

GOD'S ANTIDOTE FOR DARK VALLEYS
Stressbusters - Part 5
Rick Warren

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Psalm 23:4

Examples of Life's Valleys

The Valley of Calamity -- Josh. 7:26 (LB)
The Valley of Weeping -- Ps. 84:6 (LB)
The Valley of Trouble -- Hosea 2:15 (NCV)
The Valley of Deep Darkness -- Ps. 23:4 (Heb)

I. WHAT TO REMEMBER IN DARK VALLEYS

1. VALLEYS ARE _____

"In this world you will have trouble." John 16:33 (NIV)

2. VALLEYS ARE _____

"Disaster follows disaster... In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter falls in a moment." Jer. 4:20 (LB)

3. VALLEYS ARE _____

"(It) rains on the just and the unjust too." Mt. 5:45 (LB)

4. VALLEYS ARE _____

"There is a wonderful joy ahead, even though the going is rough for a while down here." I Peter 1:6 (LB)

"Our troubles are short-lived and their outcome is an eternal glory which outweighs them all." 2 Cor. 4:17 (NEB)

5. VALLEYS ARE _____

"... at the present you may be temporarily harassed by all kinds of trials. This is no accident -- it happens to prove your faith ..." I Peter 1:6b-7 (Ph)

II. WHAT TO DO IN DARK VALLEYS

1. REFUSE _____

"I WILL FEAR NO EVIL"

"God will strengthen you with his own great power so that you will not give up when troubles come, but you will be patient." Col 1:11 (NCV)

2. REMEMBER _____

"FOR YOU ARE WITH ME"

"When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up -- the flames will not consume you." Is. 43:2 (LB)

3. RELY ON _____

"YOUR ROD AND STAFF COMFORT ME"

"The good man does not escape all troubles -- he has them too. But the Lord helps him in each and every one." Ps. 34:19 (LB)

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There is an old Arab parable that says: "All sunshine and no rain makes a desert." If you never have any down times, dark times, gloomy times in your life you'll be dried up. You'll have no depth to yourself, no maturity. It takes good times and bad times to make a mature person. Life is a mixture of pain and pleasure, of victory and defeat, of success and failure, of mountain tops and valleys. Today we're going to look at God's antidote to the Dark Valleys of life.

Even in our darkest valleys, our darkest days, God is there. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Psalm 23:4

In Israel there is a real Valley of the Shadow of Death. It's a steep, deep and narrow canyon. The sun only hits the bottom of it when it's directly overhead at high noon. The rest of the time the bottom of the canyon is dark. David probably led his sheep through the valley of the shadow of death as he was growing up.

As you look in the Bible, the term "valley" also refers to all kinds of rough times in life.

Joshua talks about the Valley of Calamity
Psalm 84 talks about the Valley of Weeping
Hosea talks about the Valley of Trouble
This verse in Hebrew actually means The Valley of Deep Darkness

How do I handle the dark valleys of life?

There are five facts about valleys that you need to remember whenever you go through a tough time:

1. VALLEYS ARE INEVITABLE

They are going to happen so you might as well count on them. You have just come out of a valley, or you're in one right now, or you're probably headed toward one. Valleys happen throughout life -- one right after another. After every mountain top there is a valley. Jesus was very realistic about it. In John 16, He says "In the world you will have trouble." It's not a matter of *if*, it's *when*. It's going to happen. You're going to have difficulty, disappointment, discouragement in life. There will be times of suffering, sorrow, sickness. There will be times of frustration, failure and fatigue. They are going to happen. They are a normal part of life. Don't be surprised by it.

2. VALLEYS ARE UNPREDICTABLE

You can't plan them, time them, schedule them. Valleys are always unexpected. They usually come at the worst time -- when you don't have time, when you're unprepared. Have you ever

had a flat tire at a good time? They just happen. And usually when you least need them and it's most inconvenient. It would be very great if we could schedule our down times in life. You can't plan life like that.

