

## Part Three: Doing it Alone

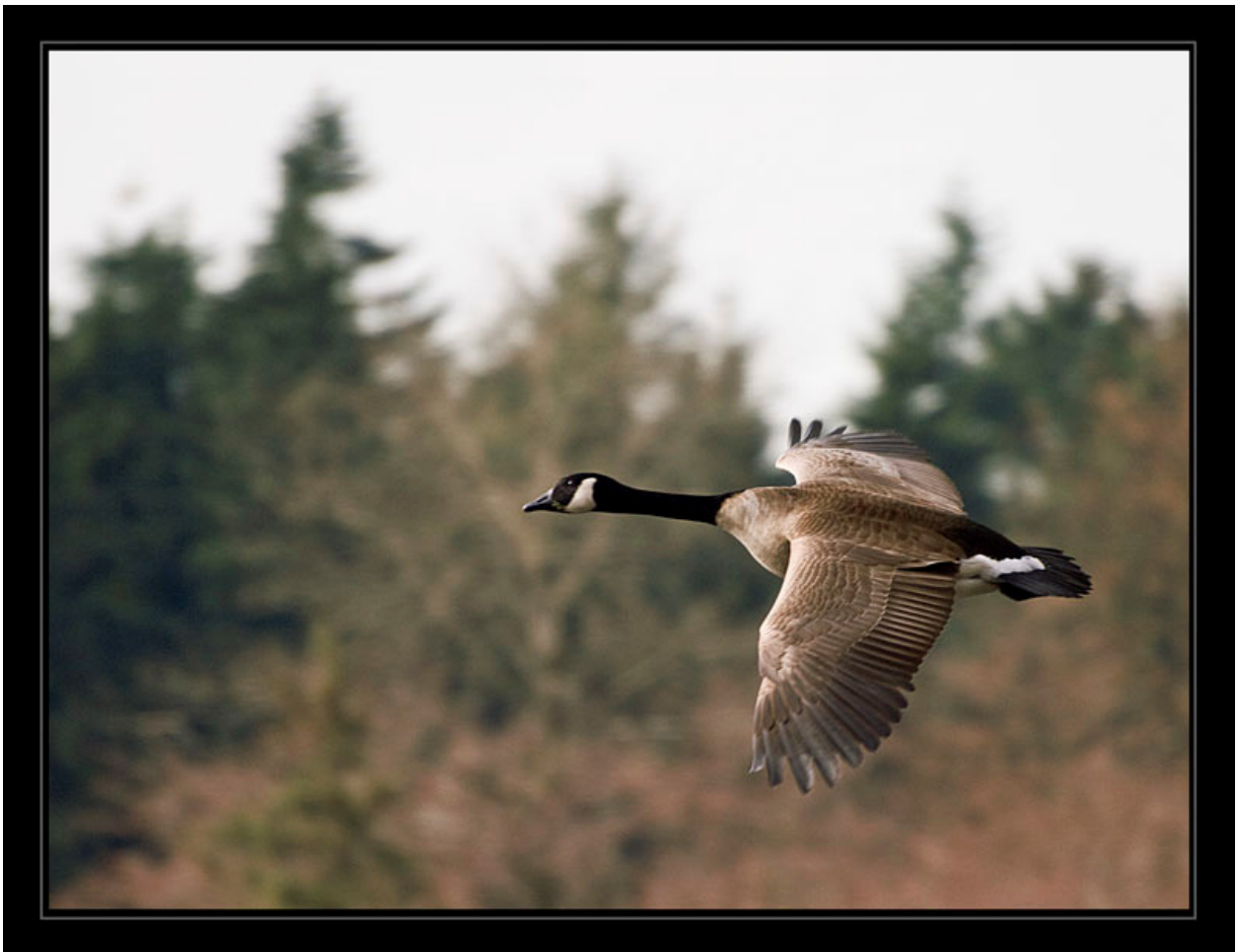


Photo by Michael A. Wollen; February 2009; [www.mindtapmedia.com](http://www.mindtapmedia.com)

### Visiting Hours

Allowing an “ex” to visit the family home is awkward no matter what arrangements have been made. This is especially true if the wounds of the divorce are still fresh and the behavioral quirks that led to the divorce continue. Visiting hours are arranged mostly outside the parental home, but the court made an exception for us. The children were still young and couldn’t travel by bus to Langley to visit their mother.

