

In His Hands

My Father taught me his priorities of life as he had acquired them. By all means preserve and protect self first, then family, and then, if time, of which there was little, to the needs of others. Be a hard worker. Exceed all expectations. Never quit! Most importantly, provide for my own needs, without burdening or needing anyone else. The simple rule of life was the harder you work, the better your life will be. Moral instructions were relative to neighbor. What God thought of things seemed unimportant to him.

My Mother would drag us to church, occasionally, when we were young, but I remember mostly the bowling afterwards. We did not pray at dinner. I never recall seeing scripture in our house. I was taught to live by the Boy Scout rules of life, excluding the word: *reverent*. Aside from that, we never spoke of morality.

As I grew through my youth, I became a product of my teaching. I excelled in most everything I tried, finished high school, went straight on to college, got a good job, found my wife, and began a family, all with little or no hitch. There was neither need nor room for God in my life. I could do this all on my own. Most of those whom I met along the way, who referred to themselves of Christ, I saw as far less moral. I saw them as weak, and liars. I would dismiss the reoccurring nights where I would awake in sweat over the thought of death. I went on as if oblivious to such thoughts of life ending some day. As if there were to be no end.

By my forties, I had created the good life. The American dream comes true. I had become an owner of my own business, with worldly possessions coming my way beyond my imagination. An ostentatious house, apartment building investments abounding, two airplanes, the best of cars, a cabin in the mountains, all the pleasures of life were mine. Who needed God anyway?

I had the best of everything or so it seemed. I all too easily succumbed to the lies of my world. That is what is so delusional about relative morality. There is

always someone by whom one can justify his or her ugliness. Working 80 hours a week seemed good and right, regardless of the time necessary for my children. An occasional lie was no big deal? Everyone lies, don't they? Surely we all do! A bit of adultery. Who would mind? All those around me were partaking with such pleasure. Why not me? After all, did I not deserve a little pleasure for all my hard work? When self is at the center of being, the affect to others matters little.

One would have thought I might have turned my head toward God when Charlie, my oldest son, came home from college to tell my wife and I that he had been molested by my best friend for the past decade. Why didn't I know? The many long days and nights at the office didn't give me the time to hear my son. I can't tell you how this tore me apart. It ripped at my very being, at the depths my inner soul. The trust given and the violation felt by a best friend. I wanted to kill. Our family was a wreck. But, I somehow got by the matter, sending my molesting friend to jail, my son to years of counseling, and a life of doubt of any self-worth. Perhaps my pride prevented me from looking to God in the midst of this horror. What was happening to my American dream? This horror. Why was it upon me? How I wish now I would have looked God's way.

A year later or so I had another chance to look God's way. My Brother, struck with diabetes from childhood, had a life of suffering. By the time he was forty, he had a kidney transplant, a failing heart, far too many visits to the hospitals, and then blindness. He had two lovely daughters, full of life and beauty. His only real pride. His blindness had evidently been caused by the blood vessels to break in the back of his eye. Somehow, one day the blood had drained returning his sight. He called me at my office to tell me that he awoke with his eyesight returned. Sight lost and gained!

I encouraged him. Now that he had his sight with no certainty of its permanence, he must do whatever he missed doing. He must not let this second chance at sight pass. He said he had always wanted to see Hawaii with his daughters. I told him to do it now, even if he hadn't the money, I would pay for such, to just do it now while he had the chance. The weeks passed, and he never got around to it. I anguish how we humans let important things slip easily.

It was late one Friday evening, when my wife and I got the call. My Brother and his daughters were involved in an accident on their way to visit us in Lake Tahoe. We took the long drive to the hospital. His oldest daughter of 21; a wonderful human, great friends, great student, in the prime of her life, had been killed. One of the most difficult things I have ever had to do in my life was to go tell my wounded Brother. It was unbearable wheeling his wheelchair to her casket. But, I somehow got by the matter; the funeral; the hospital stay; and the trial for the drunk driver. With vivid realization of life's uncertain length, one might think I would turn to God.

We had really become quite good, as the children of a military officer, to be independent and strong and to get through anything, to stuff pain, relying only on ourselves. What could God do? How I wish I had looked God's way.

