

Finding Value in the Valley Venture

by Dr. Ray Burwick

He sat in my counseling office - a man of about 50 - wringing his hands, lamenting, "my son is gone. He took his own life. Where did I go wrong? What should I have done differently?" The story unfolded of a young man who had always trekked on the edge of life, had marched to the music of his own drum, gotten into drugs and finally ended his life with an overdose. How many times as pastors, have you listened to variations of this valley venture? For how long have you been experiencing the pain of your own valley? When people come to you for answers and you don't feel you have answers for your own family addiction problem, where do you go, what do you do? How do you handle your own pain, which sometimes includes guilt, shame, anger, blaming and confusion? Is there any greater pain in life than to see one of your own children destroying him or herself? Has your parenting trauma begun to interfere with your marital relationship and/or your ministry? These and other questions are being addressed at this conference.

We're glad you're here. It's a safe place to bleed. Clerical protection and masks to cover pain are not needed here. This is a source for healing, encouragement, inspiration and instruction. You'll receive encouragement and be an encouragement to others as you process your own pain. Typically, when in a traumatic situation, our tendency is to figure out what to do. How to change the circumstances. How to get out of the trauma. And in this conference environment, what to do to help the addicted family member become free. There is nothing wrong with this "doing" perspective. However, if it is a single-minded focus, you may be setting yourself up for more frustration and losing out on the benefits of experiencing pain. May I encourage you to get all the information possible on what to do, but along with that, there needs to be a balance of "who am I to be." Being in conjunction with doing. Let's look at "being."

An appropriate prayer going through a tough time is: "Father, I do not pray for freedom from this trial but for your wisdom on how to make the right use of it."

Let's see if we can explore the right use of your current challenge. You've been to support groups. You have read excellent material. You've attended the *You're Not Alone* conference. Would you mind sitting with me in my counseling office?

If we were counseling, I would ask you to share your story, not just to listen to the details but also to hear how you are handling your situation. What are you feeling?

Is there a subtle anger towards the addicted person or toward God? So often, those of us who really desire to be Godly inadvertently cover up our human emotions like anger because "who are we to be angry at God? What good does it do to be angry? Good Christians don't get angry. Why should I be angry at my child on drugs? They have enough on them now."

If I were counseling I'd be listening for guilt. "If I had just spent more time with the child, he/she wouldn't be hooked on alcohol." Or maybe you've taken guilt a step further and it has evolved into shame. "I've been a bad parent."

Possibly there is some blame shifting. Your spouse pampered the child and was too lenient. Leniency leads to a child expecting things to come easily. They didn't. Drugs were an escape. It's your spouse's fault. A marital cold war has set in or maybe the relationship has taken on explosive proportions.

At "best" there is confusion. "God, I've dedicated myself to your ministry. Why have you allowed this to happen? How can I be an effective minister when my family is not in order?" The pain of having an addicted family member is severe enough; let's not exacerbate it with anger, guilt, shame, blame shifting or confusion. Let's face it. Let's resolve it. How? you may ask.

My counseling philosophy is based on Christ's last days on earth. I call it "Gethsemanizing" which is a process to wholeness. We obviously will never carry the load of pain Jesus shouldered; however, the example He set is a pattern which we can follow.

We begin in the Garden, observing Christ quoting Scripture "all things work together for good". Not!!! In His humanness, He, according to Mark 14, was deeply distressed and troubled. Jesus own words: "my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." And in Luke 22 we see His stress so great His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Christ was not quoting scripture to anesthetize His pain. He was feeling with the full extent of His humanness. So, "Gethsemanizing" is being honest with ourselves and God about circumstances and how we feel. Do you allow yourself to feel? Could you be denying some feelings regarding your family pain? I'm not suggesting allowing feelings to control you - to live by your feelings. I'm suggesting we follow Christ's pattern. He emoted. Then He prayed that classic yielded prayer: "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me," (I'd prefer not going through the crucifixion ordeal), "yet, not My will, but Yours be done." This step of "Yielding" cannot be avoided if we are going to achieve wholeness.

