

Prepare to be Delivered

God's love is able to deliver you from the pit of despair.  But will you receive this transforming love and be rescued?

He is one of my favorite patients. His appointments are usually made on Saturdays, and when I come into the exam room, he reminds me that I'm a pastor's wife with four kids so I'll understand when he adds, "I won't take up too much of your time." He brings a newspaper to read while he waits then gives it to my staff when his visit is over.

He is HIV-positive.

It was long before I became his doctor that he contracted the virus. He was married to a woman who, in time past, had used drugs intravenously, and she was the source of his exposure. As I got to know him, he revealed bits and pieces of who he was as a person, beyond the facts that go into the medical record.

It's funny how men and women are different. My female patients are uninhibited when it comes to expressing their emotions. I'm given intimate details of their personal lives, usually on their first visit and within minutes of introducing myself. But men are different. What they share beyond the nuts and bolts of their medical condition does not flow freely. Those facets of their lives are gathered piecemeal, and over the course of time.

As I learned his story, I couldn't help but stand in awe of God's transforming love for this man. When his wife became ill, they weren't prepared to hear that the diagnosis was HIV. Learning she had infected him was the second wave of that tsunami. At the time of her diagnosis, her illness was more advanced than his, and her health declined rapidly. He was

devastated by her death, and even neglected his own health during the months that followed.

Then, unexpectedly and tragically, his son died. And while he thought he had hit rock bottom when his wife passed away, he sunk even deeper into the depths of despair with the death of his son.

When I discovered the details of this part of his life, I was reminded of Psalm 40 when David said: “I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps” (vv. 1-2, NKJV).

My patient’s testimony, like David’s, bears witness to the power of God’s love, which is able to deliver us from the pit of despair. But the decision rests with us as to whether we will *receive* His transforming love. That decision is sealed through preparing our hearts.

Had my patient not positioned himself to receive God’s love, he would have sunk deeper into the pit, which could have overwhelmed him even to the point of suicide. But instead, he prepared his heart for deliverance. And now, he is doing remarkably well with a viral load that is undetectable.

I believe God’s love has preserved him—body, mind and spirit. So what did he do to position himself to receive this love? It required that he:

Eliminate Self-Pity

While God’s love is able to pull us out of a pit, self-pity keeps us anchored to the bottom. My patient faced adversity on many fronts, and adversity brings with it the temptation to slip into self-pity. This is especially true with chronic illness, with which we tend to assume a “woe is me” persona. The psalmist said: “I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from

whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:1-2).

If self-pity has us completely focused on our problems, then it becomes difficult for us to see the source of our help. Adversity is real, but there is a fine line between accepting the reality of affliction, and becoming totally consumed by it. David neither denied nor minimized his hardships. But they did not take his focus off the Lord. Rather, at the height of his pit experience he said, "Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, 'The Lord be magnified!'" (Ps. 40:16).

Remove Regret

Many chronic diseases are preventable and are the result of lifestyle choices related to diet, exercise, tobacco and alcohol, substance abuse or sexual exposure. And when disease (or any challenge for that matter) could have been prevented, we are prone to being overtaken with regret. Even though my patient acquired HIV in the state of holy matrimony, there was nevertheless the potential for him to look back and wonder what might have been, what could have been—what if, what if, what if. It's a deadly germ indeed that causes "if only-itis." My patient shielded his heart from catching it, and this positioned him to receive God's transforming love.

Consider Others First

The Bible says: "In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). One sure way to experience God's transforming love is to consider the needs of others ahead of your own. When my patient was in the depths of despair, he turned his attention to his daughters, and made a promise to himself to always place their needs above his own. And this pledge to them changed his life for the better.

Our best example of this truth is found in the life of Jesus. God's power was manifested through Christ on Calvary when He sacrificed Himself for the needs of others. And God's power is seen in our own lives when we put the needs of others before our own.

My patient could have easily met his end in the pit of affliction. But he chose another option requiring him to reject self-pity, resist regret and reach out to meet the needs of others. In doing so, he positioned himself to receive a miraculous manifestation of God's love. And his life was forever transformed.

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