

RACERUNNERS

CHRISTMAS 2004



“Kicked In the Gut and I Can’t Catch My Breath!” Putting You On Your Feet Again

Debby Woods

Corrie ten Boom said, “When God sends you on stony paths...He gives you strong shoes.” “If you’re kicked in the gut, He’ll help you catch your breath.” We have Mr. Peterson (The Message Bible) to thank for that “down to earth” paraphrase of the last half of Psalm 34:18. Who among us can’t relate to that kicked in the gut, knocked off your feet feeling?

This has certainly been a “kicked in the gut” kind of season for me. God has been sending Racerunners (and me) on some definite stony paths. And while I’ve had to negotiate some difficult terrain mentally, physically, spiritually, financially and emotionally, it has provided the backdrop, as usual, for many exciting and wonderful opportunities to watch God work. It has required numerous trips to the Father (shoe store, smile), but each time He has faithfully provided me with the strong shoes I needed for every stony path.

One such “stony path” involved the development of a bone infection in my lower gum that required oral surgery. I experienced a great deal of pain, a major reaction to the first two antibiotics AND my insurance company did not

“feel led” to cover the thousands of dollars it would cost. In all honesty, I began to feel sad, crushed, overwhelmed, discouraged and dismayed. Paul calls this “afflicted on every side: conflicts without, and fears within” (2 Cor. 7:5). So on this “stony path” I cried out to the Lord and He led me to Is. 57:15: “For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy. I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly, and the heart of the contrite.” The Message Bible puts it like this: “I live with the low-spirited, and spirit-crushed, and put a new spirit in them, and get them up and on their feet again.” When I read this “sharp and double-edged word” from God, He released His fuel of refreshment straight to my crushed spirit and lowly heart! It was like the next breath I took was deeper and the tension that was gripping my insides melted away. And then it hit me...that is what He meant when He said, “I’ll help you catch your breath again” (Ps. 34:18). I thought to myself, “That’s it...there they are...there are my strong shoes! The Word, His anointing, His penetrating power and His life changing presence are my strong shoes!” How encouraging it was (and is) for me that we know a God Who not only CAN touch us right where we are, but that we walk with One Who really DOES!

Last week Miss Kitty made the familiar sound she makes when she has “captured” something and wants my attention. She always waits for me to respond to these moments with admiration and amazement that she is “the Lioness of the Kingdom.” I, unaware that it was NOT her normal, stuffed-animal “prey”, didn’t readily respond. After a few more cat sounds I went to investigate and realized that she had chased and cornered a live victim...a tiny lizard. She was taunting it with her paw and spitting at it when I arrived on the scene. I instantly picked Miss Kitty up and observed with great compassion this tiny, helpless, inch-long lizard. It was “puffed up” with its mouth wide open, attempting to look as vicious as possible in an effort to hide its utter powerlessness and fear upon facing what was sure to be certain death. And maybe, just maybe, we could speculate too that it felt like it had just been “kicked in the gut.” This lizard’s only hope was that there was someone bigger and more powerful than Miss Kitty who was near and was willing and able to deliver it from its present trouble.

With great compassion I locked Miss Kitty in my bedroom, got a wash cloth and took the tiny lizard outside and put it in the grass, literally “on its feet again.” Later that night God spoke to me, “Debby, you are like that lizard. You need Someone near Who is bigger,

stronger and moved by compassion to revive your lowly spirit and aching heart when it’s crushed. You need Someone Who can help you catch your breath again. If you can have that much compassion for a lizard, how much more compassion will I have for you?” Amazing love...HOW can it be?

“Is anyone crying for help? God is listening and ready to rescue you. If your heart is broken, you’ll find God right there” (Ps. 34:17-18). Loved ones, are you crying for help? God is listening and He is standing right at the door of your circumstances, willing, able and moved with compassion to “help you catch your breath again.” Let Him “put you on your feet again” (Is. 51:15). And you can bet you’ll be wearing...strong shoes!

Selah.

