

# Carrying on when your Heart is Broken

by Dr. Kim and Lynda Hodge

**Kim:** We would like to share our story with you in the hope that somehow it will encourage you. I thought again about the section of Second Corinthians in the first chapter that says, “we receive God’s comfort so that we can share it with others.” I hope that somehow the comfort we received will be passed along. By the way, we admit to you that we are far from experts, experienced, but far from experts. In going back to this process I realized how much we had forgotten. I think some of it we forgot because we wanted to forget. I think some of it we forgot because it was best that we forget. And I am sure that some of it we forgot because of a declining brain cell count. In any case we are going to share with you what we do remember and what has come to mean a great deal to us personally because of this being our own experience. We have seen God work in our lives in a tremendous way especially in recent years, but definitely in this whole process.

As we sought to organize our thoughts, we came up with ten different stages in process in the last thirteen or fourteen years. This will be a way to organize not only what we are going to say to you but to recognize that there was an organization in what happened to us.

The first of those stages is not very complimentary to us. We call that stage ***Ignorant Oblivion***. We thought we were wonderful parents. It seemed to us that we had all of the right pieces to be good parents. We were believers in Jesus Christ; we were convinced that God had given us the two sons that He wanted us to have. We were in ministry and felt called to ministry; and so it seemed to us that being in the ministry should have been a protective shield that would make it possible for us to have kids that would do exactly what you wanted kids to do. We watched other families struggle with their families. There were other families who had children with severe problems and we cared about them and we even prayed for them, but that was not us. Our first son was a good student. He was very talented as a musician; he was an excellent athlete. So we assumed that the same thing would take place with our second son. However, what happened caught us off guard and surprised us greatly. One day our son went off to the sixth grade in the middle school and when he got home there was an alien inhabiting his body. We struggled with it from that moment on.

**Lynda:** We thought Evan was using something but neither of us wanted to believe it. Evan was young, only in the sixth grade. We just figured that he would have more sense, that he would not be so stupid. We just could not believe that this could possibly be happening in our home.

However, we soon were led into our second stage, which was ***Suspicion***. He began using a lot of incense in his room and I hated that smell. I detested it. He said, “Mom, I will just change to a different brand, get a different smell.” I said, “I don’t care what brand you get, I don’t like it. Why do you insist on burning that stuff?” He had such convincing logical answers and the same logic would show up when we would question him when we found drug paraphernalia in his pockets, in his schoolbooks, in his room. We actually believed him. We trusted him and we had no reason up through the fifth grade not to trust him. But soon, however, that trust factor did erode. Doubts began to creep in when we saw the change in his behavior, the redness, the haziness, and the glaze in his eyes, the disinterest in things he used to love, his sullenness, his frequent talks and threats of suicide and, of course, the anger and his tremendous rage.

**Kim:** But with all of that I, for one, was not willing to believe that our son was using drugs. That leads us to the third stage: ***Denial***. I’ll say that I was the one who was immediately in denial about the process. Lynda and I have very different temperaments. Lynda is much more discerning than I am. I am slower to accept something, slower to deal with an issue; I want to give it some time. She would see this and she would talk to me about it and say, “I think we have a problem.” I would say, “I don’t think we have a problem.” I continued to live in denial.

**Lynda:** Well, obviously I came to the realization that we had a problem, I also realized that this situation was beyond our control. I realized I had two choices. I could choose as a pastor's wife and a pastor's family to cover it up and try to catch Evan and protect him or I could choose to put myself in God's hands and to have Him do it His way. I did choose to put it into God's hands. He started working on me right away. I thought He ought to work on Evan, but He didn't. Instead, He started dealing with my pride. That pride wanted to cover up the situations; that pride wanted to keep making excuses for Evan's behavior. During this time, the Lord helped me realize that what our son was doing, the choices he was making, were choices he was doing on his own. We were not doing anything to cause him to make those choices; we were not forcing him into this. This was his own making.