Valleys come suddenly. They are unpredictable. Have you noticed how easily a good day can become a bad day? A phone call, a letter, a routine doctor's check-up, a freak accident. Valleys just happen.

Jeremiah 4:20 "Disaster follows disaster... In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter falls in a moment."

3. VALLEYS ARE IMPARTIAL

No one is immune to them. No one is insulated from pain and sorrow. No one gets to skate through life problem-free. Everybody has problems -- good people and bad people. Problems, trials, difficulties, disturbances, downtimes, depression doesn't mean you're a bad person. It means you're a person. It doesn't mean you're an evil human being; it means you're a human being. The Bible is very clear that good things happen to bad people and sometimes bad things happen to good people. Valleys are impartial. They don't care how good or bad you are.

Matthew 5:45 Jesus said, "It rains on the just and the unjust too." When we go through a difficult time -- a valley in life -- the first reaction is always "Why me?" Yet really you should ask "Why not me?" Do you think you should be exempt from all the problems everybody else has to go through? Do you think you should be the only one in the universe that never has a tragedy, a loss, loses a loved one? Instead of saying "Why me?" just realize it's going to happen because you're a human being. Remember this is not heaven. Things are not perfect here and there are problems and difficulties. They are going to happen in life -- to good people, Christians. Disasters and tragedies happen to all of us.

4. VALLEYS ARE TEMPORARY

They have an end to them. They don't last. They are not a permanent location. David says, "Even though I walk through the valley..." The valley is not something you stay in your entire life. It's something you go through -- a circumstance, a situation that has a season to it. When you're in a valley you often think it's a dead end, but it's not. It's like a tunnel -- there is a beginning and end. You go through the tunnel and eventually you're out of it and back out in the light again. They don't come into your life to stay. They come to pass.

I Peter 1:6 "There is a wonderful joy ahead, even though the going is rough for a while down here." He admits that sometimes you're going to go through tough times. It's going to be rough. Life is tough. You're going to have it. But it's only for a while. There is wonderful joy ahead. He's talking about Heaven. There are no problems in heaven, no valleys, no dark days. While you may be harassed down here, in heaven you'll have no problems. If you know the Lord Jesus Christ, that's where you're going.

He says don't get discouraged. Even if you live 80 or 90 years and have a problem your entire life, that is so insignificant compared to the thousands and millions of years in eternity problem free. He says, even if it's your whole life it's just temporary compared in light of eternity.

"Our troubles are short lived and there is an eternal glory which outweighs them all." They won't last; they will be short. But he says, there is an eternal glory. This is important. Pain can be productive. There will be a benefit for our problems if we respond in the right way. While we have the temporary hassles there is long term, eternal benefit when you go through a valley and respond to it correctly.

5. VALLEYS ARE PURPOSEFUL

God has a reason for taking you through the valleys. Whether it's doubt, depression, despair, discouragement, defeat -- He's got a reason behind it.

I Peter 1:6-7 "At the present you may be temporarily harassed by all kinds of trials." He says *temporary* -- they aren't going to last forever. You are temporarily harassed with problems here. And there may be all kinds of trials. There are financial valleys, relational valleys, emotional valleys, all kinds of different trials. "...This is no accident -- it happens to prove your faith..." The valleys are not just a freak of nature. God wants to build your faith in the valleys of life. We love to enjoy the mountain tops, but you don't build faith on the mountain tops. You build faith in the valleys of life. When everything is going fine and great you don't really need God. But when you come face to face with a dark valley, you get on your knees. Faith is strengthened in the valleys. When you don't feel like serving and trusting God, praising God... that's where your faith is tested. Not in the good times of life, but in the valleys.

1. Every problem has a purpose. Even the little tiny ones, the inconsequential ones, the things that seem like mere irritations. They have a purpose. God can teach you character. He wants to change you, mature you.
2. Faith is built in the valleys of life.

God wants to build your character. He is far more interested in your character than He is in your comfort or your convenience. God's goal in life is not to just make life comfortable for you. He wants to build character. He's more interested in your holiness than He is in your happiness. Holiness lasts, happiness doesn't. Happiness comes from holiness anyway.

