

## CHAPTER 15

A summary of the book...  
**“SHATTERED DREAMS”**  
by Larry Crabb

**It is the dream of every believer to be TRULY HAPPY and feel excited about life.** The Health-and-Wealth Gospel has devolved into a gospel of “*wish-fulfillment*.” Paul writes, “If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world” (1 Cor 15:19). As Christians, we need to believe God when He promises to work everything for our good that happens to us – both in our lives and in our souls. We all cling to the *false hope* that happiness we were created to enjoy is available here and now... that hope can become a narcissistic, obsessive quest for the spiritual fulfillment we assume we are entitled to. We deny the truth that our deepest desire of fully felt union with God largely remains unsatisfied. The shattering of our deepest dream of “*fulfillment in the present*” becomes the unexpected pathway to genuine happiness. (viii-xi)

**God truly wants to bless us** (Jer 32:40-41). As His beloved children, there is never a moment in all our lives when God is not longing to bless us. At every moment, in every circumstance, God is doing us good. He never stops. It gives Him great pleasure. God is not waiting to bless us after our troubles end. *He is blessing us right now*, in and through those troubles. He is giving us what He knows is good... though we do not always agree. We cannot stop wanting to be happy – our souls long for whatever we think will provide the greatest possible pleasure. Our problem is that we are not yet fully aware that an “*intimate relationship with God*” is that greatest pleasure. In our foolishness we look for that experience in all the wrong places. We dig “*broken cisterns*” to satisfy our thirst and walk right by the fresh spring of water that is God.

**An encounter with God is what we really want – we just don’t know it.** We dream “*lower dreams*” and think there are none higher. We dream of good marriages, talented kids, health and money to enjoy life, rewarding work – and for some reason, we think they are the best things. That is what God means when He calls us “foolish.” The greatest blessing is not the blessing of a “good life,” it is the blessing of *an encounter with God*. We don’t see things that way; we almost always mistake lesser pleasures for this greater pleasure and live our lives chasing after them, so God goes to work to help us see more clearly. *One way He works is to allow our “lower dreams” to shatter* – He lets us hurt and does not make it better. The Holy Spirit uses the pain of shattered dreams to help us discover our desire for God. He leads us into the depths of our being, into the center of our soul where we feel our strongest passions. It is there that we discover our desire for God. Shattered dreams are not accidents of fate; they are ordained opportunities for the Spirit to awaken us to our highest dream – an encounter with God. Through the pain of shattered lower dreams, we wake up to the realization that we want an encounter with God more than we want the blessings of life. Our shattered dreams (suffering) are an opportunity to be embraced, a chance to discover our desire for the highest blessing God wants to give us, an encounter with Himself. (1-7)

**God told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in WEAKNESS”** (2 Cor 12:9). We want God to give us power/victory over our weaknesses and troubles... but God normally gives us the power/grace to *endure them*. Paul was taken up to the third heaven and God revealed some incredible things to him – things that made him vulnerable to pride. As such, God gave Paul a significant weakness (great suffering) to keep him humble. Man is prone to becoming *proud* when things are only positive; so God gives us weakness (suffering) to *humble* us – [think about that] – difficult humbling trials

serve to make us more like Christ. Paul's thorn in the flesh was a constant humbling presence of some painful suffering. God sends hardship into our lives to keep us humble – totally dependent on God (not ourselves or our circumstances). *Humility is far more important than our comfort.* It is not in victory that we are made more like Christ, but in difficulty, trial, and suffering. Reflect upon the words of **John Newton's** hymn, "I asked the Lord" – it speaks powerfully to our suffering and its purpose:

*I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith and love and every grace,  
Might more of His salvation know  
And seek more earnestly His face.*

*Tw'as He who taught me thus to pray  
And Thee I trust has answered prayer,  
But it has been in such a way  
As almost drove me to despair.*

*I hoped that in some favored hour  
At once He'd answer my request,  
And by His love's constraining power  
Subdue my sins and give me rest.*

*Instead of this He made me feel  
The hidden evils of my heart,  
And let the angry powers of Hell  
Assault my soul in every part.*

*Yea more with His own hand He seemed  
Intent to aggravate my woe,  
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,  
Cast out my feelings, laid me low.*

*Lord, why is this, I trembling cried,  
Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?  
"Tis in this way," the Lord replied,  
"I answer prayer for grace and faith."*

*"These inward trials I employ  
From self and pride to set thee free;  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy  
That thou mayest seek thy all in Me."*

**The man's life was "pleasant" – he attributed it to his faith.** So he said, "This will soon pass. God is faithful. Life will again be pleasant." His worship remained shallow... God allowed more unpleasant things to happen in this man's life – "*I will be patient,*" thought the man. His worship became a way to convince God to restore his pleasant life. God was not pleased. The man's life became more miserable. Finally, the man got angry. *God still did not move.* The man became increasingly convinced God was becoming increasingly indifferent and uncaring; thus the man could only think of better yesterdays, not of better tomorrows. *He finally lost hope.* God had withdrawn His blessing. The man fell into depression, and his worship stopped. God was not pleased... so He released the forces of hell into the man's life. Temptations once manageable, now became irresistible. The man finally "begged" for help – "You owe

