the accident scene. Numbness surrounded my mind and clouded my thoughts. “Why can’t I think clearly?” I wondered to myself. “How long will it take them to get Ben out of there?”

Christine looked at me and asked, “Is Ben ok?”

I am a man of words, yet I could not find my voice at that moment. I stared at her and said nothing. “Ben is ok isn’t he?” Although I didn’t know the answer to that question I was beginning to realize that something was not quite right, that Ben might not be ok. I stared at her unable to answer the question that I was desperately trying resolve in my own mind.

I was recalling what God had told me several years before. I was hoping that I was wrong, that somehow this was all just a dream. My spirit was weeping within me and I knew that it wasn’t. How could I speak the most dreaded words a man can ever say to the mother of his children? The finality of it was unbearable.

At that moment a police officer, who must have been watching and listening to the conversation walked over to us. “I have another son who was driving the car,” she said to him. “Is he ok?” He looked at me. There was a sympathetic understanding in the entire volume of words we spoke with our eyes. He knew I couldn’t tell her. “I’m sorry maam, he died.”

(Job 3:25-26 NIV) What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. {26} I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."

This verse came rushing into my spirit as the dread of the situation overtook my mind. I knew that this moment was one of the deep testing points of my faith. God had been preparing me for this moment for years and my choices at this point would determine my future relationship with him.

I knew that my wife needed me and that she needed the son she could never speak to again in this life. Yet, at that moment when revelation upon revelation crashed against the shores of my soul I knew that what mattered most was how I responded to this situation before God.

In silence I screamed to God from my spirit and my mind. “I praise you!” “I PRAISE you!” “You are righteous!” “You are Holy!” “You are my Lord and I accept and agree with your will for my life and Ben’s life!”

They say the true test of faith is whether you praise God in the bad times. I had lost a son. I wasn't about to lose my faith. I didn't feel happy. I didn't feel like praising. But Christianity is not a feeling. It isn't goose bumps during a heightened song service that reveals the presence of God in our lives. It was a decision to follow God and submit to him as absolute ruler of my life. One more time I chose God over the world in spite of circumstance.

I had lost other loved ones to death in the past as a Christian. Each time God spoke to me to confirm within a matter of minutes that the loved one was safely tucked in his arms in heaven and they were at peace. God didn't respond to me this time.

We went to the hospital to take care of Mike. He had to be placed in restraints when we told him that his brother had died. Still God did not speak to me. "Father, is Ben with you? I know he repented. I know he had a life change. Is he with you?" The silence was painful. "I praise you, Lord. I agree with your will."

They brought Ben's body to the hospital after they extracted it from the car. It took them nearly half an hour to pry it free. Family and ministers began to appear to comfort us. Mike calmed down. "Lord, why are you silent? I need you now more than ever before in my life.

Is Ben with you Lord? Are you silent because he isn't with you?" Fear was choking me as I moved from wife to son to daughter to son, comforting each of them. It was my job to take care of my family. It gave me something to do; a way to avoid facing the cold shoulder that God had turned toward me.

Arrangements were made with the coroner. Ministers left. Family members went to their respective homes and the remainder of our family went home. We were exhausted. Everyone was numb. Everyone was thinking of how permanently their lives had been changed by the events a few hours earlier.

I sent them all to bed. I couldn't sleep until I had heard from God. I was anguishing over scenes of Ben suffering in Hell. Satan kept screaming in my ear, "I have him and there's nothing you can do!" I continued to rebuke him but God remained silent.

"I praise you, Lord, even if I lost Ben to Satan." The words nearly destroyed me as I heard them come from my mouth. I began to think of others that I had known who had died that God never confirmed their location. My hope had finally succumbed to the satanic taunts.

"Tim, Ben is safely with me. He is having a blast and is at peace." Tears finally poured out as I stifled a scream of painful praise. I went outside the house for a walk so I would not disturb my family. The dam of my emotional turmoil broke and flooded me. I wailed, not caring what anyone thought at 4:00 in the morning as I walked through the streets of our neighborhood.

"Lord," I said as I wiped away tears, "why did you wait this long to tell me?"

“Tim, if I had told you right away you would have thought it was just you telling yourself that Ben was ok. I had to wait this long so you would know that it was me. So that you could be certain that it was me and certain of Ben’s location.”

I must admit, at the time I thought it was somewhat cruel of God to do such a thing. I also wondered if I had just waited that long to tell myself such a thing. That was July 23rd, 1997. Just over three years ago. God has continually reassured me that Ben is with him.

Satan finally gave up trying to taunt me with his lie of having Ben because I eventually began laughing in his face and quoting to him what God had told me. I realize now that God was right to have waited that long to tell me. I would have thought it was just me tricking myself into what I wanted to believe.

God was so concerned about Ben and me that he had begun to prepare us years before the event took place. He is faithful even when we sometimes lack faithfulness and persistence. In his mercy, he took the son that was prepared to spend eternity with him and the son who was not prepared only got a scar from the accident.

Mike has fought a long hard road in life but finally managed to get off drugs. He had an experience with God that helped him. I was very skeptical at first because he didn’t follow the same miraculous change that I saw in Ben. And Mike doesn’t worship God in the same manner that I worship God. It took me a while to realize that my children could worship God in different ways. ☺

Although we’re still not the super spiritual family that I had hoped we would be each of us is following God’s will as best we can while we eagerly await our reunion with Ben. I am still praising God for his perfect gift to Ben and our family. Though grief is sometimes hard to bear we have all come to realize that none of us could have provided better for him than God did by giving him eternal victory over death that fateful night.

(1 Cor 15:53-55 NIV) For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. {54} When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." {55} "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

Tim Russ is the publisher of Believer's Bay (<http://www.believersbay.com>).

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