

Faith Worth Imitating

✖ Editor's

note: *In*

1983, Gracie Parker Rosenberger fell asleep at the wheel and experienced a horrific car accident that has led to more than six

dozen operations ... including the amputation of both legs. She wrote the following about her experience directly following her accident.

If “dismal” described the days, then “horrific” serves as a perfect word for the nights. Sleep came sporadically; staring at the ceiling waiting for the next pain medicine injection served as the only activity.

I lost count of how many times nurses and techs rolled me to surgery for debriding the wounds, adjusting the Hoffman device holding my severed right foot to my leg, and whatever other surgery I needed. Yearning to find any position of comfort, I resigned myself to never be anything other than truly miserable.

“Why is this happening to me?!” I screamed silently at the ceiling while fumbling with tubes and IV lines. Hurling my hurt, rage and despair at heaven, the groaning, tears and heartache flooded out of me. In the deluge of emotions, however, I heard another question in the farthest corner of my mind.

“Is Jesus your friend?”

"Huh?" I replied with bewilderment to the thick foreign accent.

Suddenly, I was 6 years old and meeting an elderly woman back in my hometown, Fort Walton Beach, Fla. Riding in the back of Aunt Anne's car over to her friend's house, I swung my little legs while smoothing out my new dress. "Today Gracie," Aunt Anne told me, "You're going to meet a special lady who is spending the winter with a friend of mine ... and you get to give her a Christmas present."

Holding the gift tightly in my hands, I offered it to an old woman sitting in a wheelchair. Feeling nervous under the intense gaze of the strange woman, I backed away somewhat ... until she asked the oddest question about Jesus being my friend. Wearing an eye patch following the fourth operation to repair the crossed eyes I arrived in the world with, I think the woman may have considered me mentally challenged since I didn't respond to the question.

"Is Jesus your friend?" She asked again more purposefully.

For several months prior to meeting this woman, I traveled from family to pastor asking how I could become a Christian; but everyone told me to wait until I was older. Yet here before me sat a strange old woman, with an even stranger accent, bluntly asking me if I was

friends with Jesus.

"I want Him to be, but no one will tell me how!" I blurted out.

"It's very easy, dear." She responded with such kindness, and then told me in the most simplistic way about the reality of our sinful life, and that God made a way for us to be saved from sin by sending His Son, Jesus, to die in our place so that we could be free—if we turned from our life of sin and trusted in Him.

Looking at this woman, she clearly believed the words she spoke; as if nothing on this earth could shake her conviction. That day, I gave my heart to Christ. I believed the old woman with the strange accent. I believed God.

With legs in traction and my body in unending agony, I asked myself silently, "Do I still believe God; do I still believe He loves me?"

Struggling with those questions, I avoided sharing them with others. Who did I even know who could credibly speak to the faith I previously thought strong ... but now seemed so fragile?

"Remember your leaders and superiors in authority [for it was they] who brought to you the Word of God. Observe attentively and consider their manner of living (the outcome of their well-spent lives) and imitate their faith (their conviction that God exists and is the Creator and Ruler of all things, the

Provider and Bestower of eternal salvation through Christ, and their leaning of the entire human personality on God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom and goodness" (Heb. 13:7, AMP).

When our lives are filled with pain and despair, the Bible tells us to look back at those "leaders and superiors" who journeyed in faith before us ... and be encouraged that they too felt the same feelings, yet they pressed forward.

Many people talk a good talk and use a lot of churchy words and catchy motivational phrases, but I often wonder if they truly get it; would those nice words and inspirational slogans sustain them while in agony for days, weeks, months, years and even decades?

Struggling to reconcile their own faith with the suffering they witnessed, even friends and family offered me platitudes and shallow observations reflecting their limited understanding of God's providence ... while I lay helpless in bed. Down the hall from the room where I lay writhing in pain, many of my visitors struggled in impromptu late night Bible studies—trying to wrap their minds around the theological implications of a level of suffering that once served as an academic discussion, but now was witnessed up close and in person.