## FAITH vs. FEELINGS

The dynamic of the flesh is *FEELINGS*; the dynamic of the Spirit is *FAITH*. As human beings, when we don't "feel good" our inner self become dark, anxious, discouraged, depressed, dissatisfied, angry, and full of pain; in short, we feel miserable and set out to do whatever we can to make ourselves "*feel better*." One of the reasons we don't like temptation is that it is a very uncomfortable feeling. We would love to just be able to push the right button and experience instant deliverance and feel better; but that is not the economy under which we live. Since feelings are a by-product of our thoughts, the key is to walk by the Spirit and think right thoughts (Phil 4:6-9). When "*anxiety*" rules in our hearts, peace and joy exit, and discontentment and frustration enter. Our initial response to temptation as believers is to "pray" that God would simply take it away – after all, we don't want to sin; so why should we be subjected to the "hound of hell" beating on us until we finally cave in to it? There is a reasonableness to that argument, but it completely misses out on "*God's purpose*" for temptation – God uses temptation to test us, to prove us, to purify us, to purge the sinful dross that remains within us, to humble us, to strengthen us in our faith, to mature us in Christ, to conform us to the image of Christ, to sanctify us, and to keep us mindful of how weak we are in and of ourselves, and how much we need His mercy and grace. So to expect God to operate in a way that runs contrary to His purposes, is foolish – it is simply not going to happen. Thus anxiety will reign in our hearts until we determine to "fight the fight of faith." When we truly trust God – believe Him, walk by faith, walk by the Spirit – instead of being overwhelmed by our anxious feelings, we will experience His peace and His joy (Phil 4:6-9). Therefore our problem is a "*faith*" problem, not a "*feeling*" problem. Obviously, when we are *feeling good*, nothing feels better... but the reality is, good feelings quickly grow wings and fly away, especially when we are confronted with trials and temptations. The biggest problem we have with this thing called "feelings" is that we so desperately want to "feel good," that we actually think it is God's supreme desire for us. The flesh would have us believe that *God genuinely desires that we feel good about ourselves, and that we are really happy and content* – that may sound good, but that is not what Scripture teaches, and it is not God's supreme desire for us. Sadly, this wishful thinking, Santa Claus kind of theology, is very popular here in the West; people buy into it – hook, line and sinker – because that is what they really *want* to hear (2 Tim 4:3). I have heard many professing Christians say, "I could not believe in a God who did not want me to feel good about myself and be happy in life." Yet that is not what Scripture teaches. The Bible teaches that God, above everything, wants us to enjoy *Him* and live a life of faith and obedience – those two positions are radically different from each other. Though God does care about our feelings, they are not His *primary* concern; they are of *secondary* importance. By the way, those who enter into an intimate, joyful relationship with Christ, and live a life of faith and obedience, experience far more peace and joy and contentment and happiness than anyone else in the world – why? because such things are the *by-products* of right living.

me help! I don't deserve all this that has happened to me! This pain is not my fault! It's Yours!" God was not pleased, so He even let new struggles come into the man's life. The man finally concluded, "I have no choice but to conclude that *God is not good*." The battle waxed hot. But a flicker of hope remained. "I'm trying to maintain faith in you, God – doesn't that impress you? if not, what does?" God was not

pleased. So He allowed the man's trials to continue unabated. He provided the man no comfort. God had a greater dream for the man than a return to a *pleasant life* – He wanted the man to find *true joy*. The fog around the man's soul thickened... and all that was left was the mystery of a bad life and a good God.

**He remembered Jacob – so he began to fight!** For the first time he cried out to God to “*Bless me!*” “Bless me! Not because I am good and deserve your blessing, but because You are good. You owe me nothing. I appeal only to who You are.” He still saw his pain... but now he also saw God. It was a cry for whatever God wanted to do. The man felt something different – it was the beginning of humility. *The man had forgotten himself and discovered his desire for God.* Fresh water bubbled up from a spring in the desert of his soul. It was a dream of actually knowing God and representing Him in an unpleasant world. He had never before felt grateful for his troubles. *His suffering became to him a doorway into God's heart.* Suffering actually made him feel closer to God. The man thought, “My soul is thirsty – a pleasant life is not water for my soul; whatever comes from God – this is the only true water, and this water is enough.” *The man worshipped God, and God was pleased.* So God kept the water bubbling up out of the spring in the man's soul. When the man failed to drink every morning from the spring, or return every evening to drink again, his thirst became intolerable. Some things in his life got better, some stayed the same, some got worse. But the man was dreaming new dreams, greater dreams than merely a pleasant life – and he found the courage to pursue them. He was now a man with hope, and that brought him joy... and God was pleased. (8-12).

**Larry Crabb: “Sometimes God seems like the ‘least responsive friend’ I have.”** My real problem with God becomes apparent when long-held and deeply cherished dreams are shattered and He does nothing. And these are good dreams, not dreams of money and fame. We long for a job we really like... to serve God in a fruitful way... but nothing happens. Depending on an unresponsive God in the middle of crumbling dreams can be tough on one's faith. *Live long enough and dreams important to you will “shatter.”* Some will remain shattered. God will not glue together the pieces of every Humpty Dumpty in your life. The divorce will go through... cancer will claim a loved one... Alzheimer's will not be arrested... broken friendships will not be restored despite your best efforts to reconcile... your marriage will not be satisfying no matter how many counselors you consult... your singleness will not be tolerable... your ministry will not be gratifying. You will feel low for a long time... the dark tunnel will lengthen with no end in sight. You will be miserable... *AND GOD WON'T DO A THING* – that's the problem with Him. (13-21)

**When dreams shatter, we hurt and the pain won't go away.** But it can be numbed for a time by working hard, seeing lots of movies, dining out a lot, sometimes a regime of rigorous self-discipline, sometimes a season of private pleasures. Whatever the means, the goal is the same – *Handle Pain!* Find some way to keep going in spite of the hurt. Don't think about it. Stay strong. Do whatever it takes – spiritual retreat, leaning on family, talking to a counselor, reading books, whatever – handle the pain! The question is, “*What do we do with how we are feeling toward God?*” What we want is good. Why won't God let us have it? He promised us an abundant life – we are not seeing the abundance. In the midst of the pain of crumbling dreams, God so often seems to pull away. *When we cry the loudest, He sometimes turns a deaf ear.* When we pray earnestly for relief, He sometimes adds new pressures to our pile. And nothing improves inside us. We pray for love, joy, peace – and feel anger, despair, and fear. It is hard to escape the fact that God is not coming to help us – He is unresponsive to our pain.

**Crabb's thoughts here remind me of an “Old Papa Polar Bear” who once took his son fishing.** The story goes like this – after the old bear and his little cub were out on the ice for a couple of hours, and hadn't caught anything, the little fella finally looked up at his dad and asked him a question, “Papa,

am I one hundred percent polar bear?” Old papa bear looked down at his son and said, “Sure you are, son... my father was a polar bear; my mother was a polar bear; and all of our descendents were polar bears.” The little guy still had a “puzzled look on his face,” and said, “You sure, Papa?” At that point old papa bear looked down at his son and said, “Yes, Son, I’m absolutely positive! Why do you ask?” “Well,” the little cub said to his father, “I’m freezing!” Sometimes each of us as believers might begin to wonder whether we have the “*spiritual DNA*” we’re supposed to have – it happens to all of us when we go through seasons of darkness, especially when God is silent and unresponsive... but it is during these times that God is doing a very significant and painful work in our lives... our faith is being tested, and some of the dross is being purged from our hearts. *Keep seeking Him during those dark times – the sun will shine in the morning.* God never stops the work He is doing in us. Never! He fully understands our anxieties, and won’t suffer us beyond that which we are able to endure (Heb 12:11; 13:5; Jam 1:2-4; 1 Pet 4:12, 18; 5:10; Phil 1:6; 1 Th 4:3; 5:24).

