

## ***How God Shapes Us Through Our Experiences***

Romans 8:28, 2 Cor. 1:3-4

10/12/14

**I want you to imagine that you're standing at the end of a long hallway. The hallway represents your life so far on earth.** Where you're standing is today, Sunday, October 12, 2014; all the way at the other end of the hallway is the day of your birth. As you begin walking down the hallway heading back in your life, you notice pictures on the wall. These pictures are all events from your life; it's like a photo album of your entire life. Some are large framed pictures; they are the most significant experiences you've had so far. Some are good; some are bad; some are happy; some are sad. As you walk down this hallway of your life, I want you to take a long look at these large pictures. What significant events from your life do you see that stand out? Is there a wedding? A birth? Are there family vacations or sporting events pictured on the walls? Is there an achievement like a diploma or an award? Are there spiritual experiences like your coming to faith in Christ or a time when God especially touched your life? Are there painful experiences—a divorce, the death of someone you really loved, a failure, abuse, alcoholism, an eating disorder, a miscarriage, an abortion, or an addiction? Take some time now to walk all the way to the end of this hallway of your life and notice all these significant experiences in your life...[SILENT REFLECTION].

**I want you to realize that all these experiences have shaped who you are today, whether you like it or not.** God didn't cause all these things to happen, but He did allow them to happen to you. **WHAT GOD WANTS TO DO IS TO USE ALL OF THESE EXPERIENCES--GOOD AND BAD--(1) TO GROW YOU SPIRITUALLY AND MOLD YOU INTO THE LIKENESS OF JESUS AND (2) TO SHAPE YOU FOR THE UNIQUE PURPOSES HE HAS IN YOUR LIFE.** He doesn't want even one of your life experiences to be wasted.

**God takes all of your life experiences—whether positive or painful, intentional or accidental, caused by you or by someone else, to shape you for His unique calling in your life.** Romans 8:28 may be the most personal verse in the Bible: *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.* Your life experience is one of the most overlooked ways that God uses to shape you for the way He wants you to serve Him and others in this world.

**The Bible says that God is working in every experience you have—your stupid mistakes, your dumb decisions, your successes and failures, your education, different jobs, relationships, your unemployment or divorce or cancer or bankruptcy—you name it.** God is working in everything in your life—even your SINS--to accomplish His purpose for you.

**What is the purpose for which God is working in everything in your life? HE IS ALWAYS WORKING FOR THE GOOD IN YOUR LIFE.** Rick Warren puts it this way: *God can take the mess in your life and bring a message out of it. He can take the test in your life and create a testimony out of it. He can take a crisis and show Christ through it. GOD DOESN'T WASTE ANY EXPERIENCE YOU HAVE.*

**Moses murdered a man and had to flee into the wilderness between Egypt and Israel to save his hide.** 40 years later God came to him and said, *Moses, I've chosen you to go back down to Egypt to set my people free from slavery and lead them through the wilderness to the Promised Land.* Moses knew the wilderness; he had lived there and learned its ways for 40 years. God wants to use the wildernesses of your life to help others find God's way for their lives.

**Joseph, his father's favorite, was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers.** He ended up in Egypt, but God gifted him and made a way for him to become the prime minister of Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh. When famine threatened the very existence of God's people, God used Joseph to supply the grain that His people needed. And when his brothers came to him starving, Joseph said to them: *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

**But notice God doesn't do this for everybody.** God works His good for those who love Him and follow His plan. The promise of Romans 8:28 is not for everybody. God does not work His good in our lives when we don't love Him or turn our backs on Him.

**It's not that God turns His back on those who don't follow His plan for their lives.** God loves everybody, but He cannot help and use those who close their lives to Him and His plan for their lives.

**One of the most common ways God uses our life experiences for good is TO HELP OTHERS.** God can take our experiences, especially the painful ones, and use them in a positive way. Who better to help someone who is struggling than another person who has gone through the same struggle? 2 Corinthians 1:4 says, *God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*

**Our trouble can become the very ministry God will use to help other people.** My wife is a breast cancer survivor. She went through surgery, chemo and radiation treatments for the better part of a year. It was HELL ON EARTH. But Jane can now minister to cancer patients so much more effectively than I can. She's been there. Widows are the best ministers to widows; divorcees are the best ministers to divorcees and so on.

