

The Blessings of Brokenness

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Introduction Hi everyone! My name is Jack M. Redfearn, Jr., pastor of West Hartselle Baptist Church, Hartselle, Alabama. My dear friend, and Brother in Christ, Guy Shipp asked me to contribute an article for the website, something that would encourage you to live for God, or to trust Him as your Lord and Savior.

As a pastor, I do my best to help those in my congregation who have experienced heartache and tragedy. Someone has said, **“In every pew sits a broken heart.”** One of the “pastoral” things pastors do is **“comfort those who mourn.”** We comfort hurting folks by reminding them of God’s promises, praying with them, and just being there when they need someone to talk to. I must confess to you that before 2003, my efforts at comforting people were sincere, but not from personal experience. Pastor’s who preach God’s truths are vital to the Kingdom of God, but pastor’s who preach out of personal experience have the added dimension of **“knowing that they know”** instead of just knowing!



Captain Joshua T. Byers, July 23, 2003. This picture was taken 30 minutes before he died from a roadside bomb.

My purpose for sharing these events with you is not to gain your sympathy, but to let you know that God is faithful, and that you can place all your confidence in Him – you can lean on his promises and they will never break under you! The Apostle Paul writes some incredible words to the Corinthian church::

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (KJV)

Illustration Someone has said that **“It is doubtful that God can use a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.”**

I suppose the question of the ages is why God allows evil and injustice to continue ... after all He could stop it couldn't He? I'm sure God allows these things to happen for good reasons, some I understand, and some I don't. I can tell you that God is good and His grace is **super-sufficient** for any trial you will face. I know this is true on a theological level, now I know it's true through personal experience. Discouragement, sadness, disappointment, tears, and heartache are life events that God can use to help us know and experience His love, His grace, and power.

My story is wrapped around the Biblical text of **2 Corinthians 12:9-10** which speaks about brokenness and the blessings that can come from what the Bible calls infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecution, and distresses (**verse 10**).

1

BROKENNESS ENABLES US: To Experience God's Grace. (9)

2 Corinthians 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Did you know that none of your abilities impress God? Do you know that your weakness is an opportunity for God to show His power in your life? God loves for us to depend on Him! My human weaknesses were revealed to me through a series of events in 2003. Here's my story.

On March 21, 2003 my sister, Kay DeMott and her husband Tommy was in their home in Camilla, Georgia. At 5:05 AM a tornado set down on their house, picked it up and threw it about sixty feet away. Tommy held on to Kay as long as he could before the pressure from the tornado literally snatched her out of his arms. Tommy later told us that Kay's fingerprints were still in his back, she was trying so hard to hold on to him. He also told us that she was screaming and was terrified before she disappeared out of sight (I would have reacted the same way! **See Psalm 56:3**). Kay was crushed under the mainframe of the house. I am so glad that Kay had asked Jesus to come into her heart several years before! And, Kay really loved the Lord and she did her best to live for Him. When she was killed it was hard for me to understand the timing of it because she had just begun to live her life for God – and she was so happy!

My family and I traveled from Hartselle, Alabama to Pavo, Georgia to be with our family. I had the extra burden of knowing my son entered combat in Iraq on the day my sister was buried. Most of you remember that it was on March 23, 2003, that the Coalition forces invaded Iraq for the purpose of displacing Saddam Hussein and eliminating any weapons of mass destruction they might find. On that day, my son, **LCPL Daniel Redfearn, along with hundreds more Marines began a major assault on An Nasiriya, Iraq.** The battle was fierce and lasted about seven days. Daniel and most of the Marines did not get much sleep. Daniel later told me that on this Sunday, the Sunday we buried my sister Kay, he came close to death many times over. Daniel was in a fighting hole about 300 meters away from the town of Nasiriyah and operated a SAW, a beefed up M-16 rifle. Daniel was in Bravo Co. but was involved in pulling the bodies of many of his friends in Charlie Co. out of a track vehicle that had been hit by an RPG (rocket propelled grenade). Most all of them were people he knew. Their bodies were dismembered and charred! A total of 18 Marines died in Charlie Company that day! <http://www.thefinalrollcall.us/stories/charlie.htm>