**Trusting God is dangerous business.** In his college days, *Ted Turner* trusted God. When a loved one contracted cancer and, in spite of his prayers, died a painful death... he turned from God. He could no longer depend on God. He was right. *God cannot be trusted to always minimize our suffering in this life.* When dreams shatter, we lose hope. When the capacity for soul-pleasure is lost, we become irresistibly attracted to “*lesser pleasures*” – power, popularity, sex, prowess in business or sports, eating, drinking. That is my problem with God – to people whose souls have been inundated with pain, God seems so unresponsive. We pray and nothing happens. The problem sincere Christians have with God often comes down to a wrong understanding of what this life is meant to provide. We assume we are here for one fundamental reason: *to enjoy life and have a good time* – if not good circumstances, then at least good feelings. We long to experience a compelling pleasure that eliminates all pain. We give up immediate pleasure in order to later experience a deeper kind of pleasure – but we expect to feel that pleasure soon, certainly before we die. We insist on the internal good time of peace, of self-respect, of feeling at least pretty good if not fully alive. Sometimes all that separates believers from unbelievers is our understanding of how to produce those good feelings – *the pursuit of “soul pleasure” remains primary*; it continues to be the aim behind our choices. As long as our purpose is to have a “good time,” to have “soul pleasure exceed soul pain,” *God becomes merely a means to an end, an object to be used... never a lover to be enjoyed.* When God fails us – we feel betrayed, let down, thoroughly disillusioned. He neither reverses the tragedy nor fills us with peace and joy. He typically remains aloof... our souls remain unsatisfied... and eventually, we may even learn to hate Him. Going to church doesn’t help, and Bible study becomes boring. We lose hope. Nothing gives us a good time... things remain hard and we continue to feel bad.

**How are we to “find hope” when God’s kindness hurts, when bad things happen that God could have prevented?** We must discover a hope that thrives when dreams shatter, when sickness advances, and poverty worsens, and loneliness deepens. It is harder to discover our desire for God when things go well. Shattered dreams are the truest blessings; they help us discover our true hope. But it can take a long, dark time to discover it. Does Christianity genuinely offer anything in this life other than a good ethic to follow? Is there anything we can hope for in this life? Shattered dreams destroy false expectations, such as the “*victorious Christian life*” with no real struggle or failure. They help us discover true hope. Pain always has a purpose. It will not go away, without doing its work. It will stir an appetite for *a higher purpose* – *the better hope of knowing God well enough now to love Him above everything else, and trusting Him no matter what happens.* Suffering has an important function in this life – as nothing else can, it moves us away from demanding what’s *good*... toward desiring what’s *better*... until heaven provides what’s *best*. (22-33)

**When we think of “hope,” most often we think of things “getting better.”** In the Old Testament the idea of salvation almost always means deliverance from tough circumstances. That is the kind of hope we want. But then the writer of Hebrews goes on to talk about others who were “not delivered” – their gratification was delayed until heaven (Heb 11). Apparently God is pleased with people who suffer terribly, but who keep on trusting. What the Bible wants us to *hope for in this life* is very different from what most of us think. Some of our fondest dreams will shatter, and we will be tempted to lose hope. God will seem callous, or worse – weak; unresponsive to our pain. As we struggle with dashed hopes, we will fail, just as Peter did. You will then feel discouraged with yourself to the point of “*self-hatred*.” And God will seem to withdraw from you and do nothing. When this comes to pass, “*do not lose hope*” – a plan is unfolding that you cannot clearly see. What God is saying to us is this: “In the deepest part of your soul, you long more than anything else to be a part of My plan, to further My kingdom, to know Me and please Me and enjoy Me. I will satisfy that longing. You have the power to represent Me well no matter what happens in your life. That is the ‘hope’ I give you in this world. Don’t lose it.” (34-43)

**God could have done something, but He did nothing.** Why is God so inconsistent, so maddeningly unpredictable? A faithful missionary for sixty years recently died an agonizing death from lung cancer. He had never smoked a day in his life. His final days were spent screaming, “Where is God? I can’t find Him! All I can feel is darkness!” The Lord did nothing to preserve the dreams *Naomi* once thought were essential to her happiness (Book of Ruth) – if Naomi could speak to us now, she would probably report, “Everything worked out for the best. It was extremely difficult... but don’t let pain cause you to miss the power of shattered dreams to change your life for good, forever.” From Naomi we learn –

1. Our fondest dreams for this life must be “fully abandoned” if we are to know God well. Shattered dreams are necessary for spiritual growth.
2. Shattered dreams sometimes produce “excruciating pain,” and we emerge from the experience as “changed people” (though not always for the better). The pain is not evidence of weak faith; it is evidence that we are “normal.” Something wonderful survives everything terrible, and it surfaces most clearly when we hurt.
3. Some cherished dream will “crumble” in your life – that’s inevitable; no one makes it unscathed to the end. Whether we believe God caused the trial (as Naomi did), or that God merely allowed the trial, one thing is clear – God could have prevented the trial, and that fact creates within us a tension with God, which results in a battle with Him.
4. Only an experience of “deep pain” develops our capacity for recognizing and enjoying true life.
5. Most people never discover “true life.” Not many Christians drink deeply from the well of living water. As a result, our worship, our community, and our witness are weak.
6. The past is “irreparable,” but no matter what happens in life, a wonderful new dream is always available, that if pursued will generate an unfamiliar, radically new internal experience. That experience, strange at first, will eventually be recognized as *joy*. (44-51)

**We like to remain “naively happy.”** Other people get cancer, suffer through divorce, lose their jobs, and experience a friend’s betrayal. With adolescent maturity we declare that “*God is good*” when we ace a test or when a biopsy comes back negative – and when blessings come, we should of course enjoy them. In His mercy, God takes away the good to create an appetite for the better. It comes down to this: God’s best is available only to those who are willing to sacrifice the merely good. If we are *satisfied* with good health, responsible children, enjoyable marriages, close friendships, interesting jobs, successful

ministries, we will *never hunger* for God's best. Furthermore, we will never really truly worship. Only a few people believe an "*intimate relationship with God*" is the greatest blessing – and those who believe that appear to have developed that conviction only through *suffering*. Happiness must be stripped away, before joy can surface. Most Christians can envision nothing higher than "*circumstance-dependent happiness*" – marriage, children, nice house, health, financial security (what every culture calls "the good life"). When this kind of happiness is not experienced, life can be very depressing (actually, downright miserable). Naomi called God "Shaddai," the Almighty One, the invincible mountain, the force that cannot be resisted; God does what He wants – we can do nothing but endure His choices. And we conclude that most tragedies are a discipline for our wrong choices or for some other reason, but *whatever the reason, tragedies are God's doing. He could prevent them, but He doesn't*. Happiness is taken away, and is replaced by despair. *God is working when we see nothing but darkness*. We are being taken to an experience of joy along the path of suffering – there is no other way to get there; God is creating within us an appetite for a "*better dream*." We cannot rush the process – the water of life will find its way down the mountain to fill the lake from which we can drink. (52-59)

