



OCTOBER 2002

*Jesus cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.
He who believes in Me...out of his heart will flow rivers of LIVING water" (John 7:37-38).*

For you are the temple of the LIVING God (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Joy's back incision appears to be on the verge of healing! She is scheduled to be on IV antibiotics at least through November. She still has some healing pain, particularly at night. Through it all, we are learning the difference between a *historical testimony* and a *living testimony*. Historical testimonies are wonderful reminders of how God has worked in our lives...they focus on WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US in the PAST. We do so much want Joy's healing to be a thing of the past. However, God is revealing to us the most important testimony is a *living testimony* that focuses on WHO GOD IS TO US NOW! God lovingly gives us a joyful anticipation of Christ faithfully shining through all our circumstances!

Joy and I read together each night. We are currently reading the book Grace in Ungracious Places, written by the president of Lifetime Guarantee Ministries, with whom Christ Life Ministries is associated (see www.aelm.org). Joy is amazed that one chapter expresses her heart perfectly in regards to her long-term bouts with pain, including the pain of night. An excerpt of this chapter is on the back...it is Joy's current living testimony. We hope it encourages you, too. We see now that there is no hope in clinging to the past or even in anticipating how things might turn out in the future. True hope is the enjoyment of our faith in the living Christ NOW! He is the Light that shines in the darkness NOW!

A Living Testimony from a Mother

I am currently witnessing a single mother with two children blossom in the present hope of the gospel I am sharing with her. I recently asked her to write out her testimony, and here (by permission) is what came from her heart, even in the midst of struggles. Notice it is present tense.

"Jesus is the love of my life. He is my Redeemer, Savior, Healer, Protector, Guide – my Rock. Jesus has been there for me, in me, when all others have deserted me. Nothing on this earth is more important as my relationship with Him. Life is eternal in Him – heaven can be here on earth. Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." God blesses those who realize their need for Him for the kingdom of heaven is given to them. Christ lives in and through me...I live the Christ life. This may not be easy in this world, but the rewards of His love and grace far outweigh the life-changing challenges and persecution of this world. Thank you, Jesus."

Have you a need to overcome something now in your life? We all do. Be comforted by the words of Jesus:

*I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble.
But take heart! I HAVE OVERCOME (past tense) the world (John 16:33).*

So, how do you overcome? By the living testimony of Christ!

They OVERCAME him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their TESTIMONY (Revelation 12:11a).

I have never understood this verse from Revelation before...until now. The blood of the Lamb in this context represents the very the LIFE of Christ! The physical blood of Christ is a PAST event that takes away all our sins ONCE and FOR ALL. The spiritual blood of Christ poured into us through the Holy Spirit gives us all of the life of Christ NOW and FOREVER! Therefore, we overcome by knowing the truth of the life of Christ in us, and then trusting His living testimony to speak through us in our daily lives in any way He perfectly enables! The life of Christ that flows through a Christian has already overcome sin! Wow! As a Human, Jesus secured the perfect antibody for the deep infection of sin!

A Living Testimony in Puerto Rico

I took a leave-of-absence from work in January and February 2000 to train full-time at Grace Life International (GLI) in Charlotte, NC (see www.glionline.com). It was a watershed experience for me in being nurtured in the indwelling life of Christ and in ministering His life to others. One of my mentors Mark Maulding (president of GLI) will testify of this life in a sermon to the largest Southern Baptist Church in Puerto Rico (2000 members) on November 10. His message will be taped and televised to the entire island of 4 million. GLI has been discipling Puerto Rican pastors for over a year. Mark will also teach a GraceLife Conference in that church November 14-16. I recently witnessed the lives of six people be nurtured in the life of Christ in GraceLife Conferences I helped teach this past month in Hendersonville, NC and Simpsonville, SC.

GRACE NOTE

What a treasure we see, when we are allowed a glimpse into what God is up to with us. God is awesomely beautiful in all of His ways!
(A recent living testimony note from a friend to encourage Joy.)

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Grace in Ungracious Places

by Preston Gillham (Fleming H. Revell, a division of Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002)

Excerpts from Introduction and Chapter One

For most of my life I have lived in pursuit of a concept – a godly ideal – called grace, considering my quest noble and my goal spiritual. It simply never occurred to me that grace was a Person and that He was pursuing me. It has taken divine effort to break through my human effort to understand grace. In a shrewd act of genius, our heavenly Father reveals His grace in ungracious places, just as an astute jeweler displays a diamond against a dark backdrop.

