

PROFITING
FROM THE PATH OF MOST

Resistance

Trusting God's goodness
when life treats you badly.

BY JAMES FIELDS

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Dedicated

Profiting from the Path of Most Resistance
by James Fields
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To my wife, family and multitudes of friends who helped me become willing to profit from the path of most resistance.

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Preface

Each Christian is a tablet on which God writes His story. We are truly “a letter from Christ.”¹ The Lord Jesus leads us through experiences which imprint His message upon our hearts. In *Profiting from the Path of Most Resistance*, I share the message God has written upon my life.

Let me briefly share the objectives of this book that spring from the unique pathway along which God has taken me.

Harvest the benefit of suffering.

God designed benefit into the suffering that afflicts His people. I want to help the Lord’s people harvest this benefit contained within trials, tribulations and difficulties. This harvest leads us into a life of unconditional victory.

Bring out the encouragement in Scripture.

Even though suffering benefits God’s people, we often become discouraged and give up before harvesting the victory He intends. I want to point God’s people toward the encouragement in Scripture that fortifies us with divine courage to keep going.

Illustrate the love of God.

We often doubt God’s love when pain afflicts us. Sometimes we

regard suffering as a sign that He is displeased with us. I want to assure His people that God’s love for us never wavers. He only intends the best for us, whether life treats us nicely or badly, pleasantly or unpleasantly.

Stimulate appreciation of perseverance.

The New Testament repeatedly urges Christians to value the perseverance which God so highly prizes. Perseverance enables us to endure until we reap the benefit of suffering. Our life on earth follows a chronological sequence. We measure this chronology with days, weeks, years, and decades. But humans are more than mere physical creatures that are born, live, grow old, and pass away.

We are a jumble of desires, emotions, plans, and ideas. Consequently, the message God writes on our hearts cannot be encapsulated in a neatly packaged sequence.

The Lord used several pens to write simultaneous messages on the tablet of my heart. Relating this story required me to often flash back to the earlier days of my life. Therefore, I write topically rather than chronologically. Please bear with this story when chronology seems confusing.

I pray this book will encourage you no matter what path of most resistance you’re walking.

—*In Jesus’ love,*
James

CHAPTER 1

The Path of Most Resistance Begins

“God, what’s wrong with you? Why don’t you heal me?”

These angry words erupted from my mouth as I stood behind the little church I pastored in Clifton, Texas. In 1968, I was 23 years old, despondent, brokenhearted, and deeply disappointed. I was faltering on the path of most resistance.

Days before, when I went to renew my driver’s license, I had almost failed the vision test.

“Mr. Fields, you better take care of those eyes!” the Highway Patrol officer said while shaking his finger at me. A knife in my heart would not have hurt any worse than his words. I drove home confused. *How can this be happening to me? I’ve tried with all my heart to believe God for healing, but my vision keeps declining.*

Back to the Beginning of the Path

In December 1945, hundreds of young women excitedly chattered as they waited for the train bringing their

husbands home from World War II. The young wives standing on the railroad station platform in Ft. Worth, Texas, talked noisily about nothing in particular. All ears listened attentively for the train whistle. It was a great time to be alive and to know that your husband had survived the war in the South Pacific.

My mother, Joanna Fields, was almost 23 years old on that cool December morning. She beamed with joy at the prospect of seeing her husband, J. R., step off the train. Dressed in her best outfit, she strained to hear the train. She straightened the little jacket and hat on her seven-month-old son (me), and prepared to present her firstborn to the husband she so thoroughly loved. I appeared to be a nice, plump, healthy boy. But those eyes—they swerved in different directions and seemed so unfocused. Well, at that moment, nothing mattered except her husband’s safe return.

There it was—the unmistakable shrill whistle of an oncoming train! Slowly the locomotive passed, the passenger cars clanged to a halt, and the doors opened. Looking through the surging crowd, Mom finally spotted her husband. They embraced. Tears of joy flooded their

eyes as they experienced the reunion, which, for so long had only been a dream. Mom then handed me to my father. Dad didn't mention my chubbiness, my cute baby clothes, or the elation at seeing his firstborn son.

"What's wrong with this baby's eyes?" he blurted out.

For some unexplainable reason I had been born with scarred macula. The macula, a tiny point on the back of the retina, contains the highest concentration of light responsive cells. It absorbs ninety percent of the light that enters the eye. It's one hundred times more sensitive to detail than the peripheral retina. Scars on the macula created areas of total blindness in the center of my vision. In an effort to see around these blind spots, my eyes swung wildly from side to side and worked independently of one another.

The pediatrician, Dr. Edward Weir, had assured Mom that by six months of age, I would be able to focus normally. Dr. Weir's confidence had soothed Mom's concern, but now, Dad watched my eyes cross, then turn outward, re-cross, and swing up and down. Something wasn't right.

As Dad carried me out of the train station, he determined to take me to an ophthalmologist.

My folks took me to Dr. Speight Jenkins in Dallas. After examining the plump, seven-month-old boy, Dr. Jenkins recommended glasses immediately.

"How can you keep glasses on a seven-month old?" my parents asked. "Do we tape them on? Do we tie them on?"

"No, Mr. and Mrs. Fields, your baby will instantly notice the difference in his vision when we place the glasses on his face. He'll leave them alone."

As they walked out of the doctor's office, my young and inexperienced parents concluded that the doctor didn't know what he was talking about. No seven-month-old would ever leave glasses on his nose.

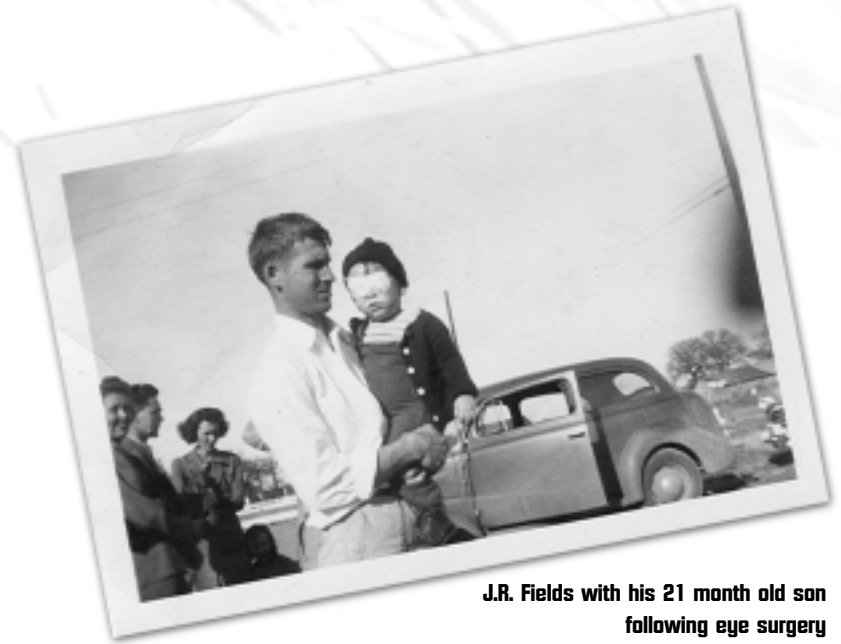
A week later, Dad held me in his arms as he sat in the doctor's office. Dr. Jenkins knelt down before me, placed the glasses on my nose, and wrapped the ear pieces behind my tiny little ears. I reached up to feel the cause of this new sensation. Dad gently lowered my hand. "No-no Jim. Don't take it off." And I never did. Dr.



**Joanna Fields
with her 7 month
old son and his
first glasses**

Jenkins expected glasses to correct the focusing muscles.

My parents moved from Dallas to Corpus Christi, Texas, in January 1945. Because an infant's muscles develop so rapidly, the doctor had to change my prescription frequently. Mom and I made the 400-mile trip from Corpus Christi to Dallas four times a year, and each trip required new glasses.



**J.R. Fields with his 21 month old son
following eye surgery**

On one of these quarterly trips, Dr. Jenkins surprised my parents by recommending eye surgery. My folks consented and allowed the doctor to operate on the eyes of their 21-month-old child. The surgery on the eye muscles enabled them to work together but did not remove the scars from the macula. The blind spots remained.

During childhood, I functioned pretty well. My vision actually improved. I passed the requirements for

driver's license and, like any 16-year-old boy, excitedly moved into the driver's seat of my parents' car.

About this same time, I accepted a Sunday School teaching position. In addition to preparing for the class of first grade boys, I started visiting the boys' homes. *Man, I can't read these street signs. I wonder how other people see them.* I didn't have an answer, so I just kept stopping the car at street corners and walking within a few feet of the signs so I could read them.

During my senior year of high school, my eyes began feeling very tired and my dad took me to another ophthalmologist. "I recommend bifocals for your son," the doctor said. Both my parents and I accepted Dr. House's advice, and I wore bifocals my final year in high school.

Looking For the Wrong Kind of Healing

During my last year in high school, reading the Bible convinced me that Jesus not only saves our souls, but also heals our bodies. I readily accepted divine healing and expected God to touch my eyes and restore perfection to my vision.

For six more years, I eagerly anticipated a miraculous healing that would enable me to throw away my glasses. I believed in God's healing power. I sought healing by fasting, praying, having faith, attending healing evangelists' services, being anointed with oil by the elders, memorizing Scripture promises, and by striving to believe with all my heart. However, my vision declined while pain and muscle fatigue increased.

But God had another kind of healing in mind. He wanted to heal my angry spirit that accused Him of wrongdoing.

I Don't Like This Path of Most Resistance

God, what's wrong with You? Why don't You heal me? Those angry questions in 1968 revealed my total distaste for the path of most resistance. *I can't lose my driver's license and still pastor a church. What's going to happen to me?*

A few days after raising my fist toward heaven and angrily shouting at the Lord, I faltered once again. As I sat inside our small mobile home, discouragement

saturated me with despondency. Suddenly, I reached for my Bible, flung it against the wall, and shouted, “God, Your promises aren’t true!” Immediately, I ran across the room, picked up the Bible I so loved, and hugged it to my chest. “I love you, God, but I’m so angry. Why aren’t You helping me?” Tears gushed from my eyes, and sobs welled up from my inmost being.

God just kept loving me!

God loved me before the creation of the world. He is love—eternal, infinite love. Love motivated all His decisions regarding my physical condition. The birth defect that placed me upon the path of most resistance served God’s loving purposes for me.

“For You created my inmost being, You knit me together in my mother’s womb.”¹ “This is what the Lord says—He who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you.”² “Listen to me...you whom I have upheld since you were conceived and have carried since your birth....”³ “He...formed me in the womb to be His servant....”⁴ God was not absent when blind spots developed on my retina. He saw how much I could profit from the path of most resistance.

I wanted so desperately to walk the path of least resistance. I could not imagine any benefit in difficulties, trials, and disappointments. Nevertheless, the One who loves us with infinite love wisely chose a physical handicap for me that proved to be my best friend.

“Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your unfailing love you kept me from the pit of destruction.”⁵

CHAPTER 2

Why a Path of Most Resistance?

God wanted to heal me. No, not my eyes, but my ugly, mean spirit. He wanted to replace the harshness I felt toward Him with a sweet, unconditional love. God always heals, but He doesn't always heal the part of us that hurts. He faithfully heals the part of us that hinders love for Him.

I began loving God as a 17-year-old. My love was true enough, but it was unperfected. Heavenly Father's love for me motivated Him to set me on a path of most resistance. The path of most resistance is also the path that leads to perfection. This path became His instrument for incredibly enlarging my love for Him so that I could keep the first and greatest commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."¹

Heavenly Father refused to deviate from His purpose for my life. He wanted me to love Him wholeheartedly and unconditionally.

His unbounded foresight constructed a path that irresistibly led me toward His goal.

Heavenly Father's Foresight

On a warm Sunday morning in June 1962, people filled the pews at the church my family attended. At the close of his sermon, Pastor Douglas J. Friesen invited folks to surrender their lives to Jesus. I set aside my teenage self-consciousness, stepped into the aisle, and walked to the front of the church.

