

## **Ministering in Spite of the Pain of the Ups and Downs**

by **Bill and Brenda Faulkner**

**Brenda:** We will soon celebrate our 38<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We were high school sweethearts. We have three married children and 6 wonderful grandchildren. Bill was pursuing a career in engineering when we married. After several years of sensing God's call on our lives, we "surrendered" to full-time ministry. Our oldest son, Scott, 36, is the child we will share about today. He was four years old when we first moved to begin seminary and preparation for what God had called us to. Over the next 12 years we moved several times, which proved to have been a negative factor in Scott's development.

**Bill:** Scott has been using drugs for the last 20 years. We wish that we could share from a point of victory, but in fact, we are estranged from him at this point. This has only been for a month, after us setting some boundaries in our own lives for the first time. That really affected his life and he really does not know what to think. He wants to set boundaries for everyone else, but not have them set for him. He has been married twice and has three beautiful girls. He has been in drug rehab 4 times. He was arrested twice in his later teen years. Only 4 years ago he was diagnosed bi-polar/manic-depressive, which complicates the entire situation and that is a whole topic in itself.

He is a tremendously gifted young man, having been the star quarterback in high school. He was given a full football scholarship to college, where the drug addiction became self-destructive. The effect of drugs has truly been the most painful thing we could have ever imagined for our lives. It is difficult enough to go through such a nightmare as "private" individuals, but when you have to go through all of it publicly, it is very difficult. The statement on the mail-out of "You're Not Alone" says a "ton of bricks hit your home." That is a vivid description of what happens. As we were talking about how we could approach our subject, we felt that bricks can be devastating and yet they can be combined to make something very useful and beautiful. We will share with you today how we feel that we have been able to take the bricks that crashed into our lives and allow God to use them to work into our own personal lives the things necessary to be effective ministers. We will not share so much about Scott, as we will about what God developed in us through Scott's life. These six bricks are "Purpose, Praise, Promises, Prayer, People and Perseverance."

### **Purpose**

**Bill:** The first recognition that Scott had a drug problem came literally like a ton of bricks for me. Scott had come home from college where he had gone on a full football scholarship. I knew he had problems disciplining himself to study and after the second semester he decided to come home.

The next January after he had come home, he decided he wanted to go to Palm Beach Atlantic College in West Palm Beach. It is a Christian school and we thought he was ready to settle down and get on with his education. He went to PBA and we thought things were going pretty well. Late on a Thursday night we received a phone call from Scott's girl friend who would eventually become his first wife. She told us that Scott had been arrested in Ft. Pierce and was charged with shop lifting, possession of a controlled substance, and resisting arrest. I was devastated. I couldn't believe what my ears were hearing. Why would he do such a thing? These things seemed so inconsistent with who he was and everything he had been raised to believe. That began a very long and dark road for me.

I called the chairman of deacons and told him to assemble the deacons because I needed to talk with them. We met together, and I told them what had happened and offered my resignation. I

told them that I obviously did not have my house in order, and I was not fit to continue as their pastor. All of the men were very understanding, and began to share some of their own struggles, some of which I was aware and some of which I wasn't. They refused to accept my resignation. They said, "Pastor, you have stood with us; now it is time for us to stand with you," and stand they did. I did not resign, but I felt so inadequate, so weak, and so vulnerable. What could I say now that had any authority? How could I help other people whose children were struggling when I couldn't help my own? I felt that my ministry was no longer valid. How could there be any credibility at all? How could I stand and preach, when my heart was crushed? How could I ever counsel anyone again?

Over a period of time I had to revisit why I was a pastor. Did I just decide one day that I would be a preacher, or did God call me to do this. I went back to the time in my life when God made it abundantly clear to me that He called me to preach. I was reminded of the words of the apostle Paul when he said, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." God reminded me that His call on my life was irrevocable. He had called me and that was settled.