Possessions had become my security. I had everything the world says one should need. My business was more monetarily successful than I could have ever imagined. My material cup ran over. My long-term retirement set in plan and place. I had anticipated cash from my apartments to provide for me in my old age. Why would I need God to provide?

I had taken all my excess earned cash flow and invested it in highly leveraged real estate apartments. The tax laws provided shelter for such investments. My thought was, as rents increased over time and my loans were paid, the income gained would provide for a wealthy retirement. In the eyes of the world, I had it made. But things without warning changed. Perhaps my source of provision was not so reliable!

I didn't predict that the tax laws would change. I didn't plan on the government removing the tax deduction. I was faced with an irresolvable dilemma. I had either enough money to pay my mortgages or pay the government, but not both. These were my only two options. I chose to pay my mortgages first as this was my first commitment. This was especially difficult in the midst of a nationwide real estate slump. As time would have it, I ended up at the office of the Internal revenue service with a demand for hundreds or thousand of dollars in taxes,

penalties, and interest. The IRS advised me to go bankrupt and pay them first, or warned that they would take every material thing I owned.

My pride and sense of commitment wouldn't allow such. I must get by this on my own. I could not fail. I wasn't raised to fail. And so, over a period of several years, I worked harder and harder. Everything earned was to go to the IRS. NO matter how hard I worked, the IRS eventually took everything I owned. House by house, car by car, item by item was sold until I had little left.

I recall my daughter, Jenny, and I crying the day we sold our fishing boat. We loved our times in that boat. I promised her, someday, she could pick out a new one. I recall my children asking me why I broke my promise to never sell our cabin in the woods. It was our only evidence of real home. It was our only family gathering place. I could not keep my word. How could I tell them to keep their word and me not keep mine? Everything I owned, that had provided me the delusion of security, was lost. Worse was that I was failing in my duty as a father and provider. I wasn't raised to fail.

For the next several years I endured the miserable, unkind, uncompassionate, and, at times, even dishonest hands of the Internal revenue service. Everything I owned had been sold. I was now a renter. Every extra dime went to pay the taxes. Years of struggle and financial hardship passed with twice the work, twice the time away from my family (now of seven). Years of suffering and yet, I still didn't turn to God. What could he do? I just needed to work more hours. How I wish I had looked his way.

It was nearly over, or so I thought. I had only a remaining balance near \$200,000 in taxes and penalties and interest remaining to pay. A fraction of what had been collected. I had been working for years now for the IRS. It was a grueling time. But I could see light at the end of the tunnel. Soon it would be over. Soon, **I would work** myself out of this IRS bondage. I just need to work more. Or so I thought.

My partner and I found, with our business growing, the need to hire an additional accountant for the accounting office of our business. He interviewed and hired

an accountant recommended by our independent accounting firm. Other than meeting with her occasionally and saying hello as I walked by her office, I really didn't have time to get to know her. After a few months of her employment, she informed my partner that she wasn't happy with her work. It involved more of her time, she said, than anticipated and wanted to leave. She agreed on a June departure date, three months away, allowing us time to find a replacement.

However, she lied. A month later, without notice, she abandoned her job. And left without notice. We were good to our employees so it took us at surprise. A few weeks later, we received a letter from her attorney. She had spent the last month of her employment going through five years of our accounting records. She was looking for error. She made careful record of the amounts we paid to our working children. She made record of the lunches we took with friends that were charged to the business.

A new law, under the Ricoh Act, had been created to punish drug dealers. It basically allowed accountants to be paid from recovery, if they reported evidence of tax fraud found at an employer. She was making claim that she found such fraud in our records and was suing us for hundreds of thousands of dollars. She claimed that she was terminated, though she quit without notice, because her employer asked her to perform functions that were illegal. She threatened that if we didn't pay her, she would give our records over to the IRS.