"Jesus, I give my life to You," I prayed. "I want to live for You and never turn back from following You." Even though I felt little emotion and spoke very quietly to the Lord, He honored my request and sent the Spirit of Jesus into my heart. Joy flooded heaven as God's Spirit transformed me into a new creature in Christ Jesus. Immediately, His presence generated in me a love for the Bible. I had never read the Bible with much interest and certainly with no diligence. But that very Sunday, I went

home, picked up my Bible, and began reading Scripture each day.

Five or ten minutes of daily reading of Scripture simply didn't satisfy my hunger for the Bible. *I'll set my alarm at 5:30 a.m. so I can read 30 minutes in each Testament before going to school*, I decided. So I began a new journey of self-disciplined living. Seven days a week I arose early for an hour in the Word. But still something was missing.

"Jim, why don't you come by my office and visit with me?" Pastor Friesen suggested.

I arrived at his small office and settled into a comfortable chair. "I noticed you're much more serious about the Lord, and you never miss services," Pastor observed. "Well, Jim, let me share with you a method for memorizing Bible verses." Pastor then showed me a memorizing system using index cards.

As I drove home, joy flooded my emotions with the prospect of not only reading the Bible, but memorizing large portions of it. Armed with a fresh package of three-by-five index cards, I excitedly organized my card file box for a new adventure. *Probably 20 minutes a day will suf-*

fice to memorize three new verses and review those I've already studied, I projected. In addition to memorizing Scripture, I devoured the Bible study books Pastor Friesen loaned me. I couldn't ingest enough of God's Word. I always wanted more.

This insatiable hunger for the Bible and its promises sprang from Heavenly Father's foresight. He anticipated the day when I would be unable to read the Bible with my eyes. He knew I needed to be saturated with the Word in order to successfully walk the path of most resistance. He intended to improve my love for Him; He did not want to destroy me. His Word fortified me for all the stumbling, falling, and struggling that awaited me on this ordained path.

Replace Hostility against God with Submissiveness to God

After almost failing the vision test for my driver's license at age 23, hostility for the God I loved poured out. "God, what's wrong with You?" I shouted. "Why don't You heal me?" How could hostility against God coexist in my heart with love for Him? I know; it made no sense. But the battle was very real. I could not submit to the will of

One who failed to remove my pain.

The Spirit of God continued drawing me into His Word. This precious Revealer of Scripture began showing me new insight into passages I had read earlier.

I noticed how quickly the people Moses led out of Egypt angrily turned against God. When threatened with annihilation, the people God had so mightily blessed cried out, “Why?” The stress and pressure of life forced to the surface the hostility hidden in their hearts. Was this a picture of me? Peter loved Jesus. He determined to follow this Teacher from Nazareth. But when faced with the prospect of arrest for Jesus’ sake, Peter denied the One he loved. He didn’t *want* to deny Jesus. He so thoroughly hated his own actions that “he went outside and wept bitterly.” Suddenly, I saw myself reflected in Peter’s life. Hostility against God and submissiveness to God battled within me.

My loving God purposefully placed me on the path of most resistance. He was doing me a grand favor by using the path of most resistance to deliver me from hostility against Him and fill me with submissiveness to Him.

Another passage of Scripture came alive to me. “For you, O God, tested us; You refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.”² God refines us? God tests us? He causes us to go through both fire and flood? He lets our enemies dominate us? This was not the gospel I believed. God always answers prayer with healing, deliverance, blessing, and good things—that was my gospel.

Then I noticed the last statement of Psalm 66:12. “But you brought us to a place of abundance.”

Maybe there is purpose in pain. Maybe God doesn’t want to heal my eyes. Gradually Scripture helped me recognize that God can use pain for achieving good purposes. Understanding that truth, I began submitting to His purpose for either causing or allowing me to hurt.

Replace Independence from God with Dependence on God

One day I concluded God wanted me to take a step of faith which would bring my healing. I heaved my black rimmed glasses into Lake Whitney. I watched them

splash into this Central Texas lake and expected God to honor my effort to believe. *This act of faith will bring God's healing power to bear upon these eyes!* I reasoned. *God will touch me because "by His stripes we are healed."*

The next morning, I showed up at the machine shop where I worked to supplement my meager pastor's salary. Several high school boys who worked at the shop during the summer noticed that I wasn't wearing glasses. When they questioned me, I told them the whole story. They didn't seem too shocked at my "act of faith." When we gathered for afternoon break, one of the high schoolers remarked, "I'll bet a big catfish is wearing Fields' glasses." Everyone chuckled, but no one ridiculed my not-so-smart action.

I believed divine healing was God's only will for my body. *"I am the Lord who heals you"*³ swirled around in my consciousness several times a day.

My belief controlled the way I saw Scripture. So, throwing my glasses away seemed perfectly logical. In reality, I was acting independently of God's will. Yes, He wanted to heal me, but not with the healing I expected. He had something better in mind. The God who loved



James and Delores in the late 1960s. These are the glasses he committed to the catfish.

me determined to deliver me from my tendency to act independently of His will. He wanted me to walk by His logic, not mere human logic. He definitely demanded that Scripture control my beliefs.

"God is love."⁴ Love motivated all His choices regarding my physical health. Because He ardently

sought my welfare, He both watched my glasses sink to the bottom of the lake and wisely decided not to heal my eyes. He mercifully gave Himself over to healing my inner self.

Satan's appeal to the first humans invited them to act independently of a God who created them. A few thousand years later, the same devil urged Jesus to act on His own without regard for Heavenly Father's will. Regardless of what I believed, flinging my glasses into a lake did not represent an act of faith. Discarding my glasses represented an attempt to force God to do things my way.

Even without glasses, I continued functioning fairly well. During this glasses-free time, I read Paul's words. "As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the Gospel to you."⁵ What a revelation to me! God used Paul's illness to direct his steps? People heard the gospel for the first time because sickness would not allow Paul to travel? These ideas didn't fit into my belief.

The God of unbounded love continued using Scripture to gain control over my beliefs. Still I grasped my determination to do things my way and I only had

one way of doing things—healing my body.

The God of love kept me on the path of most resistance. He worked irresistibly to free me from my insistence upon doing things my way.

Replace Faith in My Faith with Confidence in God's Faithfulness

The days of waiting for healing drug into months. I stubbornly rejected the possibility of purchasing another set of glasses. I had too much faith in my faith.

Didn't Jesus promise that faith the size of a mustard seed could move mountains? Surely God will soon heal me! This thought sustained me while I lived in a very blurry world.

I thought my faith was in God. My belief was sincere. But God desired my faith to be in His faithfulness. He wanted a son who relied exclusively upon His dependability. So He refused to change the direction of my life. He would not let me step off the path of most resistance.

In our small Central Texas town, it was easy for me to get around. In fact, I walked a lot. I pastored a large church, a church of 300–295 crickets and five humans.

The crickets entered through the cracks in the walls; most humans came in through the doors.

A couple of the humans were named Brother and Sister Rice. One day, I answered the phone and heard her elderly, quivering voice. “Pastor, would you and Sister Fields come over and pray for me? My back hurts so badly! I can’t get off the living room couch.” I immediately responded, “Sure, we’ll be right over.”

Delores and I walked the five minutes to the Rice home. As I stepped across the front door threshold, a thought entered my mind. *Tell her; “This is for My glory.”* Out of courtesy, Sister Rice attempted to arise from the couch. She grimaced because of the pain, and tears ran down her cheeks. We urged her to remain still.

Her elderly husband and young pastor and wife stood next to the couch and began calling on the Lord to heal her. My glasses lay at the bottom of Lake Whitney as I asked Jesus to touch Sister Rice’s delicate, aging body.

“Sister Rice, as I entered your house, these words entered my mind, *‘Tell her; that this is for My glory.’*”

Instantaneously, this frail little lady leaped up from the couch, lifted her hands heavenward, and began praising God. I couldn’t believe it. She shouted, danced around, and appeared totally healthy. And she never experienced another moment of back pain.

I returned to the parsonage with a heavy heart. *Why did God heal her so easily? Why is healing so difficult for me?*

Jesus wanted to redirect my faith. He was in the process of sweetening my spirit.

CHAPTER 3

The Path that Leads to Sweetness

I never realized how severe the blind spots in my vision were until I almost ran over a pedestrian. I saw him about to cross the road from my right to the left. *No problem. He'll wait to cross after I've passed by him.* Then, for an instant, this person disappeared from my sight. Suddenly, he reappeared on my left, standing on the center line of the road. He had crossed in front of me and waited in the middle of the road for the opposite lane to clear. But I didn't see him. For a very brief moment he literally vanished from my vision.

Panic seized me. *What's wrong with my eyes? I could've run over that guy! How could he so completely disappear?* He stepped into the blind spots caused by the scars on my macula.

God can let us live with blind spots in our physical

vision. He *cannot* let us go on with blind spots in our spiritual vision.

My love for Jesus compelled me to equip myself to better serve Him. I wanted so much to repay Him for loving me, forgiving my sins, and making me a child of God. I loved Him thoroughly and sincerely. I pursued His plan for my life because nothing else mattered. Nevertheless, blind spots persisted in my character.

Jesus knew I loved Him, but He also knew I could love Him even more. In order for my love for Jesus to grow, He had to remove blind spots that handicapped my love for Him. My Love for Him depended on how I perceived His treatment of me. Love for Him could not grow outside the limits of my perception of Him. The blind spots in my spiritual eyes prevented me from seeing His beauties. I saw Him very imperfectly and He wanted to clear my vision so I could see Him accurately.

His infinite love for us compels Him to remove from us every particle of bitterness against Him so we can become sweet in our spirit. Becoming like our sweet-hearted God enlarges our capacity to love Him wholeheartedly.

The path of most resistance inevitably leads us out of bitterness of spirit into sweetness of spirit. God was doing me a favor by not healing my eyes, but I didn't know it.

Promises and the Promise Giver

Where was God, the God who promised healing? Where was Jesus, the Jesus who healed the sick and raised the dead? Hadn't I memorized many scriptures about divine healing? I could quote verse after verse from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. These promises assured me that God would grant me the desire of my heart—and I wanted my eyes healed! I was tired of the muscle fatigue, pain, and declining vision.

I tightly gripped Bible promises while relaxing my hold on the Promise Giver. I had forgotten the most important command in the Bible, the command to love God wholeheartedly and unconditionally. I treasured my opinions about His Word instead of treasuring His wonderful Person.

God wanted to satisfy my desire to live close to Him. He withheld healing from my body so He could reveal to

me the anger and bitterness in my spirit which interfered with my love for Him. While I accused Him of wrongdoing, He diligently sought to bring me into the intimacy with Him that my soul longed for.

I needed to love Heavenly Father like Jesus loved Him. By not giving me what I *wanted*, God granted me what I *needed*. I needed Him, His presence, and His nearness.

I felt shocked as I read Jeremiah 4:10: “Ah, Sovereign Lord, how completely you have deceived this people in Jerusalem by saying, ‘You will have peace,’ when the sword is at our throats.” He accused God of deceiving the Jewish people. God had promised peace, but war surrounded Jeremiah's beloved city of Jerusalem.

I asked myself why this prophet of God so angrily denounced God. Suddenly, I saw myself in Jeremiah. I had denounced God because His promise wasn't fulfilled in the way I expected. Jeremiah's experience helped me see myself as one who loved God's promises without respecting His Person. “Your promises aren't true” rushed from my mouth as I hurled my Bible against the

wall of my house. Was I not accusing God of deception?

I wanted to love God wholeheartedly. I could not bear to be an ugly person who accused God of wrongdoing. Yet, that's exactly the kind of person I was.

God, You don't have to heal me, but please wash away my harsh feelings toward You. The day I asked God to cleanse me of bitterness toward Him, He began sweetening my spirit.

I continued on the path of most resistance, but the path became a sweetener of my spirit.