When I found out later what happened to Daniel and the other Marines, my heart broke for him and the families of those Marines! From this point on, my family lived with the awful tension of having a son in the Marine Corps on the front line involved in these incredibly fast assaults on Iraqi towns. We rejoiced when Daniel and the Marines of Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines returned to Camp Lejeune at the end of June 2003! I thought to myself, **“Self, things are better now. All you have to worry about is Josh being in Iraq. Just get Josh home and everything will be alright.”**

Lt. Joshua T. Byers had married our daughter Kim in 1998. Josh was a West Point graduate and an outstanding soldier. He was more than a great soldier, he was a great Christian and the best son-in-law a parent could ask for. Josh made the rank of Captain quickly while at Fort Stewart, Georgia. Later, Josh and Kim moved to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and then on to Fort Carson, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Josh and his unit, the 3rd ACR based out of Fort Carson left for Iraq in April 2003. I knew things would be dangerous for him since his unit would be operating in the Sunni Triangle, west and northwest of Baghdad.

On Wednesday, July 23, 2003, I came to my church office as usual. Not long after being there I received a phone call from my daughter Kim. Before I took the phone I knew something was wrong. She was crying and told me that Josh was killed by a roadside bomb that morning! I dropped the phone and staggered out into the main office where Carolyn our secretary was and said, **“Josh has been killed!”** The killing occurred on Highway One near Ar Ramadi, Iraq, in the Sunni Triangle. Josh had recently taken over command of an elite Army armored combat company and was loved by his men. He was called Fox Six. It was his dream, to command, and to serve his country and the fighting men of the 3rd ACR out of Fort Carson. More than anything Josh wanted all his men to return home to their loved ones ... sadly, not even Josh made it home alive.

I can't describe to you the heartache and emotional pain I felt at this moment. Questions swirled around in my mind, **“What happened? Who did it? Were the killers caught? What was the condition of his body? What were his last words? ...”** I had been told the death of a child is an emotional pain different from that of losing anyone else. I agree, even if it's your son-in-law! I don't think I could have hurt anymore than if my own son had been killed in combat. To me, Josh was my son! **Death of a loved one in a war zone creates a nasty spin on the memories you have to deal with!** On one hand, I was extremely proud of Josh. I was thankful and proud of his commitment to our nation. Josh was an incredible writer. He wrote us while he was alive and said he hoped that what he and others were doing would make life safer for us in the States. Even though Josh endured the soldierly stress of commanding in combat situations, he wrote the most incredible love letters back to Kim ... it was like he was trying to take care of her all the way from Iraq!

Several weeks after Josh died, my son Robert was injured at Parris Island and suffered a dislocated knee cap and a torn MCL. He spent right at five months on the island and still didn't graduate as a Marine! He also lost at least \$24,000 dollars in scholarships that he needed for college. But God was watching out for Robert! Had Robert not been injured, he too would have gone to Iraq in September of 2004. I'm not sure I could have handled having two sons in the Marine Corps in Iraq at the same time! And because of Josh's death, my stress level had been bumped a few notches higher.

The combination of my sister's death, and the death of my son-in-law, and not being able to see Robert while he was injured nearly broke me into! I can't describe to you how helpless and weak I felt. **This was the darkest period in my 46 years of existence.** I was powerless to control my circumstances or my emotions. I couldn't even talk to God for a few days. I was angry with those who killed Josh – in fact I wanted to kill them! I was angry at not having grandchildren through Josh and Kim.

I needed relaxation, rest, and revival in the worst way! I had read **2 Corinthians 12:9-10** hundreds of times. I asked myself, **“How is God’s strength going to be made perfect in my weakness?”**

It’s not easy to “rejoice” in times like these. I had to find strength in other places. My help and healing came through friends, family, and caring church members. If you’re reading this article and you’ve never invited Jesus into your life as your Lord and Savior, you’re the one missing out on blessings and spiritual resources only God can give. **Friend, as sure as you are reading this message, heartache will visit your house on an appointed day. Who will you turn to when a son, or a daughter, a wife, a husband, a loved one dies or is killed?** You say, **“I’ll handle it myself!”** You’re not capable of handling events like this on your own! You need a friend in high places to handle **“stuff”** like this in life. You also need friends in low places (the church) to help you put the pieces of your emotional life back together. And none of this **“stuff”** will ever make sense unless you start looking at it through God’s eyes – and you do that through His word!

