

My Road less Traveled

A short story of the life of an amazing woman and of a man who lost his love but not his hope

By Steve Leavitt



“I guess I need to go see the doctor about it.” Martha had just gotten back from another, early morning, six mile run. She had been training for the grueling 26 mile White Rock Marathon that she had dreamed of all her life. The training was not getting any easier. We had just found out why she was getting sick every morning, she was pregnant with our second child. Her gynecologist, being a runner himself, had given her the OK to continue in training as long as she was careful. The marathon was only a month away and if all went well, she would be able to run the race safely. But that is not why she felt she needed to go see the doctor this time. For the past few weeks, she had been complaining of a chest pain that made her feel like something was pushing out on her breastbone.

The doctor visit was short. For the baby’s sake, no x-rays were taken. Martha was diagnosed with a strain on the cartilage of her sternum and given therapy. Although painful, Martha was able to complete her training for the marathon and on December 8th, 1996 ran and finished the most difficult race in her life. However, we didn’t know we were about to embark on a much more difficult race, the hardest anyone is ever ask to run, the race for her life.

After repeated therapy to her chest, the pain continued to worsen. An x-ray was finally taken. On a cold, dark, January morning I got a call from the doctor’s office where Martha had gone. “Steve, I need you to come down here so I can talk to you and Martha together.” The call sent me to the deepest, darkest fear that I have ever experienced. I was torn between racing across town and not wanting to go at all for fear of what I might hear.

I entered the examination room with hesitation. Dear Martha sat there as confused and afraid as I about what the doctor wanted to share. He entered the room. It’s amazing how, in a glance, I read every wrinkle and contortion of his face before he ever said a word.

“You have a tumor in your chest the size of a small melon. It lies under your sternum and it is probably fatal. You should see an oncologist immediately.”

“What in the world could God be thinking?” was my first thought. I mean, here we are a young Christian family. We were leading bible studies, in the ministry, and I was still going to seminary. We had a one and a half-year-old son and a precious little girl on the way. “We have great plans for the future serving the Lord. This just does not make sense. God, you must have made a mistake.” Martha, reading me like a book, took my hand and said words that I will never forget. “Steve, I know we don’t understand, but God is bigger than this. He is in control and His control is perfect. No matter what happens, it is His will and His will is the safest place to be.” My heart melted at the strength of these mighty women of God. For her to sit next to me, right after hearing the doctor, and say those words, was just more than I could handle. We both broke down and wept openly. We also immediately prayed for God to heal her and for Him to be glorified in whatever He was going to do. I had never prayed so soberly in my life. The feelings we shared that day have been the theme of my life ever since. God is

perfect, nothing happens outside the will of God, and to be in God's will is the safest place to be. The overriding theme for me has been that no matter what the circumstance that God has placed me in, I can find peace and joy in knowing that He is sovereign. I am not talking about happiness; that's different. I am talking about pure joy in the Lord. I have been asked many times in the last two years if have been asked, "How is it that you have remained so peaceful and kept from being angry at God?" My answer is always the same, "When you know who you are in light of who God is, and you know who God is and begin to understand His sovereignty, then you find peace and joy."

We made arrangements to see the best oncologist Dallas had to offer. Within a week, Martha was on the operating table getting a biopsy to confirm exactly what we were dealing with. Again the doctor entered the hospital room with results, and again, I found myself reading every curve that a face has to offer. "You have large cell lymphoma cancer. We need to start Chemotherapy immediately. We suggest aborting the fetus, as it will only cause complications and would probably not survive the harsh chemo treatments anyway."

Martha and I had always been great advocates of the sanctity of life inside the womb. Martha was even a counselor at the local Crisis Pregnancy Center. Her life was largely about counseling women to not abort, but save the lives of these precious unborn children of God. So we obviously wanted to be able to save the baby. But I did not want to save the baby at mother's cost. I would not trade Martha for our unborn baby. We ask the oncologist all the right questions and even called in a doctor that specialized in high-risk pregnancies. The answers were, "The baby would probably not survive. If it did survive, it would have deformities. Martha would not have to compromise her treatment if you kept the baby." We camped on Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all of you ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." And went for it. The choice to try save both Martha and our little daughter was not as difficult as it may sound. We knew that God was in control and that Martha's life would not be compromised. We let God do what He may.