We thought the suit was a joke. Having experienced other frivolous lawsuits, we simply turned the matter to our attorneys. This was especially difficult for me because I just spent years enslaved to debt to the IRS. I didn't know if I could work any harder. Her attorney said he wouldn't take the trial to a jury of businessmen, for he knew it was common for businesses to take the deductions we were taking. Common does not make right. He said he would take the trial to a jury of the poor in Oakland, and tell them how we cheated them out of their tax dollars. Our attorneys advised us to settle. Sick and disgusted as we were, we gave the accountant \$75,000 to go away and leave us alone. She took the money and agreed to destroy her copy of our records. But she didn't leave the matter. As if evil, after taking our money, she gave our records anyways to the Internal revenue claiming we were tax frauds. Her plan now was to extract even

more money as a reward for turning over our records.

I was out of town when I got the call. The Department of Justice had stormed our offices with badges, guns, and threats. They confiscated all of our tax records. It happened without notice, with embarrassment to our staff, and to our families. I felt like I was immersed in a bad movie. This couldn't be happening to me.

The next thing we knew all the principals of our business, our in-house accountant, our independent CPA, and some of our associates were being investigated, we were told, by a grand jury for prosecution for tax fraud.

Again, we thought it was a fluke or, at least, a very big mistake. We soon found ourselves with individual criminal attorneys. I turned my records over to the best attorney in these matters, in my opinion, in the country. It cost me tens of thousands of dollars to just begin the process of having my issue reviewed. What hell!

I assumed this would also pass in time with more hard work and much more frustration. Some American dream! A few weeks later I took my family to Disneyland and arranged to meet with my attorney while the family was at Disneyland. When I went to meet with my attorney, who was a lead attorney for the Department of Justice before private practice, he advised me that I had a problem. I thought he was going to tell me that I had to pay yet more taxes but he didn't.

He told me, he was certain that I was going to be put in jail for a term of 2-4 years. He told me that there would also be significant civil and monetary penalties charged to me. I can't tell you how this tore me apart to the bottom of my soul. He told me that the items turned over to the government, if taken on their own, in an individual tax audit, would probably result in a simple tax bill and penalty payment. But, when five years of data were stacked in one pile, it looked of tax fraud, and that the laws were such that I could and would be found guilty. I can't tell you how empty and unprepared I was for this moment. I was in shock and in denial.

I appealed to my attorney's conscience telling him I never so much as had more than a traffic ticket in life. I always did what I thought was the right thing. Always got independent legal and accounting advice on every deduction taken, and did nothing different than what others were doing in nearly every daily business. He said it didn't matter. I could not rely on my attorney's or C.P.A.'s advice; that it was my signature of the tax returns; that I would be held accountable for such. He told me that my C.P.A. was also under Grand jury investigation for offering illegal advice.

I left his office stunned and numb. How could this be? How could this happen to me? Now came the hardest point of my life. Over the years, I had lost my brother, his daughter, my son was molested, my houses and possessions were taken away, while my wife endured it all the while, staying by my side, loving me in spite of all. Now I had to take my wife in my tears out of the Disneyland hotel room, look into her eyes, and tell her I was a complete failure, that I was going to jail for reasons, at the time, I knew not why.

I had finally hit bottom. I couldn't take it anymore. I had failed in every aspect of life. I considered suicide. My wife was distraught and feared for me and herself and my family. I fell on the floor of the closet in the hotel room, in early morning anguish and tears. I turned to God. I prayed for God to help me. I promised to read the Bible ever day of my life, if he would rescue me from this sentence. I have never had a more bottom of soul conversation with anyone that I had with God that day.

I began reading the Bible daily. In a few months, I found myself aware of my sins. In repentance for so many things, I soon I made covenant with God himself to follow Christ in my living. The reading and praying continued. Daily, I began to see the errors of my way. I began to understand that I was living a life of lies that I had cheated in my taxes and in so many other parts of my life.

In ways many of you perhaps are doing the same. In ways that are thought little lies, common cheating, ways that can become big problems. Problems you might not even imagine. I began allowing God, through repentance, to change

my ways. The little things became big things. My orientation, my way of seeing, my way of listening had changed. Integrity became important. Character became the issue. Accountability to God in my living became foremost. Family and others were set before self. I continued reading and praying daily. My priorities had been altered.