He Does No Wrong

The focusing muscles around my eyes continually grew weaker. I purchased large print Bibles and used a magnifier when working in my office. Outdoors I always clipped sun shades to my prescription glasses, and wore a cap. Without this protection from sunlight, my eyes fatigued in just a few minutes. But, the focusing muscles in my spiritual eyes grew stronger. I felt less and less disturbed by lack of physical healing.

Three wonderful Old Testament verses helped me see what God is really like. I had assumed that He was

wrong in not healing my body and answering my prayer. But these verses moved me out of human assumption into divine revelation:

“He does no wrong.”¹

“Everything He does is right and all His ways are just.”²

“He does no wrong...He does not fail.”³

I memorized these verses because they told me about the Promise Giver. The Promise Giver doesn't always answer prayer the way I expect, but He never does wrong because everything He does is right. He's incapable of wrong doing. I started trusting God without understanding Him and His ways. He started sweetening my spirit.

God Always Heals

My dad served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. While on the island of Guam, my father and many other Americans contracted parasites. Dad returned to the U.S.A. a very sick man. From 1945 until April 1951, he lived on medicine. The parasites weakened Dad so much that Mom helped him out of bed every morning.

Beginning in November 1950, doctors often examined my father's colon. Because the parasites had eaten holes the size of quarters, they referred to Dad's colon as "perforated." Finally, Dr. Buchanan decided to operate on my father and remove either part or all of his colon. Surgery was scheduled for Friday, April 20, 1951.

The Sunday prior to the scheduled surgery, Dad accepted an invitation to visit a church in Corpus Christi, Texas. As soon as he led his family to a pew in the church, Dad responded to the Jesus he felt by saying, "I'm sorry, Jesus." Immediately the Holy Spirit transformed my father into a Christian, a new creature in Christ Jesus.

The next morning, Monday, Dad walked into the kitchen as my mother prepared breakfast. Since she hadn't helped him out of bed, Mom felt absolutely startled at Dad's appearance. "I feel remarkably well this morning," Dad commented.

Dad checked himself into the hospital on Thursday afternoon. Examinations of his colon began immediately. Surprisingly, Dad's colon appeared perfect. The doctor could not explain the change but suggested that surgery

should be delayed. Dad agreed and checked out of the hospital. He never experienced any more difficulty with his digestive system.

What a contrast to my experience! I had sought divine healing for several years, but my physical condition deteriorated. *Why did God heal Dad but not me?* I wondered.

I decided that God loved me, but not with the same intensity as He loved others. He helped them. He answered their prayers and healed them, but He didn't heal me.

God wanted to remove my doubt in His love. He wanted to take away this impairment from my spiritual eyes. He wanted to do me a favor, so He chose to not heal the part of me that hurt.

During my routine Bible reading, I came across Isaiah 41:9 in the New International Version. "You are My servant. I have chosen you and have not rejected you." These words exploded in my mind. God had not rejected me; lack of healing for my eyes did not indicate that He loved me less than He loves other people. "I have

chosen you and have not rejected you” plainly revealed His loving feelings toward me.

God healed my relationship with Him. He changed my feelings about Him. I felt loved. As I continued reading, Isaiah 54:10 added yet more health to my emotions: “Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will never be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed.”

I began regarding God as my faithful Healer. He always heals the part of us that’s the sickest, so He wisely cured my bitter spirit. He continued adding sweetness to me.

Making Myself a Joy to Jesus

During the early years of my Christian experience, Jesus’ presence thrilled me with unrelenting joy. Even in the middle of my most difficult days, Jesus sustained me with inner happiness. I assumed that He would forever seek joy for James Fields.

My senior year in college brought more and more struggles with fatigue and eye muscle pain. I didn’t feel

real happy all the time. In fact, some days I felt absolutely rotten. After graduating from college, these physical battles increased, and my confusion over God’s treatment of me continued. I began occasionally expressing anger toward the Lord and resenting Him for not blessing me. In spite of these terrible days, God’s Word accomplished a radical change in my feelings for Him.

I had always assumed that Jesus wanted to fill me with overflowing joy. *Making myself a joy to Jesus* never entered my mind. I believed that God’s emotions were unaffected by me although my feelings were greatly influenced by Him. In Scripture I discovered a God impacted by human behavior. I saw that our sin grieves Him. Jesus wept tears of sorrow when the people of His beloved Jerusalem rejected His love and offer of eternal salvation.

“A wise son brings joy to His father,” I read in Proverbs 10:1. Suddenly I saw my relationship with God in a new light. I could bring joy to Father! My life touched His emotions. Joy was a two-way street—God rejoicing my heart and I rejoicing His heart. *If humans*

can grieve God, we can also rejoice Him, I mused.

“Be wise, My son, and bring joy to My heart.”⁴ Oh, how I wanted to be a son who rejoiced Father’s heart! Another verse strengthened my gradually developing desire to be a joy to Jesus. This verse declares that “he refreshes the spirit of his masters.”⁵ Can I refresh God’s spirit like He refreshes my human spirit? Yes!

I knew my anger against heavenly Father hurt Him. I felt ashamed of my harsh words spoken about Him. I realized that the anger against Him came about because I didn’t feel He was keeping His promises. Now His treatment of me no longer mattered. My treatment of Him mattered very much to me. I no longer wanted to hurt Father. I wanted to be a wise son who brought joy to Father. I wanted to be an obedient servant who refreshed the spirit of my heavenly Master.

Since God didn’t heal my physical condition, I grew weaker and weaker. Fatigue more often attacked my focusing muscles. But it didn’t matter. I just wanted to be a joy to Jesus. I wanted to defeat anger against Him. I didn’t want to feel suspicious about His intentions. I didn’t

want to question His treatment of me. I just wanted to place a smile on His face by reacting to life’s trials in a Christ-like way. I wanted Him proudly bragging to the entire universe, “That’s my boy down there who loves me no matter how life treats him.”

God was sweetening my spirit so I could harvest all the wonderful benefits of remaining patient in affliction.

CHAPTER 4

A Harvest of Good Things

Tires squealed and the distinct odor of burned rubber filled the interior of my car. I simply didn't see the vehicle stopped in front of me. My perspiring hands tightly gripped the steering wheel, adrenaline caused my fearful heart to pound heavily, and visions of what could have happened flooded my imagination.

Although only in my late twenties, my vision had seriously declined. My driving was becoming scary to me, but I couldn't bring myself to surrender my driver's license. Pastor without driving? Live without the freedom to use an automobile? Unthinkable!

Some of my friends declared that my guardian angels ended every day in complete exhaustion. With drooping wings and halos down around their ears, the angels begged God to never again give them the responsibility of protecting James Fields!

Opening My Other Set of Eyes

Just a few days before my twenty-ninth birthday, I reported to the driver's license office. The kind clerk asked me to sit down and take what I guessed would be a vision test. I psyched myself up for it, ready to strain with all my might to read the letters that would soon appear on the blank screen before me.

The clerk told me to relax and smile. I suddenly realized that this was not going to be a vision test but a photograph for my new driver's license.

Relief flooded me and I smiled a huge clown-like smile that showed all my front teeth. That clerk got more smile out of me than she bargained for and a dangerous driver was released to continue burning rubber.

God protected me, everyone who rode in my automobile, and all other vehicles in the universe. During the thirteen years I drove, I never had an accident, but experienced innumerable close calls.

God was preparing to open my other set of eyes, the eyes of my spirit. He was about to show me a harvest of good things.

Much of my life revolved around attempts to escape pain. I viewed divine healing as a release from unpleasantness. God saw things differently. He anticipated a harvest of six wonderful benefits from the pain I endured. Pain served as a seed from which valuable harvests sprang.

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First Harvest: Unselfishness

No one likes pain. We don't search for it, we don't purposefully create it, and we don't ask God to give it to us. But pain can make us very unselfish.

I never considered that God allowed me to hurt so I could help others. Then I read the Apostle Paul's words:

"I endure everything for the sake of the elect."¹

"I rejoice in what was suffered for you."²

"If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation."³

The apostle's words helped me see that I was suffering for other people's benefit.

God graciously designed all my trials, my struggles, and my pain around other people's needs. He wished to make me a comforter, a strengthener, and an encourager of His people. Before becoming what His people needed, I had to experience His people's pain.

We can always harvest good things from pain.

Second Harvest: Overcoming Guilt of Not Being Healed

My parents began attending a Pentecostal church when I was six years old. All during my childhood and youth, I heard sermons and teachings about divine healing. My parents often asked Jesus to heal my siblings and me of this or that ailment. Evangelists and guest speakers at church anointed the sick with olive oil and called on God to heal them. I accepted divine healing as normal as breathing.

During my years of reading Scripture, I found many examples of divine healing. Jesus opened blind eyes and deaf ears. He cured leprosy, fever, birth defects and other afflictions. Both the Old and New Testaments contained stories of dead people being raised to life. As I read the

Bible over and over, I became thoroughly convinced that God wanted to heal my body.

Something else reinforced my belief in divine healing. I read books by respected Pentecostal authors. This literature taught that God always willed healing. He never wanted anyone to suffer from either disease or injury. Some of these fine folks wrote books or pamphlets that listed 15, 20, or 30 ways that you prevent your healing. If you aren't healed by divine power, something's wrong with you, they wrote. God wants to heal you, but you won't let Him, summarized their teaching.

Guilt over not being healed loaded me down with condemnation. I saw myself as inferior to the rest of the family of God. I questioned both my relationship to heavenly Father and His feelings toward me.

In Scripture, I discovered that divine healing is not a requirement for eternal salvation. Neither does healing or lack of healing indicate the depth of our relationship to the Lord.

The same Bible that promises divine healing, also points out that Elisha, a mighty man of God, died of an

illness. Although God used the Apostle Paul to perform many miraculous healings, he didn't heal everybody. Paul recorded that he left "Trophimus sick in Miletus."⁴

I decided that God did not want me struggling against the guilt of not being healed. I could not explain why healing didn't happen to me, but I realized that guilt was simply compounding the struggles. I began to refuse to let guilt over not being healed rob me of spiritual victory and growth.

One day I read Psalm 71:20-21. "Though you have made me see troubles many and bitter, You will restore my life again; You will increase my honor and comfort me once again." I realized that living on Planet Earth guarantees some form of suffering for all of us. The suffering may be emotional, spiritual, relational, or physical. Nevertheless, in all suffering our heavenly Father helps those who trust Him during suffering. Sometimes God heals—always God helps.

Yes, I wish that prayer instantaneously delivered all of us from every type of suffering, but it doesn't. On the other hand, every type of suffering can serve to enhance

Jesus' image in us and enrich our relationship to God.

“There is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus”—even those who are not divinely healed!

Let nothing shake your faith in God's promises of divine healing. Also, never let lack of healing load you with guilt or feelings that Father rejects you. After all, Father declared that “you are My servant. I have chosen you and have not rejected you.”⁵

Third Harvest: Healthy Self-Image

Escaping the guilt of not being healed increased my self-respect. I quit comparing myself to other Christians who were healed by the Lord. I no longer felt inferior to Christians whose prayers brought miraculous deliverance from illness and disease. Confidence in God's love produced in me a new self-esteem. This self-confidence was soon thoroughly tested.

In April 1974, I reported to the driver license department located in the Kleberg County Courthouse in Kingsville, Texas. The kind clerk requested that I remove my glasses for a vision test. I asked to take the test with

my glasses on. She consented and I proceeded to completely fail the vision requirements for a driver's license.

“Mr. Fields, is that all you can see?”

“Yes ma'am.”

“I can't even give you restricted license,” she replied.

I purposefully smiled, thanked her, walked to my car, and drove home. As I walked through our front door, I held up my keys and said to Delores, “You are now the official driver of the Fields family.”

My self-confidence wavered. I asked Delores to not tell anyone at church or in our family that I lost my driver's license. My plan didn't succeed. A man who attended our church worked in the driver license department. Even though he wasn't present for my vision test, word soon reached him. Quickly, everybody I pastored knew I could no longer drive.