In order to keep on going, I had to make another choice. I always had to keep making choices. I kept asking the Lord about this. "Why don't you ask Evan to keep making right choices? You keep pestering me." I realized that Evan's behavior could have disastrous effects on our marriage, on Kim's ministry that God had given him as a pastor and, of course, on Evan himself. So the Lord and I got into lots of deep discussions about this issue and I decided with God's prompting to give Him my pride and our reputation. I gave Him Kim's ministry. Actually, it was not Kim's ministry. It was the ministry into which God had placed Kim. As an act of my will, I chose to give Kim's ministry to the Lord. I said, "Lord, if You want to allow Evan's behavior to destroy himself and destroy us as a family and the pastorate that you have given Kim, then that is Your decision. That's Your responsibility. Lord, I want to ask You to keep me out of the way so you can keep working on Evan." So my constant prayer continued to be, "Lord, get me out of the way. Keep me out of the way. Help me to be the person you want me to be so that I do not give Evan any cause to make the choices he is making."

Putting that prayer into practice came soon enough. One time the phone rang and it was the police. When I answered it, the officer told me who he was and said, "We have your son Evan in custody." We were to report to the police station. At that moment—I can still remember it—it felt like a huge boulder had just hit me. In fact, I could hardly breathe. When I came to, I had a thought. I said, "Lord, I am to keep out of the way. I think this is a father-son event." I promptly went out to the study to tell Kim the "good news."

**Kim:** When she found me in my study and told me of the phone call, I have to admit to you that I was absolutely overwhelmed. As I sat there in my chair, I don't think for the first few moments I had the strength to get up because the last thing I expected was a call from the police. But as I was sitting there, my mind was flooded with questions. "Why? Why us? Why now? Why would you even allow this kind of thing, Lord? Isn't there a verse in Proverbs 22 that says: "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he won't depart from it?" Lord, what happened to that verse? What happened to that truth?"

I moved at that time. I'm not sure Lynda did immediately, but I moved into the stage of **Confusion and Questioning**. On the ride to the police station my questions continued. What did I do wrong? What did we do wrong? Was I too busy for Evan? Could I have spent more time disciplining my son? Could I have done a better job of disciplining my son? Was I a good example? All of these things were literally flooding my mind and not one of those questions seemed to have an answer. I picked him up at the police department. I brought him home and Lynda met us at the front door.

**Lynda:** Evan looked very hard and yet, when I looked into his eyes, he was very embarrassed. I said to him, "Evan, your dad and I love you, not what you're doing but we love you as a person. But I also want you to know that we will never get in the way of your experiencing the full weight of the consequences that come as a result of your choices. However, Evan, I want you to understand that your dad and I will always stand beside you; we will never turn our backs on

you.” Then I put my arms around him and hugged him hard and looked at his face and saw a tear coming down. He said “Thanks, Mom” and he went to his room and closed the door. Then Kim proceeded to tell me that was the same thing he had told Evan on the way home from the police station.

**Kim:** Over the coming days my **Anger and Frustration** grew. That was the next stage for us. The anger was not even directed clearly. Sometimes I was very angry with Evan. How could he do this to us? How could he do this to himself? I was often angry at the world. It just did not seem fair that you had to try to bring up a kid in a world that is so evil, a world that has so many opportunities for sin. I was angry with the kids that he hung around with because I knew that they had a tremendous impression on him. I was angry that he was more interested in what his friends thought about him than what we thought about him. I have to admit, although it was extremely hard, that I was also angry with God. To my knowledge, before that time I could never remember at least admitting to myself that I was angry with God.

I said to Evan one day and this was in a calmer moment, but I had to say it, “I think that I am going to have to stop being a pastor.”

He sat up straight and said, “Why would you do that, Dad?”

I said, “Evan, what you’re doing right now appears to me to be disqualifying me for ministry.” He said, “Who told you that you were disqualified?”

