

STILL STANDING !

By John Gagliardi



As I write this and as I look back on this year, my only comment on the year past is that I will not be sorry to see it end! It has been among the most challenging years in my 30 years as a Christian, and I suspect, talking to other people in various parts of the world, I would not be “Robinson Crusoe” in making that observation.

During this year, I have had a major company failure with severe financial repercussions on our family, the death of three close friends (all younger than me I might add), the decline of my mother into dementia and her admission to full-time nursing care, and as I write this, a longtime friend whom I led to the Lord nearly 30 years ago lies in a hospital bed mute and paralyzed from a combined stroke and heart attack!

There is more – but this is enough to paint the picture. Not a year I would care to repeat!

But having said that, it just reinforces our resolution to stand firm on our faith in spite of severe testing (and of course our old friend Job comes to mind). We have had strong support from close Christian friends at home and in various parts of the world, and a lot of encouragement to remind us that – no matter what – God is still on the throne, and nothing takes Him by surprise.

His promise that we have a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11) is not negated by circumstances, and indeed, one friend prophetically said that in spite of all the losses and heartache this year, the real test for us was to remain in faith.

To be honest, there have been times when Kay and I have had to look through a microscope to see that tiny “mustard seed” of faith – but it has always been there, and we know that we will come through this year stronger and firmer in our faith.

Indeed, unless your faith is tested (even at furnace/crucible level), how do you know your faith is real? Abraham wasn't given any easy options when God told him to take his “son of promise” Isaac up to the top of Mount Moriah and sacrifice him – indeed, Abraham had the knife in his hand ready to plunge it into Isaac (Genesis 22:10) before God said to him to spare Isaac and instead sacrifice the ram He had already provided “caught in a thicket” and ready for sacrifice (Genesis 22:12 and 13).

Testing is not pleasant – Bible heroes from Job to Joseph to David will attest to that – but in the end, God always keeps his promises, and “comes through” for us. “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15).

No matter how hard it is, no matter what threats lie before you, and no matter how unfair your treatment may seem, and I know right now the reality of that, it does not change for me the Word God gave me 30 years ago the night I was saved: “TRUST AND OBEY”. After all these years, through ups and downs, through victories and defeats, I have no better or more deep theological insight to offer than just those three words – TRUST AND OBEY.

One of God's promises to us, is that with every test, He will give us a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13) – and I have never yet found any of God's promises to fail. He also says that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1).

I believe God will give us a Word to encourage and help us through the current test – at least that has been my experience for the past 30 years, so I have no reason to doubt it now. And as often as not, He will confirm it by bringing it more than once in different ways or from different people.

I read a couple of “devotionals” each day, as well as The Word – and one I read is Henry Blackaby's *“Experiencing God Day by Day.”* His Scripture for today – December 24 – was Luke 1:45 – “Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord”. And you've guessed it – my routine reading today in The Word brought me to Luke 1, with the second “witness” to that very same verse!

Henry Blackaby says in his piece for today that believing (trusting) God is a prerequisite to receiving His promises. He goes on: "God spoke to Mary and gave the assurance that He always gives when He assigns the impossible to His people.

"When God speaks about His plans, He does so with everything already in place to fulfill His Word. God never speaks hypothetically. He knows exactly what will come to pass. He simply asks you to *believe him*. You will experience great blessings when you place your *absolute trust* in Him.

"...You cannot possibly imagine all that God has in store for you when you *trust Him*. He knows exactly what He will do to bring salvation to someone you have prayed for, or to heal your friend, or to provide for your needs. God has everything in place. *Will you believe Him?*"

I believe beyond any shadow of doubt that this was a Word from God for me this morning – and for others reading this who are also "going through it" at this present time. God can speak in many ways to different people, and throughout the Bible, has indeed spoken in everything from an audible voice to writing on the wall.

But in my personal experience, the most common way he speaks is through His Word, if we are prepared to come before Him each day, get quiet before Him, and be open to hear a "rhema word" – the "sword of the Spirit" spoken about in Ephesians 6:17 – "And take ...the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God:.

So let us put on each day the "whole armour of God", which defends us against the works of the enemy, and also take up the offensive weapon He also offers us, His Holy Spirit Sword:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and have done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace;

Above all, taking the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.