**God wants to use every experience in your life--good and bad--to help somebody else.** God says, *DON'T WASTE YOUR EXPERIENCES. USE THEM TO HELP OTHERS GOING THROUGH THE SAME THING.* That painful experience in your life that you keep locked in the inner recesses of your soul could become your greatest ministry.

**God has used the failures and hurtful experiences of my own life more than anything else to shape me for His purposes.** These bad experiences have helped me grow spiritually. Truthfully, in the good and happy times of my life, I have usually just coasted spiritually

**Four and a half years ago now, my only son Kyle died. God does not want me to allow my son Kyle's death to count for nothing.** I have become a better pastor to parents who have lost a child. Kyle battled anxiety attacks from childhood until his death; he also lived with excruciating pain in his back and neck caused by a car wreck; and over time he became addicted to the anxiety and pain medications the doctors prescribed for him. His addiction was an illness he never overcame; many times it wrecked his life and others; and then it killed him. But you know what? WALKING WITH HIM DOWN THE ROAD OF ADDICTION HAS MADE ME MORE UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSIONATE AND A BETTER MINISTER TO THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM THE DISEASE OF ADDICTION AND THEIR FAMILIES.

**GOD ALSO USED MY SON WHILE HE WAS STILL ALIVE AND BATTLING ADDICTION.** Listen to this personal tribute written by Kyle's girlfriend for his funeral: "I met Kyle when I was trying to take my first steps into recovery from alcoholism. Kyle played a big role in my recovery. He helped lead me to the Higher Power; it is my relationship with God which continues to keep me sober a day at a time. With Kyle's help I experienced things that in my early recovery were important to me believing that life after alcohol would "go on", and even be interesting and fun. We hiked countless trails (he could name every plant we came across), fished in ponds and streams, found swimming holes and swung from vines. He was my friend, almost like a brother. I was so "at ease" with Kyle, a stark comparison to the "dis-ease" I was struggling to recover from. He truly brought to my life a joy and comfort that will always be etched in my memory. It seems tragic that Kyle's life ended so soon. Some people have to live to be 80 or 90 to accomplish the purpose God has for them on earth; maybe Kyle had completed God's mission for His life; but there is no doubt God touched many lives through him. I am sober today because of Kyle. I am married and the mother of two beautiful preschool children. Kyle helped me to see how life is supposed to be lived—IN TUNE WITH GOD AND NATURE. He helped me to find

God and the church.”

**On more than one occasion, the Bible says that God chooses to use weaker vessels to do His work so that He may get the glory.** In 2 Corinthians 12:9, God says: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” And Paul responds: “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

**God can help people more through your weakness than you can through your strengths.** That’s why we need each other; it’s why we need the supportive fellowship of the church. You can learn from others who have gone or are going through the same struggles you are. Perfection, if we could achieve it, would help nobody. WHAT EXPERIENCES HAVE YOU HAD THAT GOD COULD USE TO HELP OTHERS?

**The death of the perfect Son of God was the darkest moment in world history, but look at how God used Jesus’ death.** Jesus’ death atoned for our sins and made for each of us a way back to God and into heaven when we die. Out of Christ’s crucifixion, God brought salvation for all who trust and follow Jesus. I believe that my son’s back and addictions have now been healed, that he is with the Lord, and that one day I will be reunited with him. This is our hope in Jesus Christ!

**On that first Easter Sunday two millennia ago, God brought life out of death.** Christ arose from the dead and is now a living presence among us right now—forgiving us, delivering us, shaping us, guiding us, and wanting to use us for His purposes. God can use all your life experiences, good and bad, to shape you for His unique calling in your life—if you let Him.

**PRAYER:** Would you pray this prayer with me? Lord, I offer my life to You. Everything I’ve been through, Lord, use it for Your glory. Jesus, I give You my all. In your name I pray and commit myself to Your continuing work in this world. Amen.

**INVITATION:** God has 3 callings in your life: (1) He calls you to salvation and a new life in Jesus Christ; (2) He calls you to be an active part of His church; (3) He calls you to serve Him and others in the unique way He has gifted and shaped you.