I said, “The Scripture says very clearly that if a father can’t take care of or control his own children, then he has no right to think that he can care for the church.” Then it was very interesting because at that moment Evan got angry, not with me, but with anyone who could tell me I could not be a pastor.

He said, “Dad, you can’t stop being a pastor. That’s what you are supposed to do. You’re supposed to keep doing what you are doing.”

I said, “Evan, I know right now I am putting tremendous pressure on you. If I leave the ministry I’m not going to say I left the ministry because of you but I have to tell you that I don’t have the confidence anymore that God is going to want me in the ministry because of your actions.” It was a very heavy time for both of us. Again our differences in temperament showed up between Lynda and me. It showed up in a variety of ways. For instance, when I struggled with anger and frustration, she did not struggle in the same way I did. My response showed something very different from hers.

**Lynda:** I have always tended to be stronger and more rigidly disciplined than Kim. He was far more laid back but he came from a laid-back family. My family was highly structured and we worked from early morning until late at night. My mother’s favorite phrase was, “What is done before breakfast and after supper is what really counts.” She kept us working. She said, “You kids can go out and play after you get your work done.” It did not take us very long to realize it was a no-brainer that our work was never done when mom was around. So we learned how to make work play, which is why I love to work the long hours that I do. This strength was helpful in many ways but in other ways it was not so good. Kim asked me not to deal with the issue with Evan but just to love him and have fun with his friends and him. He did not want me to have to carry the weight as a disciplinarian; he would assume that role.

At that point I had to go to the Lord in His word for direction. In the book of Ephesians Paul said we wives are supposed to be obedient to our husbands. However, I found it difficult to be obedient when I knew that Kim was not right. When I did not feel Kim was dealing with the drug issue as strongly as he ought to, it really did go against my authoritarian grain and the way that I was brought up. But the Lord was so precious and was tenderly teaching me that I was to obey that Scripture, especially in this situation, and to honor Kim’s directive to me concerning

Evan. When I finally let go and did submit, I found that it really freed me up not to blame Kim for everything that was not working out correctly with his plan in taking over this business with Evan. I did continue to believe that Kim was too easygoing and that fact brought me countless times of frustration. But Kim did say to me that when my frustration level would get too high, I was not to take it out on Evan. I was to come to talk to Kim. I would strongly give it to Kim outside the hearing of Evan. I can still see Kim sitting on the bed in our room patiently listening to my ranting. He never criticized me; he was always very gracious because he knew I had to get it out of my system. I know those confrontations were very painful for him and left him sagging because he also many times felt at a miserable loss as to what to do for, or with Evan. After I released my frustrations on Kim, I was fine. I could go back into my life and do what Kim asked me to do and to have fun with Evan and to love him.

Our home had always had an open door policy. I grew up with that policy and we continued it with our kids. We just said to feel free to bring your friends over any time all hours of the night and day. We want you to feel that you can do here at home with your friends what ever you would like to do. Evan thought he could just bring his drug friends home. I did want to close the door and lock it at that point, but I recognized that we could not do that. We had to continue living our lives as we always did. I also recognized that this was the first time that many of these kids would ever see the love of Christ. I remember coming home from work and finding these really weird and strange looking guys with their heads in our refrigerator digging out whatever food they could eat.

One day I remember in particular, Evan brought home eleven of his friends because he had been announcing to them that his mom knew how to cut hair and she could do it any way they would want. So I said okay I'll do this and they thought that was really cool. It was really quite a day. It took me over three hours to cut and style their hair and some of them really wanted weird, way-out styles, but I cut as directed. So at the end of those three hours, I had about a three-foot area piled high with hair. The friends talked about that for a long time. They said to Evan, "My mom would never do that. My mom wouldn't even let us bring our friends to the house."

**Kim:** This whole process with Evan literally broke my heart. The sixth stage in our process was **Discouragement**. I think I moved into it first, although I know Lynda experienced the same problem. I don't even remember being that discouraged at any time in my previous history. Finally, it led me to depression. I don't know if it would have been defined as clinical depression because I never went to a doctor or psychologist to ask, but I was deeply depressed. You can guess that that flowed into every part of my life and affected every aspect of ministry.

