



LOSS/SUFFERING/STORM

SCRIPTURE VERSES (NIV)

John 14:1

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.

John 14:26-27

²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Isaiah 53:4-6

⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

Psalms 55:22

²² Cast your cares on the Lord
and he will sustain you;
he will never let
the righteous be shaken.

2 Corinthians 12:9

⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

1 Peter 4:12-13

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

1 Peter 5:7

⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Revelation 21:4

⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death'[a] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

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5 THINGS TO DO IN A STORM

Rick Warren — July 15, 2016

When you're going through a storm, God is not distant or uninvolved. He is "I Am," and he is working in your life for your good. Here are five things God wants you to do if you feel like you're sinking in a storm.

Have courage, because Jesus is with you.

Don't ever argue with a fear. Just tell it where to go! Tell it to go talk to Jesus.

Take a risk in faith.

Don't ask God to bless what you're doing. Do what God is blessing. Ask him what he wants you to do, and then be willing to get out of the boat.

Stay focused on Jesus.

The moment you take your eyes off the Lord, you're going under. Matthew 14:30 says, ***"But when [Peter] saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'"*** (NIV) When you focus on the wind and the waves — your circumstances — you're going to sink, just like Peter. If you look at the world, you'll be distressed; if you look within, you'll be depressed; if you look at Christ, you'll be at rest.

Don't doubt.

You don't need great faith to make it through the storm in your life. You just need faith in the right person.

Praise God.

Even in the storm, even when you feel like you're sinking, even when you're scared to death — praise him all the time. Thank God in the middle of the storm.

What storm is scaring you right now? What storm is sinking you right now? Why do you think God is letting you go through this storm?

He's letting you go through this storm for the same reasons he sent the disciples into the storm — to say, "I'm all you need. I can handle anything. I will come to you in the ninth hour. And I'll come walking on the very thing that scares you the most. I'm not asking you to come to me. I'm going to come to you."

Talk It Over

- ◆ What can you thank God for in the middle of your storm?
- ◆ How have you grown in your understanding of God because of the storms in your life?
- ◆ What can you do to limit the distractions that keep you from focusing on God?

DON'T WASTE YOUR PAIN

Rick Warren

“He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble. We share in the terrible sufferings of Christ, but also in the wonderful comfort he gives.” (2 Corinthians 1:4-5 CEV)

Your greatest ministry will flow out of your pain — not out of your strengths or your talents but out of the painful experiences of your life. It is your weaknesses that help other people in their need, not your strengths.

A great example of this is the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 1, Paul says that he was in a time of his life when he was so discouraged that he was ready to kick the bucket. He despaired of life itself. He was ready to give up on life. He was ready to crawl in a corner and die. And Paul was probably the greatest Christian who ever lived except for Jesus!

But Paul was able to say this in 2 Corinthians 1:2-5: *“I pray that God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will be kind to you and will bless you with peace! Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Father is a merciful God, who always gives us comfort. He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble. We share in the terrible sufferings of Christ, but also in the wonderful comfort he gives”* (CEV).

Who can be more sympathetic than somebody who has already been through what another person is going through right now? Who can better help the parent of a special needs child than a parent who raised a special needs child? Who can better help somebody going through a bankruptcy than somebody who has gone through it before? Who can better help somebody experiencing the heartbreak of divorce than somebody who remembers how terrible it felt? Who can better help somebody who's been abused or molested than somebody who has been abused or molested?

Don't waste your pain. If you hide it and hold it back, it doesn't do any good. But if you're honest with God and yourself and with other people, God can use the thing you hate the most in your life, that you're most disappointed by, and that you wish had never happened. God says, “You can't change what happened to you. But I can use it for your benefit and for my purposes. When you're willing to share your brokenness, I can use it to help other people.”

Talk It Over

- ◆ What is the painful experience in your life that you want God to use for good in someone else's life?
- ◆ Who do you need to forgive so that you can move on from your pain and release it for God to use in ministry?
- ◆ Who do you think you can share your experience with so that they can receive God's comfort?