**Gautama Siddhartha one day announced he was "Buddha"** (the awakened one), when he gained the insight that the way to end suffering is to end desire. Buddhists seek to "*feel less*" when confronted with pain... to find some way to deaden the desires that bring pain. Jesus taught the opposite – His way is to *awaken a passion within the soul* that transcends all other passions. So instead of deadening the pain, He emphasized deepening the desire. Gautama Siddhartha made it his life's mission to understand suffering and discover its solution. His awakening consisted of the "**four noble truths**" –

1. Life is *suffering* – suffering is the gap between what we desire and what we experience.
2. The cause of all suffering is *desire* – people suffer because they don't experience their desires.
3. The way to end suffering is to end desire – if you want nothing, then nothing can disturb you.
4. Spend your life learning to eliminate desire – Gautama's "eight-fold path" shows you how.

**Jesus directs us to a different path.** He tells us to not let our hearts be troubled; He teaches that –

1. Life includes suffering, but life is good – in this world everyone will suffer tribulation.
2. The cause of all suffering is *separation from God* – we are deceived into looking elsewhere for joy.
3. The way to handle suffering is to *discover your desire for God* – then everything, both good and bad, becomes redemptive; everything moves us toward the God we desire.
4. The new life provided through Jesus must be accepted as a gift of love – we spend the rest of our days discovering our desire to know God better, and we come to realize it is a desire whose satisfaction no shattered dream can thwart.

**Remember what "brokenness" is – it is the awareness that you long to be someone you are not and cannot be without divine help.** Never pretend to God or to yourself that you *feel* what you don't or that you *are* what you are not. Be completely honest with yourself and God. No one discovers the fullness of their desire for God without entering the fullness of "*lesser desires*." We must feel the soul-piercing pain of disappointment and despair before we can enter the depths of our souls. Beneath our troubled emotion is a desire for God that in rich measure can be satisfied now. Every Christian, no matter the depth of his pain, can discover that desire. It takes time, agonizing time, characterized more by despair than hope, but discovery can be made. *Don't let your hearts be troubled – in the middle of shattered dreams, discover*

*a desire that Christ pledges Himself to satisfy.* The desire will surface like bubbling water from a spring that can no longer be held back. When that desire is discovered, we wake up to a new world of passion, a quiet world of genuine rest – spiritual disciplines become our favorite things to do. People who insist on happiness never find joy; they only allow themselves to feel those desires that are met. The effect is to feel happy for a season, but it is a selfish happiness. They live for the ongoing satisfaction of desires other than the desire to know God. They become “*self-absorbed.*” God stripped Naomi of happiness to prepare her for joy. *Desperate people* discover that desire – happy contented people never do. (60-72)

**Everything helps me to God – He causes “all things” to work together for good in the believer’s life.** St. John of the Cross found “light” in his darkness, knowing God was at work in ways he could not see. Impatient Westerners want “*quick sanctification*” – bring your soul to a counselor/pastor and get it fixed right away. Wisdom knows the deep workings of the hungry, hurting, sin-inclined soul and patiently follows as the Spirit moves quietly in those depths, gently nudging people toward God. There is no Concorde that flies us from immaturity to maturity in a few hours – there is only a narrow, bumpy road where a few people walk together as they journey to God. Naomi was on that path... she was not doing well... life was very cruel and difficult... she couldn’t shake the feelings of depression... and she was mad at God... she believed she was a victim of His ruthless sovereignty. It was at a point like this that **Ted Turner** dismissed God, and learned to live like a functional atheist – “*There is no God I can depend on; He offers me no real help.*” Churches are filled with worshipers who have reached that conclusion.

**Believers need to know that “God’s Spirit” is working quietly in their souls,** redeeming everything that has happened to direct them to Himself. We need to interpret all of life’s hardships not as problems to fix, or struggles to relieve, or pains to deaden, but as important elements in a much larger story. Believers need to accept wherever they are on the journey, whether happy or miserable, as the place where God will meet them, where He loves them, where He will continue to work in them. *The last thing suffering saints need is to hear sermons that leave them feeling scolded and pressured and falsely hopeful, because biblical principles are presented as formulas for making life work.* God never stops His work of making His children aware of a dream that remains alive beneath the rubble of every shattered dream, a new dream that when realized will release a new song of joy in our hearts. (73-80)

**The function of pain is to carry us into the inner recesses of our being that wants God.** We need to let “*soul-pain*” do its work by experiencing it fully. If we deny how badly we hurt, we remain unaware of our desire for God and aware only of “*lesser desires.*” We need God. He is all we need. But until we realize that fact, we experience lesser desires as “needs” and devote our energy to arranging for their satisfaction. That is the essence of “*addiction*” – addictions are not the product of psychological disorder; they are not the expression of internal damage caused by difficult backgrounds; they are rather the fruit of the flesh, that natural tendency in all of us to fill our empty souls with some pleasure other than God. Obedience to God is a fruit of the Spirit’s revealing the sweetness of Christ to our spirits so that we actually enjoy obedience more than sin.

**When the deepest desire we feel within our hearts is for something “other than God,” a spirit of entitlement develops.** We see ourselves as needing something we don’t have and we believe we should have. Whatever brings satisfaction relieves pain for the moment, then creates deeper emptiness, that in turn clamors for even greater relief – the will then becomes a slave to whatever *god* makes us feel better. Only “*true worship*” expresses our deepest freedom, but we do not properly worship until we discover our deepest desire for God. The decision to live for whatever brings instant pleasure turns us into addicts (alcohol, porn, being obsessed with growing great kids, closing the next big deal, accomplishing the next



big task, etc). When second-place desires become first-place priorities, we don't discover our core longing for God. *The flaw is in the premise – God wants us happy.* Our generation wants what it wants *now*. Unsatisfied desire has become to us like a bad toothache that demands quick relief at any cost.