For your situation it may sound like "Father, I am so angry at my spouse for laying the ground work for our child's addiction. I prefer not going through this ordeal, God, yet, not My will but Yours."

Or, for another, it might be: "Father, I feel so guilty for not spending sufficient time with my child. I prefer you deliver my child from the addiction right now; yet, not my will but Yours."

We don't want to contaminate our lives with bottled up feelings. We emote. King David set a good example of emoting on paper. Many of the psalms are his expression of feelings, like 109 "kill my enemies. Make their widows to be childless." Journaling and praying feelings is a healthy discipline of emoting.

Once feelings are expressed, a yielded attitude is cultivated. "Not my will but yours." I choose to let go of that guilt, that blame shifting, that anger. This is transitional from "sweating blood," as it were, to the cross. Emoting, yielding and then observing Christ on the cross. Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me...." I am "crucified" to my controlling the situation, which in turn allows God to work.

I die. I am dead to the rights to be seen as a successful pastor who produces successful children. I die to the rights of having a spouse who should have parented more effectively. I die to the rights of having you, Father, save my child from this destruction.

I emote. I yield. I die. And the last gaze at Christ is His resurrection. "It is no longer I that lives but Christ in me." A prayer may sound like, "Father, forgive my spouse through me. Love her/him through me. Forgive/love my child through me." Or, "I know I didn't cause my child to develop an addictive lifestyle, but I sure feel responsible. Help me forgive myself and expect that you will turn this tragedy into good."

Do you catch the concept? **Emote. Yield. Crucify.** Allow God to **Resurrect.** There is tremendous pain in addicted families. This pain is exacerbated by stuffing feelings, or the opposite, living by feelings. Process the feelings with Christ. See how God is using the situation to actually build and purify you. Our focus becomes the resurrection dynamic. How can this situation be turned for good to all concerned? How is my "being" enhanced by going through this trauma? Why is this "good" for me?

My child on drugs good for me? Unfortunately, we often have wrong reactions to an addicted family member. Those reactions include: anger at God or the family member, guilt, shame, blame shifting or confusion. These reactions can harm us unless we follow the "Gethsemanizing" process.

Will you allow me to personalize this? I unexpectedly lost my wife of 36 years to a brain aneurysm Oct.30, 1999. The grief, pain and loneliness were horrendous. That was good for me?

Fifteen months later, I was asked to resign ("fired") at my position at a Christian College. I had been teaching psychology, counseling and coaching the ladies basketball team. I didn't get the job done with the women's basketball team and was fired in a very unbiblical manner. At the age of 62, it was definitely a new experience for me. Since then, I've gone through times of feeling like a worthless, impotent leper. Worthless and impotent because of performance failure. Leper, because some who were close to me backed away from me. This was good for me? Yes. Let me explain.

Like you, I desire to be a Godly person - one totally committed to Him for His service. The loss of Ann and the loss of an excellent work reputation seem to be part of God's plan to strip me of "self-confidence" so He can instill a deeper, richer "God-confidence." An emptying of self for more filling by Him. A breaking of pride to be more aware of His working in and through me, not my power and expertise. He has caused or has allowed the death and the firing to take me through a time of joyless isolation from performance and relationships as a prerequisite for experiencing more deeply the joy of His presence. I have two choices. I can become bitter and cynical; or, I can choose to yield. "Father, I prefer not going through this valley, nevertheless, not my will but yours."

On March 30, 2001 insight for experiencing joy even in tough times came together in a refreshing light. I've read Psalm 16 scores of times, but my vocational failure has provided a readiness that is a key for deeper learning. Your family addiction trauma is providing opportunity for deeper learning and growth. Bottom line for seeing the good in the loss of Ann; bottom line for seeing why it was good for me to be unjustly fired; bottom line for you going through the family addiction pain; bottom line for experiencing the joy of the Lord no matter the depth of trauma is perspective. Look with me at Psalms 16 and gain resurrection perspective.

1. God is my resource

Verse 1: "God is my refuge." (my place of security).

Verse 2: "Apart from God, I have no good thing." (not self-confidence, not self achievement but God confidence. This comes through stripping of self-confidence).

Verse 3: "Delight in saintly relationships" (not in achievement).

