

THE CALL

THE CALL came on Saturday morning, August 30, 2003.

After staying up late Friday night cleaning house, I was sleeping in and did not hear the phone ring. When I listened to the answering machine, Mom simply said to call Eric. I called Mom back to find out what was going on, and she again told me to call Eric.

When I called the home of my daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter, a stranger answered the phone. She told me my beloved daughter had been in a car accident. Angie was in serious condition. It was more critical than Eric realized, the stranger said. She told me that Sophie, my 11-month-old granddaughter, needed my husband and me to fly down there as quickly as we could. Then she cautioned me not to tell Eric how serious it was when I talked to him on the phone, because he was in the car driving to the hospital. She was afraid he would have a wreck.

When I called Eric, I told him we would fly to Arizona immediately. He was sobbing uncontrollably, and I wasn't sure he would arrive at the hospital safely. I told him to drive carefully because we did not need him to be in an accident, too. Sophie needed him.

Then I called a friend to track down my husband, Joe, at football practice. Dave, Joe's good friend and colleague, wasn't at home. His wife, Phillis, called him at the school and he delivered the message to Joe at football practice. I was half dressed when Phillis walked in the back door and asked if she could help.

She immediately sat down at my computer and made the plane reservations for Joe and me to fly to Phoenix to be at what we thought would be our daughter's bedside. The next flight would leave in about an hour and a half, and we were at least a 45-minute drive from the airport.

Phillis booked the flight. My neighbor Janet came in and said she would notify all of the day care parents for me, as I would not be there to watch them in my home day care the following week. The preacher's wife rushed to my aid. I had called to tell Lisa we could not go to Red Lobster with them that evening, and Joe and I would not be there to teach class Sunday morning.

Dave came in with Joe. He told Joe to pack and went to the bank to withdraw his own funds to loan to us so we would not have to take the time to get cash for the trip. When he returned, we put the luggage in Dave's car and left the three women in the kitchen to notify others and lock the house. We had been unable to reach our son, Mike. I had called and e-mailed, but there was no reply.

On the way to the airport the real nightmare began. Eric called saying Angie had died instantly. She had gone garage sale shopping early that morning. Phoenix/Mesa is a high traffic area. Angie was turning and going across a line of traffic. She could not see because of the bushes, trees and garage sale signs in the median. She pulled out in front of a Suburban whose driver was going at least 45 miles an hour.

Angie did not have her seatbelt on, probably flitting from one sale to another up and down the block. Sophie was at home with Eric when the accident took place. Everyone said that Sophie could not have possibly survived the crash, since her car seat was

demolished. We are extremely thankful that Sophie was not in the car with Angie.

To speed things up, we approached the curb side check-in and I whisper-stammered, "Our d-d-daughter d-d-died and we have to g-g-get on th-th-this f-f flight." The curbside attendant took us directly through, telling the baggage attendant inside to put our bags on the plane. He then took us to the gate where we would be boarding.

Just before we entered the plane, Mike called to see what was wrong. Joe told him his sister had died in a car accident. We had to board the plane then, and we would call him from Phoenix. Mike had just joined us in our wide-awake nightmare.

We rented a car and drove to the house. Eric was home and Sophie was taking a nap. It was all so unreal. We kept thinking we should wake up and find that this was only a terrible dream.

Eric's parents were able to make plane connections from Texas and arrived a couple of hours after we did. What a tragedy for them to see their son in pain which no medication could ease!

It was Labor Day weekend, and Eric had been told an autopsy would be required due to the holiday. The body would not be released until Tuesday.

Somehow we made it through Saturday, calling as many friends as we could. Joe and I were blessed to each have a cell phone. Eric's phone seemed never to be silent. His parents were on their cell phones notifying people, too.

Sunday morning I told Eric we would understand if he was not able to go to worship services. He said, "No, I

just as well get it over with.” He was not referring to worship, but the fact that everyone in the congregation would want to talk to him and tell him how sorry they were about Angie. I stayed home with Sophie, as it was a very difficult time for her. She missed her mommy. Angie had been breastfeeding her. She would not take a bottle, but fortunately she drank water from a cup. During the night I slept with Sophie, and she was somewhat comforted with a pacifier. I went to worship services that evening while Eric’s mom, Judi, kept Sophie at home.