Martha received the first of seven rounds of really severe chemo treatments that night. I will never forget it. It was about 11:00pm when they started. They gave her some medication to relax her and she fell right off to sleep. I, on the other hand, sat about three feet away watching everything with precision. The first bag of chemotherapy was hung and the needle was placed in to the clear IV tube. The chemo was bright red and I remember watching it slowly move down the tube and into her arm. I was so scared of what this awful poison was going to do to her. Isn't it ironic that such a deadly potion was what we were using to try to save her life? I stayed up all night hovering over her, praying, sweating, and watching her chest rise and fall with each breath. I feared that with each fall there would not be a rise. I literally watched each breath she took that night. By 7:00am the treatment was complete and Martha awoke feeling pretty much normal. Now we wait, pray that the tumor begins to shrink and look forward to six more rounds of the same thing. Oh, and anticipate how being bald can be.

The plan was to receive a round of chemo once a month for seven months. If the baby

survived, we would induce labor and finish up the cancer treatment with radiation. We were hopeful. The oncologist told us that in his many years, he had never lost a patient of her age and health to this type of cancer. It looked as though Martha would be fine if we could just get our precious baby born.

As planned, we made it through five rounds of chemo. Each time devastating Martha's body with powerful blows that would almost kill her only to see her body bounce back and say give me another shot.

As expected the tumor was shrinking dramatically, it was now the size of a plum. Unbelievably the baby was doing quit well also. There were times when we would not feel the baby kick for a couple of days and we would get worried, but the next visit to the gynecologist and a sonogram would always prove the miraculous nature of God. By now we had discovered that the baby was not just a baby, it was a baby GIRL! After all seven rounds of chemo, the tumor was the size of a grape and may be just a dead mass that would always be there without any worries. Our little girl had matured enough to induce labor and we were on cloud nine. Martha had told me all the way through that God was in control. She would say, "his will is perfect and that whatever His will is, it is the safest place to be." Well, He had brought us to a great place. One of our prayers had been that if we were going to have to go through this, we wanted to glorify God as much as possible. Our story had gone out all over and many were greatly encouraged at watching mine and especially Martha's strength in the Lord. Not a doctor or nurse met Martha that didn't find out her faith in the Lord. It was evident to all that met her that there was something very different about this calm, collected and peaceful woman. She made it a point that they knew why her God was bigger than the situation. Even bigger than her cute, shiny, bald head.

With great anticipation, the day came for our little girl to be born. We knew that she was alive and would probably be born that way, but what we didn't know is, would she be healthy? Would she have all of her arms and legs? Would she have any deformities? The odds of her having problems were high and that made us anxious. Many say that all those things don't matter, but until a person is faced with that possibility they don't understand the difficulty of the wait. It is true we were thankful to even be at this point and we were ready for whatever God dealt us. Martha huffed and puffed and blew the house down. She gave birth to a beautiful, healthy, perfect little baby girl named Madison Jane Leavitt. The joy was incredible. I can't even describe our feeling. I will never forget Martha holding my, well crushing, my hand as she gave that last big push. The baby came out and neither of us could look at her. We just stared at each other, cried heavily and waited for the doctor to say something. After what seemed like hours, we heard this huge cry and the doctor said, "she is perfect, great job guys". Wow, what a relief, the cancer all but gone, little Madison here and healthy, a little radiation and we were done, so we thought.

