Rejoice in the Lord

God never moves without purpose or plan
When trying His servant and molding a man.
Give thanks to the Lord though your testing seems long;

In darkness He giveth a song.

I could not see through the shadows ahead,
So I looked at the cross of my Savior instead.
I bowed to the will of the Master that day;
Then peace came and tears fled away.

Now I can see testing comes from above;
God strengthens His children and purges in love.
My Father knows best, and I trust in His care;
Through purging, more fruit I will bear.

O rejoice in the Lord, He makes no mistake.
He knoweth the end of each path that I take.
For when I am tried and purified,
I shall come forth as gold.

—Ron Hamilton ("Patch the Pirate")
Dear Readers

Over the past month I have been reading a book from our church library that I couldn’t put down. It tells the story of a wife who is going through the experience of the death of her husband. The book is, To Live Again, by Catherine Marshall, the wife of Dr. Peter Marshall, a penniless Scottish immigrant who set foot on American soil at Ellis Island, New York in 1927 at the age of 24, and went on to become one of America’s greatest preachers and a Senate Chaplain. He died suddenly at the age of 49. His wife writes these words after his death:

“I was to be led by God along the path that leads through and out of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Not a single one of us can fly across the Valley of the Shadow of Death; we must walk its rocky paths step by step. There would be steep slopes, slippery places, and many a fork in the road where a clear-cut decision would be required. I knew none of the trails: The Valley was untrodden country. Yet by sure steps I would be led through it. I was to discover the Lord as my Shepherd—quite literally and in many practical ways.

To read the thoughts, prayers and inner pain of a wife who is going through the experience of the death of her husband is something you cannot get from another source. Catherine Marshall took me back to conversations and many practical ways.

Catherine Marshall tells of the trials she faced, the love and encouragement of family and friends, and how God had taken over for me and my son in a new way. It was as if, at the time of Peter’s death, I literally stepped into the radiant Kingdom of God on earth.”

As you read through this issue of CF, our prayer is that you will know the comfort and leading of the Great Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ. May He restore your soul in these difficult days, may He help you not to live in fear, but be comforted by His presence even as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death. What a wonderful Shepherd we have!

—Miriam Loquist
Editor, wife of The Executive Director of IFCA International, and mother of five.

Psalm 139:7-12

Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there.
If I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea:
Even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me,”
Even the night shall be light about me.
Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee;
But the night shineth as the day:
When the sun riseth, because it is dry.

—excerpted from a psalm of David

Dear Readers

At the age of 27, Ron Hamilton developed a problem with his left eye. After exploratory surgery, Ron’s wife told him, “The doctor found cancer. Your left eye is gone.” This unwelcome circumstance caused Ron to see God in a new way. Consequently, he wrote a testimony song, the words of which appear on our front cover.

Eventually God transformed Ron’s loss into unexpected blessing. Because of his eye patch, children nick-named him, “Patch the Pirate.” Now he and his family reach children around the world through Patch the Pirate Story and Song Cassettes and CDs. They have a nationwide radio program as well.

The beautiful tune and words of Ron’s “signature song” have ministered to me in a special way. In 1998 I too heard the word “cancer,” an extremely rare kind of cancer. Your left eye had been removed as well. I too heard the word “cancer,” an extremely rare kind growing on the side of my head. It took three surgeries to remove the cancer, along with most of my ear and my hearing on the right side. Like Ron, “I bowed to the will of the Master that day, [eventually] peace came, and tears flew away.” So I feel a kinship with Ron; only instead of a patch, I wear my hair down.

Because of cancer and other losses that year, I wrote the Bible studies that appear in each Chera Fellowship magazine. This issue contains one of my favorites—it deals with finding God in the darkness, which I have selected as our theme this time. Where is God during the darkest periods of our human experience? The answer may surprise you!

Other authors tell about finding hope from their “dark night of the soul.” We have also included our prayer ministry feature, “Anna’s Kin” and another “Book to Help You Heal.” We encourage you to write and let us know other ways we can minister to you. I would especially like to hear how you answered the final question of this issue’s Bible study on page 7. My addresses are on the back cover.

—Marcia Hornok
Managing Editor, pastor’s wife, and mother of six young adults.