Well, trouble had knocked me down, but I wasn’t knocked out! Why? I received God’s grace!

2

BROKENNESS ENABLES US: To Receive God’s Power (9-10)

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (KJV)

Wouldn’t it be great if you could always boast about how great God is – even in the roughest trials of life? If you can, it means that God’s grace and power is real to you! I need God’s power to live life personally. I also need God’s power to be on mission for Him. The Lord brought to my mind this verse:

Habakkuk 3:2 O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy. KJV

I needed a revival of God’s **“work”** in the middle of my years! My son-in-law, Josh said in one of his letters **“God’s plans were always perfect.”** God’s plans are always bigger than our plans. You see, in my personal pain, I had forgotten my mission in life. God always gives us the power to do His will, and when we work for Him He floods our lives with power. I had also forgotten during this **“down”** period of my life that **God’s work is still the most important work in the world.** Jesus said, **“I must work the works of him that sent me, for the night comes when no man can work.” (John 9:4)**

Illustration When Josh was killed, Lisa and I immediately flew to Kim's home in Fountain, Colorado, just next to Colorado Springs and Fort Carson. My wife Lisa and I cried all the way there. We stayed with Kim for two weeks. During the first week, I hit a real low point, and God picked me up in an unusual way. I had started reading the book "**Mission Compromised**" by **Lt. Col. Oliver North** several weeks before Josh died. The book was loaned to me by Jon Anderson, one of our Deacons and one of my best friends. I struggled to get into the flow of the book but just couldn't, so I laid it down. When Lisa and I left for Kim's home and the memorial service at Fort Carson, for some unknown reason, I took the book with me on the plane. I didn't think I would even read it – I was too sad to read! At 2:00 AM one morning at Kim's home, I opened the book in hopes it would divert my attention from the pain I felt. The plot in "**Mission Compromised**" was heating up and the story became interesting. At one point in the story a Marine and other soldiers are on a mission in Iraq. A missile hits their plane and it goes down in the desert. The pilot was a young black woman who is seriously injured in the crash. All the other characters were killed except her and the main character, a U.S. Marine. He cradled her head in his arms as she lay dying and she shared with him her story. She told him her husband was a Baptist preacher in Chicago, they had a little boy, and that life had been good. She also shared her faith in Jesus with the Marine as she lay dying in his arms. Her testimony led to the Marine accepting Christ into his life. **And then it hit me!** Here's an elite, black female pilot who knows she's going to die. She knows her military mission is over, but not her Master's mission – not until she witnesses to this Marine about the most important mission in life which was to know God and make Him known! **In my grief over Josh's death in Iraq, I had forgotten "My Mission!"** I begin to weep and to thank God for reminding me that "**It's still the cross that matters!**" God's mission was not finished! In fact, it's still on! The plot in "Mission Compromised" was especially meaningful to me since Josh died in Iraq!

When a soldier dies that is close to you, you struggle to find meaning in their sacrifice. I supported the war, Josh supported the war, but God gave me reasons for it that go beyond liberation of an oppressed people. Was God using these events in Iraq to make it possible for the Muslim people to hear the gospel? I know our nation did not go in for that purpose, but you know God is so sovereign, He can use events beyond our control to fulfill His will. I thought about this aspect of the Iraqi war often. At the end of 2003 Steve DuVall, my former Minister of Education, and now missionary to Costa Rica shared with us the story of how many bibles had gone into Iraq in the last three months of 2003. Credible sources told Steve that nearly 80,000 Bibles had found their way into Iraq since its liberation! So Josh died, not only to liberate people, but for a cause beyond a cause – to bring the light of the gospel into dark places.