Three days in the hospital and baby and Momma were home. Martha, as you would expect, was exhausted. Seven rounds of chemo and birthing a child will do that to you. After two weeks at home, she started feeling some pain in her lower back, which the

oncologist dismissed as aftermath from the childbirth. But after a horrible night in pain, at the point where Martha could barely function, I finally convince her to let me call the doctor and take her to the emergency room. A sonogram showed that her kidneys and most of her other organs in her abdomen were consumed by tumors as well. No one was hopeful, except Martha. "God is in control and He is bigger than this. If he takes me home then that is the best place for me to be, I'm not afraid". She was the only one who wasn't afraid. She did not want to leave us, but she wasn't afraid to die.

After a lot of pain medication and rehydration, we were able to go home only to return within a couple of days in the same situation. This time she passed out and everyone started to panic. By 9:00 the next morning I was sitting in the ICU waiting room. A surgeon I did not know was standing over me with a very sad look on his face. He said, "Martha is very sick and we need to do surgery." He continued to explain that her body had shut down and there was only blood flowing to her lungs and brain. The lack of blood flow had killed part of her intestines and they would have to remove it. She will probably not make it through the surgery and if she does there would be no way for her to survive the recovery. The doctor ended his conversation with me by saying, "We will do the best we can."

Anytime someone has cancer the fear of them dying is strong. It had never really left me from the day she was diagnosed, but now faced with this it was different. I remembering selfishly praying over and over again "God please don't take her home, leave her here for me and the kids, I don't want to be alone." I also remember the most profound thing that was said to me through the whole ordeal. As I was waiting for the doctor to return after surgery, my pastor came next to me, leaned against the wall, looked deeply into my eyes and said "she's Gods". That's all. So often we think a long dissertation on the faithfulness of God is appropriate here. Not this time, it was perfect "she's Gods". Perfect word at a perfect time. She was Gods' and no one loved her more than Him. He will do what is best and a rush of peace came over me.

The doctor returned with a much more pleasant face to say she made it through and she looked pretty good, but he still did not think she would make it through recovery. As I walked into the room, she basically was on life support. She had every tube imaginable coming out of her. I had never seen someone who was alive be so close to death. After eight unconscious days she finally woke up and for the next two weeks she got better. At first, she was not even able to talk, but finally she was well enough to get out of ICU and to a normal room. Then she finally got out of the hospital to go home. The doctors continued to say she is terminal, which we all are, and it was only a matter of time before she would die. We prayed for her to be healed, but if it was God's will for her to go, then we pray He would be glorified.

I slowly watch Martha condition worsen, but never her smile or attitude. No matter how weak she was or how much she hurt, she was always the strong one. She was always the one to correct everyone's doctrine of dying. It was us she was sad for. She knew she would stand in the presence of God soon. We would be left here to suffer through life. In and out of the hospital, mostly in, for the next few months and we were done. She was

home and had stopped eating anything and barely conscious from the amount of morphine it was taking to control her pain. I called hospice, got a hospital bed and set it up in the living room. For the next six days I slowly watched my dear wife die. On a fairly pleasant November evening, I held her hand as she could barely breathe and told her it was time to let go. "We were going to be OK without her" I told her. She needed to go home to be with her first love. It took an hour of almost fussing at her when she drew her last breath in my arms.

There was actually relief. Relief for her, I and everyone that loved her. There was also emptiness deeper than I can describe. I was now only half of a whole. Martha is gone and I am left here with a two-year-old son and a newborn daughter. Where is the fairness in that? As Martha would say, "It's not fair, life is not fair, but God is good and just. His will is best no matter what it is. It may hurt and we may not like it, but it is good. He is good and perfect. No matter where His will puts you, that is the safest place to be, so be at peace with it." She was a very wise and courageous woman of God. I pray to be half as faithful.

As I write this, it has been almost a year since Martha died. The kids are both healthy and adjusting well. I too have healed quickly. Martha and I talked about how things would be after she was gone. She wanted me to move on and remarry as soon as I felt it was right. God has blessed me with a new wife and a great new mom to my children. She is wonderful and every way. God has again blessed me with a woman way over my head. Many men my age are still looking for one incredible woman to marry. I have found two.