GOD LOVES YOU IN YOUR BROKENNESS

Rick Warren

***“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”
(Psalm 34:18 NIV)***

In Genesis 32, Jacob had wrestled all night with a man, who was actually God. Genesis 32:27 says, “The man asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Jacob,’ he answered” (NIV).

What a strange request. God obviously knew Jacob’s name. Whenever God asks you a question, it’s never for his benefit. He already knows the answer! The reason he asked this was that he wanted Jacob to admit what he was. In ancient times, names were chosen for their meaning, not for how nice they sounded. So you could be named after a profession like a baker or a carpenter or a smith. You could be named after a relative or you could be named for the situation you were in.

But at that time, parents mostly named their kids based on their character. When people said their name, they were telling someone what kind of person they were.

Jacob’s name means “deceiver.” And — oh boy — did he live up to his name! His entire life he lied to get out of many situations and one conflict after another because he was a deceiver. He was a manipulator. When God asked Jacob what his name was, he wanted him to own up to who he was.

Here’s the cool thing about it. When Jacob says, “I am Manipulator,” God was not shocked. He didn’t say, “You’ve got to be kidding me! I’m fighting with a manipulator? How did I miss that? I didn’t see that one coming.” God already knew everything bad about Jacob, just like he already knows everything bad about you — even the stuff you don’t know about yourself.

The Bible says in Malachi 1:2, “*I have loved Jacob.*” I like that verse because it gives me hope. If God loved Jacob who was so unlovable, who was such a manipulator, who was such a scoundrel, who was such a crook, who was such a liar — then God can love someone like me, too.

If you want lasting change in your life, you have to stop making excuses and rationalizing and blaming others for your brokenness. You have to be honest with God and with yourself and admit in humility, “I am the problem.”

How does God respond to our brokenness? The Bible says, “*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit*” (Psalm 34:18).

Talk It Over

- ◆ What do you think God wants you to admit about yourself so that you can move forward in healing?
- ◆ Why is it so difficult to be honest with God, even when you know he already knows everything about you?
- ◆ What are the parts of yourself that you think are unlovable? Talk to God about those weaknesses today, and ask him for help to accept his unconditional love and let it change you.

JESUS COMES TO YOU IN YOUR STORM

Rick Warren — July 14, 2016

In Mark 6, Jesus sent the disciples ahead of him to Bethsaida while he went off by himself to pray. It wasn't a long trip by boat, but they were blown off course by a storm, and when Jesus saw them struggling against the wind in the middle of the lake, he came to their aid.

Have you ever had a storm blow you off course? You had no intention of being where you are today in your job, your marriage, your finances. You've been blown off course by situations you couldn't control. You feel like you should be where you intended to go there by now, but at this point, you've given up hope of getting to your original destination. You just want to get back to safety.

Maybe you had big dreams for your life that you gave up on a long time ago. You're not even worried about progress anymore. You're just wondering, "Can I survive?"

What does Jesus do when you're at your moment of desperation? Mark 6:48 says, *"About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water"* (NLT, second edition). Notice he didn't tell the disciples to come to him. He knew they couldn't get to him. He went to them. When you're at that point of desperation, Jesus comes to you!

I love the fact that Jesus did not stand on the shore and shout instructions. When you're in a storm, you don't need advice. You need a miracle! You need somebody to show up, and this is what Jesus did. He intervened in the disciples' storm.

This is the Gospel — that God doesn't stand on the shoreline telling us what to do. He comes out and meets us in our pain, our fear, our depression, our storm, and our discouragement. He comes to us. What a God!

You may feel abandoned right now, but you're not. The Bible says in John 14:18, *"I will not abandon you or leave you as orphans in the storm — I will come to you"* (TLB). You can count on it!

Talk It Over

- ◆ What dream have you given up on because you didn't see any progress? What do you think God can do about it?
- ◆ Think of a time in your life when you felt desperate. How did God intervene for you?
- ◆ Who in your life needs God to intervene in a desperate situation? How can you pray for and support that person?