Sophie’s visiting hours were scheduled for Saturdays at my house. She was an early riser and arrived way too soon for my liking. Her knock on the door interfered with the unhurried breakfast that I enjoyed on weekends. To avoid surprises I tried to get out of the house before she arrived. She also visited during the week and her unscheduled

appearances began bothering me. The children understood my desire for autonomy and alerted me to her presence when I came home from work.

Sophie expressed her love to the children in many ways. She was a nurturing mother who brought many gifts, took them shopping, and ate at restaurants. They liked her generous manner, unhurried disposition, and just spending time together. In comparison, I was the disciplinarian who prepared home cooked meals and had little spare time, or patience, or money for extra curricular activities.

Was there competition in getting the children's favor? You bet there was. I worked hard to keep up my popularity. There's bound to be friction when one parent does the hardcore duties of running a household while the other comes for friendly visits with bags full of gifts and goodies. Each of us wanted to instill in the children what we thought was best, but our perceived values diverged. Sophie's emphasis was on meeting their very material needs and desires. I, on the other hand, worried about spoiling them rotten by giving too much. Lack of communication in custody disputes causes serious misunderstandings that can lead to mistrust and tension.

In spite of the perceived interference and apparent indulgence, Sophie's visits had a positive spin on the children. The boys needed the tenderness of their mother. Her presence offered a balance to the otherwise male-dominated boot camp that ran like the Swiss Army.

Her visits also taught the children how to care for their mother. The youngest two looked after her especially well. At first they didn't notice much wrong with Mom and wanted her to stay at home for good. They didn't understand why she couldn't move back in, and were saddened that she had to leave again in the evening.

### **When Divorce is a Solution**

Why do some youngsters do well while others go astray, although the home setting may be similar? I cannot solve this puzzle other than sharing my own experience in raising a family under disadvantaged circumstances. Let me remind the readers again that I am not writing as an expert with professional degrees, but as a father who has observed the rise and fall of his family.

There is evidence that children from broken families experience greater problems in school, get poorer grades, are more tempted to break the law, and have bigger health issues than those from well-functioning two-parent families. Blaming the problems on single parenthood is an oversimplification that may lead to a wrong conclusion. Instead of pointing the finger at divorce, we must go deeper and examine what caused the family break-up in the first place. We do this by evaluating the character of the couple.

A marriage can only succeed if both partners are rational and mature. Self-sacrifice and servant-hood, two ingredients that are vital in a good marriage, are often missing in a troubled marriage. These shortcomings interfere with forming a stable family in which to raise obedient children.

Another culprit is a behavior problem or a psychiatric disorder that hinders a partner from carrying out his or her assigned duty as spouse and parent. It is important to realize that it's not necessarily the *divorce* that leads a youngster to go astray, but the *defect* of a parent that will, or has caused the divorce. Let's look into this hypothesis further.

It is known that a single-parent family in which one parent was taken away by death has fewer problems raising children than if the loss occurred through divorce. Before the death of the spouse, we assume that the family was fully functional as a two-parent unit, and after one dies the surviving parent does surprisingly well. This theory rests on the belief that a person who is capable of maintaining a good marriage is also competent in raising a family as a single parent.

We now take a case in which the partner in a two-parent setting becomes irrational and causes harm to the family. Many view this as more damaging than the death of a spouse or a divorce, and I support this finding. Let's observe such a family by looking through a kitchen window.