They didn't care. The men of the church offered to drive me anywhere, anytime. These people's love and support helped me begin regaining my self-respect.

Soon after losing my driver's license, a new battle erupted in my mind. The assistant superintendent of

schools brought his family to our church. We made arrangements to visit his home and as we left, they escorted us to our car parked in front of their house.

Why don't they go back inside? I don't want them seeing that I can't drive. I was not prepared for the role reversal in which Dee and I found ourselves. Husbands are supposed to drive and wives ride.

But God was trying to show me that my worth doesn't depend on what I can or cannot do. He values me for who I am. God paid the same price to redeem all humans from sin and Satan. The price? The blood of Jesus. So all humans are worth the same, although we all accomplish very different tasks.

I opened the driver's door for Delores, closed it, walked around the car and sat down on the passenger's side. We drove away from our new friend's home, and I entered a much healthier level of self-respect.

I was 29 when I lost my drivers license. Four years later I decided to become a scuba diver. I enrolled in a physical education class offered by Texas A&M, Kingsville, Texas. The class taught scuba and offered

scuba certification through the YMCA organization.

The scuba students were required to pass a physical examination administered by the university doctor. My exam went fine until he tested my vision.

"Young man, I can't believe you see so little," the doctor replied. "I will not sign your release to take scuba. You'll get hurt and sue me."

His comments didn't shake me in the least. I walked across campus to the gymnasium and told the scuba instructor what happened. He asked for my physical examination report and told me he would call me in a couple of days.

Later that week, Mr. Harris, the P.E. teacher, contacted me and said he would sign the release and that I could enroll in the course.

I passed the course with flying colors and fulfilled all the requirements for scuba certification. More importantly, I passed into a healthier self-image. I began seeing myself as God sees me — a winner no matter what the circumstances.

Fourth Harvest: Optimistic Submission to Authority

Early one Monday morning in November 1962, everyone in my family scurried about the house preparing to leave for school and work.

“Jim, come here a minute,” Mom called as she rushed around the house preparing to leave for her job. In view of the hectic nature of the morning, I felt a little surprised at her request. I dropped everything and quickly walked down the hall. Mom was sitting on a stool before her mirror and without looking at me she asked, “Jim, what are you going to do with your life?”

Unhesitatingly, I answered, “I want to be a missionary. At the close of last night’s church service the Lord called me into missions, Mom.”

“I know,” she remarked. “The Lord told me the same thing.”

Moms know things like that.

My four years in college revolved around preparing for Christian ministry. I majored in Missions and Bible. I served as a missionary intern in Guyana, South America. The young lady I married also wanted to be a missionary.

Delores and I looked forward to pastoring for a few years and then serving as missionaries in a foreign country.

Things didn’t move along as swiftly as we had expected. We pastored seven years before offering ourselves to a missions sending agency. The personnel secretary of the Division of Foreign Missions, Dr. Delmar Guynes, was no stranger to Dee and me. We both worked for him when he pastored near the college we attended. Pastor Guynes officiated at our wedding ceremony. Our successful years of pastoring and our friendship with Dr. Guynes could have guaranteed our acceptance into missionary service. But it didn’t.

My letter offering Dee and me to the missions board was very ordinary. I listed our ministerial experience and accomplishments. I mentioned our educational status and included several names of people who could serve as references.

The closing paragraph of my letter *was* unusual. I told the missions candidate approval board that because of legal blindness I could no longer drive a car.

Dee and I excitedly mailed the letter and waited for a response. In just a few days, Dr. Guynes’ letter arrived

at our home. Anticipation filled our hearts as we opened the envelope and began reading the letter. In view of my loss of driver's license, Dr. Guynes suggested that we remain in stateside ministry. We were not approved as candidates for missionary work.

Neither Delores nor I experienced great disappointment. We accepted the decision made by the Division of Foreign Missions as God's will for our lives. We optimistically submitted to the mission board's decision. My faith in God's control of my physical handicap empowered me to submit to human authority. I did not fear their decision.

We remained as pastors in Kingsville, Texas, for the next eleven years. The experiences of these years wonderfully equipped us for a time when the Lord used us for ministry in both Japan and the Republic of Singapore.

God's vast power and profound wisdom guarantee the best for all who optimistically submit to human authority. My physical impairment never prevented the accomplishment of God's purposes. My legal blindness promoted God's design for my life in ministry.

Fifth Harvest: Self-discipline

Before surrendering my life to Jesus, I was never an earnest student. After discovering Him as a friend, study became serious business with me. When I began using my eyes to read and read and read, I also entered a new level of fatigue. Although the eye muscles comprise a tiny percentage of the body's muscle mass, they consume 25% of our energy.

Physical exercise began wearing me out very quickly. I gave up weightlifting and running track. I just couldn't do it anymore—I was simply too tired.

But I made the right choice. It was either enjoy exercise or spend time reading the Word before going to class. I had to make a choice and choices are what self-disciplined people do. I chose to put away the athletics that had meant so much to me in favor of reading the Bible for an hour prior to attending class.

My life became a series of choices forced upon me by the ener-

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gy consumed by my eye focusing muscles. By age 33 I had quit all television viewing.

The first three and a half months of 1979 tested me thoroughly. My energy level dropped severely. Fatigue plagued me day and night. I often visited Roy Holz, our family doctor. But all the examinations found nothing wrong with me. In April of that year, I traveled to East Texas to perform my brother's wedding ceremony. All my books stayed at my church office and after two or three days without any reading, my energy returned. I immediately suspected that reading and study lay behind my long-term tiredness. After the wedding, I returned to my office routine, and within two days I felt totally wiped out.

"Delores, I have to quit reading. Let's move all my books into the secretary's office and let her read to me over an intercom."

The plan worked, and I regained the stamina required for just living.

I forced myself to avoid everything that overtaxed my eyes and consumed my energy. I found that disciplin-

ing my body helped me discipline my thoughts and emotions. The physical discipline spilled over into spiritual discipline. The act of giving up athletics, television, and reading not only helped me survive physically, but also strengthened my resolve to control my thoughts and my emotions. Giving up the unimportant freed me to tightly cling to all that God considers valuable.

Sixth Harvest: Trusting God's Intentions

"Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and our children will be taken as plunder."⁶ As I read this verse, my thoughts became riveted on these people's question.

These Israelis, the very people God delivered from Egyptian bondage, distrusted His intentions. They imagined that He intended to harm them, to let them fall by the sword. They feared that He would let their wives and children be taken as plunder.

I saw myself in their shoes. I, like them, had grown suspicious about God's design for my life. Since He allowed my physical impairment to drag on and on, I sus-

pected that He didn't purpose good for me. My first two attempts to pastor ended in heartbreak. "Will things ever improve?" I asked myself.

Hardship, unanswered prayer, and failure as a pastor blinded me to God's reliable love. I forgot about the innumerable blessings God lavished upon me. That's exactly what happened to those Jewish people who followed Moses out of Egypt. He proved Himself to them over and over, but during the time of crisis, they distrusted His loving intentions.

But I was more fortunate than the folks described in the Book of Numbers. I had read the Bible through many times and had heard countless wonderful sermons based on Scriptures. The promises I memorized lodged in my discouraged mind. God's promises filled my imagination with His intentions to bless me. When yielding to discouragement, I forgot His promises that predicted victory. I could only anticipate ruin, difficulty, and more failure. Then His powerful promises fought back the discouragement that attempted to dominate my thoughts.

"He holds victory in store for the upright."⁷

"Whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease without fear of harm."⁸ "It's your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom."⁹

God could have surrounded me with success in my first two pastorates, but He didn't. He could have restored my vision by removing the blind spots, but He didn't. He could have made my life much more pleasant, but He didn't.

He purposefully kept me on the path of most resistance. He graciously fenced me in with disappointment. He used both the path of most resistance and disappointment to change me for the better.

When I recognized my suspicions about God's intentions, I felt heartbroken. *How can I distrust the One who's been so good to me? How can I doubt His promises?*

I decided that His promises are true whether we experience blessing or cursing, good times or bad times. He intends the best for us all the time!

As I rejected discouragement and forced my imagination to expect the best, my confidence in God's intentions grew more and more powerful. Even though the focusing muscles behind my eyes grew weaker, confi-

dence in God's intentions grew stronger. I began "seeing" my future filled with victory after victory—victory unrelated to my circumstances or my health.

Trusting God's intentions filled me with confidence in His choices. This faith in God freed me to flourish on the path of most resistance.

Flourishing On the Path of Most Resistance

God wanted to take me beyond mere survival. He wanted me flourishing on the path of most resistance. God desired to use the path of most resistance to transport me into an ever-deepening friendship with Himself.

Delores and I survived the loss of my driver's license. I referred to her as the world's prettiest chauffeur. The men who attended our church picked me up at my office for luncheon appointments. Often these same wonderful guys accompanied me to home and hospital visits. I humorously offered to drive the church bus.

We discovered that a pastor who can't see well enough to drive is far from doomed. The church I led grew numerically and financially. Folks I shepherded experienced greater and greater love for the Lord and one another. I was surviving on the path of most resistance.

A Second Battlefield

Folks in our church occasionally commented on my consistent steadiness. They appreciated that I didn't yield to emotional ups and downs. But they didn't know the whole story. Privately, I truly fought tremendous mood swings. Except for Delores, no one knew the physical fatigue I often battled. This fatigue sometimes threw me into the depths of depression and discouragement.

In the mid 1970's, an evangelist named Betty Swinford ministered to our church. Betty had endured many physical, relational, and emotional wars which made her sensitive to others' feelings. Thus, she became aware that I was fighting to keep myself happy and optimistic.

"James, are you doing all right?" she asked.

"Quite frankly, I'm tired a lot of the time and I have to fight unexplainable feelings of discouragement."

"I've been through that. My doctor recommended that I take a glucose tolerance test. He suspected a condition called hypoglycemia."

"What's hypoglycemia?" I questioned.

"It's low blood sugar. When the glucose in your blood diminishes, fatigue sets in and it becomes a struggle to control your emotions," Betty pointed out.

After our revival services with Evangelist Swinford, I immediately scheduled an appointment with our family doctor. Dr. Holz agreed to administer the hypoglycemia test. The test results showed that my blood sugar level severely declined under certain situations. He recommended a strict diet similar to the one followed by diabetics.

The high protein/low carbohydrate diet reduced but did not completely eradicate my struggles against periodic depression. The strain on my eye muscles caused by the blind spots sapped huge amounts of physical stamina. So I continued fighting on two battlefronts: weakened physical energy and low blood sugar caused by a malfunctioning pancreas.

But God was preparing to use the war I was fighting. God always plans to help us, to bless us, to enliven us. He never seeks our destruction, but continually searches for ways to strengthen us. He only kills the part of us that's bad. He enlivens us with divine energy. He

shatters us in order to reconfigure us into something much better. “For He wounds, but He also binds up; He injures, but His hands also heal.”¹

Choosing My Emotions

Tears gushed from my eyes as I shouted, “Delores, I feel perfectly horrible. There’s no future for me. I need help. Where’s all this discouragement coming from?”

Poor Delores didn’t know what was happening, and I didn’t either.

“I’ll call my dad. Maybe he can help!”

I dialed my father’s number. When he answered I shouted into the phone, “Dad, I’m sick! I’m so exhausted. I don’t know if I want to live!”

I cannot recall Dad’s response, but I didn’t like his words. I violently slammed the handset down on the phone. Sobs welled up from deep within me as tears soaked my shirt. I walked a few feet from our kitchen to our back porch, sat down on the concrete steps, and literally wailed.

After I went outside, Delores called my dad back

and they decided that my parents should come to the little town we lived in and help me through this very difficult time.

What was happening to me made no sense. Life was treating Dee and me very well. My low vision and eye muscle fatigue and pain should not have filled me with such despair. But the despair was there.

Until this incident, I regarded emotions as something that happen to us. Whether pleasant or unpleasant, emotions choose us. The unpleasant ones sneak into our feelings. They bring us down, they beat us up, and they hurt us.