It Takes One to Know One

Sometimes God puts us through the experience and discipline of darkness to teach us to hear and obey Him. Songs birds are taught to sing in the dark, and God hides us “in the shadow of His hand” until we learn to hear Him (Isaiah 49:2). Pay attention when God puts you into darkness, and keep your mouth closed while you are there. Are you in the dark right now in your circumstances, or in your life with God? If so, then remain quiet. If you open your mouth in the dark, you will speak while in the wrong mood—darkness is the time to listen. Don’t talk to other people about it, don’t [attempt] to find out the reason for the darkness; just listen and obey. If you talk to other people, you cannot hear what God is saying. When you are in the dark, listen, and God will give you a very precious message for someone else once you are back in the light.

Taken from the February 14th entry in My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers, edited by James Reimann, copyright 1992 by Oswald Chambers Publications Aas., Ltd., and used by permission of Discovery House Publishers, Box 3566, Grand Rapids MI 49501. All rights reserved.

The Discipline of Hearing

Pay attention when God puts you into darkness, and keep your mouth closed while you are there.
See Jesus in Your Clouds

Behold He is coming with clouds... —Revelation 1:7

In the Bible clouds are always associated with God. Clouds are the sorrows, sufferings, or providential circumstances, within or without our personal lives, which actually seem to contradict the sovereignty of God. Yet through these very clouds, the Spirit of God teaches us how to walk by faith. If there were never any clouds in our lives, we would have no clouded days.

If it is not true to say that God wants to teach us something in our trials, through every cloud He brings our outlook to understanding. Through every cloud He brings our view of God's character, we do not yet know Him. We cannot come near to us without clouds—He does not come shining, but He is coming with clouds. When our husband dies, you don't care if you live or die; you hope you will die but you know you won't. You have God's promises, but sometimes you are so resentful of God, you don't want His word. You want someone's hug, but you live alone now.

When your husband dies, you don't care if you live or die; you hope you will die but you know you won't. You have God's promises, but sometimes you are so resentful of God, you don't want His word. You want someone's hug, but you live alone now.

After Dan died, I knew I had to give myself time. Time does it. Time heals, so I kept doing what I knew I should do, but then something would go wrong, and I would feel helpless again. I believe in love even when not feeling it. I believe in God even when He is silent.

—Anonymous inscription on the wall of a cellar in Cologne, Germany, where Jews hid from Nazis.

Bitter or Better

What is the point of trials? What are we to gain from the pain, suffering, and loneliness we experience? In seeking to understand what God communicates about suffering, widows, and the fatherless, our musings and study have settled into one conclusion. God's focus in our trials is: "What happens in our relationship with Him?" Does it become bitter or better, distant or close, strong-armed or submissive, independent or dependent?

We have many different ways of avoiding intimacy with God. Some are sinful, some seem benign. Yet God allows these responses! How amazing! He, the God of the Universe, listens to us as we stand down here with clenched fists and angry postures and demand, "Why has this happened to me? Why now?" We say (or at least think) these things in our lonely moments. Meanwhile, His love for us continues through it all! "Oh, but this can't be love. It hurts too much." Isn't pain part of love? Any relationship that has depth to it contains elements of both pain and joy. Consider family relationships, childbirth, friendships, Jesus' death.

Even so, we who are grieving are left with pain and aloneness. What can we do with it? We offer it back to God—over and over and over again—until we have received His comfort, His purposes, and His plans as our renewed perspective. Our lives refocus on the eternity we long for (Phil 3:20, 21), while maintaining clarity about our temporalness (Isa. 40:6-8), and a stronger understanding of God's purposes for leaving us here. He would have us worship (I Pet 2:9; Eph 1:3-12) and serve Him (I Pet 4:6-11) and evangelize the lost (I Pet 3:15).

Yes, there are many ways we cope with loss, suffering, and death. Yet the bottom line remains: will we let Him hold us (when there's no one else to do so), tend our tears, and draw us close to His heart and will for us? Our choice yields eternal results.

—Eidene Anderson

Eidene Anderson writes from Raymore, MO. She began working at Calvary Bible College in Kansas City after her husband David's death.

A Light Bulb Story

When your husband dies, you don't care if you live or die; you hope you will die but you know you won't. You have God's promises, but sometimes you are so resentful of God, you don't want His word. You want someone's hug, but you live alone now.

After Dan died, I knew I had to give myself time. Time does it. Time heals, so I kept doing what I knew I should do, but then something would go wrong, and I would feel helpless again.

One evening sitting in my home office, I noticed that an outside light to our (my) driveway had burned out. Changing it used to be easy; it used to be to take care of things like that. I would tell Dan, and he would fix it. Now I had to find someone, ask them to do it. However, I thought to myself, "I'm going to take care of you—one light bulb at a time."