Eric’s desire to worship God in spite of his extreme sorrow reminded me of Job. After hearing the news of the death of ALL of his children, we learn:



Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly (Job 1:20-22).

Yes, how foolish it is to charge or blame God when a loved one dies. In a later chapter we will discuss why God allows good Christians to die. For now, please notice the word “allows.” I did not say God “causes” Christians to die.

The funeral was in Arizona on Thursday, and the burial was in Lubbock, Texas on Saturday. Rather than fly Sophie to Lubbock, I remained in Arizona with her. Angie had not left her with other people, and Sophie had suffered such a great loss, one she will not understand for many years. I thought, "I know what Angie would want me to do. She would want me to stay with Sophie and shelter her as much as possible from the trauma." Mike stayed with me while Joe went to the graveside services with Eric and his parents.

The following week was spent packing everything in their home so Eric and Sophie could move to Texas to live with his parents in Olton. Joe had flown directly to Kansas from Texas, while I stayed to help care for Sophie and pack. Eric was so kind to allow me to sleep with Sophie every night. I believe we comforted each other. After a few days of kicking and screaming when she woke up, she settled down to a few whimpers during the night. I would reach over and pat her or help her find her pacifier. As I told her I loved her and that everything was OK, she rolled over and went back to sleep.

Eric is part owner in Bahama Bucks, and the other two partners urged him to stay with the business and either take time off or work mainly from home for at least a year, which he did. As this is being written, Eric has just moved to Shallowater, TX. We moved here two months ago to help care for Sophie. Eric has a much shorter drive to work in Lubbock, where his company's main office has been relocated.

How did I survive this past year? There is so much to explain that it will take the book to do it, and even then it will only scratch the surface. So many have told me that losing a child is the hardest death to face, and I believe they are close to being right. However, I

would never say it is any easier for a husband to lose his wife after being married only six years. With a child to raise, certainly there are many trials and fears to face. At the same time, raising a child can help ease the pain.

How will you survive when THE CALL comes to you? OR -- How are you surviving after receiving THE CALL? Certainly our physical family is a comfort to us in times of sorrow. Perhaps an even greater comfort is being part of God's family.

The song "God's Family" has a special meaning for those of us who have been enfolded in the love of our church family when we have been in extreme sorrow. For many, this sorrow is brought about by the death of a loved one. But there are other events that may bring about sorrow, such as learning that a spouse has been unfaithful.

My mother's sister told her that she lost two husbands, one through death and one through divorce. The divorce was harder because when her husband died, she knew he still loved her. But when she went through the divorce, she felt abandoned and unloved.

Regardless of the reason for our present suffering, we can be blessed by being a part of the Lord's church, our Christian family.

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another... Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep (Rom. 12:5,15).

There is no comfort in this life that can surpass the comfort provided by God and our brothers and sisters

in Christ. A more detailed study of God's family will be made in Chapter 3. As was mentioned in the Introduction, God comforts us so we may comfort one another (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).

How can we be prepared for an extreme tragedy?

1. Christians have access to the spiritual blessings offered by God. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." How do we get in Christ? Galatians 3:27 informs us, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."
2. Prior to explaining our spiritual blessings in Ephesians 1:3, Paul addressed his letter "to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (v. 1). Only faithful Christians can expect to be blessed with the ultimate blessings to which Paul has reference. When Paul says God blessed us, he is talking about the faithful brother or sister in Christ's body or church.
3. If we are faithful, we will study God's Word regularly. Paul admonished Timothy (and us) to: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).
4. The faithful spend time in prayer. Several pages could be filled with verses admonishing us to pray. Remember, "...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).
5. The faithful worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). In speaking to the Father, Jesus said, "...Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Jesus warned,

“But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). The word vain means worthless. Our worship is null and void if we add men’s teachings to God’s commands. This would include items of worship such as burning incense or adding musical instruments when God only commands singing as the type of music He desires under the new law.

6. The faithful are comforted as they worship with brothers and sisters in Christ. When we worship together, we are busy exhorting each other (Heb. 10:25). The word “exhorting” in Hebrews 10:25 comes from the exact same Greek word which is translated “comfort” in 2 Cor. 1:4. Christians speak in a caring, exhorting, comforting manner to one another. We also show our love in many other ways.