I finally concluded I could not continue in the pastorate. I was reminded of Christ's question a number of times. What good if a man should gain the whole world, then I paraphrased it, what good if a man should gain the whole world and lose his own son? What good was ministry if I was a pastor and I could help people but I could not do anything for my own son? Now, if you are a pastor you have probably resigned often on Monday or maybe after a deacon's meeting or after an elder's session, but I was at the point where I concluded there was no answer but to quit. I was disqualified, and there was no one to turn to. However, Lynda was struggling in another way.

**Lynda:** To keep on going, I knew I had to spend a lot of time with the Lord and His Word. I had learned early on in our marriage that Kim could not always be there for me. This was certainly true during this time. I learned that there is no human being that can be there for you and to meet that gut level heart and soul wrenching pain that is within you. So I was with the Lord a lot. In fact, I was intensely focused on Him. When I was in His Word, I came across a verse I had known for a long time.

First Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Always be joyful (I thought that's a bunch of garbage, Lord) keep on praying no matter what happens and always be thankful for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."

The Lord and I had really strong discussions and I really discussed a lot with the Lord about this verse. I said, "Lord, how in the world can I be thankful? What's there to be thankful for?" The Lord is so gentle and so kind and through His Spirit it was just like He was saying, "Why can't you be thankful?"

"What do you mean, why can't I be thankful? I don't like what You are doing, Lord. How in the world can I be thankful, for You are allowing our son to be on drugs. And another thing, God, I trusted You. You let me down. How do you expect me to be thankful for that?" I spoke out loud and said, "Lord, you are simply a Person I can not trust; You are unworthy of my trust." I was absolutely shocked when those words came out of me.

I realized that I thought for years that I was trusting Him, but it was in situations in my life when I sort of had control of things and I could sort of fix things. I still had a hand in what was going on. This situation was way beyond any human control, and I realized that I could not trust God because I didn't feel He was trustworthy. Anybody who would do something like this to me for my good was definitely not trustworthy. I don't know how long I struggled with this matter of God being Someone I couldn't trust, but I do know I really struggled.

Finally, one soul-wrenching day I verbalized out loud once again, "God, I truly believe You are worthy of my trust and You definitely know what You are doing. I want to thank You, Lord, for this very struggle, which has led me to really evaluate my level of trust in You."

The moment these words came out of my mouth something wonderful took place in my spirit. God knew I really meant what I said. Philippians 4:6-7 sums it up: "Don't worry about anything. Instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done. If you do this you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your heart and mind as you live in Christ Jesus." See, something wonderful took place in my spirit. God's peace was settling down into my heart and He was guarding me and taking control of the situation. This led then to our next stage, which is **Dependence**.

**Kim:** I wish I could go back now and tell you exactly how long it took for me to move from the discouragement and the depression to dependence but I really can't do that. It may have been the longest part of the process. Two issues converged in my life at the same time. Actually, these issues were in both our lives, but mine especially pushed me over the edge. We decided that maybe if I wasn't going to leave the ministry, maybe we could just change ministries or move somewhere else to get Evan out of southern California, which was bound to be more evil than any other place on the planet. Then a wonderful opportunity came to us from Eugene, Oregon. So we candidated there. The day after we candidated, they voted to call us. I lost my voice. I could not figure out what was wrong, but I literally lost my voice. I couldn't speak at all. So I went to the doctor. He said there were medical problems that required surgery. Now, I had resigned from one church, accepted a call to another, and I'm a preacher who can't talk. Think about that for a moment. It was a tough position to be in. So we had Evan, on one hand, still in the midst of his struggles and no solution in sight, and that had stretched me to the point of discouragement and depression. Now I'm supposed to go and pastor a new church and I literally can't make a sound.