Trying to keep the family functional, the responsible spouse puts in double duty, but the ill partner sabotages the work by being demeaning and arrogant. He or she abuses the family in a controlling way, not realizing that this mannerism short-circuits all attempts to remedy the situation. Arguments break out, dishes get smashed, and the children cry. Counseling is of little help because the ill partner is unwilling or unable to change. The responsible spouse gets exhausted and a crisis situation is only a matter of time.

“Should a reasonable spouse hang on, or should he or she seek divorce to correct the home situation?” we ask. “What’s more important, marriage or the family?” I agree with church leaders and counselors to restore the ailing marriage. If this has been tried, and there is no reason to believe that the situation will improve, divorce is the best choice. This decision should be made unencumbered by religious rules.

Keeping a malignant marriage alive against all odds is like feeding a tree with poison. It stifles growth and eventually causes death. The Latin proverb *Succisa virescit* (pruned, it grows again), also applies to families that have no hope of reconciliation. Clear and concise guidance from one parent is better than contradicting instructions from two. Just as we have two arms, two legs, two eyes, and two ears and are able to function with only one if the other is taken away, so also must the responsible parent make the tough call to go with one if the other becomes dysfunctional.

If divorce is inevitable, waiting for the children to grow up will have serious consequences, as my experience has shown. I confess that this realization came late for me also. I kept hoping for a miracle or a medical breakthrough. This didn’t happen and biblical Lazarus did not awaken. Perhaps the biggest mental block was my conservative upbringing, believing that a marriage covenant is irrevocable, disregarding the circumstances involved. Yes, marriage should last for life, but there are exceptions. The ties *must* be broken if irresolvable marital problems harm the nucleus of the family. This view is in sharp contrast to my former belief that I so cherished.

There is a misconception that a single parent cannot do a fine job of raising a family, and statistical records supporting the ideas might be wrong. Allow me to repeat that it’s not so much the *divorce* that causes youngsters to go astray, but the *human defect*, which leads to divorce. As good management is key to a flourishing business, so also does solid parenting build a functional and stable family. Although God’s plan of a loving mother and father is best, the traditional family is not the only model that works. Success cannot be based on *marital status* alone but on the *character* and *competence* of the parent(s).

Going through a divorce and raising a family as a single parent doesn’t automatically solve all problems. On the contrary! Like surgery the patient will likely get worse before better. This happened to us. Having dwelt in a dysfunctional family for more than five years, it was hard for the children to adapt to a more predictable home life. With their mother gone, they blamed me for everything that went wrong. I was the target of sharp

criticism and became their punching bag, so to speak. It was their way of coping with the loss and they took out their frustrations on me.

Disrespectful behavior by youngsters is common in a divorce. The custodian parent must be aware and learn how to cope with this mannerism by being there and offering support. Who can better soak up the leaks from the hurting wounds of young children, and take the sharp hits from rebellious teenagers, than a loving parent?

We must look beyond the stinging remarks uttered and the insults flung and grasp the underlying cause. Youngsters want to check if parents are real, have integrity, and can be trusted. They want to make certain that Mom or Dad possesses the solid character that is required to lead the family through the troubled times. They push the limit, appear strong and in command but deep inside they are broken, begging for sympathy and love.

As parents we must become a rock for them. We must exercise tolerance and understanding, while staying firm on delivery. Only by keeping a steady course, establishing solid household rules, and listening to their needs can a broken family become functional again. It took a full year before my family began adjusting to the new order, and the children began doing better with me in sole control.

## **Leaving the Nest**

God lends us the children for only a season. When the time comes to move out, the young will pack up and leave. Even though raising the troop was hard, this is a difficult time for parents. We dislike spillage and want to keep the nest full.

Raising children is like waiting at a railway crossing while a long freight train slowly passes by. The unscheduled stop is always an inconvenience because we had planned the day differently. The delay this morning seems extra long. We are impatient and can't wait to get to the other side of the tracks to carry out our planned mission. We start counting the passing cars but soon get distracted. Then, finally, the last car is in sight, passes quickly, disappears down the track, and the train is gone. The track is clear.