God is good. He does what is right. He is in control of everything always and His will is perfect. Christ as you're Savior and the knowledge of these things is where true peace is found.

Following are my journals after Martha went to be with the Lord

Martha went home to be with her Father Nov. 19th 1997

1.21.98

With the death of my wife still so near, I have many thoughts, question, and wonderments. How about the issue of "What is her current state? Is she aware of me and my actions? Does she know how my life will turn out? Why would He take a 30 year-old with two young children and a husband that loves her deeply? Why such a servant of His, someone who has dedicated her life to serving Him and spreading His message? What will be my relationship to her when I get to heaven?" Lots of questions, but not a lot of biblical information that is really clear. As Martha got sicker and sicker, I prayed that the Lord would come take us all home, Martha would not have to die and we would go to heaven together. God chose differently and for whatever reason, perfectly. I can handle "perfectly" OK and I handle His decisions OK, but I just deeply miss her and long for the time when this empty, deep, black hole of a void in me will be gone. I am only a part of a whole without her and long for the return of Christ so as to get relief from the lack of understanding His decisions. I sometime joke about the fact that He must be beefing up His heavenly army with the most righteous, that is the only explanation I can give for what seems to be such an irrational choice. I desire to move on and my life will be whole again, but that is at such a distance that it is not comprehensible right now. I do know that God is good and perfect and when I get to heaven it will make perfect sense. I will be so thankful that He chose as He did. Amen.

1.23.98

As I get further out from Martha's death, I feel the cloud around me lift. I begin to lose the strong desire for the Lord's return and start to look forward to the future years the Lord may give me. Even as I write now, my 2 1/2 climbs on my back with no concern for the events of the last year. He only knows of what is ahead of him. His enthusiasm for life is good for me. Life is good for me. I crave it, I long for the time when life is more about living than death. Each day someone else comes to me and tells me of the impact that Martha Leavitt has had in his/her life for the Lord. My, how she has impacted the advancement of the kingdom of God. I pray for half of that impact in my own life. She has truly left a legacy. Just yesterday, a young lady said "You look familiar, who are you?" After telling her, she replied, "Oh my, how your family has changed my life. You don't know me, but I have followed, closely, the events of the last year. Martha's life and death have changed how I view things. I totally see God's love and work in our lives now and for eternity." Wow, God's plans are perfect, no matter what they are. He is sovereign!

1.26.98

I find myself concerned about what impact I will make in others lives for the kingdom of God. To what extent will God use me to change people? Also, how much of His using me depends on my faithfulness. I will have many opportunities to speak over the next year. I need to use the experiences of the last year as illustrations, but how will I do? Will it be to close, too soon? We will see.

1.31.98

As I move toward the future, I find myself enjoying the company of others more all the time. What will my future hold? Will the Lord return soon? I pray so, but will live as though I have all my years ahead. We must live as though He will return tomorrow as well as a thousand years from now. God fixed it that way.

2.4.98

I have been thinking a lot about grief lately. Did God grieve the death of Christ? Or did he rejoice the victory over sin? Or both? Is He rejoicing the return of Christ to fulfill His plan? Did He more grieve the sin of Adam? How much should I grieve the loss of my wife, and does it compare to the Lord's grief? We can obviously grieve the Holy Spirit and as part of the triune God we must grieve God. I'm not sure that it is a fair comparison. There are similarities. I grieve Martha's death and rejoice in her union with the Lord. I grieve my emptiness only to look forward to the fulfillment of the Lord's return and my union with Him. I grieve over my own sin and the "If I could have only said this..." and "If I had only done or been this...." to and with Martha. I know those are small and a part of every marriage, but they do hurt. The funny part is that I know that Martha is made perfect now and it is of no concern to her now. That is the beauty of Christ and His return, to be made perfect. No more grief, no more hurt, only perfect ness, the kind only a perfect God could give. I am thankful that this does not have to only be a hope for the reunited with Him. It can also be the hope of us here today. Each day He teaches me a little more about that. Hope. What an extraordinary word. We use the word in our Christian circles as though it is a given. It is not! It is a blessed word that we can feed from in our darkest moments. It is this word that has carried me through this time. Hope, that all I have placed my belief in is true. That she is and we will be made perfect, and all that happens is to the glory of God and His kingdom. That is my hope! Praise God for His hope given to us. Praise God that in the things we do not understand, we have hope that He is right and our deepest frustrations and confusion is wrong. That's true and that's hope!