—A Light Bulb Story

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—A Light Bulb Story
In the Dark of the Night

Nights are worse than other times. I hear noises—the creaking house, wind, and probably imagined sounds. My mind and emotions are exposed, unprotected. Sometimes tears wet my pillow. Sleep problems assume mountainous proportions. I don’t dare think about big problems or I would never get any sleep. My physical weaknesses are magnified.

At night I think of death. Sleep is so much like death. Because my husband died in his sleep, I feel more vulnerable at night. I wake aware wondering if my heart palpation is normal. I’m afraid to stay awake and afraid to fall asleep. The children’s prayer, “If I should die before I wake…” becomes frighteningly real to me.

When I’m in the throes of insomnia, rather than thrashing around in bed restlessly, I get up and read or write my thoughts or feelings in a journal. I find it best to use my bed only for sleeping and confine reading to my favorite chair.

One sure way to combat my sleep problem is to take a bulldog grip on one of God’s promises. I repeat it mentally over and over before going to sleep, during interrupted sleep, or when I wake too early. It may be a whole verse, a phrase, or the words of a hymn. Repeating impresses its truth indelibly on my spirit, mind, and emotions, and lulls me to sleep. “I remember Thee on my bed, I meditate on Thee in the night watches” (Psalm 63:6).

I have also discovered that when my mind is on the Lord, He sometimes reminds me to pray for certain people or impresses me with something I should do or say that I would not otherwise have thought of. “Thou hast tried my heart; Thou hast visited me by night” (Psalm 17:3). “I will bless the Lord who has counseled me; indeed, my mind instructs me in the night” (Psalm 16:7).

Morning will come at last. It always does. “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning” (Psalm 130:6). And God’s faithfulness will be new again to take me through another day. “I lay down and slept; I arose, for the Lord sustains me” (Psalm 3:5). “In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8).

“Lord, help me anchor my mind on You in the quiet and darkness of night so my emotions won’t drift into stormy waters.”

—Leona Choy


The Tourist’s Psalm

The Lord is my Tour Guide; I shall not worry. He makes me lie down in eternal security. He leads me on the great adventure. He renews my spirit. He guides me through all hardships and hurts for His name’s sake. Yea, though I groove through dark valleys and steep mountains, I will fear no danger, for You are with me. Your Guide book and Your presence, they comfort me.

You prepared my travel arrangements and paid in full for all that I need. You anoint my future with hope. My cup of comfort overflows. Surely His goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my journey, and I shall reach my destination safely.

 Dwelling in the House of the Lord forever.

—Used with permission of the author

Our Readers Write

Dear Miriam,

Thank you for sharing with me and listening and for your heart-felt sympathy. Also for sending me ten copies of Chera Fellowship. I have given copies to the “Hospice” here in Mason. I’ll be sharing a copy with a friend tomorrow, who just lost her husband.

My wife made a study years ago on “Becoming a Woman of Excellence” by NavPress. I read her notes recently and I can say from her notes and her life, she was a woman of excellence. She became a woman of God.

May the Lord richly bless you.

—Robert A. Mains, Mason, MI

Dear Marcia,

I am sorry but I can’t remember if I wrote you and thanked you for the Chera Fellowship magazine. I do appreciate your sending it to me and enjoyed all the articles and poems so much. I was sorry that it doesn’t come every month and did call so that I will continue getting it.

—Lila Brooks, Douglas, WY

Dear Miriam,

I have really enjoyed the Chera Fellowship for the last seven years, since my beloved husband went to be with the Lord. The articles have been a great source of comfort to me. I keep most of the issues and go back and read them over many times.

I still miss my husband, Erwin, very much, and life will never be the same without him. The Lord has been so close to me and given me great peace in my heart.

Thank you for everything, and may the Lord continue to bless you and give you wisdom.

—Lydia Pankratz, Elon, NC

Dear Friends,

I have been receiving Chera Fellowship since 1997. The Gregories were good friends of Bob and myself. In fact, Dick sang at our wedding. Carol introduced me to Chera, and I was privileged to write an article for the magazine. I have been greatly blessed by the ministry. It is a wonderful outreach to widows and widowers.

—Ruth Barnes, Melrose Park, IL

Editor’s note: Ruth Barnes also contributed information for our Fall, 2002 issue of CF. We appreciate all our Ruths!