Surely the items above do not in any way exhaust the topic of living a faithful Christian life. How will we be better prepared for a tragedy if we are faithful? With faithfulness comes strength. We will have the spiritual strength to face a tragedy. We can be strong as Paul was when he wrote, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). God has promised, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5).

The wise man and the foolish man is a familiar parable. Jesus said the wise man “heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them” (Matt. 7:24). The rain, flood and winds represent the trials we must all face here on earth. By building our lives on Jesus and doing as He commanded, we will be ready to face the storms of life. The foolish man did not prepare his house for the storm. The foundation was inadequate.

When the storm came, his house fell, “and great was the fall of it” (Matt. 7:27).

Jesus taught that this parable illustrated how “Not every one that saith unto me [Jesus], Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

The time to decide life’s great and ultimate question is **before** the storm comes our way. When our lives are firmly committed to serving God, and our number one goal is to spend eternity in heaven, then we will face the storms of life knowing that we will not falter from that commitment.

By studying God’s Word in anticipation of life’s tragedies, we are able to “steel ourselves up inside” through the tremendous and true principles from God. Will you be ready to stand strong when the winds of trial beat against your life?

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it vital to be prepared before you receive “the call”?
2. What can each person do to be prepared to face a tragedy?
3. How can we know that God plays an active role in comforting Christians when they are grieving?
4. When Lazarus was ill, Jesus delayed coming. Lazarus died. Read John 11:33-44 and explain how Jesus reacted to seeing his loved ones in such great sorrow. How did raising Lazarus from the dead serve to prove Christ’s Sonship to a greater degree than if he had merely healed him?

Chapter 2....

THE NIGHT

Have you ever been outside at night in the country when the house lights were all off and the sky was cloudy? The clouds obscure the stars and moon, and it is very dark. Often we feel like that dark night when someone precious to us dies. It is an Alaskan night, with no daylight showing for ages.

Every Friday night for many weeks after Angie died, I cried because I would never get to talk to her on the phone again, as I had done so often on Friday nights.

I had returned to my home day care business. God blessed me with very good children that year. I only had three preschoolers in the morning for about six months. Three kindergartners also came in time for lunch. Fridays I cleaned my house with the help of a teenager, and then we went over to Mom's apartment to clean. Invariably, on the way home from Mom's there would be a big lump in my throat; I couldn't always wait until I got home before the tears began streaming down my cheeks.

It has been over a year now, and I still have the message Angie recorded, saved on our answering machine on Thursday, August 28, 2003. First you hear little "Da da da" baby sounds. Then the sweetest voice on earth proclaims in her sing-songy way, "Sophie says, 'Happy Anniversary.'"

Often when I go shopping, there are mothers with grown-up daughters - sometimes with one or two children. They laugh and smile at each other like mothers and daughters do. OH, how it hurts! Angie

and I loved shopping together. She delighted in the gifts Joe and I bought for Sophie. She once revealed that she told all her friends, “And when Mom buys a dress for Sophie, she won’t just buy a dress. She’ll buy matching socks, purse and everything to go with it.” I want to tell her, “Angie, I still do.”

In spite of the many tears I’ve shed throughout this past year, I have seen glimpses of the dawn. There are times of peace and joy, and these times increase while the dark night recedes.

A sunrise can be so beautiful. It brings hope with the new day. I cling to the promise that “... weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

How did I survive the dark night? The most crucial factor is a strong faith in God. We must cast our cares on Him, all the while being aware of our vulnerability and the manner in which Satan is eager to use our times of distress to cause us to doubt and perhaps even to leave the Christian faith. May we learn from Peter’s words in 1 Peter 5:7-9:

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in [experienced by] your brethren that are in the world.

Christian friends are vital during the trials of life. But even our unsaved friends provide a measure of comfort – knowing that they care about us because we have made an impact on their lives.