We check our watch and notice that thirty years have passed. The surroundings have become quiet and we are suddenly all alone. Our intended mission is now a blur and no longer important. We decide to turn around and go home. But instead of entering

a house bustling with active children, we find an empty place. We sit in a quiet room, our mind still following the train, wondering where it's heading and how far it has traveled. Loneliness sets in and we hope that one of the kids will call to say hello.

Every parent will eventually experience the bittersweet moment when he or she will sit in a quiet room and stare at the marks on the wall left behind as souvenirs of a busy household. How we wish that the happy voices would return one more time! For a while it appeared that raising a family was a never-ending chore that would take a lifetime — and now this time has shrunk to a short season.

We look back at the stage where the family played and watch the scenes unfolding. They are etched in stone that can no longer be changed, although at times we wish we could. God gave us only one season to perform our parental duty, and that opportunity has now passed. We reminisce on the good times and try to forget the less desirable moments. Each family has a bit of both.

For those going through rough times raising a family, let me assure you that quieter times will lie ahead. Just as tending a garden during the hot and dry summer produces little in return until autumn, so also do parents see only thorns and thistle when the youngsters go through the parched teenage years. When the replenishing rains come and the refreshing water quenches the earth, the flowers burst into bloom, the fruits explode with sweetness, and life receives its reward.

It's reassuring to know that there is a God who understands our problems and accepts who we are. In due time, the heavens will send relief to all struggling families and the difficult times will pass. It's then when the young adult will discover the valuable treasure that lays hidden in the family chest. The work put in by the parents will come to light and turn into a precious asset, rising above material possessions. The everyday quandaries will be forgotten, and the thorny issues will no longer consume us as they did then. This is the time when we begin realizing that divine help was at work to guide the family through the rough passage.

Theodore Roosevelt, a professional historian, naturalist, explorer, hunter, author, soldier, and president of the United States placed the work of a parent above his own achievements and writes:

No other success in life — not being president, or being wealthy, or going to college, or writing a book, or anything else — comes up to the success of the

man or woman who can feel that they have done their duty, and that their children and grandchildren rise up and call them blessed.

Theodore Roosevelt, 1917

## **Report Card on my Parenting**

During a recent family retreat at a Whistler resort I asked the now grown children to judge my handling of the family crisis. I soon realized that the hurt of the past is still deeply entrenched in their hearts. I had hoped that the passing of time would have erased these dark memories. This hasn't happened yet and, in part, they blame me for the rough ride. Pointing the finger at a parent is common. I pointed a finger also during my growing up years.

I left the old country without resolving the issues that troubled me most. It would have helped if my father had explained the circumstances that led to what I thought were unfair punishment. Admitting shortcomings and letting me know that no parent is perfect would have drawn me closer to him. Insisting on being right when the child thinks otherwise casts a dark shadow on the parent-child relationship. A father may think he is doing well, but the child sees the theatrical play from a different angle.

We all have an axe to grind and remember unpleasant incidents that happened while growing up. These memories become the *Wailing Wall* to which we flee to release our grief. Everyone remembers unfairness — some small, others large, some justified, others not. We preserve them in our memory as if they were valuable treasures, and bring them into adulthood so that we can replay them again. Each time we recall an incident we add drama, and what goes back into memory is an enhanced adaptation that overwrites the original version.

I detect some embellishments with my own children. As the saying goes, "Children are the world's greatest recorders, but the world's worst interpreters." As parents we try to downplay irregularities that upset our children and focus on the *finish line* instead. We look at the skirmishes and mishaps as unfortunate incidents that couldn't be avoided and deem ourselves successful when the children turn out well and lead productive lives.

My family expresses emotions best by email. Among a flurry of messages Holly articulated her thoughts by saying, "You write as though your role was absolutely faultless. You don't humble yourself, nor do you admit to your mistakes. They are always

justified with a fleeting reason. What if you had been more in tune with Mom's emotional needs right from the beginning and sought to fight the illness together?" She then stated that I am always trying to rationalize my actions, including the divorce.