YOUR PAIN OFTEN REVEALS GOD'S PURPOSE

Rick Warren — November 7, 2016

Your pain often reveals God's purpose for you. God never wastes a hurt! If you've gone through a hurt, he wants you to help other people going through a similar hurt. He wants you to share it. God can use the problems in your life to give you a ministry to others. In fact, the very thing you're most ashamed of in your life and resent the most, could become your greatest ministry in helping other people.

Who can better help somebody going through a bankruptcy than somebody who went through a bankruptcy? Who can better help somebody struggling with an addiction than somebody who's struggled with an addiction? Who can better help parents of a special needs child than parents who raised a special needs child? Who can better help somebody who's lost a child than somebody who lost a child?

The very thing you hate the most in your life is what God wants to use for good in your life.

The Bible says, *"[God] comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others . . . When we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer"* (2 Corinthians 1:4a, 6 NLT, second edition).

This is called redemptive suffering. Redemptive suffering is when you go through a problem or a pain for the benefit of others.

This is what Jesus did. When Jesus died on the cross, he didn't deserve to die. He went through that pain for your benefit so that you can be saved and go to Heaven.

There are many different causes for the problems, pains, and suffering in your life. Sometimes the stuff that happens you bring on yourself. When you make stupid decisions, then it causes pain in your life. If you go out and overspend and buy things you can't afford and presume on the future, and then you go deeply in debt and lose your house, you can't say, "God, why did you let me lose my house?" You can't blame God for your bad choices.

But in some of your problems, you're innocent. You've been hurt by the pain, stupidity, and sins of other people. And some of the pain in your life is for redemptive suffering. God often allows us to go through a problem so that we can then help others.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What are some of the problems in your life that you have questioned God about or wondered why they had to happen to you?
- ◆ How can you use your painful experience to minister to others?
- ◆ Why do you think God does not always reveal his purpose to us? How should we respond when this is the case?

THE STORM COMES

“Insider” J. Jackson, Jefferson City, MO — April 11, 2017

Today is Tuesday, and I want to share with you my journey that began yesterday. My prayer is that my season in life right now would bring those who read this to seek Jesus, and to know in your heart that He is Lord of all. That regardless of your own situation, hardship, or place in life right now, may you find the peace of God.

Philippians 4:5-7 “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone . The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

You say you have faith. You say you believe in Jesus and that He is Lord, He has saved you. You live your life with a new perspective, and for most of us we do as we want, with small changes, and we tell ourselves ‘God knows best’, and ‘If it is meant to be then it will be’. Do we ever really take the time to pursue Him, seeking His will considering our situation, or do we lazily take the approach of whatever will be will be? For most Christians that is our ‘faith’.

Really is it an ignorant approach to our relationship with God? Do we know what God says, or know how God responds, and does it requires too much effort, or too much time to read His word and to seek Him in prayer? The reality is, when the storm comes our house has been built on sand. The scriptures do not say ‘If the rain, floods, and wind comes’;

Matthew 7:25-27 “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

The scriptures say they came. The wise build their house upon a rock, the foolish build their house upon sand, and when it fell, the fall was great.

Sounds good, makes a good sermon, it encourages, it exhorts, and it brings conviction. It should bring examination to your heart on what you put your faith on. In reality what does house upon a rock look like in life? For over a month I have been dealing with flu like symptoms, and they seemed like they wouldn’t go away. Two trips to see nurse practitioners resulted in Tylenol and sinus pills. Never mind the dry whooping cough, extreme fatigue, and shortness of breath. In prison Claritin and Ibuprofen fix everything. After a month of symptoms, I finally seen an actual doctor and she recommended me getting a chest X-ray, breathing tests and a blood test. Monday, I walked into the office and sat down to hear my results. Mr. Jackson I have your pathology reports, and your X-ray findings, and I’m afraid it’s not good. It’s not good at all.