2-8-98

My, what an odd relationship the past has to the future. They are so related and the past has so much to say about the future, but there are times when the past is best left alone. Not in the case of our Savior. The past tells us of the future and the relationship we will have with the Father. The hope we have in the future comes from what we have been told in the past about the future. Not the case with my memories with Martha. I have such beautiful memories of her, the things we did, the places we went, the feeling we felt, and

yet the more beautiful they are the more painful they are. I just took the kids on a drive out to the lake to play. It was a beautiful day, so I said "Why not?" Little did I know that place, where Martha and I spent so many great days and nights together, would be so painful to go back to. Why does it hurt to go there? The past is the past I am now in the present looking forward to the future. I realize that loss is more real when you have a place in front of you to go with the memory, but those were good memories. Somehow they are not good for me right now. They hurt! How does this get better? Does the memory fade? Does the hurt just stop hurting? Do I learn to tame the hurt? How does it get better? I know it will, but how? Part of the pain is the loneliness. I cannot begin to realize the loneliness Christ must have felt on the cross when all was forsaken of Him. He must have felt the hope of the future. That is the only rope I cling to now. Hope of the future. What a ministry Martha's life was and still is. Just yesterday the church made 100 copies of the audio tape of the funeral to keep up with the demand for people to hear what a legacy she left. Many, many souls were and still are being won to heaven through Martha and the woman of God she was. That is at least a peace that her life and death were not for not. My hope is that many more may know life in Christ because of her life and death in Christ.

2.9.98

Loneliness is a funny thing. It leaves you with no one but Christ to lean on. I do not understand how someone, who is not a Christian, goes through the loss of a spouse. I always thought that when Martha was gone that the loneliness that I would feel could be replaced when God gave me a new spouse some day, but this loneliness is not one that can be fixed by another person. I'm not lonely because of the lack of a spouse. I am lonely because of the lack of Martha. This is a good thing for me to realize. The emptiness does not have to do with a mate; it has to do with the mate. God made Martha and me one. Part of my oneness is gone and now I am only part of a whole. That's the loneliness. Should Christ jump right in and fill that gap for me. Many will tell me yes. They are full of it. Christ is allowing me to feel like part of a whole and that is not bad. It is now that I lean further toward Him. I would not if I were not so lonely. It is called grief and all that lose a spouse go through it. It is healthy and God ordained. God always uses our pain to draw us nearer to Him. We should consider our trial a blessing. Martha did, and she taught me a lot about proper perspective. When I am empty it allows room for Christ in my life. I can see why the loss of a spouse ends up destroying many people. There is an emptiness that we all strive to fill. I understand why some will fill it destructively if they don't have the wisdom to fill it spiritually. The problem is that in reality God will allow us to continue to have the void, but with a slow healing, or filling by Him. That is the road back to recovery. A constant moving toward Him. That is constructive and it's the best we can do to fill the void. I guess, whether we are suffering or not, we should always move toward Him. I do feel it is easier now than without suffering. I guess that makes me feel more blessed than before. Yes, this trial is a blessing! So what is God teaching now? That suffering is not a bad thing even though it hurts. That I am supposed to feel a void and if I were perfect, God would completely fill the void, but that is what my union in heaven someday is for. I will never be completely full, as Martha is now, until I reunite with Him in glory, but for now the best I can do is move toward Him, and that will have to be enough. I am supposed to feel that is enough.

I do. Thank you Lord that you are sufficient in every way, even when I feel an insufficiency in me.