About this same time, I read Jesus’ words, “Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. *Rejoice* in that day and *leap for joy*...”²

Jesus sounds like He wants us choosing our emotions. But we can’t choose emotions, I reasoned. Emotions just happen. They result from our circumstances, the way people treat us, and the way things turn out for us.

Through the Word, I began realizing that Christians

are free to choose their emotions. I came across one of St. Paul's declarations: "In all our troubles my joy knows no bounds."³ *How strange. It seems like troubles ought to eliminate joy, but he speaks of boundless joy in the midst of trouble.*

I recalled some Scriptures I memorized during my late teenage years. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."⁴ I understood that the Holy Spirit's presence brought forth a crop of love, joy, peace, and patience in our lives. Banana trees produce bananas, apple trees bring forth apples, and the Holy Spirit creates His love, joy, and peace in the Believer. The Christian becomes a tree bearing the Holy Spirit's fruit.

Love, joy, peace? These are not merely fruit— they are emotions! I mused. *These two verses list the Holy Spirit's primary emotions.*

It appeared to me that the Holy Spirit's emotions dwell in me. When the person of the Holy Spirit moved into my heart, He did not leave His emotions in Heaven. When the Holy Spirit took up residence in me, He

brought His love, His joy, His peace.

I can truly choose to love when I don't feel love. I can choose joy and peace when I feel sadness and turmoil. What hope flooded my soul. I didn't have to remain a victim of whatever emotion wanted to conquer me. I could actually yield myself to Holy Spirit emotions. By faith I could love when I felt hate; I could select patience when impatience tried barging into my soul. The Holy Spirit's self control can free me from the discouragement!

God kindly led me in ways that were best for me. His choice to not heal my eyes turned out to be a huge favor. Assigning me a pancreas that forced me to follow a rigid diet sprang from a stroke of divine genius. The emotional battles I fought helped me see that the Holy Spirit's emotions dwelt in me. As I began surrendering myself to the Holy Spirit's emotions, He conquered me. My emotional ups and downs gradually became much less severe. I began flourishing *because of* the path of most resistance.

I discovered three keys to flourishing on the path of most resistance.

First Key: Respect the Maker of Our Bodies

I always respected God as the Creator of everything. He spoke and His mighty Word brought the material creation into existence. I definitely qualified as a Creationist.

But as long as I insisted that God's will is the same for everyone, I struggled with respect for the One who made me legally blind from birth. I reasoned that God wanted to heal every kind of ailment and that I qualified. But healing never occurred.

My insistence that God's will is the same for everyone amounted to denying His sovereignty. I didn't feel that He had the right to not heal me since He promised healing. I gave God no choice in the matter.

But John 9 began moving me toward a new respect for my Creator. As I read John 9:1-3, I began realizing that God's will isn't the same for everyone.

As Jesus went along, "He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this

man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.'" New ideas began dancing in my mind. *This man was born blind so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. I thought the healing brought glory to God. But for a healing to take place, there had to be a sickness, an impairment.*

Then I saw that the apostles' question centered on the man's blindness. I had changed the subject from blindness to healing. They wanted to know why he was born blind. Jesus' answer to their question focused on the vision impairment, not the healing of the impairment.

Maybe God doesn't intend to heal everyone. Perhaps He can use sickness to promote His purposes, I speculated.

The next morning I continued reading John's Gospel. I was well acquainted with the account of Lazarus' resurrection. Nevertheless, John 11:4 captured my attention and refused to let me continue reading. In this verse, Jesus pointed out that "this sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory."

In previous readings of this chapter, I always riveted my thoughts on Lazarus' healing, but John 11:4 refers

to Lazarus' sickness. "This sickness...is for God's glory."

Perhaps wisdom led God to not heal me. Maybe all the physical battles I fight contribute to His glory. Maybe divine logic lies behind this physical impairment that He has not removed from me. I struggled with these radically new thoughts that were moving me toward respecting Him as my Maker. I was beginning to trust the One who made all of us different from one another.

I couldn't change the Bible. I began admitting that God didn't heal me because He knew what He was doing.

Furthermore, in Philippians 1:12 Paul penned words that proved a huge blessing to me. "What has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel." The Roman government held Paul prisoner. He faced probable execution and yet he regarded all that happened to him as a vehicle that carried him along in God's will.

I had long resisted the idea that God willed anything for me except divine healing. I refused to submit to His sovereign choices. I loved Him, but I loved Him incompletely. But reading the New Testament gradually softened my heart. The day came when I acknowledged

that God sometimes heals illnesses and sometimes doesn't. Either way, He's right. I became free to trust the way He made me; I became free to respect the God who personally designed me around His purposes and plans.

Second Key: Adapt to the Way Things Turn Out

Respect for God proved to be only the first key to flourishing on the path of most resistance. Respect for Him empowered me to adapt to the way things turn out in life. A new happiness filled my emotions as I trusted the One who personally designed the impairment I was born with. I chose to live with His design. Worry over unanswered prayer no longer agitated my thoughts.

My insistence that God heal me amounted to an attempt to manipulate God and life. I threw my glasses away because I thought my faith would force Him to heal me. I tried using belief in healing as a method for getting my own way. The rigid beliefs I conjured up made it impossible for me to adapt to life's ever-changing circumstances. I insisted that life fit into my beliefs. I could not simply relax and accept the way things turned out.

Atrophy set into my spirit. I began wasting away as

my joy declined. I didn't want to adapt to life, I wanted to change life. But God wanted to change me, so He manipulated circumstances in my favor. He used the path of most resistance to improve me.

God
manipulates
circumstances
in our favor.

In the mid-1970s, as I strolled through the showroom of Forkey's Office Supply in Kingsville, Texas, I noticed a very large, manual typewriter. I asked Mr. Forkey about it and he explained that it typed giant print letters. Then he added, "I purchased two of these for an elementary school, but they returned the machines. I don't know what to do with them."

He showed me a sample of the typing, and I immediately purchased the ponderous gray manual typewriter. I felt elated! The very large print made reading my sermon outlines so much easier. The typewriter became an object lesson of God's love for me. He didn't heal me, but He made it possible for me to make it with impairment.

Dee and I nicknamed our huge typewriter the "Gray Elephant." I was learning to adapt to the path God chose for me to walk. This ability to adapt freed me to be happy

with the way things turned out. I could actually tease myself about the struggles vision impairment caused me.

The adaptations were just beginning. By age 37, I could no longer focus on the giant print provided by the Gray Elephant. Also, I began noticing that reflective paper tired my eyes very quickly. We purchased a ream of light brown parchment paper. We used transparency markers to write large letters on the brown paper. This system worked great! The non-reflective paper and the tall letters let my eyes relax and I felt much less eye strain. Instead of asking God to heal me, I adapted to the way things turned out. I began regarding Him as Controller of my circumstances.

The folks I pastored noticed the new outlines. One day a man in our church made what he felt was a brilliant suggestion.

"Pastor, just hold up your outline. We'll read it and then we can all go home." I promptly vetoed the idea, but we enjoyed a good laugh.

The National Library for the Blind and Physically Impaired publish thousands of books on cassette. These books, read by professional narrators, proved a real bene-

fit to me. In my reading I came across a quotation that helped me become more flexible in adjusting to life:

“Things always turn out best for those who make the best of the way things turn out.”

As I meditated on this quotation, I recalled many Bible examples of people who made the best of the way things turned out. Life laid many severe blows on the 17-year-old Joseph. He staggered, he wept, he hurt; but he adapted. Willingness to accommodate himself to the way things turned out equipped Joseph to become everything God wanted him to be. Also, Jesus walked a path of most resistance, but never allowed life’s hardships to embitter Him. Faith in God’s control of everything made both Joseph and Jesus happy and successful.

Even though I didn’t experience it, I decided to continue believing in divine healing. I discovered that trusting God for healing wasn’t the same as demanding that He heal me. Suddenly, it came to me that God *was* healing me. No, not my eyes, but my feelings toward Him. Healing my eyes would have robbed me of healing for my spirit. God always does His best for me and that’s good enough.

Large print Bibles enabled me to continue reading from the Scriptures during my sermons. A day came, however, when I could no longer buy Bibles with large enough print. What was I to do?

Delores offered a wonderful solution to my dilemma. “I’ll sit on the platform with you, Honey, and I’ll read the Scriptures.” I accepted Delores’ suggestion and we became a team; I spoke and she read. This arrangement worked great and people enjoyed hearing both a male and female voice during my sermons.

About this same time, Psalm 66:10-12 inspired me with fresh hope in God. “For You, O God, tested us; You refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but You brought us to a place of abundance.”

These verses indicate that God caused His people to walk a path of most resistance. The concluding statement of Psalm 66:12 declares that He leads us to a place of abundance. Whether He causes trouble or whether He allows it doesn’t matter. He always uses the path of most resistance for our benefit. What new emotional and mental

freedom I experienced. Expectations of receiving good from the hand of God overcame all my confusion about not being healed or rescued.

Third Key: Welcome the Good God Sends Your Way

One church we pastored paid us 65% of the Sunday morning tithes and offerings. Consequently, our monthly income proved very unpredictable. But neither of us cared. Serving the Lord satisfied our desire for personal enrichment. Over the next three years, the church's financial condition improved considerably. My 65% of the morning tithes and offerings increased dramatically. We had never enjoyed such a generous income.

I realized that my share of the church's income prevented the general fund from doing very well. I devised a plan for the board's consideration.

"Why don't you pay me \$1,000 a month so my income can be predictable? Also, the church's treasury will allow us to pay off our debt and build another facility."

The board agreed to this idea. In addition to my salary, the church began paying all our utility bills. Soon after the board and I adopted this new financial arrange-

ment, I stopped by the church secretary's office to pick up my check. She handed it to me and commented, "Pastor, you're losing a lot of money by placing yourself on salary."

My response to Mary revealed a feeling about myself which God had to change. "Mary, I'm not worth the kind of money the church has been paying me."

I allowed disappointment over not being healed to diminish my expectations of receiving good from God's hand. I felt unworthy of the blessings God wanted to lavish upon me. I was incapable of welcoming the financial blessings God wished to send my way.

My Creator committed Himself to using the path of most resistance to improve me. He wanted me to learn how to flourish in the valley of the shadow of disappointment. Feelings of unworthiness shut the door of my heart to many good things God offered to give me.

Through the next six years, the church board frequently raised our salary. Nevertheless, our income did not keep up with the double-digit inflation of the 1970's. By 1980, we needed another car, but could not afford one. But God was about to help me escape my feelings of unworthiness. He prepared to open my heart to welcoming

His blessings.

During one of my private prayer sessions with the Lord in the fall of 1980, the Holy Spirit asked me a question. “Are you willing to abound?” There was no doubt in my mind that the Holy Spirit had clearly spoken to me.

My heart began feebly expecting God to bless me. I thought He would remove me from the path of most resistance and then bless me. He saw it differently. He wanted me expecting good even though I walked on the path of most resistance.

In early 1981, our board decided to renovate and enlarge the church nursery. We estimated a \$2,500 price tag for this project. We appealed to our congregation for special offerings.

A friend called me. “Pastor, I see that you need \$2,500 for improving the nursery. I’ll give you \$10,000.”

I ecstatically responded with “Thank you!” phrased in several ways.

“I noticed that your car doesn’t look very good,” he continued. “If you’ll buy another one, I’ll pay for it.”

Silence.

“You mean you’ll buy me a new car if I’ll pick it out?”

“Yes, let me know how much it costs.”

I could scarcely believe what had just happened. God’s question, “*Are you willing to abound?*” ran through my mind. God intended for me to start welcoming the good He sent my way. He was certainly getting off to a good start.

Also, my brother and sister convinced my parents and me that our family needed a ski vacation. We decided to spend Christmas in Keystone, Colorado. As arrangements for this trip progressed, it became apparent that the trip would cost about \$1,000 per couple.