When I came to that point because of the extremity of it, I said, "Lord, I have two choices. I can either finally trust You, which I have been rebelling against doing with this situation with Evan, or I can just give up on life altogether."

I don't think I've ever considered suicide. I've considered quitting, but not suicide. Yet at that moment, the choice seemed clear. I trust God or I just give up on living. Did you ever have this happen to you? I could think back to all the times I stood up in a pulpit and pointed to the people and said, "Trust the Lord; He is trustworthy." They could be sure to trust God; I wasn't trusting Him at all.

I came to the conclusion that the only thing left for me to do was to trust the Lord. I know that in a sense that sounds foolish for someone who has believed it all his life and taught it and yet it was very real to me. I basically had a similar experience as Lynda's. I got down before the Lord and I said, "Father, I can't talk and I don't know if I'll ever have my voice back, our son is using drugs and we're not sure we will ever get him back, but I choose and am determined to trust You." At that point, we were both led into our next period, which was probably the longest period. I call it ***Patient Waiting or Endurance***.

**Lynda:** Down through the years of struggle, Kim and I practiced the unconditional love shown to us by the Lord himself. Many times we had to call upon the Holy Spirit to flow this unconditional love through us to Evan as a person, especially when it was so hard to get past the continual problems and heartache he was giving us. Many days we did not see our son; we only saw his drug problem. When it would keep getting in the way of our loving the actual child, the Holy Spirit always came through for us. We wanted the Holy Spirit to give us that unconditional love for Evan and He was faithful; He did exactly what we would allow Him to do. This practicing of unconditional love extended to Evan's girlfriend who became his wife. It was a relationship we knew was in trouble but they insisted on getting married. I wept the whole day of his wedding. In fact, two days later while in surgery, my heart stopped. I was experiencing physically the results of this tremendous burden.

Also, during this time of patiently waiting and enduring, there were other opportunities to practice what God was teaching me. Getting out of the way so the Lord could work both in Evan and in Kim was something I had to keep practicing. Getting out of God's way really freed me up. It took a weight off my shoulders. I did not have to be so fixated on them. I really had no clue as to how very depressed Kim was. Kim and I never expected Evan to even get to his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. We thought he would be dead. We never expected to see him alive but I found that by getting out of God's way, I was able to get out of the center of the forest. I was able to get out of the center of the fire, and I was able to stand back. I felt then as if I was on the outside looking in. It was much more comfortable to be on the outside, knowing God was in control. He was taking care of Evan and Kim, and He was taking care of me because He was helping me stay out of the way so He could keep working on Evan. I also daily practiced letting the Lord know I could fully trust Him. I realized He was sovereign, and even though I didn't know where He was going in all of this or where we were headed, I knew He knew. That brought such comfort and peace to my soul and it enabled me to keep on going. At times I felt that I was alone, but I wasn't alone. I had the Lord with me because my guys were certainly bouncing up and down on this sea of constant uncertainty. Since this struggle with Evan took so many years, I had a long time to practice these God-given lessons. Today they have become a natural part of my life. Before Evan's drug problem began, I thought they were a part of my life; but they really were not.

During this process of time, God sent along angels to minister to us in the form of Godly men and women. When we moved to Eugene, two retired men, one who worked with the high school department and one who worked with nursing home ministries, took Evan under their wing. They each took him out individually. They took him to lunch, and they would call him up and tell him, "We are praying for you, Evan," and this is all while Evan was doing drugs. Evan loved going with them; he has a tender heart. I'm hearing from many of you that your son or daughter has a tender spirit and yet they are on drugs. Evan did have a very tender heart and he loved these men and he was just amazed that they loved him. They would let him pick out where they would eat. He couldn't understand why they loved him but they did.

God also sent along mighty powerful prayer warriors for our family. They did not criticize us; they just prayed and this was a tremendous gift. During the time we were struggling with Evan, my twin brother's daughter at the age of sixteen had a catastrophic accident. We spent months in

the trauma center in Palm Springs. She was in a coma and for seven and a half years had constant critical nursing care twenty-four hours around the clock.