When a very close loved one dies, we can all be encouraged by the acts of love and kindness bestowed upon us by friends. Consider a few of these, and think of additional ways to comfort the grieving:

- After you pray for the grieving family – tell them you are praying for them.
- Go to the visitation, funeral or burial if it is at all possible. Our family was blessed to see many who had traveled hundreds of miles to be with us for the funeral and burial. You don't have to say anything profound. Simply, "I'm sorry," or "I care," means so much.
- Call or send a card. Don't merely sign your name to the card. Say you are praying for them. Comment on your friendship to the deceased or the grieving ones. Write about a happy time you shared with the departed one that the family may not know about.
- Take food to the home of the grieving family both before the funeral and shortly thereafter. When we were packing so Eric and Sophie could move to Texas, we greatly appreciated the food that was brought to the house. We did not have to stop packing to prepare a meal or shop. Food was also brought to our home in Kansas both while Joe was alone and when I returned.
- Think of other ways to help the grieving family. Tears came to my eyes when I saw a neighbor mowing our lawn. Many from the church in Arizona came to help with packing, and ladies even took care of the garage sale for Eric.

- Offer to assume a responsibility to make life easier for the family for a while. Lisa offered to teach my Bible class for a few months. It was a huge relief to me. Eric's business partners told him to take off as much time as he needed. He did a lot of work from his parents' home in Olton for the first year.
- Stay close after the funeral. Continue calling, sending notes (e-mail is great!) and cards, dropping by for a few minutes, etc. Show that you still care!
- Tell the family that you have not forgotten their loved one. It means so much to me every time someone tells me, "I remember when..." Talk with them about the loved one unless they are unable or unwilling to do so.
- Remember the family on special occasions. It is torture knowing that the departed one will not be calling for Mothers' Day or your birthday, and you can't call or see the loved one on his or her birthday or Christmas - ever again in this lifetime. A grieving woman needs a gift not for the sake of receiving a gift, but to know that she is loved and you care about how much she is hurting.

If you have gone through a similar experience, you can be a special help to those who are grieving. John K. Wills is a brother in Christ who lost a child, and was able to provide a comfort that others were not able to offer. Through God's providence, I became acquainted with John several months before Angie died. He had been writing lessons for students in fifth through eighth grades to go along with the Reproducible Work Sheet (RWS) lessons I write, publish and sell for first through fourth graders.

Because we left for Arizona so suddenly, I had not thought about taking my address book with phone

numbers. Neither did I have any of the e-mail addresses, which were stored on my computer in Kansas. But John and I sent e-mail messages often, as we were working together to teach children about God. So when I saw his e-mail to me on Eric's computer, I felt blessed to be able to "talk" to someone who had gone through a similar experience.

John e-mailed me and related how he and Pat had relied on each other and God's help when their son died. As they were thinking about me and praying for me, it must have caused them to remember so many painful things. Yet this is how we heal. As we help others, we also grow stronger. It doesn't happen overnight - or even in a year's time - when the loss is a beloved child.

John told me that it would not seem like time would help, but it would. He and Pat know. He told me that Angie would never grow old. I will always see her happy smiling face as she was at age 33.

Please read what John has written about his son, Mark, in Appendix A. When I thought about what John and Pat had gone through, and the fact that they remained strong Christians, it helped me face each dark day with a ray of light shining from his messages to me.

John did not quit writing to me when the funeral was over, the packing was done and I had returned home. For a long time we corresponded frequently. Some messages were just news we share about our families, or work we were doing together. Others were notes from me telling him how much it still hurts, and his reply - I know -- Pat and I have been there, and it still hurts sometimes. Knowing that John had continued writing Bible lessons gave me courage.

Another friend who has helped me through the darkest of nights is the woman who taught me the truth about God's Word, Dorene Carter. She is truly my sister in Christ, or maybe mother in Christ is a more accurate description. I called her on my cell phone often from Arizona so I could cry to her. She told me once that it hurt her as much as if one of her own grandchildren had died. Even though she has never lost a grandchild, I know she loves me so dearly that she shared my pain, and still does.

While I was raising my children, I often called Dorene for advice. She always had time for me. I know everything she taught me contributed to raising my children to become Christians. Dorene is a living, breathing version of Titus 2:3-5:

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children. To be discrete, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

Young women, if your own mother lives a long way from you, or if she is unsaved, find a mother in Christ to help guide you through the difficult child rearing years (1 Tim. 5:2). Those of you, who have already raised Christian children, take a young woman under your wings and be there for her like Dorene has always "been there" for me. This close bond is what Paul described to us in the above passage. You can't build this bond on the spur of the moment when a crisis hits. Develop a loving bond while times are peaceful so it will be there to fortify you through times of distress (2 Cor. 7:5-7).