2.14.98

What is a legacy? How do you leave a legacy? What a difficult question, but one that can be answered by looking at the lives of others, namely Christ. Christ lived and died for many reasons. First of all, He lived so as to usher in the new covenant. His death paid a penalty too great for any human to accomplish. His life was a representative of how we are to live. He lived knowing that all of the remainder of earth would look at His example as one that we should follow. That's a legacy. We are to look at Christ's life and realize the actions, attitudes, service, and love that we are to imitate. Our lives are to be a better service to the glory of God because of Christ's example. God also put humans on this earth as an example to follow. Although they are not perfect, they still represent a model for us. Paul was one such man. As we read of his life, we are encouraged to live more holy for the Lord. Not in any way to compare Martha to Christ, but Martha's life stands as one of these models. Martha lived and died as an example for those of us left here to encourage us to live more holy lives. Martha's life was, like all of us, bedded in a history of sin and failure to comply with the will of God. It was a great moment in her life, when she realized that God is a God of forgiveness and love. At that point, she knew that she could wipe the slate clean and begin her new life as a purified child of God. From that moment on, her life was about glorifying the Lord. As her life got more complicated, discipleship, husband, and children, she again began a legacy of priorities for the Lord. Her heavenly Father always came first. Her true love. None other could compare. It was always God first, family second and "her girls", the women she discipled, third. It was this order that drew me to love her so much. I knew that she loved God more than she loved me. Many people looked in on Martha's life, and found that they had much to learn from her discernment. People could look at her life and see the joy and love in her life and realize they too could bear the same burdens and still have that joy. I receive phone call and cards constantly from those who have grown in the Lord or were saved because of Martha's life. My friends, that's a legacy. It was never more evident than at her funeral. The church that held a thousand was three quarters full in honor of her and the pastor laid out a thirty minute legacy of who Martha was. He talked of her love and dedication to God, her family and her church. All who were there will never be the same because of the words spoken about her. She truly leaves a legacy. Today, on Valentines Day, I am reminded of what true love is because of the memories of Martha. True love for the Lord and true love for those around me. I went to visit her grave and to take her roses, her favorite, and felt not sadness but warmth of the love she shared with me. She leaves me a legacy of how to love. It is this love that God gives to each of us. A love so great that we cannot attain its magnitude. A love so strong that we would joyfully allow and accept the death of a loved one to advance the kingdom and works of God! That's my love for Martha.

2.21.98

I praise God that He does not always answer prayer the way I ask it. I praise God that He always answers prayer. God's answer is always perfect and glorifies Him. I read a story today of a missionary who had found out that on a trip, while he was sleeping, there was

a group of men who had planned to ambush, rob and kill him. Just before doing so, they notice an army of 26 men were surrounding him so the men decided to leave him alone. When the missionary came home he told the story to his congregation and a man stood up and said that on that day, the Lord had burdened him to pray, so he got together 26 men to pray for the missionary. Prayer is answered and God does answer perfectly. The difficult part is when I prayed so diligently, actually half of the U.S. prayed for Martha to get better. She did not. IF that was not the perfect answer, for her to get better, then wow, God's plan must be outstanding, perfect. I must continue to not get discouraged in prayer. I have such a "God is sovereign" mentality that I feel He does not need my prayers. His will is going to be carried out anyway. The fact is He does not need my prayers He desires them. Not to better accomplish His goals for what I am praying for, but to better accomplish His goals in me. My prayers are for me. They teach me that the Lord is in control and that my total dependence is on Him, not on my own merit. God chose to take Martha home, not because she was not prayed for enough or not because she did not have enough faith, but because it was perfect in His will. There are many wonderful Christians, close to us, who are really struggling with this concept. They have been taught that there is a problem when someone is not healed, that there was not enough prayer or faith or that demon oppression won. I feel that is such an arrogant view, that God was defeated because we did not do enough, that He needs us to accomplish anything. Martha's death leaves them very confused and hurt, that it is somehow their fault. Boy, Satan loves that one! The fact is that God carried out His perfect will and we prayed as we should have and that is all. We honored God and Martha in our prayers and God honored us by bringing glory to Himself. That's all. I am thankful God's perfect will gets done in spite of my desires.