Holly was supportive of the divorce but questions my approach. She has also criticized that I wasn't always emotionally available to her, Perry and the other children. When her mother hurt her during a family dispute, the 911 call she made was a cry in desperation. It was an urgent attempt to thrust open the door so an outsider could see what was happening inside. She was shouting for help.

Perry writes that the divorce was necessary for the kids because it was the lesser of the two evils. He stated, however, that, "Dad chose to focus on his company and not engage in our lives. He was too much in a survival mode and didn't provide enough emotional support."

The younger three boys give more credit for my parenting role. Mattie, the middle child who had gone through a great deal of hurt growing up, wrote that he had no regrets in the way he had been raised and thinks that the type of upbringing motivates him to attain more in life. He says that, although not perfect, the rearing strangely worked.

Todd, who was in early grade school during the family crisis, explained that the lack of parental supervision made him more mature and independent. "Let's keep in mind that we were raised during a crisis time," he says. "No one had it easy, especially Dad. It's unfair to expect Dad to be the full-time father and mother of five growing kids. Given the circumstances, I understand why Dad raised us this way. We expected too much from him."

Somewhat sheltered from the storm, Randy, our youngest, sent me this moving message, saying, "Dad, I think it is a miracle that somehow you raised five kids while going through a roller-coaster marriage and running a business. You did the best job possible and I am not at all bitter about the way I grew up. For the most part, the house was stable and always welcoming."

In the midst of the floods of criticisms, a surprising incident happened just recently. Randy came home from work and said that his boss gave him a compliment: "Go home and tell your dad that he has brought you up very well, and thank him for it." Puzzled by this comment made by a total stranger, I thought that God has a way of stepping in to defend the accused in times of trial.

My broken marriage has made my children cautious of getting married. They worry that their loving dates could turn into monsters one day. The boys keep asking, “Dad, were there any signs of problems when you married Mom?” To which I reply, “No, *none*.” I then advise them to go ahead and marry the person they love. I emphasize that with goodwill and prayer most marriages work out well. Very few must be dissolved. Having tasted the bitter pill of a failed marriage I understand their concerns and pray that my divorce will serve as a sacrificial offering so that my children will be spared this horrible ordeal.

In her concluding email Holly writes, “You shouldn’t feel guilt whatsoever. In every way, you have exceeded as a father and grandfather. I have accepted that times were rough and your empathy was a healing medicine to me.” The boys added these words, “You led by the example of being unselfish, using a strong moral and ethical code, being consistent in advice and punishment, and never choosing favorites.”

### **What Counselors Say**

As parent and breadwinner, my duty was (and still is) to create a stable home by setting firm rules, and then go out and earn a living. This wasn’t possible when Sophie was still living at home. She acted as a lightning rod for the children, undermining my authority, and letting them get away with murder. I was aware of the flaw and knew that one pillar supporting the family structure was caving in, causing the building to list to one side. The children took advantage of this and gravitated to the path of least resistance. Allowing this to continue would have caused an eventual collapse. Sophie’s departure prevented it from happening and the family regained equilibrium, albeit on only one pillar.

Many families suffer from serious deficiencies and Christian counselors, broadcasters, and authors of self-help books are eager to assist by offering tons of resource material. Although well meaning, the information often fails to address the more serious family problems, especially if it involves a dysfunctional partner.

I detect a trace of ignorance with these self-help resources in that the advisors prefer taking a home setting in which two functioning parents is the norm. They assume that the family’s crisis would be resolved if proper guidelines were given, and followed. In short, advisors pick cases where the offered resources would have a positive impact to remedy the situation.

A family dysfunction that can only be resolved with a divorce is a taboo. It's something that's not supposed to happen and Christian advisors stay from this alternative. Very few would suggest divorce, even if this were the best solution. Simply saying, "Our hands are bound by the Bible," as some ministers do, is not a good answer when a hurting family falls apart because it can no longer function under the repressive scheme of an irrational spouse. Books and programs do indeed help if the problems are mild and correctable, but giving advice on *interior decoration* is inappropriate if the house is collapsing.