When Joe and I moved to Shallowater, TX to help care for Sophie, God providentially placed another devoted Christian in my life. Cindy Wood is the wife of the preacher for the 12th Street church of Christ in Shallowater. Cindy and Don lost their son, Kyle, in a car accident in 1999. You can read about Kyle in Appendix B. God allowed us to meet and become friends so we could comfort each other, as is described in 2 Corinthians 1:3,4:

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

Cindy had told me she wanted us to get together sometime and share our “Mother stories” since she had gone through a similar experience. Please read about her loss in Appendix B. The day she came to my home, she told me about her tragedy. Hearing her openly describe the great pain she and Gary shared allowed me speak freely of Angie’s accident and death.

On August 30, 2004 Cindy knew how hard it would be for me to remember Angie’s accident a year earlier. She brought by a gift of a figurine of two women sitting talking to each other, and said that she knew it would remind me of how close I was to Angie. And it does. Cindy and I are sisters in Christ, but so much more. We are sisters in sorrow and sisters who are striving to find joy in the morning. Beyond that, we are sisters who are willing to open our hearts and share our sorrow with you, in the hope that when you face a personal tragedy, you will remain strong in the Lord. As Paul admonished in Eph. 6:10,11:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

How do we remain strong? The answer is found in the next few verses (Eph. 6:12-18). As we study God's Word we grow stronger. With a strong faith, Satan's "fiery darts" are quenched. By praying for each other, we strengthen the Christian bond and God helps us through the difficult times in life.

When the night was the darkest, there was one who was always by my side, holding my hand, crying with me, helping me get through. My husband, Joe, has been there for me every step of the way, and I have tried to do the same for him. Several people have told me that when parents lose a child, they either grow much closer, or they become estranged. I thank God for a wonderful Christian husband and the love that has grown deeper and stronger through our recovery.

Some couples grow apart because they play the "Blame Game." "If you would have just done thus and such, maybe this would never have happened." Even if they don't blame each other, they may think life is easier if they simply don't talk about their pain. How sad! They are missing the best medicine couples can give each other for their grieving hearts. Talking and crying together. Describing their pain to each other. Sharing happy memories. Don't be like Job's foolish wife who discouraged him rather than serving as a source of encouragement (Job 1:18,19; 2:9,10).

Joe and I have also grown closer because together we decided to move to Texas to help care for our granddaughter, Sophie. Eric had told us he would buy a home and move to Shallowater if his parents could sell

their house and move to Lubbock or if Joe could find a teaching job in or near Shallowater.

Joe willingly gave up an excellent job of teaching math in the Eudora High School; a job he had held for 35 years prior to our move. The adjustment has been difficult. At first he was traveling 45 miles to a job which was much more difficult than the one he had in Eudora. Now he has found a job only 12 miles away, and is looking forward to a better teaching situation.

Dorene is fond of the saying, "When life gives you a lemon, make lemonade." Joe and I know our lives will never be the same again. But we know there is great joy in being near Sophie and helping her grow up to be a Christian. The joys we are discovering in Texas are far greater than the losses we incurred by moving. We took our time, prayed and made the best possible decision under the circumstances. God is blessing us as we continue to strive to please Him.

There is a beautiful love song called, "Through the Years." I have a recording sung by Kenny Rogers. The song speaks of the good and bad times, and what the husband and wife have meant to each other "Through the Years." Christian wives, let us so live that King Solomon's words (Proverbs 31:11,12,30,31) can apply to our lives:



The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.... She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.... Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

3. Have you ever tried to walk barefooted over sharp rocks? Our feet must be “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” to enable us to walk in God’s service. Describe how 2 Timothy 1:13 and 2:2,3 relate to Ephesians 6:15.

4. How can faith help us “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked [one]”? Use Hebrews 11:1 and 6 in your explanation, as well as other verses about faith. Also consider how the ability to handle everything Satan throws at us is related to the evidences we have studied in God’s Word, proving that our faith is true. Compare 1 Thes. 5:21 and 2 Peter 1:16-19.

5. Helmets protect the brain, the center of thought, from damage. Salvation is central to Christianity. In the book of Acts, there is no example of unsaved people praying to invite Christ into their hearts. Even the great apostle Paul (formerly Saul) was not saved until what took place (Acts 22:16)?