2.26.98

I was asked again today to pray for someone else with cancer. This is a young boy with a brain tumor that is growing faster than they can keep up with. As I prayed, I realized that I was praying with much faith that God could and would heal him. Sometimes I wonder why I still think God will do a miracle of healing someone. Martha was prayed for so much by so many people and yet God did not answer our prayers the way we wanted. My view of God has not changed; I still believe that He can and will answer prayer. This really does not jive inside of me. Something deep inside me says what does it matter if I pray. God, in His ultimate wisdom and love will do what's best for His kingdom, so why pray. Because we are supposed to! That's all. It brings joy to Him for us to pray and we are told that prayer does change things. I don't understand why it changes things the way we want sometimes and not sometimes. I am not supposed to understand I guess. That is actually O.K. with me I guess. Either way, I still pray and believe, for what else do I have? I was also reminded this week of Martha's great faith and love for the Lord. Martha always memorized scripture by writing the verses on a sheet of paper and putting it in a baggy and putting the baggy in the shower. It has been three months now and I just noticed her last verse was still in our shower. Yes, I have taken showers in the last three months; it's just that I was so used to seeing the baggy I did not notice. Anyway, the verse that she had last put in the baggy was James 1:2-4 "Consider it pure joy my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be

mature and complete, not lacking anything." Martha is complete now and is not lacking anything. God has made her whole in His presence. The most amazing part of this story is that she always dated her verse. The date on this verse is Sunday, Jan. 19th, 1997. Just after she first found out she had cancer. Even after just finding out this terrible news, she did not get mad; she did not get sad or even confused. She truly was joyful of the trial the Lord had given her. Her first response to the news was "O.K. Lord, how can I use this for you?" That's all, nothing else. She was an amazing woman that we can all learn from. Thank you Lord for sharing her with us.

2.27.98

So where do I go from here? What lies ahead for me? Where am I with my feelings? I have been praying for a long time for God to tell me when I am ready to move on. I have been moving on for a while, but when do I really let go of Martha's death and focus on what is ahead. When my life is more about the future than the past 15 months, I am very close to being there. I am content with where I am. I don't feel stuck or muddled. I feel clear and awake. So what does that look like for me? I begin to be able to focus on nurturing my children more. I am able to focus on my studies more. I am able to begin to develop relationships again. This brings me to another thing. When do I begin to develop relationships with females with the purpose of future remarriage? O.K. I guess I can say it. When do I start dating again? I don't feel like it will be long. I have honestly been grieving Martha's death for a long time now. Four or Five months before she died. We knew what was coming and I prepared my heart for it. I began to grieve Martha's death eight or nine months ago. I feel the Lord is moving me on and I am open to what He brings. I don't trust myself, so I must camp wise people around me to lean on. The Lord has given me those people and I feel blessed. God is in control and I will let Him fly the plane.

2.28.98

Lord, how shall I most effectively minister for you now? As many of my thoughts have been toward heaven and what lies ahead for me and the current state of Martha, I am increasingly more concerned for others and their eternal state. I am blessed, and Martha was blessed, to have been given the gift of eternal life. I think of so many who do not know, or have chosen to refuse to believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God and that He died so that all who would believe in Him shall be saved and receive the gift of eternal life. I also have a burden for those who are Christians and are married and are blowing it. What a gift a mate is. Yes it is hard, and yes some mates are boneheads, but you had better find a way to make it work. God intends for you to have a blessed joyful marriage. It may be that He does not nurture enough or she doesn't honor enough or he works too much or she is cold or whatever. It doesn't matter, make it work. Don't worry so much about what the other is doing, worry about you. What can you change today to make yourself a better spouse? Pray for your mate that God would change his/her heart in the areas that will make you a Godlier couple. And above all else, appreciate one another regardless of your shortcomings. Listen to me, you do not know what you have until it is gone. Love each other and make it work!