"What did you go out into the desert to see?" Jesus asked the folks who visited John the Baptist. "A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces."

These words from Matthews 11:7-8 remind us of the harsh environment in a desert, and the unfamiliarity when sheltered people visited the wasteland. Applying this biblical verse to modern marriage and family counseling, advisers must come to grips with the harsh reality when helping a dysfunctional family. Not all spouses are blessed with a healthy and rational mind. Many are simply not able, or willing, to follow outside advice when given. The textbook approach, even if Christian based, has limited benefit if the old house needs rebuilding.

"A parent should always engage fully in the children's lives," is a common phrase I hear from well-meaning advisors. How can a single parent do this when he or she is also the sole breadwinner? As my finances got tighter and the legal bills kept rising, my divorce lawyer hinted that I might have to pull the children out of Christian education, sell the house, and find a place to rent. I didn't follow her advice and instead moved the financial urgency to a higher priority by putting in extra hours at work. Working hard is not always done for material enrichment and self-fulfillment, as some well-meaning advisers might believe. For many it's survival!

When soft advice no longer provides a solid underpinning to rebuild your family, then you, the responsible parent, must take a leadership position and go on your own. Let's not forget that help is available from above for those who ask. "I will never leave you, nor forsake you. The Lord is my helper and I will not fear," says the Bible.

This verse from Hebrews 13:5,6 became true and our family survived the crisis. I was pleased when Todd told me how proud he is that I started Cadex and appreciates that I am able to pay the tuition for his study at UBC to become an engineer.

We must accept that many parents are called to do more than raise children. Our forefathers worked hard to provide the freedom and prosperity that we take for granted today. They did this above their parental responsibility, and many went through deep hardship. While textbook counsel will work for some, Blaise Pascal<sup>14</sup> reminds us: “The supreme function of reason is to show man that some things are beyond reason.”

## **Unfulfilled Dreams**

When we marry and start a family we carry with us the hope for a better world. We glance at the generation that has passed before us, see their failings, and resolve to do better. God appreciates our noble intentions but also places obstacles in our journey.

Life can be portrayed hewing a path through dense bush, not knowing where we are heading and not understanding what lies ahead in the untouched wilderness. Every morning, replenished with fresh energy, we grab the axe and advance further into unfamiliar territory.

Then, when autumn comes, our strikes get slower but more skilled and calculated. We stop for breath, look back at the hewn path, and reminisce about the past. It's then that we see the carnage strewn along the way and wonder if we could have done better.

One piece of carnage on the trail is my broken marriage. It is a bloodshed that cannot be flushed out. I am reminded of this each time when I attend a family event to which my “ex” is also invited. Yes, we do meet occasionally and the connection can never be broken. Reality cannot be changed, nor can it be erased.

I feel awkward in her presence. We greet each other and keep our distance. Looking at her now, I can hardly believe that this perplexed and estranged woman was once the loving young lady God chose to be my wife. I simply have no answer as to what God had in mind — giving in marriage and taking away in divorce — if one can put God into the equation. *I must have taken a wrong turn while hacking away the dense brush, I reckon. Or was this my destiny, a carefully thought-out plan, orchestrated by Someone higher, I ask?* I will never know.

Medicine has made wonderful progress but none so effective that would allow Sophie to lead a normal life. Now in her fifties, she looks happy and seems satisfied with her life, but she has to be reminded to get more exercise, watch what she eats, and observe personal hygiene. In conversations with her one realizes that much of what she says is fantasy. One cannot take what she says for real. Her days revolve around living in a cramped apartment that she manages herself, calling her children by phone, looking forward to visits by the children on weekends, and accepting invitations for family celebrations.

There are times when she gets depressed, and my children make a special effort to lift her up. The long winter months are especially hard on her. When down she stops taking her medication, begins having anxiety attacks, and becomes afraid to leave her apartment. She tells wild stories, misplaces articles, becomes irritable, and gets paranoid about food spoilage if a food item has been left out of the refrigerator for even a few minutes.

