

Living With a Broken Dream

Garth and Patty Leno

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[Garth] My name is Garth, and this is my wife, Patty. In the course of our journey together as husband and wife, we have learned that God has a purpose behind every problem.

[Patty] And we thank you for joining us this weekend as we share our personal journey – raising a daughter with disabilities.

So many of us here today are living with conditions and situations not of our own choosing. We had big plans and high hopes! Remember!?! So what happened?

Life happened, that's what happened. Jesus warned us that we would have problems in the world. No one is immune to pain or insulated from suffering. And every time you face one challenge and come up with a positive, creative solution, another challenge is waiting to take its place.

Not all of the problems we face are humungous problems or life-threatening problems, but I believe that all of the problems we face are part of God's overall design to mold and shape our lives.

Twenty-three years ago I gave birth to our daughter Jamie, and life was wonderful! I had a husband who loved me, I had a handsome three year old son, I was active in a growing, thriving church, and now God had given me a precious baby girl.

Jamie spent the first year of her life doing all of the things baby girls do--rolling over, sitting up, and repeating her limited vocabulary over and over and over! She was feeding herself by hand and playing peek-a-boo with her big brother, Nathan. She was an easy baby and very content.

However, around her first birthday everything changed! Jamie's muscle tone began to decrease, and she was unable to walk independently. We consulted with a variety of doctors and therapists trying to find answers. At first, none of the specialists were very concerned about her.

We were told she would be a clumsy child, and may have a few learning difficulties, but otherwise, she would be fine. A pediatric neurologist guaranteed us she would be walking within 4 months.

That news, although hopeful, was devastating to us. *Our perfect little girl was going to have difficulties?! She would be clumsy? No way, not our little girl! We're going to fight this thing as hard as we can!*

We were living in Alberta when all of this happened, but we took Jamie to the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. They ran a myriad of tests on her over a two-week period. They were baffled by her illness, but sent us home with shocking news. Jamie had “a severe neurological disorder,” but they were unable to diagnose it.

By the time Jamie was 2, she had withdrawn into a world of her own. She stopped crawling, she stopped talking and socializing, and she lost the use of her hands to endless and purposeless hand wringing. Two years later Jamie was diagnosed with Rett Syndrome, a neurological disorder that can cause severe mental and physical impairments.

I was devastated. Why was God allowing this happen to us? It shook my faith. It never occurred to me that God's “wonderful plan for my life” may include this kind of personal suffering.

Patty and I began to drift apart. We were both having great difficulty coping, and I was living in denial. Our marriage was in trouble, and I didn't even know it. Our lives seemed to be spinning out of control. At home we cried, and fought off dark thoughts, but at church we had to be *Pastor and Mrs. Pastor*, and I had to preach every week – talking about God's love and God's faithfulness, and God's power to heal. It was very hard...

I wasn't entirely surprised that I had a child with disabilities. I am a registered nurse, and during my working years I had seen a lot of special needs. But, I expected God to do something about my daughter, about my pain, about our suffering! I waited eagerly for God's miracle to happen. I had it all figured out!

We would take Jamie to a special meeting of our denomination! We had it all figured out! God would heal her there, and the entire Alliance church family would see it and the ripple effect would be felt all over Canada. I fully expected a miracle.

Many of our family and friends gathered around Jamie at that church service in 1988 to pray for her healing. I *expected* God to heal her. I *expected* that she would walk out of that building.

However when we left the service we carried Jamie in our arms and I dragged my faith along behind me.

But that was a turning point for us. It was a turning point! We knew that we had exhausted all of *our* strategies, and all of *our* resources and all of *our* plans for Jamie. We were physically and emotionally exhausted and spiritually drained. We had nothing left. But that's when God began to work overtime. He began to heal and restore and rebuild. But it was happening not in Jamie's life, but in ours. God reminded us that His ways are much higher than our ways, and his plans are not always the same as our plans...

I am confident that God knew exactly what He was doing when He created Jamie. The Bible says that she is “fearfully and wonderfully” made. God knew that Jamie would bring much pain into our lives, but He also knew the tremendous blessing she would bring.

God used our disappointment as His divine appointment to draw us close to himself.
Psalm 34:18 NIV *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

Did you catch that phrase? The Lord is close to the brokenhearted... He draws near to you who are despairing. He is within reach for those living with a broken dream. And many of us here today are living with brokenness of some kind.

We believe that God has a purpose behind every problem and every broken dream. And part of God’s purpose for you might be a new relationship with his Son Jesus Christ.

Discovering God’s purposes is a wonderful adventure. But it takes time. Jamie is 23 and only now some of the reasons, only now some of the answers, are becoming evident to us.

The trials of life force us to look to God and depend on him instead of ourselves. At one point in his career, the Apostle Paul suffered hardship in Asia as he was telling others about the love of God. He said, in 2 Corinthians 1...

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 NIV

We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

In other words, God may allow things to happen in our lives to teach us how to rely on him. At the same time Romans 8:28 gives me great confidence as I face an uncertain future: *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

So, in light of this, how should we respond to problems in life? How can we cope with the broken dreams that we have?

We are not experts. Patty and I don’t have all the answers. That’s for sure. But we have picked up some clues along the way that we’d like to share with you now, if we may.
How can we live with broken dreams?

First, ***learn not to be surprised*** when you face trials or suffering or disappointment or even death. That may sound strange to some of us, but let’s have a look at these verses from the Bible, found in 1 Peter 4...

1 Peter 4:12-13 NLT

Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad--because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, and afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world.