**When Shaddai allows terrible pain to come into our lives, He is removing “some satisfaction”** that keeps us happy and content whether or not we know God well. He is taking away “*good food*” to make us hungry for “*better fare*.” When the pain of shattered dreams helps us discover our desire for God, God seems to disappear. His absence becomes obvious, and we discover how badly we long to know Him. It is this frustration of our desire for God that deepens it. We cry out, “How long, O Lord, before you deliver me from all my distress?” The psalmists were realistic – they didn't see God as a divine vending machine that could be manipulated. Naomi endured ten years of pain and suffering... ten years with no visible evidence of God's involvement. But it is in the midst of pain that she ultimately discovered her desire for God. It was then that she faced the truth that there was no other answer. To whom else could she go? *Only God has the life our souls so desperately need.* In the midst of our pain, we come to really believe that. So we abandon ourselves to Him... and wait. There is no formula for making it happen.

**No longer do we live for blessings; no longer do we pray, “God, here is what I need; give it to me!”** We learn to say, “God, whoever You are, whatever You do, that is all I want. I demand nothing. I will wait for You.” If you are seeking God in the middle of shattered dreams, but are having trouble finding Him, be encouraged that it bothers you. The more you are bothered by not finding Him, the more aware you are becoming how badly you want Him. Abandon yourself to Him. Let the cross bring you confidence that He is with you and will reveal Himself to you. When you realize that your desire for God is the most passionate yearning of your heart, you are in the spiritual condition to recognize God's hand when He makes it visible. To paraphrase Naomi's words: “*The Lord has not discarded me. He has always been there, but now I can see His kind heart at work. My pain is still real, but now something matters more.*” She did not give herself over to lesser pleasures. She refused to settle for inferior joy. She did not become an addict. When God moved, her heart leaped. But, as is so often the case, when God began to visibly move in Naomi's life, He did not create a smooth path. There was more Naomi needed to learn before she could worship. Through the agony of shattered dreams, her soul was ripped open so she could discover her desire for God. Now she needed to discover God's desire for her. (81-89)

**All of us are trapped by “addiction” to a desire for something less than God.** For many *women*, that something is “*relational control*” – “I will not be hurt again, and I will see to it that what I fear never happens.” For *men*, it is more often an addiction to “*nonrelational control*” – “I will experience deep and consuming satisfaction without ever having to relate meaningfully with anyone.” Men keep things shallow and safe; their commitment is twofold – to never risk revealing inadequacy by drawing close to people, and without breaking that commitment, to feel powerful and alive. Power in business and illicit sex are favorite strategies for reaching that goal. *The only cure for addiction is the “gospel”* – we will not find the power to resist the pull toward “*lesser desires*” until we discover a more powerful desire that we long to fulfill, a desire the Spirit creates within our hearts when the Father forgives us. We must discover our *desire for God* – as we discover that desire, we come to see that we cannot pursue God and a lesser source of pleasure at the same time. The desire for God and the desire for anything else are competitive – only one can serve as the “*guiding rule*” of life.

**When we attempt to serve “two masters,”** we end up bowing before the one who is more apparently responsive to our needs and hating the other. An hour of porn reaps more immediate dividends than an hour of prayer. We will not win the battle against addiction without discovering *our desire for God*.

Therefore, if you want to know God, welcome shattered dreams. Nothing reveals our desire for Him so effectively. But we must also discover *God's desire for us* – God is constantly at work in our lives... all with the purpose of breaking us, so that we might become formed to the image of Christ. Only a fulfilled desire for God provides the power to consistently resist the lure of lesser pleasures, and to stay anchored in Christ when life's storms rage.

**How do we experience the reality of God?** That is not easily answered. It was really much easier when we were satisfied with “lesser things.” Until we realize how badly we need God, how empty we are without Him, we can enjoy a kind of happy indifference to whether we discover Him. For many people, when things go reasonably well, they feel pretty good. When their path hits a bump, they pray and things get better. They expect God to do something, and He does. Why does God seem to provide for the “*pleasantly committed*” and withdraw Himself from the “*seriously committed*”? In *Exodus*, every time the Israelites complained, God blessed them; He straightened things out. But, in *Numbers*, when they were farther along on their trek to Canaan, God changed tactics, and usually refused to bless them.

**Who wants to become “mature”?** Answered prayer seems to be more frequently reported among younger Christians. God, it appears, accommodates our immaturity not to keep us there, but to give us a confidence in His Presence that will sustain the search for a deeper, more relational expression of His Presence. The farther we travel on our spiritual journey, the less responsive God becomes to our requests for a pleasant life. Things go wrong and God does nothing. He becomes the elusive God. *Live long enough and important dreams will shatter — things will go wrong that God will not fix.* He could fix them, but He chooses not to. Then, when the pain of unmet desires puts us in touch with how desperately we long to discover the gentle *Presence of God* in our lives, we become more aware of His absence. From the depth of our being we then cry out, “God, where are You? Don't You care? Let me find You!”

**It is one thing to discover our desire for God; it is quite another to discover “His desire for us;”** to know with absolute certainty when life is at its worst that His Presence is real, that He is with us, and that He really cares. We discover God's desire for us, first, by looking at Scripture. God exists – He exists both in heaven and on earth. Most important, He exists in us. Therefore, our search for God is an “inward” search. *Silence and solitude are essential to discovering His Presence.* We must block out the noise of life and become aware of our interior world if we are to find God. Beneath every heartache, moral failure, shattered dream, a divine Presence is waiting to be discovered. Only when we discover a desire for Him that is stronger than our desire for relief from pain will we pay the price necessary to find Him. If we are to encounter the divine Presence, we must enter the interior sanctuary of our heart, and like Jesus in the temple, become indignant over what we find. There is no way to God but through the rubble of our lives. The process is what spiritual people call *BROKENNESS and REPENTANCE.*

**We must let our souls live in a “private monastery,”** in an attitude of contemplation that helps us see that all of life is sacred, where we remain alert to the Spirit's revelation of ourselves and God. When life gets tough and God does nothing, the Spirit is telling us that this world is not our home – He is exposing the rubble that must be cleared away. If we fail to be quiet enough to hear all that the Spirit is saying, we will be in danger of discovering *our desire for God* and never discovering *His desire for us.* When we first met Naomi, she was living the pleasant life of the immature, the good life of the untested. Then her world fell apart. Huge dreams were shattered. She was heartbroken with life and bitter toward God. God was moving, but she couldn't see it. Then, her daughter-in-law (the widow Ruth) met Boaz, a rich relative who could make new dreams come true. Naomi's hope returned. Her desire for God to move in her life was reawakened. When we discover our passion for God, He reveals His passion for us. First,

we are reduced to exhilarating humility, to an interior darkness, a silencing darkness, that lets us see God in the richest way He can be seen in this life. (90-98)

**More than ever before, people are self-consciously “hungry for God,”** for spiritual renewal, for deep satisfaction of the soul. The search to discover God requires that we “*abandon ourselves,*” that we give up control of what matters most, and that we place our confidence in Someone we cannot manage. As we respond to our desire for God by looking for Him, we make a fundamental assumption: it is this – *God can be experienced!* In our shallow, sensual way of looking at life, we tend to measure God’s Presence by the kind of emotion we feel. But the Spirit’s invitation to experience God appeals to something far deeper than easily produced emotions – it appeals to a capacity of soul that carries us toward a higher dimension than mere emotions can reach. *True abandonment,* giving ourselves to God in utter dependence on His willingness to give Himself to us, pleads only mercy. It allows no room for control. Only suffering has the power to bring us to this point. Followers of Christ live under His mercy always. We serve at His pleasure as well, not ours. There is nothing we can do to make Him show up. We merely invite Him to do so. God chooses whether or not to respond. We are entirely dependent on what He wants to do.