That assurance became the strength upon which I stood, and have stood. It became the light in the tunnel. I realized that God's purpose for me had nothing to do with His purpose for my son. Ezekiel 18:20 came alive for me. It says, "the son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity." I realized I was no more responsible for his choices than he was for mine. I wish I could tell you the end of the story, but I can't. The story is still going on. There are times when I would rather be anywhere than in the pulpit preaching, and I love to preach. There are times when all I have to stand on is the fact that God has called me to preach and I can't do anything else. Do you understand? It is not that I am not capable of doing anything else; I just can't do anything else. There have been times when I have not preached out of the overflow, I have preached out of utter desperation.

I have to tell you that I have learned through this ongoing experience of deep heartache that our most effective ministry platform is built on a foundation of deep pain. There are times when I still struggle, but I have learned to stand on my purpose for being where I am, and that is to preach the word in season and out season, when I feel like it and when I don't feel like it because I cannot deny the fact that God has called me with an undeniable call. That is my purpose, and I can't do anything else. These truths have brought light into the tunnel for me. It is this sense of purpose that keeps me going when I don't want to.

### **Praise**

**Brenda:** How can you praise when you are hurting so deeply and even feeling disappointed with God? How could a loving God allow such deep pain into my life? I had always tried to be obedient to Him and to point others to Him. My desire had been to raise children who loved Him with all of their heart, mind and soul. When Scott began to act out behavior that was not at all acceptable to me, I felt so out of control. I became angry with him, and with Bill, who responded with such gentleness that I could hardly stand it. Why wouldn't he do something? This need to control was something that began to affect all of my relationships. I would become angry with church members when they wouldn't act like good church members; with deacons who disagreed with my husband's leadership, with friends because they weren't having any problems or just because. I began to be consumed with anger and it was not a secret. It was obvious. My countenance was a scowl not a smile.

One week during a revival, as I knelt to tell God how everybody else needed to get right, God dealt with **my** heart about **my** anger. After a few days of coming to the point that I would agree with God and call my "problem" sin, He gave me the grace to confess and repent. After I had agreed with Him and received His forgiveness, He actually sent someone to tell me that she had felt impressed to tell me that I had a spirit of anger. We knelt together and prayed in my living room. He really did deliver me from that controlling anger.

Then I had to look at the root – and it was the need to control – things, people, circumstances. I found that it wasn't Christ that I wanted my children to be like; I wanted them to be clones of me. I wanted them to think, feel, respond like me. This is an area that God began to deal with me on a regular basis. Every time I would feel the need to control, I would take some spiritual breaths, realize what I was doing, ask myself why and then release the control to the Lord. This was accomplished gradually as I learned the tremendous gift of praise. My life verse became "He will keep you in perfect peace when your mind is stayed on Him." I began to turn my anxiety into praise. "In everything give thanks think on these things don't worry about anything but pray about everything."

There were many days that I felt the situation with Scott was so desperate and hopeless. I began to listen to praise music, to sing in my heart all day long, to quote scripture and pray back scripture to God. It never failed when I would change my focus from the horizontal to the vertical, my spirit was **always** lifted. I felt hope, I could see the sunshine not the clouds; I could enjoy my family, friends and church. I was no longer holding everyone in bondage, but because the Lord was setting me free I was able to set others free. I could trust the Holy Spirit in the lives of others – I didn't have to be the Holy Spirit.

One of the greatest difficulties for Bill and I was that we would seem to get depressed at the same time. One particular afternoon, when Scott had disappeared for three weeks, we were at the bottom the Lord led me to go into the den and put in a Gaither video. I sat on the floor and just let the songs begin to penetrate my spirit. In a few minutes Bill joined me and after about 30 minutes we were both transformed. God really does inhabit the praise of His people, but it is my conscious choice to praise Him. Praise is thanking God for Who He is, knowing Him, loving Him. And when I do that, everything else takes its proper place.

### **Promises**

**Bill:** We began to realize that we must take hold of what God says to us generally, and to us specifically at our points of need. It was not enough just to be able to quote scripture or to know them in our heads. It was time to work them out in our lives. The word "promise" means a declaration that something will or will not be done, given, etc.