I remember at one point I was in the trauma center with my twin Lynn and I said, "Lynn, how are you doing in all of this?"

He said "Lynda, whenever I start feeling sorry for myself I just look around and see others who are so much worse off than we are." I feel my brother is the modern day equivalent to Job.

**Kim:** During this very long waiting period and this time of endurance, God was working energetically in my heart. I must admit that I was not only coming to the point of choosing to trust Him, but I was coming to the point of spending a lot more personal time talking with Him, studying His Word, and trying to determine what it was He wanted me to do. I knew He didn't want me to quit ministry now. I knew He didn't want me to be a depressed pastor, so there must be an answer to all of this.

One day I was reading in Second Corinthians, Chapter 10, about the battle we are all a part of as believers in Jesus Christ. Also, I read about the strongholds that Satan wants to build in our lives to keep us from knowing God and becoming all that He wants us to be. A little phrase absolutely grabbed my attention in verse five. It said, "Taking every thought captive and bringing it into obedience to Christ." I have one of those minds that on the outside stays relatively calm but inside my mind is racing most of the time. I could have six or eight thoughts working at once and of those thoughts probably seven of them were negative and one was worthwhile. I realized I could, by God's grace, take my thoughts captive, and so over the next few months I developed a little pattern that helped exercise that truth.

I discovered that I could recognize the thought for what it was; God wanted me to do that. I asked His Spirit to teach me and His Words to enlighten me so I could recognize an offensive thought. Maybe it was worry, maybe it was anger, maybe it was frustration. Secondly, I could recapture that thought that had no right to control my thoughts for the next hour or two as it did often previously. Then, if it was a thought that was offensive, I could refuse it. I don't know if you have ever tried to refuse negative thoughts, but what you find is the harder you try not to think about it the more the thought seems to get a grip on you. I realized I could refuse something that was destructive to me if I replaced it with something that was beneficial. I could stop thinking about one thing only if I started thinking about something else. What I did again and again was to go back to God's Word and I discovered the sections of Scripture and the verses that specifically ministered to my struggle and worry and hurt or whatever it happened to be. Every time I would capture those thoughts and by God's grace bring them into obedience to Him. I can tell you today that it has literally revolutionized the way that I think. I am convinced that I would not think like I do today if Lynda and I had not gone through the experience that we did with Evan. This is what really kept us afloat and especially kept me afloat on these very heavy seas of struggle with Evan. We waited and we prayed and finally we came to the ninth stage, ***The Breakthrough***.

**Lynda:** We don't know what put it all together for Evan. As I said before, he married a gal that we did not approve of. They were both too young and unstable. They were both on drugs and they were not thinking clearly at all. During their wedding and many days afterward, I just wept. Our hearts were very grieved. Yet we continued to love both Evan and his new wife with the Spirit giving us unconditional love for them. The marriage lasted a horrible, rocky two years and just a few weeks before his wife walked out for the last time, God got hold of Evan and brought him to his knees. This experience was so dramatic that Evan came right over from his house to ours to tell me about it.

He said, "Mom, you're not going to believe this and you may think I am nuts but the Holy Spirit literally pushed me out of the chair and down on my knees. I cried like a baby before the Lord, asking his forgiveness. Mom, I know He has forgiven me."

I said to Evan, "I know the power of the Holy Spirit. I have been praying for years to give God the freedom to do whatever it took to break you and He has done that today and our prayers are answered." Evan came into my arms and both of us just wept like babies.

After his marriage was over, Evan moved back home. He and I would have long discussions into the early morning hours. One night we were discussing some deep issues when I said to

Evan, "I have three questions I would like to ask you but I've kept them hidden in my heart for years."

He said, "Go ahead Mom, ask me."