**When in the midst of terrible pain we cry out to God, we abandon ourselves more to Him...** then a confidence emerges, a sense of His Presence, that only the awakened spiritual capacities of the soul can identify. Writes Iain Matthew: “This confidence is a kind of companionship and inner strength that walks with the soul and gives it strength.” *To the degree that pain teaches us that our deepest desire is for God, we will abandon ourselves to Him.* We will do whatever it takes to create an awareness of space in our souls that only He can fill. And in His mercy, we will find a confidence developing that He is there, that He has indeed entered our space. The soul’s capacity to abandon itself to God and to enjoy confidence in Him is a capacity that the Spirit’s companionship inspires. It develops most fully when our capacity for “*lesser pleasures*” is frustrated. As the process slowly unfolds, we become aware of God’s desire for us. (99-106)

**God never promised us a rose garden until heaven, but sometimes life here and now is just too hard.** Things that matter so deeply to us, sometimes don’t seem to matter at all to God. Sometimes it is difficult to get past the thought that *real love would not let us suffer like we do.* It is hard to think of an absent nurse as caring. There are basically “three options” to mounting an assault on an unresponsive God:

1. Dismiss Him, turn from bad thoughts about Him to no thoughts at all. Handle life as best you can with your own resources.
2. Confess anger at God with how He handles things as blasphemous irreverence and heinous rebellion. Remind yourself that God is the Almighty Sovereign Lord of the universe, then kneel before Him. That is the hardest option. It requires that I smother my soul, that I kick the life out of myself in order to get along with God.
3. Scream and holler until the terror of life so weighs you down that you discover solid ground beneath your feet. The solid ground... is Him. God is not mad at us. He is not indifferent. He is not helpless. His character is love. Right now He is “cutting the wedding cake,” eagerly awaiting the Father’s signal to clear a way for His return. If we believed this, we would rest. Jesus is restraining Himself from ending our pain, for reasons we cannot fully understand. Rather than sorting through His reasons for not responding as we would like, we are encouraged to focus on the passion that makes it difficult for Him not to swoop down in power and solve all our problems. A close look at what Naomi told Ruth

might help us see that our unresponsive God is really a restrained lover. Don't let your heart be troubled; rest with confidence in His love. (107-114)

**God's restraining has a purpose.** From our perspective, he could do something... but He does nothing to deliver us from our pain. Why? To deepen our desire for His Presence, to strengthen our passion to pursue Him, to help us see how preoccupied we are with filling our God-shaped souls with something less than God. Only when we want *HIM* as we want nothing else will there develop in our hearts a space large enough for Him to fill. When our discovery creates a secret space that nothing else can fill, and when we know that to be true... *He will enter*. Through the pain of shattered dreams, God is awakening us to the possibility of the pleasure of His Presence – that is the nature of our journey; it is what the Spirit is doing.

**The *SECULAR JOURNEY* ends in this life** – this world is home to secularists; they are not pilgrims passing through. The primary purpose of those on the *SPIRITUAL JOURNEY* is neither to enjoy this life, nor the people they meet, nor themselves – it is rather to enjoy God. At best, the *secular man* feels good about this life; at its worst, he views this life as disappointing. The *spiritual man* on his journey to God experiences an appetite that is never fully satisfied; eventually he discovers his desire for God is stronger than all other desires. *Making his life more comfortable is a secondary concern*. Satan's masterpiece is not the prostitute or the skid-row bum – it is the “*self-sufficient believer*” who has made his life comfortable. (115-124)

**We want people, including ourselves, to *FEEL GOOD*.** We further assume that if there is a God, His job is to do what we cannot do to make life work as we want. But, suppose we believe God is “not” committed to making our lives work well enough for us to feel good... that God is “not” cooperating with us to make life work so we can feel now all that He has created us to feel. There are two problems with that view: One, better circumstances can never produce the joy we were designed to experience; only an intimate relationship with Perfect Love can provide that joy. Two, in this life, we can never feel what God intended us to feel, at least not in full measure. To be completely happy, we must experience “*perfect intimacy*” with Perfect Love – that will not occur until we get to heaven. Therefore – we cannot count on God to arrange what happens in our lives in ways that will make us feel good; but we can count on God to patiently remove all the obstacles to our enjoyment of Him.

**God is committed to “our joy,”** and we can depend on Him to give us enough of a “*taste of that joy*” in spite of how much pain continues to plague our hearts. God's intense desire is to intimately relate with us. For His desire to be realized, He must remove the obstacle within us that, more than any other, stands in the way of intimacy with Him. That obstacle is this – we devote our central energies to *feeling better* and to justifying whatever does the job. The belief that there is no higher good than feeling better now – this is the single biggest obstacle to our enjoying God's Present. The Bible calls it the *FLESH*.

**When life is hard and we feel bad, we turn to God to change things** – if not our circumstances then at least our emotions. When He proves unresponsive, we naturally turn and seek out some method to *ease the pain*. To realize what we most “deeply want” – *to feel good* – is not a viable option in this life. God simply won't permit sinful human beings to go through life “feeling good” through false gods and false beliefs. Why would he bless sinful human beings with such a quality of life? Good feelings would then become the basis for our joy. In this world, the dream of feeling as good as we want to feel will shatter. Shattered dreams create the opportunity for God to work more deeply than ever before, to further weaken our grasp on our empty selves. It is through “*pain*” we are made aware of our real needs. When dreams shatter, we resolve more than anything to “*feel better*” – that resolve is the *FLESH*. (125-141)

**The FLESH – it is the way we think; it is the energy that pushes us to do what we do;** it is the energy that drives us to evaluate everything that happens in our lives according to how it makes us feel. We are victims of a fickle world, an unresponsive God, a variety of insensitive people. Our chief aim is to *feel better* – that is the way of the flesh: something bad happens... we hurt... we feel unhappy... we long to feel good... we ask God for help... God is unresponsive... we are resolved to feel better... so we do whatever we can to make that a reality (eating, entertainment, sex, sports, shopping, travel, television, etc.).