He wants to make you like Jesus Christ. He wants you to develop the character of Christ. If God is going to make you like Christ, He is going to take you through all of the circumstances of life He took Christ through. Was Jesus exempted from suffering? Absolutely not. What makes you think you're going to be exempted? Did Jesus go through times of loneliness? Yes. Will you? Yes. Was Jesus ever tempted to be discouraged? Yes. Will you? Yes. Was Jesus ever misunderstood, maligned, criticized unjustly? Yes. Will you? Absolutely. What makes you think you're any different? You're going to go through valleys. God wants to build character in your life. It's not by accident. Does God cause accidents and tragedies? No. God does not cause accidents and tragedies. God is a good God and He cannot cause evil. He cannot do evil. Can God use accidents and tragedies for good? Absolutely. He can use even the evil done to us by others, turn it around and bring good out of it by building character in us. He definitely uses the tragedies and valleys of life in our lives.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU GO THROUGH DARK VALLEYS?

David said, "I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

1. REFUSE TO BE DISCOURAGED

"I will fear no evil." I've always thought Christians should be the ones wearing all of the "No fear" T-shirts. I will fear no evil; I fear nothing. That's what David says as a Christian, who puts his faith in God. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death". It says "I walk" -- not "I run through it" or "I panic and run the other way". To walk means calmly, deliberately make steps through the valley. David says "I'm not going to be afraid. I will calmly walk through the valley."

Refuse to be discouraged. You can't go around the valley. You can't go under the valley. You can't go over the valley. You can only go through the valley. Here he says "I will not fear evil". Will implies a choice. It implies an act of volition, decision. I will not be afraid.

If you are discouraged this morning, it's because you're choosing to be discouraged. I don't have to know your problems. You're choosing to be discouraged. Discouragement is always a choice. Always. You don't have to choose to be discouraged, but you're choosing to think discouraging thoughts. You're choosing to look at all the negatives. You're choosing not to look at Christ and all the positive things. You're looking at all of the negatives. That's a choice. You can choose to change, too.

That's what God wants you to do -- choose. It's a deliberate act.

How do I choose to not be discouraged? By focusing on God's power rather than on your problem. That's how you do it. You can take two people and put them in the identical situation -- a chaos, tragedy, crisis -- one of them will be blown away by it, the other is actually strengthened by it. One of them falls apart, one of them is strengthened through it. The difference is what you're focusing on. You need to focus, not on your circumstance, but on Christ. Not on the situation, but on the Savior. Not on your problem, but on God's power.

Col. 1:11 "God will strengthen you with his own great power so that you will not give up when troubles come, but you will be patient."

Human energy runs out. After a trial of a certain length of time, you don't have any energy left. No stamina. Human endurance has an end to it. It runs out. In the valleys of life you need a power source bigger than yourself. If you think you're going to make it through all the valleys of life on your own power -- forget it. You're not going to. You don't have enough power to handle all the things that are going to hit you in life. You need a power source beyond yourself to key into.

Beth Woods:

I'd like to share how Jesus Christ helped me walk through a valley of fear and depression. One afternoon while I was working at my consignment shop on Balboa Island, something just hit me out of the blue. It felt like someone had punched me in the stomach and knocked all of the air out of me. I thought I was having a heart attack. There was an overwhelming sense of doom and fear. I didn't know why or where it was coming from. All I knew was that I had to get out of there to escape those feelings. I had just entered that unknown valley of a panic attack. I had the panicky feelings in other places: grocery store, restaurant, the mall, even the freeway -- anywhere that I felt trapped. I then began agoraphobic and began to avoid all these places where I had these anxiety attacks. This narrowed my world considerably and depression set in. It wasn't long before I began to isolate myself at home because that was the only place I felt safe. I tried to fight it and control the depression but that just made it worse. I was paralyzed with fear anticipating the next panic attack laying day after day on the carpet in the living room -- afraid to leave and asking myself "What is the point? Where is my hope? Are these horrible feelings ever going to end?" Inside I felt incompetent, worthless, hopeless and my business was failing. Fortunately I had a very loving and supporting mother who encouraged me to seek some counseling. An exercise program and vitamins helped with the physical symptoms, but I still woke up every morning with an ache, a pain, a tightness around my heart. I didn't realize it at the time but it was a spiritual longing. The Lord had His hand on me then and He was nudging me, trying to get my attention through this pain. My constant fear and depression caused me to be very discouraged about life. I wasn't sure where to turn for help. On Dec. 16, 1990 I attended my first service here at Saddleback church. I made sure I sat close by an exit for quick escape if I wanted to. After the meeting began, defenses and fears melted away. I started to cry, something I had never done in public before. I could feel God's love in this place. Pastor Rick's sermon that day was "How to Stop Running Scared -- Facing Unexpected Crisis". After that service I went home and thought about what Rick had said. I gave the Lord all the fear, depression and anxiety in my heart and asked Him to come into my life. That day, after my first service at Saddleback, I committed my life to Jesus Christ. I surrendered all my burdens, fears, depressions over to Him. I realize that because God is with me now I no longer had any reason to fear evil. My decision to commit my life to Christ meant I could depend on Him to help me no matter what I faced. This was the antidote to my fear and discouragement. Now, as I look back on that decision, I can see how God had a purpose behind my pain. He used my depression to get my attention, to bring me to know Him. Because He has helped me with my struggles, I want to help others. Oct. 10 we started a new support group for people who are going through the valley of depression. Thirty people came to our first meeting. Sometimes we're afraid to admit that we feel hopelessness and despair so we hide our true feelings behind a mask. But if you're in the valley of depression, I want you to know our church family cares about you and your pain and we want to help. Join our group where you can receive loving support from our people who

understand what you're going through and can help. Ps. 34:18 "The Lord is close to the broken hearted and He saves those who are crushed in Spirit." Jeremiah 29:11 "I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you, not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."

2. REMEMBER THAT GOD IS WITH ME

David said, "For You will be with me. You're with me every moment." God not only promises us His power in the valley, He promises His presence. You will never go through a valley in life by yourself. You will never go through a dark day alone. God has said, "I will be with you."

Isa. 43:2 "When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fires of oppression, you will not be burned up -- the flames will not consume you." You're not going to drown, burn up, die -- God says I am with you. He will be with you every step in the valley. God says there is nothing to fear when Jesus is near. God does not set up in heaven, looking down on you saying, "I sure hope they make it!" He's there with you in the valley, walking with you, hand in hand. God says, I will lead you through this.

At verse 4 of Psalm 23 there is a strategic change in the language. In the first part of the psalm all of the pronouns are in the 3rd person -- he talks about God: "He leads me beside still waters, He guides me into green pastures, He restores my soul". David is talking about God.

But when he gets in the valley it changes to second person pronouns. He starts talking not *about* God but *to* God. "You are with me. Your rod and your staff comfort me." It's the valleys of life that bring us face to face with God. All of a sudden the ultimate becomes the intimate. When I'm going through the valley I don't want to talk *about* God, I want to talk *to* God. Religion becomes a relationship. Any mature believer will tell you that the times they have been closest to God were in those face to face encounters that happen only in the valley. When you're in the valley and you're spent, depleted, perplexed, in despair and you're talking directly to God, He becomes real and God says, "I'm with you. You're not in this by yourself." We enjoy the mountaintops but we come face to face with God in the valleys of life. He'll never be closer than when you're in the valley.