After a memorial service for her husband, the dessert reception was attended by hundreds of people. Phylis, radiant in red, greeted them all. She said it seemed like New Year’s Eve. Then she crashed.

After weeks and months of deep mourning, she states, “you don’t get over grief; you have to go through it.” She wrote down her feelings, and as she read her Bible, she found that God had an answer for each issue she faced.

In this pocket-sized book, a distillation of her journal, she says, “I wrote...He wrote.”

I enjoyed this book because I found that my worries and loneliness were thoughts and feelings shared by widows. The reality of widowhood, the bereavement, the spiritual and physical needs have to be lived through. God’s promises are compassionate and sustaining, offering hope that eventually all will be well.

It’s the kind of book I would pick up and read again and again the verses that touch on my need.

—Patricia M. Chambers

Patricia M. Chambers taught elementary school for 31 years. Besides writing, she enjoys swimming in her backyard pool in Landrum, SC, and traveling. She recently completed a “castle tour” of Great Britain with two of her daughters.

# Books to Help You Heal

Many of our readers on a fixed income receive this magazine without charge. Your tax-deductible donations help make this possible. To honor your loved one with a memorial gift, please make your check out to IFCA International and include the name of the person you wish to honor. May God continue to be your strength for each moment.

Addie Lister
in memory of
LEE MORGAN

Dorothy Brace
in memory of
ESTON GILLETTE

Ruth Morgan
in memory of
PAUL BISHCOFF

Gladys Gillett
in memory of
LUIS ALBARRAN

Evelyn Matiuk
in memory of
MARION ALBARRAN

Lee Morgan
in memory of
KEN BRACE

Dorothy Brace
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Ruth Morgan
in memory of
KEN BRACE

Evelyn Matiuk
in memory of
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Memorial Gifts

Encourage yourself in the Lord from these special verses.

FROM GOD’S WORD

Romans 15:4 tells us that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, we will have hope.

At times, prolonged emotional darkness drains us of desire to fellowship with God. I’ve learned that anger, resentment, and fear can make me feel like turning my back on Him and asking Him to leave me alone. Such damage can be remedied by learning how some Bible people experienced darkness and God.

Abram - Read Genesis 15:12-18. What did Abram feel when the sun was going down in verse 12? In the next verse, God spoke to Abram. In verse 17, “the sun went down and it was dark, but what happened in verse 18?” Yes, Abram experienced God in a new way, but it came with horrible darkness.

Job - What did Job say about God in Job 12:22? In Exodus 20:21, Moses had the privilege of drawing near to God. Where was God when Moses went to Him?

David - Look up Psalm 18, written after running from King Saul for 10-15 years. What do you learn about darkness from the following verses?

Verse 9
Verse 11
Verse 28

Solomon - In I Kings 8:12, where did God say He would dwell?

Daniel - What does Daniel 2:22 say about God?

Moses - Turn to Exodus 19 and 20. List all the “audio-visual” displays God used when He manifested Himself at Mt. Sinai (10:16-20)

When the people saw and heard God in this way, how did they respond? (20:18-19)

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness Who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Darkness teaches us to walk by faith because it is impossible to walk by sight. Such faith pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). The brightest diamonds grow in the darkest cavities of the earth. Look back on your “darkest” experience and tell how it became one of your best times with God.
Faith in the Dark

We live in a fallen world where humanity suffers. And we all cope with sin, error, sickness, and death. The only way we can learn to trust and obey is to have circumstances occur which we cannot understand. Faith grows in the dark, when I am afraid and alone, when situations don’t make sense.

When my husband Matt died at age 36, I eventually learned that grief purifies our lives, bringing us into a deeper relationship with God. The refining fires test us and make us strong. “You have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7). With Job, we can say, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” God desires that kind of faith of His people. It is hard to let go of the ones that are more precious to us than life itself, but we must trust them to the Father’s love.

I was made for God, and my heart will never rest anywhere else, but in the shadow of the Almighty.

As the pattern of life continues, we pick ourselves up and go on with the life God gives us. We don’t walk this valley alone, for God becomes our Husband and establishes the widow’s borders (Isaiah 54:5 & Proverbs 15:25). I was made for God, and my heart will never rest anywhere else, but in the shadow of the Almighty.

God’s word says we do not grieve as those who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). The truth of the resurrection dispels our loss and fear, for death is not the end of the story. The deep ache and hurt we experience through grief is very real and sorrowful. But there will be a restored order to life when God wipes away all tears, and death no longer touches us (Revelation 21:1-7).