“When God sends you on stony paths... He gives you strong shoes.”



“That You May Live and Not Die”

Karen Welch

One day I was struggling with wanting to give up on doing something that I knew was for my welfare. “It’s too much work. It’s too hard. I’m never going to get there anyway. What does it matter?” Then God brought to remembrance something I had said one time as a teenager, “Stop the world. I want to get off.” He showed me that I had been viewing things through that thinking, in little ways, ever since then. Though I would be determined in some areas, there were others that I would be quick to give up in or not even try. When I gave up, I was dragging myself through life just hoping to make it through. Gradually, God made it clear to me that the choice I had to make was one of life and death, both physically and spiritually. Part of a verse came to mind, “live and not die.” At the time I didn’t even know where it was in the Bible or which story went along with it. I just knew that my choice was clear. This day I could choose life or death. Which would I choose? I chose life that day. I chose not to give up. And I began saying, “I will live and not die” every time I felt like giving up.

Now, some of you may be thinking, “Oh, I know. That is Deuteronomy 30:19, ‘...I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live...’” That is not the verse, however, that God led me to read. He led me to Genesis

43:8, “...that we may live and not die...” As soon as I read it, I was interested in finding out the context in which it was said. I was committing to choose life and this seemed to promise to shed some light on the way I could actually experience life. So, let me pick up in Genesis 42:38 with Jacob being confronted with the request to take Benjamin back to Egypt. “But Jacob said, ‘My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.’”

Jacob was saying, “This is too hard. If I do this I will be miserable and die.” The irony was that he was already miserable and had been since he thought Joseph was dead. Not only that, but they were already dying because they had no food. It made no logical sense but to Jacob’s emotions it made perfect sense. He didn’t think he could bear to lose Joseph’s brother, Benjamin, too, so he was willing to choose death to avoid the pain of losing another son. He wasn’t even able to see the option of an abundant life that included Benjamin and food for his whole family because he was so afraid of the pain that he *might* experience. But then his son, Judah, speaks truth to him and even bets his life that what his father fears the most will not happen; “And Judah said to his father, Israel, ‘Send the lad with

me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones” (Gen. 43:8).

The rest of the story? Jacob then allows Judah to take Benjamin to Egypt and in the end Jacob is reunited not only with Benjamin but with Joseph as well. On top of that, his whole family is provided for! They all enter a life of abundance beyond their wildest imagination!

There was a ton of application for me personally but the most practical involved making a simple choice. When I choose to say, “I will live and not die” I am actively choosing to “arise and go” (obey, take a step, make a choice, take a risk) so that I “may live and not die.” I am choosing to believe that God’s promise for an abundant life is true and that the steps He lays out for me are leading there no matter how difficult it may be to choose His way. For me it means the process won’t kill me and no matter how hard it is I can know it’s for my welfare. Today when things get too difficult or I just *think* they might get difficult and I’m tempted to give up, I make a definitive choice to accept the life that God offers me. *I literally say, “I will live and not die.”*

My prayer for you is that God would bless you with personal application for right where you are today so that YOU may live and not die.

“I make a definitive choice to accept the life that God offers me.”



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“Got Milk?” First Love and Cereal Bowls

Laurie Cagle

I was just about to leave for the office when I heard a knock on my door. When I opened it, there stood one of my neighbors' kids, Crystal, with a bowl of dry cereal in her hands. With a most despairing look she went straight to the point; "My brother drank all of the milk and now I don't have any for my cereal. Do you have any milk for my cereal?" I smiled on my insides as my heart went out to her. Boy, could I go there. How many mornings had I woken up as a kid and run into the kitchen ready to dive into that big bowl of Trix, only to open the refrigerator door and find that the milk was all gone? It was a major bummer! "Yes, Crystal, I do!" I replied. With great joy I gave her the last little bit that I had. A week later I heard another knock at my door. When I opened it there stood Crystal again...only this time she had five of her friends in tow! I wish you could have seen it, all six of them standing there with their bowls held chest-high, each brimming over with more cereal than it could hold. "We're out of milk and we can't eat our cereal. Do you have any milk for our cereal?" "Why, yes I do!" I replied. With great joy I filled them all up and they gladly went on their way.