Mike Hiss:

I'd like to tell you how Jesus Christ has helped me and my family walk through the valley of a major illness. On May 15, 1983 I made a decision that would forever change my life in ways that I would never imagine. I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal savior and I thought at the time it was really great that I was now going to go to heaven for eternal fellowship with God. I had no idea how this decision would prepare and comfort me through the valleys of my life. In 1985, my wife, Connie, and I were breezing along through the green pastures that God had provided for us. We had a good marriage, two beautiful children, a nice home, and a good income. But the company I was working for faltered and I lost my job and we almost lost our home. Our first major valley. We started over and I eventually landed another good job. Things began to go well again for about two years, but again I lost my job. Another major valley. We were very down and we struggled financially and almost lost our home. But we still had each other and our kids. Where do we turn? What do we do? Both times we turned to the Lord. We started over again and things eventually began to go well. In early November, 1989 I noticed a lump forming under my chin which I thought probably was just a swollen gland. The doctor did a biopsy and told us I had a form of cancer known as lymphoma -- the dreaded C word. By this time we were already turning to God everyday. It was this faith in God and His will that would see us through this time. In our previous valleys we were always confident that no matter what happened we still had each other and our children. Now I was about to face what Ps. 23 calls the valley of the shadow of death. My wife, Connie, was facing the very real possibility of having to bring up our children without their father and without her husband. In the following weeks I had all the numerous tests and doctors' appointments that accompany any battle with cancer. After numerous tests my wife and I were very depressed about my situation. But we held onto the fact that God had promised to be with us through the valley of life. On my next CAT scan we noticed my situation had improved. The large tumors that had been very visible a month before were mostly gone. We were stunned by this and God was clearly at work here. The next step in my treatment was to receive a bone marrow transplant at Stanford. Although the treatment was very difficult for me, I knew that Jesus was walking through this valley with me and the transplant was

successful. One of the ways that God confirmed that He was with me was when our pastor called and said God had given him a verse to encourage me. Phil 2:26 "Indeed he was ill and almost died, but God had mercy on him. And not on him only but also on me to spare me sorrow upon sorrow." I was totally overcome with this encouraging word of God's healing presence. I don't think I've ever felt closer to God than in that moment when, in the valley, God gave me hope and healing to make it through the valley. As I've looked back and considered why God allowed me to be healed when so many others have died from cancer, I've come to realize two things: First, His healing was all because of His mercy and grace; I certainly wasn't worthy of it. This has been humbling for me. The other thing I've realized is this, the reason I've survived is because God isn't finished with His plan for my life. He has a ministry for me to do. In 2 Cor 1 it says that one reason God allows us to go through trials, tribulations, valleys is so we would be able to comfort and help others. For this reason I'm involved in the cancer support group at our church. Because so many families find themselves in the valley of cancer this group was started to provide help and care for those who are hurting. If you're currently in the valley of cancer I want to invite you to join us. Finally, if you're facing any major illness let me encourage you with this verse from Rev. 2:10 "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you the devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will suffer. But be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."

3. I RELY ON GOD'S PROTECTION AND GUIDANCE

David reminds himself that God's rod and staff comforts him. The rod and staff were the two basic tools that a shepherd used to protect and guide the sheep. A rod was basically about two foot long, at the end of it was a heavy knot. Shepherds were very skilled at hurling the rod, like a missile, at anything that would attack the sheep. God is saying, "When you go through the valley, I'm defending you. I'm protecting you." The rod of God will protect you. Today's shepherds don't use rods, they use guns. It's interesting that in the Old West a gun is also called a rod. God says "I'm going to defend you, protect you." When you're going through the valley, the dark valley of life, God is not setting in heaven unconcerned and apathetic. The Good Shepherd fights for you. While you're fighting for your life in that depression, God is fighting with you. He's fighting off spiritual forces. He is your defender and protector. That's what the rod represents.

"Your staff comforts me." A staff was a long stick with a crook at the end of it. The shepherd uses a staff to guide and comfort. He will use the staff to draw the sheep in close to him. He will use the staff to lift them up when they're down. He brings them in close with their staff. He also uses the staff to guide them. When you go through the valley, you're not going through it alone. God's going with you and He's using His rod and staff to protect and guide.