Verse 4: "Shun idol chasers and the subsequent sorrow." (Any needs sought to be met outside of God leads to idolatry and its subsequent sorrow).

Verse 5-6: "A delightful inheritance and blessing is from God. The Lord Himself is my inheritance, my prize. He is my food and drink, my highest joy. He guards all that is mine. He sees that I am given pleasant brooks and meadows as my share. What a wonderful inheritance."

Verse 7: "God, my counselor and teacher, even at night."

2. God is my focus

Verse 8: "I will keep my focus on God. He is always with me, not allowing me to be shaken as long as I keep that focus."

3. Joyful results

Verse 9: "THEREFORE my heart is glad" (inner man) "and my tongue rejoices" (outer expression of inner joy).

Verse 10: "I'll never be abandoned by God, even in the grave."

Verse 11: "In your guidance of me, I have fullness of joy in your presence, and hope for enjoying your pleasures for eternity."

4. God is always at my side.

Psalm 16 says that I, as a man of faith in Christ, can enjoy life because of God's gracious provision and care. But, when I forget, or when I lose perspective of God as my resource, or when my God-focus is skewed by life's challenges, my joy is replaced with either my natural melancholy trait or happiness/sadness determined by current circumstances. This leads to an up and down emotional instability.

When my perspective is keeping God in focus, through all circumstances, productive or disruptive, my heart is glad and I put tongue to heart and experience more fully the joy in His presence.

Am I learning this from books or even Bible study? No. As effective as reading is and necessary for us, even more important is going through depths of pain which God allows, to draw us into a deeper intimacy with and dependence on Him, from whence comes greater, productive living. But there are deterrents to experiencing joy and growth in tough times, in your valley of pain.

- **Sin/disobedience:** “Joy and gladness are taken away from the orchards; no one sings or shouts in the vineyards; no one treads out wine at the presses, for I have put an end to the shouting.” Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 7:34
- **Ignorance:** A lack of awareness of God’s joy/growth principles.
- **Resistance of the Truth:** “What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” Galatians 4:15-16
- **Forgetting God:** The Bible encourages us not to forget God’s love and provision for us. Because of the busyness and complexities of life, even Jesus told His followers to take the cup and bread as **remembrance**.

We go to **sleep** at night. Our mind is in neutral. We awaken to a fresh mental slate that is immediately bombarded by challenges of the new day and darts of negativism from the evil one. We forget who we are in Christ. We forget that God is our ultimate provision. We forget our dependence is on Him... our success from Him.

We go on **vacation** or have some other type of **routine buster**, causing us to neglect the routine time set aside to commune with the Father. Our mind is not renewed. We forget our resources. We experience a **major victory**. We become proud. Self-confidence reigns. God as our resource is forgotten. Deuteronomy 8:11-14 speaks to this: “Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws and His decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

At times we go through **major losses**, times of defeat. The pain, embarrassment, grief can become so severe we are overwhelmed by it, forgetting God as our Resource. Psalm 66:10 “For you, O God, tested us; You refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. 12 You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but You brought us to a place of abundance.”

How easy it is to **forget** the wonderful dynamics of receiving God’s gift of joy and personal growth.

- **Misconceptions:** Thinking joy is always a feeling of exhilaration and the Christian life is problem free.
- **Perspective:** Losing your God perspective and focusing on hurtful circumstances. Losing perspective of God’s hand IN the circumstances.
- **Lazy/indifferent:** Not disciplining self for the Philippians 4:8 challenge of “think on those things which are pure, right, good, etc.” Giving in too easily to feelings of despair. Not disciplining self to “abide” in Christ, which involves Bible study, prayer, journaling, and the other disciplines of the Christian walk.
- **Focus on doing:** Have a balance between doing and being.

It is important to feel the pain and explore your heart for feelings of anger, guilt, shame, confusion and blame shifting. Your family is in trauma. Process this with God. Journal. Pray. Talk to others. Follow the process of gethsemanizing: yield, die to self, and allow Christ to live His resurrection

life through you. The focus becomes then the value of your valley venture: the sanctification and growth of your being in conjunction with what you need to be doing in your family challenge.