—Gina Noel-Howard

Gina Noel-Howard is involved with the bereavement ministry at her church in Greensburg, PA. She believes God does not allow situations in our lives without the purpose of ministering to others. Seven years after Matt’s death (See CF Volume 10, Number 3) Gina married Ken Howard. God has granted them great joy in looking forward to adopting an orphaned girl from China in May.

A Seed in the Dark

God has power to penetrate a dark world. One medium He uses is the death of His saints. A seed cannot bear fruit until and unless it dies. Then in darkness, it begins to pierce the earth with shoots and roots.

Comparing our lives to a seed, it sometimes takes physical death to reap a harvest. Other times it takes death to self, which means sacrifice and suffering. Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). God’s plan is for death to result in fruitfulness.

—Don Landis

Don Landis is pastor of Community Bible Church, founder of Rocky Mountain Bible Camp and Jackson Hole Bible College, all in Jackson, WY.

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To help you have a prayer ministry, we periodically list things you can pray for or helps in having an effective prayer life. To that end, we offer the following suggestions:

1. Divide up the names in your church directory into 30 sections and pray for one section each day for a month.

2. Get 31 people in your church to choose a certain day of the month when they will pray for your pastor and his family. Buy a calendar and have them fill in their name on that day. Remind them to write “PRAY FOR PASTOR” on their own calendar for the day of the month they chose. Then give the calendar to your pastor. He will be thrilled to know he is being prayed for every day.

3. Choose seven people you know and pray for one each day of the week for four weeks. The next month, choose seven others. Use this for missionaries, neighbors, government leaders, famous people, teachers, Christian authors and workers, or ?

4. Place a sticker on each of your clocks at home. Every time you see it, say a thank-you prayer to God for who He is or what He does. When you get used to seeing it, change the sticker! You can even put a small dot on your watch.
Broken Branches and Canoes

What a privilege we have as God’s messengers in Brazil to teach the Guanano Indians about Christ. One of our greatest challenges is the lack of good vocabulary.

In one Bible study we talked about what it means to be spiritually dead, separated from God because of our sins. We brought out a broken branch to illustrate Ephesians 2:4-5, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us [made us alive] together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).” We explained that when Adam and Eve sinned, they were separated from the One who makes things live, and became like broken branches. Just as a broken branch has no life apart from the tree, so we have no life apart from God. We need spiritual life, and Jesus is the only one who can give it. Jesus said, “I am like Life-Giving Food from heaven.” We must trust in Jesus to forgive our sins and give us eternal life.

The Guanano word for “trust” is wacu tua. It means, “to think strongly about someone or something.” We ask them to “think strongly” on Christ for salvation. I illustrate it with a comparison: When you want to cross the river, you wacu tua your canoe. You know your canoe. You know it’s in good shape; it floats fine; it can carry your weight; it doesn’t leak; so without fear you climb into your canoe and cross the river. In the same way, you need to wacu tua Jesus and place your life in His hands. Because He died and came back to life, He can save you from your sins and give you new life which lasts forever!

—Lindy Drake and his wife Carol serve as missionaries with New Tribes Mission. They have worked with the Guananos since 1986, both in Columbia and Brazil.
We can see this in the life of Prophet Samuel. The Bible says that after Saul rejected the Lord, Samuel was mourning for Saul for a very long time. When God saw this, He intervened. "Now the Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons" (1 Samuel, 16:1). Rejoice, rejoice, And again I say, rejoice. Rejoice, rejoice, And again I say, rejoice. The joy in the Lord is a cure to our weary heart. Joy is a virtue rendered into us by the indwelling Spirit. I enjoy Rom. 14:17 "For the kingdom of God is not the food and drink but the righteousness peace and joy in the holy Spirit." Rejoice in Him always. Feb 9 2014. Sister Victoria. Jacksonville, Florida, United States. "However do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in the heavens." (Luke 10:20, RcV) Lord Jesus, may we rejoice in You always. Amen. Details. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice! 2 What though in the conflict for right Your enemies almost prevail, God’s armies, just hid from your sight, Are more than the foes which assail. 3 Though darkness surround you by day, Your sky by the night be o’ercast, Let nothing your spirit dismay, But trust till the danger is past. 4 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, His praises proclaiming in song; Acclaim him with trumpet and voice, The loud hallelujahs prolong. Source: The Song Book of the Salvation Army #537.