Grace is a Person, and He is engaged in our daily life no matter where that engagement takes Him, even dark and ungracious places. Grace is God's passionate determination to share His heart with me. Why? In hopes that I will find in Him a new life rooted in His demonstration of grace – Jesus Christ. In hopes that I will discover His great gift to me of a new heart capable of bonding with His heart of grace. I hope that the honesty of my journey will benefit you. May the profound realization of grace in your ungracious places inspire you to say, "Oh, wow!"

Chapter Five: Pain, The Black Knight

Have you noticed that pain and fear, like most special forces operations, use the darkness of night to gain advantage during their attack? In recent nights an old adversary has returned to joust with me for the hand of victory. He is a black knight on a gray horse who rides at dusk with an entourage of mealy-mouthed knaves. Fear's face is under the black helmet with the slotted visor. With massive hands he grips his lance and hoists his shield. Behind his breastplate is a heartless chest housing an unscrupulous soul.

For twenty years I have wrestled with undiagnosed physical pain. I have learned - the hard way mostly – what I can and can't do. I can't ride in a car for a long time; I can't lie on my right side; I can't make the bed; etc. Lately I can't sleep. Of all the twitching, wiggling, jerking, groaning, gritting, and flopping you've never seen the like. As I contemplate lying down, the spasms that will certainly begin, the tossing, the dark room in the wee hours of the morning, and the clouds of fatigue, Fear lowers his lance, or swings his mace, or stabs at me with the point of his sword. And I feel ill equipped to fight, standing there in my robe.

But fight I must, or be run through and bludgeoned. King David said to Goliath, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. The LORD does not deliver by sword or spear; for the battle is the LORD's" (1 Samuel 17:45, 47).

Fear ominously jockeys for position. I know from years of experience that his accomplice, Pain, will not miss his appointment with my bedtime. I will come to blows with Fear. Pain will land hard, burning punches on my body.

The outlook is grim, and the enemy taunts, "Sleep is illusive. The mattress is really a rack, and you are my prisoner. Morning is hours away, and I own the night and its depths. You are mine."

But the fight does not belong to Fear. The battle is the Lord's. He is able. I may *feel* ill equipped, wandering the dark house in my pj's, but I am clothed with the armor of God and armed with the sword of the Spirit.

The dark knight has his gnarly knaves, but I am surrounded by warriors from the kingdom of light and supplied by God Himself, who is love, and "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). My body takes the brunt of the battle, while my spirit and soul form an ever-tightening alliance with the Lord. I may lose sleep, but I find Father is more than sufficient. I may take a beating in the fight, but the battle belongs to Him. Fear jousts about, but the "joy of the Lord is my strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

Fear. Pain. Darkness. Sleeplessness. Disorientation. Dread. These do not lend themselves to a nice, neat, surgical battle. On the contrary. It is a grueling, bludgeoning, hand-to-hand, pummeling, spitting, kicking street fight so ungracious it feels dishonorable. But there is no dishonor in scrapping to infuse grace into the un-grace of a butcher's blitz.

The dark knight and his knaves may boast that they own the night, but Father promises He will give us treasures in the darkest hours (Isaiah 45:3a). I know you too encounter the dark rider and have bouts with Pain and Fear. I shout encouragement to you. Fear may not be assaulting the drawbridge of your castle at this time, but that's only the calm before the storm. Either he or Pain or one of their allies will come strutting his stuff. Don't even think of trying to take him yourself. The battle is the Lord's, and the hand of victory is yours.

It took several days before I could gather a cogent plan of attack I could execute when awakened from a sound sleep by the vice-like grip of Pain. I flanked Fear with a small passage of Scripture (*Psalms 18:16-19*) I kept ready night and day:

*He (God) delivered me from my strong enemy, and from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.
They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my stay.
He brought me forth also into a broad place; He rescued me, because He delighted in me.*

As for pain, it is relentless; but Father is constant. What issue are you facing that might be manageable if you meditated on a small passage of Scripture and determined to do whatever was necessary to remember that Father is constant?

Father, I thank You that You are constant, that You are the same every day, that You are unflappable, suffer no surprises, and are without shadow. They say that pain makes cowards of us all, and that is true. But my strength come from You, and You are victorious. Father, I'm not much to look at. I'm scuffed and hollowed-eyed, scarred and limping. I'm in no shape to do much dancing after a night of fighting. But I celebrate the victory You have won and am proud to be part of the campaign to conquer the final outposts of my flesh. I declare, to all who will listen, Your grace is well suited to ungracious places. It is quite a journey we are on. Thanks Papa.