**The way of the SPIRIT is this:** we long to feel good, but we trust God; His pleasure matters more than our own, so we abandon ourselves to His pleasure; we live to please Him; and at some point we discover joy. We shift from walking in the *flesh* to walking in the *Spirit*, when the pain of life destroys our confidence in “*our ability*” to make life work – that is the experience of *BROKENNESS*. (142-149)

**Lesson #1 on Brokenness** – The good news of the gospel is “not” that God will provide a way to make lives *easier*... but that He will make our lives *better*. We have a hard time understanding the nature of our journey through this life – we still think that things should go well and that we should feel good. The closest friends of Jesus had the same problem – they assumed He would free their nation from Roman oppression. It made no sense to them to think that Jesus was not committed to feeding them well, keeping them healthy, and restoring their status as a special people. We also expect things to go well, at least not too badly. We are looking for a way to feel good now. When dreams shatter and God does nothing, we move in one of two directions – either we *rebel* in some form, or we try to *become spiritual* enough to experience peace and joy. Either we enjoy the pleasures of sin or we strive to arrange for the pleasures of His Presence – the first is doable, but stupid; the second is impossible. *We continue to think life should work well and we should feel good*. The nature of our spiritual journey, we assume, is that God’s glory will be revealed in our prosperity (financial, relational, physical or emotional). It seems so natural to think the Presence of Jesus has no greater purpose than to *improve the quality of our journey through life*... with quality defined as a pleasurable, satisfying, self-affirming existence. If dreams never shattered, we would continue to believe that lie and value only what God can do for us now. In addition, we would not be willing to pay the devastating price required to experience His Presence now. Without suffering and trials, only spoiled brats would enter heaven.

**Lesson #2 on Brokenness** – When God seems most absent from us, He is doing His most important work in us. We should encourage pastors to publicly admit when they don’t “*feel*” God’s Presence; furthermore, they should also share the deep letdown that strangles their souls during those “*dark nights*.” It is a normal experience. It is part of a good journey. Seasons of personal suffering are opportunities for God to do His deepest work. When the dark night comes, we tend to numb our desires, seek relief where available, get mad at God, eat too much, feel afraid of God, or busy ourselves. When dreams shatter and God disappears we need to realize that He vanishes from our sight to do what He could not do if we could see Him. In the spiritual journey, I know of nothing so difficult to believe – but it is true. Think of those three hours of darkness on the cross – Jesus screamed in agony, “*God, where are You?*” And God said – Nothing! It was during that exact time God was in the Son reconciling the world to Himself!

**Lesson #3 on Brokenness** – It is not always good to be blessed with the good things of life. Bad times provide an opportunity to “*know God*” – blessings alone can never provide that. Healthy, normal people feel wonderful *when good things happen*. They should. But *when things go badly*, do we get mad at God? Do we question Him? Do we voice our displeasure? Suffering is required if we are to discover a desire for God strong enough to help us decline the world’s invitation to an immediately good time. Remember the flesh’s argument: *God made us to feel happy*. When we don’t “*feel happy*,” nothing

matters more than finding some way to feel happy or feel good. When things go well, we may think “happiness” is our birthright. Only *trials* have the power to break that argument. Only *pain* exposes our commitment to happiness for what it is, an arrogance that displaces God from His rightful place. So God teaches us three important lessons about *faith* through brokenness –

1. The journey to God will always, at some point, take us through darkness where life makes no sense. Life is not easy; it is hard – sometimes very hard.
2. The felt absence of God is a gift to gratefully receive. During those seasons of darkness He is doing His deepest work in us.
3. Feeling good is not the goal. When we feel bad, we have the opportunity to do battle against the enemy within that keeps us from entering the Presence of God with no greater passion than to glorify Him. *Faith* is about looking beyond our circumstances to a person. (150-156)

**True obedience to Christ springs from a “deep passion” for Christ.** No one can choose to feel genuine affection when they feel mad or indifferent. So, where does passion come from? In our day of “*feel good Christianity*,” we have come up with a wrong view of our spiritual journey. We think of suffering as something abnormal, as evidence that we “*lack faith*.” We work so hard to escape suffering that we fail to realize what good things might be happening in us as we suffer. *The pain created by trouble carries us into the depths of our being where everything revolves around us*; it is a place we actually believe God has failed us, that He has given us a raw deal. Our deepest desire is for a kind of life only mercy makes possible, a life only grace provides – a life that is *from* God, *with* God, *for* God. “Lord, only You, on Your terms, can satisfy my soul. Like Jabez, I ask that you bless me. I ask that you satisfy the highest dream my heart can envision – an encounter with You.” The dream to experience God rises from deep within the soul quickened (broken) by suffering. (157-163)

**When God said, “I will never stop doing you good,” He meant it.** He delights in doing His people good (Jer 32:40-41). I believe that is true. But still we cry, “*Lord, help my unbelief!*” There is no higher dream than experiencing God as He moves through every circumstance of life.

**Martin Luther struggled with seeing Christ as his best friend.** He once wrote, “I expect more from Kate my wife than from my sweet and blessed Savior; yet I know for certain that neither she nor any other person on earth will or can suffer that for me which He has suffered. Why should I be afraid of Him? *This foolish weakness of mine grieves me very much.*” Then he added, “Oh! His grace and goodness toward us is so immeasurably great, that without great assaults and trials it cannot be understood.” That has been my experience as well. How does that coincide with what you have experienced?

**We naturally think we would appreciate God’s immeasurable goodness if we could measure it by fewer trials and more blessings.** Good friends make our lives easier, not harder – so we think. But God insists that in our suffering He is doing us *good*, a greater good than relieving our suffering. *The problem is with our blessing-based, happiness-centered understanding of goodness.* And with our small idea of goodness, we dream small dreams, and small dreams lead to small prayers. Luther’s idea of God’s goodness was different – it was big, so big that “without great assaults and trials” it could not be understood. Here is how Larry Crabb puts it – (164-172)

*We will not encounter Christ as our best friend, as the source of all true goodness, as the One who provides the sweetest pleasure to our souls, until we abandon ourselves to Him. And full*

*abandonment, real trust, rarely happens until we meet God in the midst of shattered dreams, until in our brokenness we see in Him the only sufficient answer to our soul's deepest cry.*

**Christianity is not primarily about escaping hell and going to heaven – it is about “knowing Jesus.”**

If Luther is right – that only in suffering do we learn to fully delight in God’s goodness – then it becomes immediately clear why our enjoyment of God is so shallow. *We don’t like to suffer.* We actually arrange our lives to minimize suffering. And we believe Christianity offers a God who will cooperate with that plan. **J. I. Packer** looked over the modern church and observed: “There is something narcissistic and, to tell the truth, nutty in being more concerned about *godliness* than about *God*.” We struggle to believe that God is our greatest pleasure! How can this be?