3.01.98

I am optimistic about what God is doing in me. In the last couple of days, I have felt compelled to sit down and put together some talks. I have prepared many talks in the past and some I stumble through and some just flow. I love it when they flow, when I really feel God just flowing through me onto the paper. That is how these have felt. I could not write fast enough. The talks are all about hope, joy, and peace. I am so acutely aware of people's suffering, pain, and lack of joy. It makes me wonder what is going on with them. Not that I think something is wrong with them, but that it does not make sense that I am doing so well in these areas considering my circumstances and yet others without apparent problems are having such a rough time. I have deduced that it makes a difference in people lives what motivates their attitudes. I am finding that many try to receive hope, peace, and joy from earthly tangible things which leaves them empty. As I have searched myself, I find that my true hope comes from the position of God in relation to my position. To understand my salvation more and to realize God in His sovereignty puts my attitude in proper perspective. I really pray that we can all learn to find our peace in the knowledge of our awesome God.

3.02.98

"To leave behind the past and look forward to what lies ahead." We often read this text, but to do it is another thing. You don't just decide to do it; you must take strong, aggressive action. This has come much easier for me than most, and myself, thought possible. I find the cloud of the past has lifted and the sunshine of what lies ahead has rested on me. It is true that my circumstances could be so much worse. I could have financial worries, I don't. I could have trouble with what to do with the children while I am at school or daily errands, I don't. I could have the pressure of having to work while going to school, I don't. I could have the regrets of a pain riddled marriage, I don't. I could have haunting thoughts of Martha's fear of death and bitterness at God; she didn't, so I don't. You see, God had ordained to pluck Martha out of our environment so He set everything else to run as smoothly as possible for us. These things help me to look ahead and not get stuck in the past, but that is not the reason for my hope and joy. My hope and joy come completely from the knowledge of the saving grace that God has poured on me. The fact is that we will all die. Some earlier than others, but we will all die. The question is what will happen then. I know what my eternal state will be and what Martha's is now and that, my friend, is cause for great hope and joy of what lies ahead.

3.04.98

So I must now sum up all that shared. First, Christians serve a God that is sovereign. Everything that happens is allowed by Him. He loves us more than we will ever understand and He desires goodness for us even if that means temporary pain. Even if I did not agree with His methods, I would still serve Him because He is God and has control of all things including my fate. I serve Him because I love Him and He saved me, and I would, even if I did not think He was doing things right, because He is God. Secondly, we have a responsibility to stay faithful in spite of our situation. Martha dying hurts deeply. I will never, this side of heaven, understand why God took her home, but I do know it was for good reason and that is sufficient for me. We must be thankful for our trials (James 1:2-4) and consider them a blessing. We must find a way to use them to further the kingdom of God, for that is why they happen. We must move on through

trials, not get stuck in them. Sometimes it is necessary to stop and experience them and learn from them, but there will come a time to move on forgetting what lies behind and looking forward to what awaits us. That is when we are most useful for God. Finally, our joy and hope must be in the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we make the mistake of trying to find it in earthly things, we will fail. No amount of friends, money, or respect will attain it. Only the knowledge of a loving, gracious, saving Lord will do it. There is nothing more comforting to me than to know that I have been plucked out of a destiny of darkness to live forever in the presence of God. AMEN!

4.26.2006

As of today, I am 39 years old. I have been married to Mary for 7 yrs. We have Dane 10, and Madison 8 from Martha and I's marriage. Mary and I have had Blake 6 together and 2 yrs ago adopted little Maleah for South Korea. She is now 3. We live in New Braunfels, Tx on 5 acres in the country with lots of animals and lots of room to run and play. I have a Christian Biblical counseling practice and spent time writing, speaking to groups and loving in my family and my Lord.

I can honestly say, I have never been more joyful and complete than I am today. The Lord has completely restored me. There will always be a part of me that is gone, but that part no longer is a void.

I rejoice in the Savior that loves me completely and is sufficient for all things!

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