I thought Hep. C, some vitamin deficiency, but what she said next was shocking. You have cancer in your blood. Your white blood cell count should be between 4-8 and yours is 110. Your X-ray showed swelling of the lower left lymphnode in your left lung, and the recommendation is further testing. You appear to have anemia, and I can't tell you what all these words mean, you may read them, but I can't explain what they actually mean, as she showed me the results. Essentially what I can tell you is you are anemic and that you have some form of blood cancer. The doctors above me will be meeting with you and they have put in for you to have a full body CAT scan to determine lymph node problems, and you will have a bone marrow biopsy done to determine if you have lymphoma or leukemia. I'm so sorry I can't tell you more, but this is all that I know, and all the information given to me.

She checked my spleen for swelling and did her best to answer the questions that I could formulate in my mind, but the shock was like a dense fog I was trying to navigate through. Keep exercising, playing sports, but no contact sports, no basketball. I don't know if you are-a man of faith, but you should pray, and we have- psychiatric people who can help you if you need to talk, or feel depression. Twenty minutes and I had more questions than answers. Leukemia, lymphoma, anemia, CAT scans, Bone marrow biopsy, blood cancer. These were the words I kept hearing as I sat in the waiting area to return to my job.

The rain is pouring, the flood waters are rising, and the winds are beating against your house. You say you have faith. You say you believe in God.

James 2:19 "You believe that there is one God, you do well; even the demons believe and tremble."

For 20 minutes I sat in a room listening to other men complain and talk about seeing the parole board that day, and that they are paroled in less than 5 yrs. Once I returned to work I looked at my cubicle and everything that I was working on; Computer programming, Braille certification lessons, and miscellaneous papers, all reminded me of Ecclesiastes. Vanity.

Ecc 4:4 Again, I considered all labor, and every right work, that for this a man is envied by his neighbor.

This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

Vanity: emptiness ; figuratively something transitory

Transitory: Passing without continuance; continuing a short time; fleeting; speedily vanishing. And unsatisfactory)

What did it matter? Not in an apathetic way. Just looking at what my life looked like an hour before, working and toiling for knowledge, and certification. Things that occupy time, give some sense of purpose, now all seemed to be worthless, and of no value.

I left work and returned to my cell. I opened my Bible, and sat crying. 'Why' was not my question, I know why. We are broken, the world is broken. I understand that quite well. The question was 'what now'. I sat in tears crying to God asking what do You say I do? What is your will in this

season, this situation . I sat looking for the words to pray, looking for understanding for what was happening in my life right now. Not knowing what to pray, I knew His word was to be my answer. I began reading through Psalms until my heart connected to His words. My spirit connected to Psalm 18:1-6

Ps 18:1 I love you, O LORD, my strength.

Ps 18:2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer , my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold .

Ps 18:3 I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

Ps 18:4 The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me;

Ps 18:5 the cords of Sheol entangle led me; the snares of death confronted me.

Ps 18:6 In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

This became my prayer; Father God, I love you. I know that You have saved me, and that you are the source of my strength. You are my fortress and deliverer. In You alone I place my trust. Lord I cry to You, because you alone are God. I don't know what this is in my life right now, and I come to you. I pray that you give me your word that I may stand on what You say. Show me your will, and be glorified in my life. I know that you work all things together for good for those called according to your purpose. I know that my life is yours, and that you have set purpose for good in my life. Guide me in your truth, and may I lean to you in all my ways. Strengthen my family and give them peace and understanding of who You are. I love you Lord, and I understand now that my life is not my own. -In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

The hardest part was not looking at what I may go through. It wasn't the uncertainties of what I had been told, but the reality that I had to tell my family the news. I have endured plenty in my own life, but the hardest part of doing time in prison isn't prison itself. It is the sadness your loved ones carry. The love they have for me, and being unable to do anything. The memories of what I had done 21 yrs ago came to my mind, and the hurt and sadness resulting from my actions flooded my mind. I felt like telling them I am sick, I have cancer, these words were going to cause hurt and sadness. Yet God used my roommate to speak wisdom and love saying that I had to tell them, I had to share this. It was not my burden to carry alone.