**Listen to the testimony of “Augustine,” arguably the church’s greatest theologian after Paul.** As a young man, Augustine struggled with sexual lust. Despite his best efforts, he could not control it. The commandment to confine sexual activity within marriage was not a light burden to him. It was a maddening demand that only made his problem worse and stirred his sinful passions. He felt completely powerless to change. *He knew what was right, but he could not do it – that reality tortured him most.* He was crushed by his inability to do what God required. God’s holiness and his sinfulness were the chief sources of his torment. Augustine identified the exact center of his battle as his inability to enjoy God more than sex. Freedom came for Augustine – when he “*encountered God!*” It was an encounter with God that provided more pleasure than sex – “*Lord, You are sweeter than all pleasure!*” Only a thrilling, soul-pleasuring encounter with God that generates more pleasure than sin will free us from our addiction to sin. God longs to give us an encounter with Himself. It simply requires that we enter the pain of living in a world where good dreams shatter. (173-179)

**Perhaps you are aware of how badly you long to “experience God.”** You want to enjoy Him and know His power. You want to change and find the strength to resist sinful urges. You are reading your Bible, praying, attending church, and even serving – all good activities that can contribute to spiritual formation. You want to “*encounter God and experience His joy.*” To do so, begin by asking yourself two questions:

1. How do I think about GOD? Scripture tells us that God is “*absolutely holy.*” Our culture now thinks of God as being more “paternal” than “holy” – that means we are more apt to view God as being “strict but understanding,” as opposed to being “justifiably enraged.” Few Christians view God today as an irate judge who violently hates our sin – He is now more flexible, more tolerant, still insistent that we measure up to at least some of His standards, but gracious and understanding when we don’t. It’s what **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** calls “*cheap grace.*” So, we reduce the holy God of passionate wrath to a fatherly God with strict standards – and we do it in the name of grace. Many dismiss God’s standards by attacking them as holdovers from legalism. God has now become the “*helpful God*” of useful principles – as such, we spend our religious energy seeking to know the principles a helpful God provides for handling our lives; principles that will make our lives better. The result is that we never encounter God.
2. How do I think about MYSELF? Most Christians believe their happiness, and having a sense of well-being, matters more than anything else. We believe “*self-interest*” is a virtue – God tells us it is the essence of evil, that *God* is the point, not us. Our evil demand – that our sense of well-being be honored above God’s glory – deserves punishment. It arouses God’s wrath. We want our own way – in His justice, God is going to let us have it – hell is the enjoyment of our own way forever! Most Christians see themselves as “*minor offenders*” who perhaps deserve a scolding, but not a whipping!

In our Christian culture, we have weakened our understanding of personal sin, and focused too much on our longings and needs. We want to “*feel good*” about ourselves; we long for enjoyable relationships. “*WE*” become the point and we see nothing really wrong with it. Because we focus more on “our longings” than “our evil,” we see ourselves not as hopelessly arrogant, worthy of eternal misery, but as scoldably selfish, deserving of a *slap on the wrist*. We admit that our minor offenses warrant a *reprimand*, but we really believe that if someone knew what we have been through and the pain we feel, the scolding would actually give way to a *sympathetic hug*. Yes, we struggle and make some mistakes, but given our hurt and how poorly the people in our lives have responded to our longings, our struggles are quite understandable. If God really loves us, then He ought to “helps us.”

**When understandable strugglers meet a “helpful God” of useful principles,** they use Him to make their lives more comfortable. But they never experience a “deep change” in their inner soul, and as such never encounter God as their greatest pleasure. Their experience of God remains shallow – *they simply remain spiritual narcissists, self-centered people who live only to “feel better.”* By the way, that is the “norm” in western Christianity.

**When arrogant people who know they deserve “eternal misery,” tremble before a holy God of passionate wrath, they “discover grace.”** They encounter the depths of God’s kindness and love, and they fall on their knees and worship Christ as Lord and Savior. They know they don’t deserve a hug, no matter how badly they are hurting... but they get an eternal one anyway! That is the grace that takes their breath away. With abandon they seek God... and they are startled when they discover that their interior worlds are changing. *They discover that they actually want to obey God.* They become spiritual people and dream the dream of knowing Christ even better. As such, they welcome shattered dreams as friends. They learn slowly. More dreams must shatter before they experience their deepest joy in Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the pain of shattered dreams to help us discover our desire for God. The journey to joy takes us through shattered dreams. (180-189)

**SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS** – The enormous challenge of trusting a seemingly unresponsive God, requires a change in how we naturally look at life. More than ever before in history, believers assume we are here for one fundamental reason – to have a good time; if not good circumstances, then at least good feelings. *Furthermore, we “invent biblical strategies” for seeing to it that our dreams come true. When our life’s purpose is to “have a good time, to have soul-pleasure exceed soul-pain,” God becomes merely a means to an end, an object to be used, never a lover to be enjoyed.* It is hard to discover our desire for God when things “go well” – we may think we have, but more often all we have found is our desire to use God, not to enjoy Him. Shattered dreams destroy false expectations, such as the “victorious Christian life” with no real struggle or failure. They help us discover true hope.

**We like to remain naively happy – when we signed on to the Christian life, that is what we thought the deal was.** We do what we are told, and God stacks presents under the tree. With adolescent maturity we declare that “God is good” when we ace a test or the biopsy comes back negative. When blessings come, we should of course enjoy them. Apparently, only a *few believers* in any generation believe that the weight of “*knowing God*” is a blessing far greater than any other. And those who believe it appear to have developed that conviction only through *suffering*. Happiness must be stripped away (forcibly), before joy can surface.

**We don’t like to suffer.** We see no value in suffering. We arrange our lives to “*minimize suffering.*” And we believe Christianity offers a God who will cooperate with that plan. The cure for every form of slavery to something other than God is “*worship*” – worship that creates deep pleasure in the One who



receives it and the one who gives it. Only a thrilling, soul-pleasuring encounter with God that generates more pleasure than sin will free us from our addiction to sin.