I had never spent \$1,000 on a vacation. This price seemed absolutely extravagant. I wavered in my commitment to making the trip. In fact, I even made myself physically ill worrying about the money and my right to spend so much on recreation. Even though the Lord had given me a new car, I could not overcome my feelings of unworthiness.

But God always gets His way in the lives of those who love Him unconditionally.

Just a few days before we were scheduled to leave

for Colorado, our church secretary informed me that an anonymous donor had given \$1,000 for our vacation. All my worry about lavish spending wasted my energy and my time.

God proved to me that I can flourish, even when walking a path of most resistance. The path of most resistance doesn't indicate His disapproval. It shows His wisdom.

God set me on a road to victory when He asked, "Are you willing to abound?" God wants us flourishing, not merely surviving. He's fashioning us into people who welcome the good He sends our way, even when our way leads us along a path of most resistance.

God always gets
His way in the
lives of those
who love Him
unconditionally.

"It's Alright, Jesus, It's Alright."

Flourishing felt good; life was a joy!

The church I pastored mushroomed. From 1982 until 1986, our sanctuary could not adequately seat the people. We attempted many plans to squeeze the folks into our existing facility. We used folding chairs, moved the children into the fellowship hall, seated our leaders and their spouses on the platform, and we moved Sunday School classes into restaurants, hotels, and other off-site locations.

The influx of people brought financial blessings to our church. The church board generously shared this abundance with me. Dee and I enjoyed a very comfortable standard of living.

Nevertheless, financial, professional, personal, and spiritual prosperity failed to diminish our desire to serve as foreign missionaries. So in early 1986, we decided to

pursue ministry in the Republic of Singapore. In October of the same year, we resigned the wonderful church we had pastored 15 years and moved to Houston, Texas. From our apartment in Houston, we began making arrangements to present our missionary program to many churches spread throughout Texas. We depended on these churches to assume monthly financial support of our overseas ministry.

Human Explanations or God's Promises?

Dee and I were on our own. I assumed that no missionary sending agency would be interested in a minister who could not see to read and write or drive a car. The years of financial prosperity enabled us to accumulate a nice savings account. We expected to live on our savings until support from churches grew large enough to provide an income for us.

Early one morning in November 1986, my troubled mind awoke me from a sound sleep. Although it was one or two a.m., I felt wide awake. Tormenting thoughts filled my head.

How are you ever going to make it to Singapore? Are

you crazy? You can't leave a prospering church and financial security and live on nothing! You better call that church and see if they will reinstate you as pastor. Your savings account won't last forever.

As I arose from bed, I questioned my own sanity. I walked down the hall to our living room, sat down on the couch, and battled almost every fearful thought known to mankind. Powerful surges of terror raced through my brain cells. Had I done right in leaving a church filled with people who loved Dee and me? Did I really know what I was doing? Without the sponsorship of a national missions board, could I ever raise enough money for our missions work in Asia?

Fear of uncertainty quickly consumed me. The self confidence God had so carefully nurtured in me evaporated into thin air. I was scared and wanted to walk away from the path of most resistance and return to a familiar comfort zone. But God, who faithfully supervises our trek through life, intervened.

Suddenly, the Lord invaded my chaotic thoughts with a question: "Are you going to live by My promises or by your explanations?"

This question focused my distracted thoughts. I realized that my fears sprang out of effort to explain why I left comfort in favor of uncertainty.

My finite brain sought comprehensible explanations for my actions. God's promises are incomprehensible because they originate in an infinite person. His promises would not fit into my head. That's why I was worried, fearful and upset.

I looked up toward heaven and told God that I would live by His promises. *"I choose to trust in You with all my heart and not lean on my own explanations."*

Immediately, peace flooded me, and calmness filled my emotions. Confidence in both God and myself returned. I walked down the hall to our bedroom, laid down, and slept soundly for the rest of the night.

The peace of mind God gives cannot be manufactured by human effort. The peace that comes from Him is not a psychological trick we play on ourselves. God's peace is a gift that flows from the Holy Spirit into the human spirit. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."¹

I couldn't explain the magnificent peace I enjoyed in spite of our bleak future. There was no mental wrestling, no wars in my thoughts—just certainty that God truly led me from a pastor's dream into very precarious times.

As always, He knew what He was doing and lovingly directed me along paths that were best for me. He was leading me to Jesus, who stands at the head of all our paths.

Profiting From Loss

Our hearts and our mouths sang God's praises as we stood in a church sanctuary in Baytown, Texas. The congregation enthusiastically raised hands and voices in honor of the Lord. We expected to present our missions program to the church following the worship session.

Suddenly, without any indication of a physical problem, pain and overwhelming fatigue struck me in the area around my eyes. When I opened my eyes, the pulpit, the worship leader, the piano, and every object on the platform appeared blurry. It was like opening your eyes when under water in a swimming pool. You can see objects, but all appears out of focus.

I felt shocked. *What's happening?* I wondered. While everyone else in the congregation continued standing, I sat down and closed my eyes. Soon, the pastor called me and Delores to the platform and turned the service over to us.

I attempted to speak, but I chose my words with great difficulty. Thinking felt like back-breaking labor. I struggled through my introductory remarks.

I realized that I could not conduct the service. The pastor kindly accepted my explanation of my situation and we canceled the service. Dee and I packed up our slide projection equipment, loaded the car, and headed back to Houston. I slept soundly in the passenger seat until we drove into our apartment complex parking lot.

I lost an opportunity to bless the congregation in Baytown. God gained an opportunity to teach me how to profit from my loss.

The morning following my experience in the Baytown church, I awoke totally fatigued. I drug myself out of bed, ate breakfast, and expected to resume my daily office routine. But there wasn't an ounce of energy in any muscle of my body. I could barely think.

"Delores, I don't know how we'll ever succeed in making it to Singapore. Feeling like this, I can't do anything for the Lord. I don't know what's going to happen to us." I returned to bed for the first nap of the day. The area around my eyes felt so lifeless, so listless. I couldn't even focus on the largest print made with the transparency marker.

I could only envision losing our chance to become missionaries. My physical and emotional fatigue focused my attention on my loss. But during the next few days, I recalled that the crucified and buried Jesus looked very much like a loser. Even His closest followers mourned their irretrievable loss of Jesus' leadership. But Jesus' loss led to His resurrection, His eternal life, and everlasting enthronement as Ruler of the universe. All mankind profits from Jesus' loss.

My approach to loss gradually changed. I began accepting the possibility that God would bring profit from my loss. Acceptance became an open door through which I could see the possibility of gaining from my loss. Thinking all is lost blinded me to the benefit contained in losing. My pessimism changed into optimism as I learned

to figure on God's help, regardless of the way I felt physically. "Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in Him, for He shields Him all day long, and the one the Lord loves rests between His shoulders."²

My new belief in the possibility of profiting from my loss filled me with a fresh expectation for personal success. Even with a diminished energy level, I continued our hectic schedule of office work, seemingly endless phone calls, and weekly trips to three or four churches. Loss no longer guaranteed loss; loss prefigured gain!

Loss no longer
guarantees loss;
loss prefigures
gain.

An Invisible Companion

I expected to recover fully from the incident in Baytown. Had not my eyes and the attendant muscles knocked me down many times before? I always got up and kept going on with life. So, I overlooked my lessened physical energy and moved to Singapore in mid-1988. Then, Dee and I assumed the pastorate of a church in Tokyo, Japan, in May 1989.

God was setting the stage for a new chapter in my journey along the path of most resistance. He coordinated our circumstances in ways that would bring me closer to Him.

In Tokyo, the stress of living among 30 million people began taking its toll on the muscles around my eyes. Noise pollution prevented me from sleeping soundly at night. There was no convenient way to take a day off. The unbelievably heavy traffic prevented us from temporarily escaping the press of buildings and people. Lack of rest gradually drained my eye muscles of reserve energy. It was like holding your arms horizontally. You can do it for a while, but inevitably the shoulder muscles give out.

During the first ten months of 1991, I endured a survival contest. My eyes hurt almost daily. I attempted using one eye then the other to focus on my paper work, but nothing helped. I recall pushing back from my desk one day and saying to myself, "*This is torture.*" No one heard my words except my invisible Companion on the path of most resistance.

By May 1991, my suffering became unbearable. Dee and I decided to take a one week vacation on Guam, a

small island about a three hour flight from Tokyo. We excitedly expected seven days on this tropical paradise to refresh us both physically and emotionally. The trip refreshed us, but also reminded me of God's loving control of all the details of our lives.

Our plane landed on Guam about midnight. We arrived at our hotel and slept soundly until the morning light awoke us. I could hardly wait to see the beach, the azure ocean, and lavish green vegetation.

Following breakfast we strolled from the hotel to the beach. When we stepped off the green lawn onto the exceedingly white sand, I almost fell to the ground. The sunlight reflecting off the sand overwhelmed my light sensitive eyes. It felt like someone reached behind the eyeball and pinched the muscles and nerves. Instead of falling, I whirled around and ran back to the hotel shouting, "Delores, I'm hurt." Back in our room, I lay on the bed and told her about the totally unexpected severe pain. We prayed for the Lord's help.

I couldn't do anything except rest. Delores couldn't do anything but shop. So, she headed for the Micronesian Mall close to our hotel. Her steps were directed by the Lord.

When she returned to our hotel room, she presented me with a pair of clip-on sunshades that fit perfectly on my prescription sun shades. Basically, I began wearing two pairs of shades at once. The additional darkness provided by the clip-on shades allowed me to visit the beach without pain in my eyes.

God, our invisible Companion, stands at our side during all our suffering. He directed Delores' steps to the clip-on shades carried by a small shop on a remote South Pacific island. I rejoiced in His provision and thanked Him for His care. He made a way for me to stay on the path of most resistance.

After our return to Tokyo, I purchased a small waist pack and began carrying two pairs of sunshades everywhere I went. One pair was lightly tinted and the other much darker. I began my day outdoors with lightly tinted shades and changed into the darker shades as the sunlight intensified. Eventually, I began carrying three and four pairs of shades ranging in tint from very light to extremely dark. We called this waist pack The Optical Company.

The idea for The Optical Company originated in the

Lord's mind. Even as we walked the path of most resistance, our God supplied all our needs. I didn't need to leave the path of most resistance. I needed to know my heavenly Companion accompanied me.

But my invisible Companion wasn't through demonstrating His presence. For many years, I kept a prayer journal in which I wrote down thoughts that came to mind during my private time with the Lord. By August 1991, my focusing muscles no longer allowed me to write in my prayer journal. As the year progressed, I wrote with larger and larger letters. Finally, I tried using a transparency marker to record my thoughts. Soon I could no longer bear to focus on the largest letters written with my transparency marker. No alternative remained. I quit writing.

During August, September and the first week of October 1991, I recorded nothing in my prayer journal. But one day my loving invisible Companion sparked an idea in my mind.

Since the early 1980's, I had used micro cassette tape recorders for writing my teaching and sermon outlines, for recording letters, and general office work.

Why not use a tape recorder to write in my prayer journal? I thought.

I tried this new system and it worked wonderfully! So I not only carried multiple pairs of sunshades, but also two tape recorders. With one recorder I wrote notes related to my work; on the other, I spoke thoughts during prayer.

The infinite genius of our invisible Companion comes up with great ideas to help us along the path of most resistance.

When We Stumble

It's no sin to stumble on the path of most resistance. It's no fun either. But Psalm 37:24 beautifully describes what God does when we stumble. "Though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with His hand." God's on our side. He uses the path of most resistance to improve us, not to destroy us.

During 1991, I often visited a tiny tree-covered park near our home in Tokyo. As I sat on a concrete bench atop a small hill in the park, God and I visited. He truly held me up when worry, physical pain, or indecisiveness

attempted to trip me on the path He chose for me. Please walk with me as I briefly recount three special words of encouragement the Lord gave me.