In the meanwhile, though with groaning, I had become okay with the fact that I was going to prison. On the way to work each day, I would pass by a prison, pull over to the side and cry. But somehow, I had come to feel that if it was the Lord's wish, that if there was His work for me to do in prison, I would go. Perhaps there were others in prison for Him to help.

This loss of all material things, and public embarrassing caused many who said were my friends to abandon me. There is nothing like a place of suffering to find true friends. I began fellowship with two my two remaining friends who vowed to care for my family and children in my absence. My wife continued her steadfast love and support, never leaving my side.

Almost a year had past and it was nearing the date that I would have to leave. My wife and I had joined a couple for dinner. My wife ordered Champagne. We didn't drink much so the champagne was a surprise. So I questioned why the Champagne? She told me to sit down, that she had something to tell me.

She said in tears that our attorney called that day to tell us that, to his unexplainable surprise, that in all his years of this work, he had never seen anything like this that the government had called to let him know that they were dropping all charges against me. That I was free. God had set me free. It was an unexplainable moment of joy and tears. I knew in my soul the source of this restoration. I could never forget it. How the tears of joy flowed from me. An answered prayer. A miracle! Freedom from bondage. The beginning of restoration. Nothing of my doing but relinquish. Thanks be to God.

As God spoke to me, over time, I began making other changes within our business. Integrity and honesty became foremost. My priorities had changed from money, self, family and others without God; to God, family, others, and

self, with money off the list.

All the growth in the business, necessary over the years to pay the tax bills, required more time from me at work. It created conflict with my priorities. I prayed for help and resolution but saw no out. Our business could not be sold, as there was no one interested. My partners did not take well to my newfound interest in integrity. At times, and I found myself more and more in conflict, in a kind way, with them. I found myself yoked with people whom I had grown away from, and whose priorities were different. I prayed and asked for resolution, all the while keeping my promise of daily Bible reading.

Then things turned for the worse, or so I thought. I began having unexplainable physical health issues. I would have alternating days of loss of balance and consciousness, sometimes-hearing distortions, and loss of eyesight without notice. I began spending days upon days, months, upon months, with doctors of every kind to find the cause. None could be found. The symptoms kept coming, some requiring long recovery time. The doctors of all brands could not find the cause. My suffering would take me from my work.

I struggled a good deal in my prayer. I continued my commitment in Bible reading. I hired people to do my work and was forced to stay home. After a year or so of this continued and growing suffering, the day had come that I thought was my last. In one moment, with excruciating head pain, I lost my balance, most of my eyesight, and hearing. I prayed as I was rushed to UCSF med Center. I truly thought it was my last day.

A visiting doctor, who just happened to be at the hospital, performed a risk full test on my brain, to come and find a tear in an artery of my brain stem. My symptoms had been caused by stokes, blood clots shooting off into my head, formed by this torn artery. With the help of other angels, he that day performed one of five operations of such kind on my brain stem. They went in through my leg, through my heart, into my artery in my brain stem and placed a titanium sleeve to repair the artery. Though I was left with brain damage, partial eyesight in one eye, hearing and balance issues, the surgery was a miracle. My life had been saved. I had asked the doctor after the surgery how long I had. He said the

most we know of, is five years.

I could no longer work, though I tried. The damage and the balance and other symptoms made me mostly ineffective. Oh how I tried! I was now dependent most solely on others for my provision. I remained at home having to learn to let go of my business, and lean on others to keep it going. I had hired the wife of my best friend as my assistant a few months into my illness. She was another sent to my aid; doing everything, working day and night, at her expense for me to maintain our business with integrity and character. Her Christian values and steadfastness in belief and action are rare. It has been and is a blessing in my life to know her. She carried the business.

My partners and I, realizing that I most likely could not return, decided to try and sell the business. We had tried earlier but there was no interest. We hired a consulting brokerage firm who put a prospectus together to solicit interest for purchase. Another miracle. At least three major companies showed an interest. The business sold and at a price unheard of in our industry. My financial life had now been totally restored. Another answered prayer. Another Blessing. I found myself thanking the Lord now daily. I was removed from the yoke of my business and debt and freed to be with my family. Answered prayer. Another miracle. After years of bondage and struggle, I was being restored.