Illustration Some of you out there struggle with our troops being in Iraq. Josh's letters kept reminding me of why we are there. He saw great things happening to the people of Iraq and felt on mission there. The day Josh was killed, a good pastor friend of mine put his arms around me and said, "**Jack, I'm afraid our soldiers were sent to Iraq under false pretenses?**" I was crying at the time and I turned around and said to him "**Josh didn't feel that way!**" By the way, I still consider this Brother my friend – he was there when I needed him.

Josh said in one of his letters, "**It feels great to make men free! How often do you get to liberate an entire country?**" One of the funniest things Josh would say to Kim while he was alive in Iraq was, "**I aint skeeered!**"

I'm glad that Jesus wasn't "skeered" to go to the cross for us! He came to set mankind free! And Jesus set us free through weakness, through loss, and through His death on the cross!

As I write this message, my son Daniel Redfearn has finished his second tour with the Marines in Iraq ... we were reunited on February 5, 2005 – and what a great reunion it was! Daniel was hit by two bombs similar to the ones that killed Josh, but he was in an "up-armored" humvee. He was shaken up bad, has lost a little hearing, but otherwise is in good health. The biggest threat in Iraq this year was from mortars, roadside bombs, and suicide bombers.

Postscript: I wrote Timothy Buskell, the driver of Josh's vehicle the day he was killed, and asked him to share with me what happened to Josh the morning he died on July 23, 2003. He wrote me a letter, and I also had the opportunity of taking him out to lunch in September 2004. Here's what he shared with me. **He said the explosion occurred at around 7:30 AM.** When explosions occur in these settings they kick up clouds of dust, dirt, and smoke – not to mention rusty shrapnel. The explosion ripped through Josh's right arm, the only place not protected by his body armor. The shrapnel shot through his heart and lungs, then into another soldier. After the explosion Josh leaned over to the driver and shouted, **"Buskell, that was an I.E.D. Keep moving!"** An I.E.D. is short for **"improvised explosive device"** ... in this case two Iraqi tank shells lashed together with C-4, buried, and remote detonated as the lead humvee comes by. **After the explosion, Josh slumped forward toward the dash of the hummer.** At the time, Timothy didn't know Josh was dead, and was fighting to keep control of the vehicle. Josh lived long enough to get his humvee out of further danger and then he died. Later, an autopsy revealed that Josh had several pieces of shrapnel in his heart and lungs. We originally were told Josh died immediately, but now we know he lived a longer, perhaps no more than 10 to 15 seconds.

Josh's last words are of great comfort to me: "... that was an I.E.D. Keep moving!" Tragedy and heartache are like improvised explosive devices that hit us in life. You never know when life is going to implode or explode on you – but you have to keep moving by the grace and power of God. When I say "keep moving" I mean you have to keep living in the light of His Lordship no matter what happens to you. **Some of you might not be "moving" with the Lord in your life right now.** I just want you to know that:

God loves you!

He has an incredible plan for your life.

Call upon Jesus right now and ask Him to forgive you of your sin.

Jesus died on the cross so that you might have eternal life here and in the hereafter.

Ask Jesus to come into your heart and save you.

Don't hold any part of your life back from Jesus – give it all to Him.

Pray a simple prayer like this: "Dear Jesus, I believe that You died on the cross for my sins and that You arose from the grave. I now ask You to forgive me of my sins and to save my soul. Amen." Now tell another Christian what you've done so you can receive further instructions on how to live the Christian life.

I intend to keep moving in life because I have experienced the grace of God, and the power of God. **You must keep moving too – even through tragedy!** You can't stop – too much is at stake!

If you get a chance, you can read more about Josh in a joint book put out by HBO and Time life titled **“Last Letters Home.”** Josh is one of ten soldiers whose lives and sacrifices are featured in the book. Wal-Mart, Books-A-Million, and other good book stores keep the book in stock. A DVD of **“Last Letters Home”** will also be available for purchase sometime this year.

God bless you! **AND DON'T FORGET TO “KEEP MOVING” in Jesus!**



Captain Joshua Byers and his wife, my daughter Kim. Picture taken not long before Josh left for Iraq in April 2003.