First, "I Am Director of Decisions"

Air heavy with humidity surrounded me in the Japanese park. The evening darkness seemed unusually black because darkness filled my discouraged heart. I began practicing ruthless introspection. In my mind, I reviewed all the decisions that led me to Japan. I began regretting leaving a fabulous church in Texas and moving to Singapore. Then, I berated myself for leaving Singapore in favor of Japan. In my thoughts, I saw myself as a failure who didn't take care of his health. *Surely, there were some things I could have done to help these eyes not trouble me so much. Had I taken more time off, had I worked less than 55 hours a week, things would turn out better. But now I've gotten myself into this mess and I can't quit hurting.*

Introspection turns our attention inward. Ruthless introspection makes us a villain in our own eyes. That night in Japan, I figured I had never done anything right

in my whole life. Worst of all, I was about to give up my dream of being a missionary.

Out of the blue, the Holy Spirit engraved a sentence on my mind: "*I am director of decisions. I am controller of circumstances.*"

As these words filled my consciousness, I recalled three scriptures from the Book of Proverbs: "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps."³ "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."⁴ "A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?"⁵ These verses told me to not fear my own decisions, even the ones that brought unpleasant results.

I began resisting ruthless introspection. I quit second guessing myself. I refused self-accusation and incrimination. I expected God to bring forth the best results from all the choices I made. I quit looking inward and started looking upward to "God Most High, who fulfills His purpose for me."⁶

I defeated ruthless introspection.
Second, "I'll Use the Pieces to Feed My People"

I felt totally shattered. My exhausted eyes hurt. I stood on the verge of giving up my dream of serving as a missionary. No job awaited me in America. I was about to leave the precious people I loved at Yokota Christian Center.

As I attempted to tell the Lord what I felt, I recalled seeing a shattered automobile windshield. The windshield wasn't missing—it remained in its frame, but broken into a thousand pieces.

"Lord Jesus," I quietly spoke, "I feel like a shattered windshield."

The God who holds us up when we stumble immediately spoke to my spirit. *"I'll use the pieces to feed my people."*

He did not miraculously pluck me off the path of most resistance. He promised that my shattering would bless His people. He didn't tell me how sorry He felt for me. He told me how much people would profit from my pain.

God didn't change my physical condition. He didn't relieve my pain or remove the blind spots from my retina. He didn't alter my health, but He kept me from stumbling into overwhelming discouragement. He kept

me from falling headlong.

I accepted the Lord's word about my shattering. I realized that my shattering would enlarge my ability to help people who go through unrelenting trials. In just a few days I prepared a message entitled, *"When You Feel Beaten Down."* Many people were blessed as I shared this sermon that was born in a Japanese park.

Third, "Just Don't Be Confused"

As the time drew near for us to leave Tokyo, my mental battles did not cease. However, God faithfully kept showing up when I needed Him.

I slowly strolled down the narrow paths of the little park near our home. Softly I uttered praise and adoration of the Jesus I love. Nevertheless, confusion about unanswered prayer and dying dreams crept into my thoughts.

"How can all this be happening to me? I've faithfully served the Lord for years. I've believed Him for blessings upon the churches I've pastored. I've won victory after victory by faith in God. Now, it looks like I have no faith at all."

My patient Heavenly Father didn't grow tired of my

faltering. He kept intervening in my behalf.

"Just don't be confused," He spoke into my spirit.

I realized that I could choose to reject confusion. I didn't have to comprehend everything that was going on in my life. I needed to rely on my Heavenly Supervisor who arranged my steps according to His perfect will.

At that very moment, I rejected confusion. Without any increased understanding of what God was doing, I decided to rest my past, my present, and my future in His hands.

Becoming Expert at Loving Jesus

After leaving our foreign missions assignment in Japan in late 1991, my wife and I worked hard to establish a brand new church in Corpus Christi, Texas. The church progressed slowly but surely. Every month brought a new financial miracle. We truly witnessed God's continual supernatural provision. But I was suffering in my emotions.

I had not fully recovered from the horrible disappointment of leaving Japan. I wanted to be a foreign missionary. Foreign missions had been my dream since my

senior year in high school. But I had to forsake my dream, because the health of my eyes could not endure the stress of living in Tokyo.

During the first months after leaving Japan, I periodically experienced surges of grief. This grief was rooted in disappointment. Even though I lived in a beautiful tropical climate and enjoyed the support of a wonderful wife and growing church, I could not fully recover my emotional stamina. The grief occasionally caused me to shed tears of remorse.

During lunch one day in December 1992, I looked out the large windows of our dining room. Our back lawn never looked prettier or greener. Chirping birds fluttered in and out of the very colored shrubbery. Intensely white, fluffy clouds danced across an exceedingly blue sky. As always, Delores prepared a delicious meal and displayed it on a splendidly adorned table. The South Texas tropical climate made living in Corpus feel akin to living in paradise. But paradise did not fill my heart. A particularly powerful surge of sadness overwhelmed me. Tears began flowing from my eyes. "Dee," I said. "I have to go spend some time with the Lord." I rushed from the table

to our guest bedroom, closed the door behind me and knelt on the carpet.

Tears gushed from my eyes as I lifted my hands toward heaven. Without any premeditation or forethought, I began uttering these words: "It's alright, Jesus, it's alright!" For ten or fifteen minutes, that's all I could say. That's all I wanted to say.

"It's alright, Jesus" meant that I didn't care if I couldn't read or write. It didn't matter how much I hurt or could not see. Mostly, I surrendered my disappointment at not being a foreign missionary. The words *"It's alright, Jesus"* continued flowing from my trembling lips. I was surrendering to His will.

He could have healed me, but He didn't because He loved me. He wanted to draw me into His intimate fellowship. Intimate fellowship only occurs when all barriers between us and God are removed. So Jesus walked me through one more disappointment, the disappointment of never being able to serve full time on the foreign mission field.

When I finished that session with Jesus, I left our guest bedroom a better person. I was becoming an expert

at loving Jesus with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my strength. He healed me of grief that day, and He brought me into what I've always wanted.

What have I always wanted? What has been the center of my life, my greatest desire? I thought it was healing for my eyes. I thought serving as a foreign missionary was the ultimate joy of life. But healing or serving as a missionary was never my *utmost* desire.

Loving Jesus unconditionally was what I really wanted. Isaiah 26:9 describes the deepest feelings of my heart. "My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you...." I did not know it. I could not put my desire into words, because I didn't comprehend my own yearnings. But He knew what I wanted. So He used the path of most resistance to bring me into His intimate fellowship.

This session with the Holy Spirit in December 1992 reinforced my conviction that loving God is the purpose of our lives. But something else happened on that very special day. God began leading me along a pathway that led me out of confusion about God's goodness and life's unfairness.

{ CHAPTER 7

Overcoming Confusion about God's Goodness and Life's Unfairness

My reenergized love for God didn't heal my eyes. The muscle fatigue and frequent pain behind my eyes persisted. It was like walking a very narrow lane on top of a mountain peak. The sides of the mountain sloped precipitously on either side of the lane. The slightest overuse of my eyes threw me down the slope into mind-numbing fatigue and pain. Only bed rest revived me.

My Friend Named Habakkuk

The early morning coffee tasted great as I sat in our den and began listening to a cassette recording of an Old Testament book named Habakkuk. Although darkness enfolded the day outside, God was about to shine new light into my understanding.

"How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but You do not listen? Or cry out to You, 'Violence!' but You do not

save?"¹ the prophet complained. *That sounds like me in earlier times*, I thought.

Chapter one, verse three also captured my attention. "Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds." I remembered times when I asked God why He did this or didn't do that.

The book of Habakkuk had never affected me like it did that morning. It seemed to me that Habakkuk reflected many of my earlier struggles. One moment the prophet described God as good. "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, you cannot tolerate wrong."² The next moment he questioned God's justice. "Why then do You tolerate the treacherous? Why are You silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"³ Like Habakkuk, I had regarded God as good but also unfair.

My friend Habakkuk lived 600 years before Jesus, but his words brought life to me in 1995. During the next few months, the seed thoughts planted in my mind by the book of Habakkuk led me into a new understanding about God's goodness and life's unfairness.

God Can't Create Unfairness

I respected God as a good, supreme Creator. I reasoned that since everything exists by God's permission or creative ability, He made unfairness. Where else did unfairness come from? God is the Creator, so He is the origin of everything including unfairness.

One day it came to me that God placed creative abilities in humans. Genesis 2:15 points out that God made the Garden of Eden and the man. The Lord placed the man in the garden to "work it and take care of it." He gave the man an ingenious mind capable of generating ideas to beautify his home on earth. God took the man as His partner in creative work.

As I pondered God's act of sharing His creativity with mankind, a new idea sprang to life in my thoughts: *As long as Adam and Eve submitted to God, they brought forth the beautiful, the good, the beneficial, and the pleasant. When they rebelled against Him, the first couple created unfairness.* I realized that the unfairness came from man's mind, not the mind of the Lord. Unfairness was a human invention, not a divine creation. Adam and Eve

treacherously abused the creativity God placed within them and gave birth to unfairness.

True, we can say that God permitted the devil to tempt Adam and Eve, and allowed them to rebel against Him. But God did not cause unfairness to spring into being. Permitting unfairness is not the same as creating it.

Also, I saw that Cain rejected God's regulations on human behavior. Unrestrained by God's directives, Cain murdered Abel. How unfair! A godly man destroyed by his godless brother. Who's to blame for this act of unfairness, God or Cain? Obviously, God did not inspire Cain to kill Abel. Cain's God-rejecting heart perpetrated this horrible unfairness.

My unconditional love for God prevented me from any longer blaming Him for things I could not understand. In fact, love for God replaces our blame against God with trust in Him. Unconditional love for God enlarges our capacity to understand Him. This new understanding of the origin of unfairness freed me from

Permitting
unfairness is not
the same as
creating it

the slightest tendency to blame God for my physical disability that He chose to not heal.

Placing the Blame Where It Belongs

Okay, God doesn't generate unfairness, I admitted. But where does it come from? Should my love for God deny its existence? Does faith in God simply ignore the reality of inequality? Such thoughts followed on the heels of my admission that God can't create unfairness.

Once again, the Holy Spirit used the prophet Habakkuk to help me win my mental wrestling match against confusion.

As I read Habakkuk 3:17, I saw that the prophet freely admitted that life *is* unfair. "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls." It's unfair when farmers plant fields that produce no crops. It's not right when sheep herders and cattle ranchers invest their lives and finances in the animals that die of disease. Unfairness strikes both the righteous and the unrighteous, the godly and godless. Like the

gaseous atmosphere that envelops planet earth, unfairness is all around us.

My thoughts told me that unfairness surrounds the earth because humans sinned against God. Does this mean that every sin brings forth another incident of unfairness? Did my ancestors' sins cause me to be born with scarred macula? No, we needn't attempt attaching unfairness to specific acts of sin. Unfairness is here and randomly affects all of us.

I must place the blame for unfairness on life and not on God, I decided. What new peace of mind flooded me. I found it easy to agree with the statement in Revelation 15:3: "Just and true are your ways, King of the ages." "In all that has happened to us you have been just; You have acted faithfully..."⁴ filled me with contentment with the way God had treated me.

The Cleansing of My Feelings

During my years of walking the path of most resistance, I battled many unpleasant feelings about God. In my thoughts, I accepted His Word as reliable and trustworthy, but my heart accused Him of not treating me

right. I often loved God logically—with my intellect—while unreasonable, unruly agitation gripped the other part of me. My head insisted that God loved me, while simultaneously my heart said He didn't.

I didn't want these unpleasant feelings about God; I didn't like them. Nevertheless, occasional inner battles raged within me when life subjected me to tough times. It was like there were two of me—one part wanting to believe God, while the other part wanted nothing to do with Him or His will. These reoccurring battles disgusted me and filled me with disappointment in myself.

God watched me battle against these unhealthy feelings. He didn't forsake me or disown me. He wasn't ashamed to call me His child. He felt my hurt and cared about my plight. That's why He left me on the path of most resistance.