And so our business sold and I moved my family to Bainbridge to begin to work on whatever was to be of any recovery. I would jog, fall down, and get up and jog again to take my part in my health. I would pray and read scripture daily, and continue to try to live life as God would have me do so to the best of my heart and soul, but there was little sign of recovery. Brain injury and the healing of such in my case were neither in my hands nor in those of anyone other than God. And I was becoming depressed. Suffering may well be good for the soul, but the endurance of such may make one quite blind to the good. I was frustrated, depressed and somewhat angry with God.

A year had passed but I was none the better. God, why would you set me free from prison, restored me financially, given me my very breath from death by miraculous surgery, and then left me to suffer yet again? What possible use of

me could you be making? I sometime cannot even go to the bathroom without my wife's aid. *Why have you taken me from being whole physically to nothing? I feel like a slug. Useless! What are you doing? How can I possibly be of use and aid to anyone else? I am not doing this suffering thing anymore. I am giving up. I cannot take it any longer.*

That very day my 11-year-old daughter, Katie, comes up to me in the office and asks if she can talk. I set aside my grief and groaning and said. "Sure honey, what is it?" She says, Dad today they asked us to write a report in school about a Hero of ours and I picked you. I said in utter astonishment; "me, why me, I am but a slug!" She replied: dad, for years you have been suffering now. You have never stopped trying to be kind. You have never stopped fighting for life. You have never stopped trying to help others even though sick. You are the strongest man I have ever seen. You are my hero."

I sobbed with inner tears. I knew almost instantly that God had used my weakness to teach my daughter strength in a way no book could teach her. God also had used my daughter to strengthen me and give me new hope. Over the days I was able to hear God explain to me how my suffering moved me to be compassionate with others suffering. He needed to teach me humility. What an incredible privilege the Lord has given me to understand why I needed be refined.

Okay God, I get it now; even in my weakness you want me alive. You want to use me for your good and glory. So I went off to the hospital again for anything of hope for improvement in my suffering. They put the sonogram on the main arteries of my brain only to tell me I had great flow. That of a 19 year old. They then placed the device on the artery of my surgery and the machine went dead. In a panic of both mine and that of the nurse, they went and got to doctor.

After another test they discovered that the surgery had failed, that I have only three now arteries to my brain. You have four. If the complete stoppage had occurred at surgery I think I likely would have died. But because a year or so had lapsed, the test revealed another miracle. Thousands of new arteries had fumed in my brain to replace the mission one. Hope in these new arteries for

healing.

“Okay, God, I get it now, you do want me alive. I will go do your work. Even though suffering, I enrolled in seminary. Sitting, at first with my head propped to the back wall, with brain injury in tact, I took on Hebrew and Greek, and worked for his glory.

It has now been over ten years since the surgery. Most of my symptoms have all disappeared. This year, 2008, in June, I finished my eight years of seminary with a Master of Divinity Degree, with the original thought and purpose of filling in for pastors tired and burdened.

Though, I occasionally preach in different venues, as and when called, I mostly now spend my time as a volunteer pastor to the downtrodden in prison where I work as their teacher, preacher, and encourager. I consider my work to be a privileged trust and humbly try to be accountable to God’s will and glory.

My sermons center on new life because I was given new life. I preach that Christ will set you free, because He set me free. I address accountable living to the will of God because I have learned that on my own I am lost. I speak of God’s refining fire to His glory and our good, because I have been refined, and I am being refined. In the end if we lose our life, we find life.

I have no doubt that God has much more in store for me, as I am a piece of Work. I neither welcome nor distance myself from the thought of suffering for a while, but I am everyday left humbled by the truth that He has chosen to restore me, to aliven me, to liberate me, to bring me joy and peace beyond what I could have ever before imagined. I am left speechless, in awe, grateful and willing. Here I am Lord! You can have my all. Take me.

“If my people, who are called my name, will humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from Heaven, and will Forgive their Sin, and will heal their land.” ***2 Chron***
7:14