God has promised us many things:

- He will never leave us or forsake us, which means that He is there with us in whatever we are going through.
- He has promised that He will accomplish what concerns us—which means that nothing can thwart His plans for me.
- He has said that His grace is sufficient—which means that He will empower me to do His will.
- He has promised that in my weakness His strength is made manifest—which means that I can keep on keeping on

We began to practice walking in a way that demonstrated faith in Him; claiming to be true what He says. It brought us into perspective and reminded us that we were not alone and that we would be okay. Not that the circumstances necessarily would change but that we could walk in joy and victory. Without His promises, we would have nowhere to stand—no hope, no peace, no joy. The phrase "but God" is used many times in scripture and we began to realize how much that phrase changes things.

God has given us some specific promises for Scott during these years. One is from Jeremiah 29:11: "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." That was given to us in 1984. From our physical vision we don't see that happening...but God....God never fails us and we hold on to the promises of His word.

## **Prayer**

**Brenda:** Prayer was probably the hardest area we have had to grow in and we still struggle in this area. Prayer, without a doubt, is where the victory is won. But as we have already shared, many times it was so difficult to pray. We did not know what to pray; sometimes we just did not want to pray. We learned that prayer is a two-way conversation and began to learn what it means to hear God. He speaks in a still, small voice. He usually speaks something that our flesh does not want to hear. But He always speaks truth to us and He speaks to us what we must hear.

A lot of the most difficult times, when Scott would be in trouble, wreck his truck, be in a rage...were on Saturday. What a tremendous distraction this was to what was most important to us...Sunday. Of course, these events pushed us to our knees and bent our hearts totally to God. His grace was sufficient as we turned to our Father crying out for help. There was no way that we could have gotten out of bed without Him hearing and answering our prayers. Just recently, I was again feeling like I just didn't want to face "church" and feeling that I absolutely didn't need to be in a leadership position, thinking and planning in my head to just stay in bed on Sunday. I awoke early Sunday morning thinking who I would call to teach my class...but God met me at that moment and said to me, "do you have any armor for your backside?" I said, "No." He said loudly to my spirit, "then you have to get in the battle, not run from it." Immediately I had His strength and I knew truth. It was a great class that morning as I went not in my own power, but in His and knowing that I had had a fresh word from my Lord. Many years ago, when Scott had left town and we had not had a word from him, I was intense in prayer throughout the days. I was working for a Christian lawyer at that time whose office faced highway #1. I would stand at the window for long periods of time looking for Scott to pass by in his truck. I was strongly impressed with the scripture about Peter being in jail and the group had gathered to pray for him. He showed up at the door of the house where they were praying and they were surprised. So I just knew that one of the times we would be praying with friends at our home who had come to join us in interceding for Scott and that Scott would show up at the door. That did not happen, but into the third week, a loud voice said to me, "sit down and read that scripture." I did! The spirit interpreted it to me as Peter being set free from the bondage he was in, in jail. I felt led to pray that Scott would be set free from the bondage he was in. I shared that with a friend and asked her to pray that with me – it was 3:10pm. At 3:30, Bill called me, he said, "Scott just called...he's coming home."

Those instances greatly increased my desire to pray and reminded me of how much I am loved by my heavenly Father. God knows what we need to pray and as we seek Him He will guide us in that praying. He wants us to be a part of what He is already doing on our behalf and on behalf of the one we agonize over and love so deeply.

## **People**

**Brenda:** Ministry is people. People are ministry. How can you separate yourself? And yet, how can you minister when you feel like such a failure? What could I possibly have to say that could help anyone? These aren't feelings that I had in the beginning, but as time went on without any permanent resolve, I just wanted to disappear, to not be so visible. I begged Bill to please find something else that he could do. He would say, "Brenda, you know that I can't do that." I knew in my head, but I also felt that there had to be someplace that I could hide. It would have been so easy to build walls around ourselves and to shut people out. But we had to "show up" and to get outside of ourselves.