I said, "Evan, did your dad and I spend so much time in ministry that you felt you were cheated or did not have quality time with us? I really need to know that."

Evan responded, "No, I felt that you and dad were always there for me whenever I needed you."

I asked, "Evan, did you ever feel that we did not love you enough?" Evan said "No, I knew you and dad loved me, no matter what I did. I was always assured of your love."

Then my third question was, "Why in the world did you choose to make these bad decisions; why did you choose to do drugs?"

I can still see the smile on his face because he knew my frustration at that point. He said, "Mom, you and dad did everything right. I did what I did because of my own self-focus and self-centeredness. I thought that what I did would not make any difference to or affect anyone else but I can see now that kind of thinking was incorrect."

This brings us into our last stage and that is the one of ***Rejoicing and Thanksgiving***. I recently asked Evan, "If you could dream, what would you like to be doing today?"

His answer was, "Just exactly what I am doing, Mom. God is so good and I don't deserve it."

I have had to keep reassuring and reminding Evan that God's grace is not something we earn. It stems from His unconditional love for us. We need to accept it and give Him all the thanks and praise.

**Kim:** As we look back today at God's work we are absolutely convinced that His hand was in all of this and His desire was to shape us and to mold us, not to remove us from ministry but to prepare us for the ministry that He had for us. Lynda and I sat down in recent days and tried to decide what have we learned from this. Is there anything that is absolutely a conviction now, which we might not have had to this same degree before? I want to give you five that we've discovered.

First, no matter how out of control circumstances seemed to be God is still in control. I know you've heard that. I have preached that but today I am absolutely convinced of it. He remains faithful even when the situation appears hopeless. We sat together and held hands and just said, "Lord, this is something we are now convinced of and we were not convinced or at least I was not convinced of it before." It seemed to me when things like this happen that even God had lost control, but we are confident today that He never did.

Second, God in His great wisdom and love has used these extreme difficulties to shape us for His glory. I know you believe Romans 8:28 where it says, "God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose." But often we do not go on to verse 29 where He is describing His eternal plan. It says that He is sovereignly working to "*conform us to the likeness of His Son*." Even the most difficult of circumstances, such as the struggle with a wayward child, is used by God to conform and shape us, as we trust Him in the situation.

Third, God's Word has been a tremendous source of encouragement to us in the midst of our struggle. We found it again and again to be exactly what we needed. I used to go read this book, go to that person and to this doctor and ask that individual; and now it has become the pattern of both of our lives to say, "God, if You have given us Your revelation, it has to have an answer for each of our needs." And God has been renewing our thinking and shaping our actions as well through His Word.

Fourth, we recognize we are still in process. Evan is at a great place in his life right now; but God is still shaping him and He is still working on us. That shaping continues and it reminds me of Ephesians 2:10, where it says that we are God's workmanship, or God's poem. Our lives are still a poem in the process of being written, and I am thankful for that.

The fifth and final thing is that our struggles have tenderized our hearts toward others. There is a whole lot less criticism in my heart for poor parenting or apparent poor parenting. There is a lot less criticism in my heart for people who have kids who just refuse to do what they ought to do. It used to be easy for me to say, "If these parents would have just done this, or done that...." But now my heart is deeply concerned for them because I understand that sometimes the situation with their child is completely out of their control. Fewer pat answers come out of my mouth for people; I am more patient when I am walking through the valley with some of them, and our relationship with one another has deepened greatly through the struggle. Our desire today is to encourage you. Whatever stage you may be experiencing in your struggle right now, however broken you may be in your heart, I am convinced that "God truly is working all things together for your good and for His glory."

Let me pray with you right now.

*Father, we are here standing in front as we said in the beginning, not because we know more than anyone who is here, but because our experience is common to those who are gathered in this room. It is our desire and heart that they will be comforted with the wonderful comfort You have given us. Thank You, Father, for using the most agonizing of experiences to teach us Your important truths. May this be an ongoing process for each one of us in the weeks and months to come. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.*