My children are doing a fine job attending to her needs. But what is my duty? How should I relate to my former wife? The Bible doesn't address the do's and don'ts of ex-spouses, but reminds us to look after the sick, helpless, and poor. "Love your neighbors as you love yourself," says Jesus, and reminds us, "What you do to the least of these, you do to me."

Not everyone is blessed with a healthy and rational mind and if divorce is necessary, the former spouse should continue supporting the 'ex' outside of marriage. This sends a strong message to the children to care for the needy. Sophie would have done everything in her power to escape the debilitating bipolar disease.

I've tried to help and be tolerant, but I get cranky when I come home from work and find her puttering around my house. It's hard to love an ex-spouse after a difficult marriage. Even after all these years, something deep inside my chest keeps churning. It's an irritant I can never fully remove, even though I have forgiven Sophie.

My "ex" is very kind to me now. She means well and is the first to greet me with good wishes on Christmas, New Year, and my birthday. The resentment that had built up during our troubled marriage and the lengthy divorce proceedings has turned to acceptance and silent respect. I admire her as the mother of my children and appreciate

the sacrifices she has made in giving me five healthy offspring, a gift that can never be overlooked.

We all have unfulfilled dreams. God gives and God takes away. In my quest for answers I have come to realize that the Lord has provided me with much more than I asked for. My family is functional again. The children are healthy and we are doing well. The squandered money has been redeemed many times over. Most importantly, the Lord has shown me how to enjoy the simple things of life. They are gifts that have no price. Looking around me I see miracle upon miracle — marvels hidden from those who only seek material riches, fame, and worldly pleasures. I witness the splendor of nature that renews itself in a most miraculous way. In Psalm 19:1-4 we read:

The heavens are telling the glory of God; they are a marvelous display of His craftsmanship. Day and night they keep on telling about God. Without a sound or word, silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world.

[TLB]

You may carry a heavy load and travel on a road that is laborious, long and seemingly leading to nowhere. If you have unfulfilled dreams and are bogged down with persistent marital problems, I suggest the following:

- Try to stop the transgression. Remove yourself from the onslaught of the hurts and arguments by getting time and space for yourself. This will allow you to reflect on available options.
- Pray in quiet and ask God for a solution. Involve your relatives and close friends and ask them to pray also. Do not give up if it takes longer than expected.
- Forgive the person who causes affliction. Healing can only begin once you have opened your heart and forgiven the oppressor. If you cannot forgive, pray for the person. This will set you free.
- Attend regular church services. Quiet meditation away from home builds strength and gives wisdom. Worshiping with others will expand your understanding beyond the walls of the home and bring you into a supporting community.

During my darkest days, Frank and Mary, my longtime supporting friends, gave me a famous poem entitled, "Footsteps in the Sand." It describes a walk with the Lord on a beach. First, we see two sets of footprints in the sand, but when times get tough, there is only one. Asking the Lord why He would leave me when I needed Him most, He replied, "It was then that I carried you."

Looking back, God's help was most prevalent when I was down and out, and the path was obscured. I was never alone and help was always available. It is most striking that God sends His help through ordinary people.

### **God Works for the Good of Those Who Love Him**

In closing let us examine Romans 8:28 once more. It says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." In view of my broken marriage I have struggled with this verse for a long time. "God working for the good in all things" troubles me when I consider the encroaching illness of my wife that tore our family apart. I also question the text when I hear about accidents, fires, tornados, earthquakes, and tsunamis that kill innocent people. I have a hard time seeing anything as "working for our good" when widows long for their deceased spouses and orphans cry out for their mothers and fathers who will never return.

Romans 8:28 has been the subject of much commentary. Biblical scholars say that we must read the verse in the context of a broader text that stretches from Romans 8:14 to 8:39. By reading the entire passage, we begin seeing a different picture. God allows these awful things to happen, but promises never to abandon us because nothing can separate us from the love of God. He provides us with steadfastness regardless of what must come to pass. The key is not so much on how floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes supposedly "work for our good," but on how these terrible things do not restrict God in bringing good out of the ashes. Let these calamities be what they are, acts of God over which we have little control. We have no clear answers as to why they happen, other than pointing to the laws of physics. As long as our planet keeps spinning around its axis and the sun rises above our heads, disasters will occur.