This brought to light another area that I had to deal-- independence and pride. I can do it – myself! But God brought circumstances into my life that forced me to need others. There were many times when I could not pray. There were many times when I felt that God was a million miles away and that He was very disappointed with me. God put people, loving people, forgiving people, in our lives.

As time went on, I realized that emotionally I had shut down. I really could not feel much of anything. We went to a conference that dealt with emotions and after looking honestly at my childhood I realized that I had not had emotional needs met. I didn't know what acceptance looked like. I didn't know what encouragement looked like. I didn't know what affirmation looked like. I didn't know what comfort looked like. How could I give away what I had no clue about? Another area of healing that God led me gently through related to control. When you are a controller, you are also a fixer. I thought that I had to fix every broken thing. I can't fix things. I can't fix people. But I can care. And God has taught me how to really care. I love people and am still learning that they really are able to love me, honestly and sincerely. There are few people who don't have a deep hurt in their life and we all need each other. Our transparency enabled others to open up about their hurts and disappointments without feeling that we would not accept them or look down on them. They will come and say "I know you will understand." And we really try to enter their pain, because pain is very real and we need to allow people to grieve over their pain. The scripture says that we are comforted so that we may comfort others. Jesus said that we are to weep with those who weep. Scott continues to use and hurt people. That causes me much heartache. But I pray for those people in his life and try to be there for them when they will let me be. I am honest with people about him – to be cautious how you relate to him and to say that if you can't love him as he is then don't get involved in his life. No one can change another person; only God can change people. But we can be instruments of healing and love. We can be vulnerable and transparent. We can demonstrate God's love and allow Him to love our child through us when we can't love.

### **Perseverance**

**Bill:** My favorite book of the Bible is the book of Romans. If I could have only one book, it would be the book of Romans. It has thrilled me, blessed me, and freed me over the years. The "much mores" of chapter 5, and the "no condemnation," and "no separation" of chapter 8 have caused my spirit to soar over the years.

During the ups and downs of Scott's bipolar condition and drug abuse Romans 5:3-5 has been especially meaningful and powerful to me. Beginning in verse 3 Paul says, "and not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

We are actually learning to exult in the Lord even in the midst of tribulation, because that tribulation is producing something. Even the crushing pain, and the emotional roller coaster you ride as a parent of a child with an addiction, something good is being produced in us. The question is, "what good could come out of tribulation?" The benefit of tribulation is perseverance. The next question is obvious. "What is perseverance?" Perseverance has become one of the most powerful words in the New Testament for me. To persevere means to bear up under the load and keep on going with joy in your heart. It doesn't mean to get out from under the load so you can keep on going. It means to stay under the load because the load is producing something that cannot be produced any other way.

I learned that the right question to ask in the midst of difficult circumstances is not "why," but "what." "Lord, what am I to learn about You in this circumstance?" In the midst of the circumstance; in the ups and the downs of life God is building within us proven character; character that has been tested by fire. Proven character is the kind of character that produces hope. Hope is that confident expectation that what God said will come to pass. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus name." Hope does not disappoint. What God said would be will be. I have hope today that nothing is too difficult for God. I have hope today that He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all I can ask or think. I have hope today that no weapon the enemy has raised against us will prosper. I have the hope today that the name of the Lord is a strong tower and I can run into it and be safe. I have hope today that when I am weary and

heavy laden I can come to Him and He will give me rest. I have the hope today that because He is for us no one can be against us. I am confident today that when I don't know what to pray or how to pray, the Holy Spirit is making intercession for with groaning too deep to be uttered. I have the hope today that when I do pray according to His will, He hears me and grants the petitions I ask of Him.

I can persevere today and every day because God is on His throne. Nothing that surprises me ever surprises Him. I can persevere today because I can trust Him with all my heart. If He... "did not spare His own son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him give us all things." (Romans 8:32) I can persevere today because His mercies are new everyday, and nothing can separate from the love of God. Finally, I can persevere today because, as much as I love my son, God loves him far more than I ever could.