Learn not to be surprised. Because somehow in the majesty and sovereignty of Almighty God *these trials can make us partners with Christ, and then we'll get to share his glory!*

Brokenness happens, regardless of your religious affiliation. Don't be surprised by it.

Second, **revisit the cross** from time to time... According to Jesus, maturity comes with a price tag attached. He said, in...

Luke 14:27 NIV

... Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.

Literally, the cross was a place where Jesus died outside of Jerusalem. Symbolically, the cross is the place of full surrender to God. The cross is the place where selfishness dies, and we realize that life is more than my comfort, my security, my contentment, my wellbeing.

And maybe – just maybe – God is asking you to humble yourself and come to the cross today, to come to Jesus, and lay down your burdens. Lay down your tears and your fears and just surrender to God.

And just maybe – God is inviting you to come to the cross today and put your trust in Jesus Christ so you can begin a new life of faith and hope.

Third, learning to live with a broken dream may also mean that you need to **discover how to live with mystery.**

As parents of a child with disabilities we wanted answers. We searched for answers. We cried out for answers. We demanded answers. But what does one do when there are no answers? Well, you either learn to live with mystery...or you go crazy!

The Bible often refers to mystery. Romans 16 speaks of the revelation of the *mystery* hidden for long ages past. Ephesians 1 refers to the *mystery* of God's will... In Ephesians 3 we read about the *mystery* of Christ!

One writer says, "We ... love easy, fast answers. The devil has sold as many cheap and instant answers as MacDonal'd's has sold hamburgers. We are impatient with Mystery, especially with a

capital M. We read a fathomless profundity like the Book of Job and we say, ‘But what’s the bottom line?’”¹

We all want answers, right?! And we want answers now! Yet, some things that happen don’t have answers. Some situations are totally inexplicable. They are baffling, perplexing, and incomprehensible.

I don’t know why Jamie was born with Rett Syndrome. I don’t know why God has not healed her. The bottom line is invisible.

I don’t know why your husband left you.
I don’t know why you have cancer.
I don’t know why your business is failing.

So there is a sense in which we all need to live with mystery; get comfortable with mystery; be content with not having all the answers.

Then, learn to ***rely on God’s character***.

Somewhere along the route, Patty and I picked up this clue: When we know that God is our Father, and Jesus is our loving Savior, we can be sure that He will not fail, and that he will not leave us.

We are still clinging to this promise from God in Isaiah 41:10. “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” His resources are available to us when we trust him!

Instead of living in fear and apprehension, God wants to use our troubles to transform us and give us a hope and a future.

So how can we cope with the broken dreams that we have?

- *learn not to be surprised*
- *revisit the cross from time to time*
- *discover how to live with mystery*
- *rely on God’s character, and ...*

Finally, ***lean into the future***.

There were many days when Patty and I could not think even about tomorrow. Never mind talking about Christmas or next year or what we’ll do when we retire. We couldn’t even face the

¹ Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Books, 1986), 27.

next day. So, when I say that we need to lean into the future, I'm talking about the future that God is preparing for us who believe.

I'm talking about God's promises, God's prospects, and God's outlook on the future.

Just have a look at a few verses from Revelation 21. Here Paul is writing about his vision of heaven, and he says...

Revelation 21:1-7 NLT

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared... I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

One of these days, folks, one of these days... Everything will be new. Filled with hope. Joy everlasting. Love unending. *One of these days...*

The people of God have so much to look forward to. And so we keep leaning into the future with all of our questions, trusting God as best we can.

Jamie is now 23 years old, and she has transformed our family. Her brother and sister have been molded from the inside out in part because of her. And they are both amazing young adults today. Garth and I are different people today because of God's work through Jamie! And we all love her so much it hurts!

She is very small for her age, but she requires help to do everything--she needs to be fed and dressed. She cannot walk independently and she has no purposeful use of her hands. Because she cannot talk or gesture, communication is difficult. She rarely sleeps through the night without waking several times. She has had major back surgery to correct a severe curvature of her spine, and she has a seizure problem that is extremely difficult to control. Just two weeks ago she cracked a bone in her wrist due to osteoporosis. A few days later my back went out and I couldn't lift her without help. Then Jamie had six seizures in the same day. Just last Friday she developed pneumonia and we had to put her on oxygen. After two trips to emergency she was admitted to the hospital on Tuesday. She just came home on Thursday – just in time for us to give our talk this weekend!

So even as our family leans into the future, with faith leading the way, we wrestle with fear and uncertainty. We struggle with our circumstances as we fight to live with a broken dream.

We don't know what the future holds. But we know who holds the future. And the one who holds the future cares about us, and he cares about you. The Bible says God loves you so much that he gave his one and only Son, Jesus, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. He loves you, and his grace is sufficient to meet every need in your life.

And one day... One day we see his glory. One day the lame will walk. One day the blind will see. One day there will be no need for wheelchairs or splints or shunts or mammograms or chemotherapy. It will be a brand new day. That is our blessed hope in Christ.

Patty Leno and Tara MacDonald sing "Glory:"

One day eyes that are blind will see you clearly
And one day all who deny will finally believe
One day hearts made of stone will break in pieces
And one day chains once unbroken will fall down at your feet
So we wait for that one day come quickly

Chorus

We want to see your Glory
Every knee falls down before thee
Every tongue offers you praise
With every hand raised
Singing Glory
To you and unto you only
We'll sing Glory to Your name

One day voices that lie will all be silent
One day all that's divided will be whole again
One day death will retreat and wave it's white flag
One day love will defeat the strongest enemy
So we wait for that one day come quickly

Chorus

We know not the day or the hour
Or the moments in between
But we know the end of the story
When we'll see

Chorus