Accepting and enduring calamities, even if we don't understand why they happen, brings us into a higher realm of the spiritual world. Good things came from my broken

marriage. I am a richer person in spirit for one, and I would not have written this book if I had not experienced adversity. Dr. James Dobson writes, “Those who conquer their problems are more secure than those who never face them.” In this respect, conquering is better than not conquering, and there is truth in Romans 8:28. Hardship builds spiritual understanding, insight that cannot be obtained from academia.

The Apostle Paul said goodbye to us with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. He was a man who had achieved great things in his life even while enduring many adversities. What amazes me is how well he took hardship. In 2 Timothy 4:7 we read: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” The punch line is *“I have kept the faith.”*

No, God didn’t respond to my prayers in the way I wanted. I despised divorce with a passion because it broke the promise I had made. I hoped for a miracle through which God would reveal His awesome power and provide healing similar to the awakening of Lazarus from the grave. It did not happen. Instead, I (the very person who despised divorce as a self-inflicted act) had to stoop down low and go through this humiliating experience. I thought I was invincible, and in my haughty spirit, I believed that commitment to marriage and following biblical principles would solve all ills. I stood on dry ground and from my vantage point looked down into the abyss of divorce. I criticized those who, in my limited understanding, didn’t do so well with their marriages. This club mentality blinded me from seeing the real reasons why some marriages cannot survive and why it is better to resolve them.

I believe in the power of prayer and I am convinced that the restoration of my family, the success of my business, my good health, and the return of inner happiness are God’s answers to prayer. I couldn’t have done it by myself. Our marriage was successful in that it served as the vehicle to deliver the goods — five children. The chicks are hatched, the product is delivered, but the eggshells lay broken on the floor.

With the children growing into young adults I asked the question, “What’s more important, the marriage or the family; the eggshells or the content?” We know that both are needed, but if only one could be chosen, I would take the family. The family forms a new generation that holds the aspirations I cherish, namely *to set forth faithful soldiers who carry the good deed by walking in the footprints of the Lord.*

God mandated a marriage to be permanent. He did this for good reason — to instill discipline and order to the human race. It's a very good plan that works most of the time, but there are exceptions. God knows about these and allows them to happen.

It wasn't so much the divorce that caused my spiritual free-fall, but the thought that God had neglected me on something I treasured so much. Not getting help from above at a critical moment was a huge letdown. I felt as if God had abandoned me in the trenches for good. But looking back, this very walk in the dumps changed my life for the better.

Can we attain prominence without enduring hardship? No, we must go through disappointments in life to gain strength and reach greatness in spirit. "Rejoicing in suffering," as the apostle Paul says in Romans 5:3-4, does not make much sense when we are victims of uncontrolled circumstances and are being tossed in a merciless sea. It was during the betrayal barrier that I gained a new understanding that true happiness does not lie in *achieving*, but in *surrendering and accepting*. We must become servants of the Lord by letting go of our own desires and following Him. The yoke He prepared for me was easier to bear than I had first anticipated.

It's not the journey that counts, but the arrival. A stream of water is born on top of the mountain. It endures many twists, twirls, and torrents until it meets the big master and finds a home in the mighty ocean. God pays little attention to what role we play on the theatrical stage, but observes how we play our part.

In closing we reflect on the well-known prayer by Rev. Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr: It reminds us of the immeasurable gift that God gives to most of us — it's the heritage of a healthy mind. I beg that we use this powerful tool for the benefit of our families and the good of the society at large, and pray:

God grant me the SERENITY to accept the things I cannot change, COURAGE to change the things I can, and the WISDOM to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardships and the pathway of peace, and trusting that God will make all things right.