

How Sorrow Brings Peace

Have you ever had the pleasure of hibernating under a warm blanket on a cold winter night? I'm sure many of you have. When I was growing up, "Big Mama" (my grandmother on my mother's side) used to make homemade quilts from pieces of fabric and old clothes to keep us warm during the winter.

She could have made fancy, cotton calico quilts like those sold in department stores and at quilt shows. But our favorite quilts were the ones made from Donnie's and Milton's (my brothers) old jeans, my sister Kathy's and my khaki skirts, and wads of cotton. Those comforters were so heavy that after Big Mama had tucked us in at night we couldn't move—but who wanted to come out from underneath such comforting warmth?

I experienced a similar but more deeply satisfying kind of warmth in December 2004 when my sister Rose died. Since her passing, I've come to a better understanding of what the apostle Paul meant when he said believers can receive a level of peace that surpasses comprehension (see Phil. 4:7).

Like many of you, I have read this verse or heard it preached on more occasions than I can count. But it wasn't until my sister's death that I fully understood its meaning.

My sister was a sassy, vibrant woman who had a zest for life and a passion for God and His people. But Rose spent her last days on Earth confined to a hospital bed, wracked with pain from the cancer that ultimately destroyed her body.

Watching her lie there as her life ebbed away was excruciating for me. During those final hours I silently cried out to God, asking Him to either heal Rose or relieve her from the pain by calling her home.

Between my periods of intercession, my thoughts drifted to my mother, who is in her twilight years and frail, and wondered what effect my sister's passing would have on her. Filled with

emotion, I bolted for the door and headed for the hospital chapel.

The sobs came as soon as I reached the door of the chapel. I collapsed on the nearest pew and cried for my dear sister, for my mother, for my other sisters and brothers, and for the children Rose was leaving behind.

As I was crying, something interesting happened. I thought about how Rose loved God. I remembered how much she loved being in the house of the Lord and how she enjoyed ministering to His people.

Then I thought about how much I loved God in spite of the intense pain I was feeling. Those sobs soon gave way to expressions of praise and thanksgiving. It became clear that an overwhelming presence of my Savior was in that chapel. The stinging, bitter tears of sorrow became a refreshing flood of joy, which washed away my anguish.

When I re-entered Rose's hospital room, I had a different outlook. I looked at my sister's face and was overjoyed to discover that she too had had a visitation.

Her frowns of pain had been replaced by calmness. The room that had once seemed damp, uninviting and chilly now seemed warm—because something shifted in the spiritual realm that day.

I reached for my Bible, and that's when the answer became clear: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7, NASB).

Peace flooded my soul as I experienced an overwhelming sense of the presence and power of God. All of my apprehensions and fears were literally cast down and replaced with the assurance

God's grace affords.

Although I felt certain that my sister was going to be with the Lord, my distress over the probability of that happening had ceased. Mother would be able to weather this storm, just as she had weathered other storms. My brothers and sisters would get through this. Rose's children would somehow be able to go on with their lives.

And as for me, I am covered by something much warmer and reassuring than even Big Mama's old quilts. I have the deep peace that only my eternal Comforter can give me.