I can't tell you how many times I've thought about those kids since they came to my door that morning. My encounters with them were so endearing and God has ministered countless truths to me as I've thought about them. One particular

week I had been sensing that something was "off" in my spirit. Unsure of what it was, I sought the Lord. He soon brought those kids to mind and opened my eyes to a simple truth: *their bowls were full but their bowls were dry*. Immediately I knew what was "off"; I was dry! Full, but dry. As I continued to meditate on it, I sensed the Spirit say to me, "You've left your first love." I grabbed my Bible and turned to the familiar passage in Revelation 2:2-4: "I know what you have done and how hard you have worked. I know how long you can wait and not give up...that you are enduring patiently...bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not fainted or become exhausted or grown weary. But I have this against you: that you have left (abandoned) the love that you had at first" (vs.2 NLV / vss. 3-4 AMP). As I considered where I was and how I had gotten there, God clearly showed me the problem. In His faithfulness to reveal places of growth and healing in me that were "on deck" to be dealt with, I slowly let them become the focus of my time with Him. I constantly scanned His words for any "solutions" He might offer and the passion that ensued was directed towards answers instead of Him. Before long, pursuit had eclipsed love and just like the kids who showed up on my doorstep, my bowl was full but my bowl was dry.

The Bible warns us in 2 Corinthians 11:3 that we can be "led astray from the simplic-

ity and purity of devotion to Christ". How easy it was for me to be led astray by my well-intended desires for freedom. I had "diligently studied the Scriptures in an effort to possess my life" and lost sight of the fact that "the scriptures point to Jesus" (Jn. 5:39). It is a good and necessary thing to seek the Lord with hope in those places where I struggle and with expectation that He hears me and will answer. To seek Him, however, at the exclusion of loving Him will only cause my relationship with Him to become dry, mechanical and cold. And without love all is vain, "*for if I speak and have and know and give and do and remove and deliver but do not have love, it profits me nothing and I am nothing*" (1 Cor. 13:1-3). My only focus and purpose in all things must be to know and love the Lord with all of my heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk. 12:30). And those answers that I seek? They are God's alone to give because in the end "what is crooked cannot be made straight and what is lacking and defective cannot be counted" (Ecc. 1:15) by me. Only God can reveal and do those things in me, for "In much (human) wisdom there is much grief...and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain" (Ecc. 1:18). "Love", however, "builds up and encourages one to grow to full stature" (1 Cor. 8:1 AMP).

God delights in our freedom. He is, after all, the Author of it. But apart from love, that freedom means nothing if He is lost in the process of gaining



"Apart from love, that freedom means nothing if He is lost in the process of gaining it."

it. For certain we are to seek the Lord with abandon and God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6 AMP). We, though, have to keep our seeking in balance and our hearts in check. Otherwise we'll end up full but we'll end up dry, "always learning, but unable to acknowledge the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7).

So what's the bottom line here? Paul said it best: "I deliberately kept it plain and simple: first Jesus and Who He is; then Jesus and what He did - Jesus crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2 TM). Keep it simple and keep it Jesus. And oh yes, don't forget to ask yourself..."Got milk?"

returning to Birmingham...

MONDAY NIGHT BIBLE STUDY

In the very near future, Monday Night Bible Study will begin in Birmingham! After many years of ministering in the Auburn area, God has led us back to Birmingham and we are very excited and humbled by the opportunity to be ministering in town again. Details are still pending. If you would like to receive detailed information when it's available, please let us know! Simply fill out the form on back with your current address information and mail it in or email us at Micah0608@aol.com.



RACERUNNERS

PO Box 59230
Birmingham, AL 35259

2870 Old Rocky Ridge Road
Suite 109
Birmingham, AL 35243

205.824.8313
205.824.8315 Fax
Email: DAYINCRTS@AOL.COM

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