Though a part of me didn't even want to acknowledge what the doctors said, God used a message from Pastor Jackson I had heard years ago. The phrase came to mind clear as day. 'Real faith faces the facts'. These are the facts;

I have been sick. My body says so. Doctors say so. Tests say so. Men here have been misdiagnosed. Tests can be wrong. These are preliminary findings.

Now I search for faith. Faith' is not something I will to do, or strive to find on my own. Faith itself, like all things of God is of Him. In His great grace, He gives us faith, He builds our faith. We grow in faith as we grow in knowledge of Him through His word. Our part in all of this is to seek Him. His ways, His love, His will. What He says is truth, and what He says will be.

Here forward is uncharted, and never experienced in my life. David faced Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. David did not face Goliath as if he were a mere man, or even as a midget (as my sister told me). David knew the facts, especially when doubters told him Goliath was 'a man of war since his youth '. You are not able to fight against him, says Saul.

David recalled Gods faithfulness in his own life , delivering him from lion and bear. David knew well what God was capable of. When Saul tried to give his own weapons, they were inadequate, and 'untested'. What was tested by David was His God. David knew his purpose was of the Lord. He had testimonies of victories over lion and bear, this giant was nothing but another testimony. Not only did Goliath become a testimony of David to glorify God, he carried Goliaths sword (1 Samuel 21:9, 22:10). What once seemed like a giant to battle became provision for David in later battles.

I ask if you read this, and you know me and my family, that you set your face towards Jesus. That you look to the God who saves, heals, and desires that all would come to know Him. Pray for my family, for my loved ones to have grace and strength. Pray that God give me the strength to continue in testimony of His work in my life no matter what should come. May my life's trial be a witness to God's great love and grace.

I see the rain pouring, and waters rising. Winds are beginning to beat and I have faith. My house is no modular home. I have a fortress, I have a rock. I have a strong tower. Jesus is my fortress, my rock, my strong tower. I shelter myself within Him looking expecting a war.

Proverb 21:31 The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD. I will waive my banner. He is my banner. Jehovah Nissi.

A MESSAGE FROM A LIONS' DEN

Greg Laurie — February 17, 2017

And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"— Daniel 6:20

The Bible tells the story of a man who laid his faith on the line. As the Bible says, *"He believed in his God"* (Daniel 6:23).

Daniel had been elevated to a position of great prominence. Darius, the ruler over Babylon, saw the integrity and value of this man who had so boldly spoken the word of God. The king was preparing to make him the prime minister, which meant that Daniel would have been the most powerful man in the entire kingdom, next to King Darius himself.

But Daniel's enemies were angry. They were jealous. Yet they could find nothing wrong with him. They knew they couldn't stop Daniel, unless they had something concerning him and his God. So they convinced Darius to sign a decree that no man could call on any god except the king for thirty days.

What did Daniel do? He didn't change a thing. He prayed anyway. The trap had been laid, and the king was distressed because even he could not change his own decree. So he sent Daniel into the lion's den. But God shut the lions' mouths, and Daniel was delivered.

It is worth noting that God did not keep Daniel out of the lions' den. He had the power to, just as surely as He has the power to keep you out of any hardship that you potentially could face. But God will allow His people to go through difficulties.

Everyone on this planet faces hardships in life. Everyone faces difficulty. But Christians have the hope that no matter what, God will see us through. That is the great message resounding from the lions' den. God will be with us in the midst of our adversity and difficulties.

REACH OUT AND REACH UP IN SUFFERING

Rick Warren — March 31, 2015

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” (1 Peter 2:21 NIV)

Every person who reads this will face tragedy at some point in your life. You’ll have loss — major loss — in your life. None of us can escape tragedy.

Jesus, God’s Son, sure didn’t.

And Jesus didn’t just give us a model in his life. He gave us a model for handling pain in his death. He modeled what you should do during the worst day of your life. The Bible says in 1 Peter 2:21, *“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps”* (NIV).