We often are tempted to “adjust” or “compensate” for God in order to reconcile unpleasant circumstances with our belief about

God and His actions toward pain and suffering in this world. One

or two well-meaning, but sadly naive, people even went so far as to

question what I had done to deserve this.

When confronted with suffering, many of us want to grasp how a loving God could allow misery. “Since God is love, then the person

suffering must have done something God often does to offend the

loving God ... therefore it’s the sufferers fault.”

That logic and view of God is not consistent with Scripture. I have encountered individuals who express an understanding of what and

how God doles out what we deserve and don’t deserve. I’m not qualified to speak for God ... and I have found it’s usually better

to refer to God speaking for Himself. When Job’s friends threw out

their suggestions as to why Job had to suffer, God’s response was

stern and shocking.

“After God had finished addressing Job, he turned to Eliphaz the

Temanite and said, ‘I’ve had it with you and your two friends. I’m

fed up! You haven’t been honest either with me or about me—not the way my friend Job has. So here’s what you must do. Take seven

bulls and seven rams, and go to my friend Job. Sacrifice a burnt

offering on your own behalf. My friend Job will pray for you,

and I

will accept his prayer. He will ask me not to treat you as you deserve for talking nonsense about me, and for not being honest with me, as he has" (Job 42: 7-8, The Message).

Reading the book of Job, it is worth noticing that God never explained to Job why the suffering and loss—most of it horrendously

brutal—was allowed in the first place. God often does not reveal

His purposes, but He does reveal Himself. And difficult as it may be,

that revelation is usually through suffering. Through that suffering,

however, an individual's faith can be honed, chiseled and purified

to the point of becoming a powerful beacon of encouragement to others

facing their own trials.

While lying in a hospital bed in agony ... with scarce hope for a

different reality, I knew positive thinking messages, encouraging

sermons, motivational speeches or even soul searching for blame

offered no help. Friends' or family members' "theories" of God's faithfulness and love couldn't penetrate the wretchedness

of my new life.

No, somewhere in my background, there had to be a faith, one of

those unquestioned beacons ... a life worth imitating. Hebrews 13:7

clearly states to look to those who brought the Word of the Lord

implying a personal encounter. Considering pastors and

teachers in my
life, I mentally inventoried those who spoke the Word of God
to me.

Asking myself if I recalled any of them dealing with
brutal realities eclipsing positive slogans and “feel-good
theology;” I couldn’t think of any.

In my heart, I also knew this life of faith I rummaged for in
the
recesses of my mind would have to be a woman ... with a credible
understanding of personal suffering, loss, humiliation and
despair; a
person who stood out as a beacon of God’s faithfulness, who
chose
to trust God in the blackest of circumstances.

Who in my life met such a criteria?

“Is Jesus your friend?” I heard once more from the old woman
in the wheelchair.

What I thought for years was a chance meeting now clearly
illustrated God weaving a credible anchor of faith into
my life. The strange-sounding old woman who looked at me with
such
intensity had endured suffering, loss and humiliation on a
scale far surpassing mine. Traveling through some of the
darkest pits
conceivable while enduring terror on an unimaginable scale,
this
unusual woman emerged with a faith that literally reached
around the
world.

The most important meeting in my life, where I began a journey
of
faith in trusting Jesus Christ, was the encounter God
arranged between a 6-year-old little girl with a patch over

her eye,
and an old woman who chose to trust God through the horrors,
degradation, loss and unspeakable despair of the Holocaust. Of
all
the people I'd encountered in my life until that point—and
even
still today—that woman possessed a faith worth imitating.

Her name was Corrie ten Boom.

Gracie

Rosenberger

*and her husband, Peter, started Standing With Hope, a
nonprofit
prosthetic limb outreach that continues to help amputees in
developing countries. Although
saddled with nearly \$9 million in health care costs and
ongoing
severe chronic pain, Gracie has defied the odds and emerged as
a
powerful voice of courage and inspiration to individuals
around the
world. Married for 25 years, Gracie and Peter live in
Nashivlle, Tenn., and have two sons—one of which attends the
United
States Military Academy Preparatory School at West Point. This
passage is from her book Gracie-Standing
With Hope, and
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