Feelings have a way of hiding themselves deep within us. But life's pressures, struggles, and hardships force them to the surface. So my disappointment and unanswered prayer brought my feelings to my awareness. Without the path of most resistance, these feelings would have remained hidden deep in my person. Love

for God would have ruled my head but not all of my heart.

God was ready to take me another step toward the cleansing of my feelings about Him.

Tropical heat enfolded me as I stepped out of our house in Corpus Christi one morning in June 1995. A typical southeasterly wind off the Gulf of Mexico drove fluffy white clouds across the blue sky. Following a five- or six-minute ride to the professional building in which our church met, I stepped out of the humidity into my air conditioned office.

I began preparing my sermon outline for the upcoming Sunday service. Many of my observations about the prophet Habakkuk's reaction to unanswered prayer congealed in my thoughts.

The Habakkuk of chapter one poured out his exasperation with God's inaction in Israel's behalf. The prophet had called and called upon the Lord to save Israel from Babylonian invasion and subsequent destruction, but God did nothing. Now, in chapter two, verse twenty, the prophet acknowledged God's supremacy by

proclaiming that “the Lord is in His holy temple.” He followed this proclamation with a command, “Let all the earth be silent before Him.”

Silence? I questioned. *This guy went from violent words about the Lord to placid submission to His will.*

Habakkuk’s outbursts against God changed to loving silence before God. Habakkuk was neither resigning himself to hopelessness, nor merely squelching his unpleasant feelings about the Lord. In chapter three of this book, I saw a man *cleansed* of harsh feelings about God. “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior”⁵ describes the feelings of the same man who previously loved God but didn’t feel good about Him. It was like the Habakkuk of chapter one was a different man in chapter three. He was different—he loved God with all his head *and* with all his heart-feelings.

As I sat in my office located in the Padre Palms Square professional building, new assurance in both God and myself flooded me. *If Habakkuk’s feelings about God can change for the better, so can mine*, I determined. In my imagination, I envisioned a formula scrawled on a classroom board:

Love
For
God + Path of
Most
Resistance = Cleansed
Feelings About Him

Confidence in God’s unconditional goodness removes our worry about life’s unfairness. Then, we reap profit from walking the path of most resistance.

EPILOGUE

Giving Over, Not Giving Up

Although I've used many biographical recollections in *Profiting from the Path of Most Resistance*, this book is really not about me. It's about the Jesus who decided to bring us into the world and direct our steps during our time on this planet. We serve as "the work of (His) hands, for the display of (His) splendor."¹ So, I trust the narrative recorded in this book intensifies your appreciation of God's unique work in you.

We are in the year 2005 and God has chosen to not heal my eyes. The blind spots in my eyes are much larger and retina specialists cannot eliminate the scars on my macula. For many years I have not been able to use my left eye. It enjoys peripheral vision that's 20/400 when I wear my glasses. I depend exclusively on my right eye, but the scar has enlarged during the last few years. Consequently, I notice the blind spots several times a day.

For example, I look at my desk for my pen or micro cassette recorder and they just aren't where I left them. I turn my head slightly and like magic they appear. I know these items are where I left them, but I have to turn my head to one side or the other in order to see around the blind spot.

"James, have you given up on healing for your eyes?" a pastor questioned me one day in 2002.

Without a moment's hesitation I replied to my friend, "No, I haven't given up—I've given over my eyes to God's care."

As a young man I pursued the goal of divine healing. The path of most resistance forced me to change my goal. My goal became an intimate relationship with Jesus. As a result, His presence floods my mind and emotions with complete confidence that He only desires the supreme best for me. Expectation for the best fills me with joyful anticipation of better than the best and more than the most. "How great is Your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear You, which You bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in You."²

Guaranteed healing awaits everyone who refuses to

Scripture References

give up on Jesus and gives themselves over to His skillful handling of their lives. God's promises give us innumerable reasons for expecting victory. His Word offers us no reason to look for the worst to happen. His presence brings healing to our relationship with Him.

Sometimes His presence brings healing to our bodies, our relationships or our finances, but not always. When He doesn't heal our bodies, relationships or finances, we can rest assured that He's going to use lack of healing in our favor.

In 1997, Delores and I launched Comfort & Encouragement Ministries. We wanted to use our experiences on the path of most resistance to help others flourish during their trials and difficulties. For seven years, God has sustained us professionally and financially. We have preached in many churches, held seminars in others, and spent lots of time strengthening the hands of pastors and missionaries. We can help people because we have reaped profit from the path of most resistance.

You, also, will profit from your path of most resistance!

(Not included in the text)

Preface

1. 2 Corinthians 3:3

Chapter 1

1. Psalm 139:13

2. Isaiah 44:2

3. Isaiah 46:3

4. Isaiah 49:5

5. Isaiah 38:17

Chapter 2

1. Matthew 22:37

2. Psalm 66:10-12

3. Exodus 15:26

4. I John 4:8

5. Galatians 4:13

Chapter 3

1. Deuteronomy 32:4
2. Daniel 4:37
3. Zephaniah 3:5
4. Proverbs 27:11
5. Proverbs 25:13

Chapter 4

1. 2 Timothy 2:10
2. Colossians 1:24
3. 2 Corinthians 1:6
4. 2 Timothy 4:20
5. Isaiah 41:9
6. Numbers 14:3
7. Proverbs 2:7
8. Proverbs 1:33
9. Luke 12:32

Chapter 5

1. Job 5:18
2. Luke 6:22, 23

3. 2 Corinthians 7:4

4. Galatians 5: 22, 23

Chapter 6

1. Philippians 4:7
2. Deuteronomy 33:12
3. Proverbs 16:9
4. Proverbs 19:21
5. Proverbs 20:24
6. Psalm 57:2

Chapter 7

1. Habakkuk 1:2
2. Habakkuk 1:13
3. Habakkuk 1:13
4. Nehemiah 9:33
5. Habakkuk 3:18

Epilogue

1. Isaiah 60:21
2. Psalm 31:19

A D D E N D U M

Miracles and Medicine

Dear Reader:

Having bad eyesight since birth has meant more visits to the doctor than I can count! Is a Christian wrong for visiting a doctor? Does listening to a doctor's prescription for health indicate lack of faith in God?

No! God works through natural means far more often than "supernatural" ones! He is the author of both!

Here is an outline I wrote a number of years ago which explains how God uses both miracles and medicine to heal His people.

I. Miracles or medicine?

A. Many genuine Christians believe that God only heals physical illness with divine miracles.

1. They boldly testify of personal healing.

2. They are quite impatient with Christians who dare suggest that God might sometimes heal through doctors.
3. They condemn Christians whose beliefs don't match their own.

B. Another group of Christians feels confused.

These aren't sure what to believe.

1. They feel guilty when not healed miraculously.
2. They reluctantly administer medication after disease or injury becomes unbearable.
3. They feel like second-rate Christians whose faith must be very weak.

II. Another alternative

A. Our question, "Does God heal with miracles or medicine?" overlooks a third alternative.

B. God uses both miracles and medicine!

1. Our Sovereign God sometimes chooses to heal with miracles.

2. This same God sometimes chooses to heal with medicine.
3. There is no contradiction between miracles and medicine.

C. All healing comes from God!

III. Does all physical illness result from demonic activity?

- A. If all physical illness results from demonic activity, then all healing can be accomplished by ejecting a devil.
- B. However, notice that neither Jesus nor early Christians always healed by exorcism, Matthew 9:27-30; Mark 1:40-42; John 9:1-7; Acts 3:1-8; Acts 5:15; Acts 14:8-10.
- C. On other occasions, ejection of devils brought physical healing, Matthew 9:33; Mark 9:17, 18, 25-27; Luke 13:10-13; Acts 5:16.

D. The scriptural approach to demons and physical illness

1. Some illness is related to demons, but not all.
2. Exorcism is not a cure-all for physical illness.
3. Neither should we say that demons never create physical illness.
4. Any illness *caused by disease or infection* may sometimes be cured by miracles and other times by medicine, but never by exorcism.

IV. The other side of the coin

- A. The Bible records many stories of miraculous healings. Therefore, many Christians assume that God only heals through miracles.
- B. However, each coin has two sides. Also, the Bible teaching on healing has two sides.
- C. Scriptures which help us see that God uses medicine as well as miracles:

1. Isaiah's prescription, Isaiah 38:1,5,21.
The dictionary defines "poltice" as "a soft, usually heated and sometimes medicated, mass spread on cloth and applied to sores or other lesions".
 2. God uses a medical doctor to write the books of Luke and Acts, Colossians 4:14.
 3. Paul's prescription, 1 Timothy 5:23.
- D. God sometimes chooses to not heal at all,
2 Kings 13:14; Galatians 4:13,14; 2 Timothy 4:20.
- E. God attaches a physical handicap to Jacob,
Genesis 23:25,31-32.
- V. Is Scripture against the use of medicine or physicians?
- A. There is no statement in Scripture which forbids the use of medicine or physicians!
 1. Some believe that Mark 5:26 discourages the use of physicians.
 2. However, this verse simply states that physicians were unable to help this lady.
 - B. All healing comes from God.
 1. All understanding of how our physical/ material world operates comes from God.
 - a. In Isaiah, chapter 28, God declared that our knowledge of proper farming techniques originates in Him, Isaiah 28:23-29.
 - b. Especially note God's statements in verses 26 and 29.
 2. Mankind's understanding of disease and its treatment came from God whether or not mankind acknowledges God as source. For example, Jesus proclaimed that God indiscriminately pours out material blessings upon sinner and saint, Matthew 5:45.
 3. The idea that healing only comes from God

through miracles is incorrect. God uses two methods for ministering His healing: sometimes miracles, sometimes medicine.

4. We need not feel there is a contradiction between miracles and medicine. A famous physician's motto was, "I treat - God heals."

VI. When using medicine or physicians is wrong

A. King Asa's rebellion, 2 Chronicles 16:12

1. Although King Asa served the Lord during his early life, he later rebelled against the Lord.
2. Using physicians instead of depending upon a miracle from God was an act of rebellion against the Lord.

- B. Use of medical science is only wrong when we knowingly rebel against belief in and dependence upon miracles.

VII. When expecting a miracle from God is wrong

- A. Anger against God because He chose to not heal you through a divine miracle is wrong.

1. Demanding a miracle from God when medical science can easily correct injury or remove disease is rebellion.
 2. Anger against God because He chooses to not miraculously heal, creates disease in our spirit.
- B. God is sovereign, that is, free to act the way He wishes.

VIII. Conclusions about "miracles and medicine"

- A. First conclusion: God sometimes heals through miracles.
- B. Second conclusion: God definitely heals through medicine.
- C. Third conclusion: Faith in God permits Him to heal through either miracles or medicine.
- D. Fourth conclusion: All healing comes from God, whether that healing reaches us through miracles or medicine.



When God chooses not to heal us, He has a higher purpose in mind.

James Fields was born with damaged eyes. For years he sought God for his healing. When none came, James realized God must have a different path for his life. What he learned by overcoming his handicap—and how he came to understand the goodness of God in suffering—are the subject of this book.

This book will help you:

Harvest the benefit of suffering.

God designed benefit into the suffering that afflicts His people. This harvest leads us into a life of unconditional victory.

Bring out the encouragement in Scripture.

Even though suffering benefits God's people, we often become discouraged and give up before harvesting the victory He intends. Scripture fortifies us with divine courage to keep going.

Illustrate the love of God.

God's love for us never wavers. He only intends the best for us, whether life treats us nicely or badly, pleasantly or unpleasantly.

Stimulate appreciation of perseverance.

Perseverance enables us to endure until we reap the benefit of suffering.

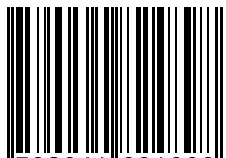
“The message of *Profiting from the Path of Most Resistance* ranks with that of biblical Job and Habakkuk. It challenges me to want to go and do likewise in an unfair and fallen world.”

Delmer R. Guynes, pastor, missionary and university president.



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