Two years ago — five days before Easter of 2013 — my youngest son took his life. It was the worst day of my life. I’ve been asked many times how I’ve made it through the past two years. I looked to the model of Jesus. That answer is Easter.

So what did Jesus do during the worst, most painful day of his life on Earth?

1. He reached out to friends. On the night that Jesus knew he was going to be arrested, tortured, and executed, the last thing he did on the earth was gather with his closest friends. Jesus didn’t ask for speeches or advice. He asked for their presence. Most of the time, we do just the opposite when we’re experiencing pain. We pull away. That’s just dumb! God never meant for us to go through pain on our own. That’s why you need to be involved in some sort of small group environment in a local body of believers.

2. He reached out to God through prayer. You need friends in times of trouble, but you need God even more. God will be by your side when no one else will. Jesus did this in the Garden of Gethsemane. And in doing so, he gave us a terrific model for prayer during suffering: You affirm God’s power. (Pray something like, “Lord, you can do anything.”) Second, express your desire. (“I don’t want this pain.”) Third, submit to his will. (“Don’t do what I want; do what you want.”)

You weren’t designed to go through suffering alone. As times get tough — and they will — reach out and reach up.

You’ll be glad you did.

Talk It Over

- ◆ Do you find it more difficult to reach out to God or other people during times of trouble? Why?
- ◆ Why do you think it’s so important to affirm God’s power in the midst of difficult times?

THE TRUTH ABOUT SHADOWS

Rick Warren

One of the common sources of stress is loss. You can lose your freedom, your health, your money, your reputation, or a loved one.

When people go through loss, there are always two common reactions. One is fear, and the other is grief. Grief is good. Grief is the way we get through the transitions of life. In fact, if you don't grieve, you get stuck! Grief will not kill you if you let it out.

On the other hand, fear is a bad thing. Not once in the Bible does it say, "Grieve not," "Sorrow not," "Weep not," or "Cry not." What it does say is "Fear not." And it says that 365 times! Because grief doesn't paralyze; fear does.

David says in Psalm 23:4, *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me"* (ESV).

Shepherds always carried a rod and a staff to protect their sheep. David knew that, in the same way, God has the tools to protect him, and he trusted him, even in the darkest valleys.

Some of you are going through the valley of the shadow right now — maybe the valley of the shadow of death. It may be the valley of the shadow of debt. It may be the valley of the shadow of conflict. It may be the valley of the shadow of depression. It may be the valley of the shadow of discouragement.

Shadows are scary. Remember how you used to be afraid of shadows when you were lying in bed as a kid? I've learned a few things about shadows.

First, shadows can't hurt you.

Second, shadows are always bigger than the source.

And — here's the good news — wherever there's a shadow, there has to be a light. You can't have a shadow without light. So the key when you're going through the valley of the shadow is to turn your back on the shadow and look at the light. Because as long as you keep your eyes on the light — Jesus, the light of the world — the shadow won't scare you.

That's how you go through the valley of the shadow of death. That's how you lower your stress. You trust God in the dark valleys, just like David, who prayed, *"When I am ready to give up, he knows what I should do"* (Psalm 142:3a TEV).

Talk It Over

- ◆ What are the shadows you've recently been facing? Why are they so daunting to you?
- ◆ How can memorizing Scripture help you face the fears in your life?
- ◆ Why do you think fear stresses people out?

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

*One night I had a dream.
I dreamed I was walking along the beach
with the Lord.*

*Across the sky flashed scenes from my life..
For each scene, I noticed two sets of
footprints in the sand,
one belonging to me, and the other to the Lord..
When the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that many times along the path of my life
there was only one set of footprints.
I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest
and saddest times in my life.
This really bothered me
and I questioned the Lord about it:
“Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,
you’d walk with me all the way.
But I have noticed that during the most
troublesome times in my life
there is only one set of footprints.
I don’t understand why
when I need you most you would leave me.”
The Lord replied:
“My precious child, I love you and would
never leave you.
During your times of trial and suffering,
when you see only one set of footprints, it was then
that I carried you.”*

by Mary Stevenson