Cathy Camera:

As a college sophomore I married my high school sweetheart. He had been the captain of the football team and I was a cheerleader. It was the kind of marriage you read about in storybooks. In 1971 we had a beautiful baby boy. But in 1973 after suffering a chronic illness our baby boy died. My grief was enormous and overwhelming. But we were young and we knew we would have more children. Five years later I gave birth to a lovely little girl. We were thrilled to have another child. But two years later our baby girl died from the same chronic illness our son had. My husband and I were devastated with grief. Unable to cope with this grief our marriage went into a tailspin. My husband's personality changed and he became abusive. Finally in 1980 we were blessed with a healthy baby boy, David, but we were still reeling from the hurt, grief, pain of loss of our first two children. Our relationship shattered and eventually ended in divorce when David was only three. I found myself in a valley of grief and despair. Death had visited my door twice in five years. Nothing was happy in my life now. I was disappointed with God, alienated from family and friends, lonely and depressed and was looking for love in all the wrong places. I desperately needed God's strength, protection and guidance. I didn't know it and I didn't know where to look for it. Then a neighbor invited me to a support group at her church. A tiny seed of faith began to grow in my hurting heart. I read in Heb. 11:1 "Faith is the confident assurance of things hoped for and of evidence not seen." I clung to that hope when things seemed hopeless. Finally I opened up my heart to Jesus Christ and fully committed my life to him. As I grew in my faith, I began to see how God could use even the hurt in my life for good. I began to

trust Him to protect and guide me. I realized I was not alone. In Prov. 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding." I still don't understand why things happen but instead, I focus on trusting God in the valleys of life that don't make any sense. Here at Saddleback church I'm involved in a small group where I'm surrounded by supportive, Christ-centered relationships. This has been a very important part of my personal growth and healing. In addition, I've learned that God wants to use the experiences of the valleys I've been through to help others. I find great joy in being able to walk alongside others who have lost a loved one and help them work through their feelings of depression, despair, disappointment with God and loneliness. I can even thank God for the life experiences I've had. Through them He's shaped my character and enabled me to share with others the fact that God will protect you and guide you in the valleys of life. There is hope in Jesus Christ. He can help you grow to a level of strength that you will be able to say like Paul did in Phil 4:12-13 "I know how to get along with humble means. I also know how to live in prosperity. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

When you go through a valley of life the scary parts are the shadows. In the darkness you just see the shadows on the wall of the valley as you're going through that canyon. And you're thinking "How am I going to make it?" David says, "When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" -- he didn't walk through the valley of death, but the valley of the shadow of death. One day, someday, a shadow is going to fall over your life. Count on it. You will experience one of those shadow moments. When those times come you need to remember three important things about shadows:

1. Shadows are always bigger than the reality. Fear is always greater than the actual problem. It's the fear that is enormous.
2. Shadows cannot hurt you. Ever been run over by a shadow? There is a difference between the shadow of a truck and the truck itself. Shadows are image without substance. They cannot hurt you. They can scare you, but they cannot hurt you. They are just shadows.
3. There is no shadow without a light somewhere. When you're going through a dark valley, you think the sun has stopped shining. God is dead. I'm all alone. You can't see at all and you think you're in total darkness. But any time there is a shadow it means there is a light somewhere. When you start to get afraid of the shadow in the dark valleys of life turn your back on the shadow and look directly at the light and the shadow falls behind you. When you're afraid, don't look at the shadow. Turn in the exact opposite direction and look at the light and the shadow falls behind you. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." When you look at Him you cannot be afraid of all the other shadows around you. They fall behind you. If you look at the world you'll be distressed. If you look within you'll be depressed. If you look at Christ you'll be at rest. It's your choice. It all depends on what you're looking at. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. Don't look at the shadows. When you're walking through the valley, look at the light.

Gary Hoffman:

I have been walking through a dark valley for the last year. I am still not yet through it but I believe God is guiding me, step by step. From the time I was in the 5th grade I was always teased just about book report time about public speaking. In school, I always hung around high achievers and was always teased about being quiet and shy. Nothing seemed easy for me. Years later I realized I was dyslexic. My mind processes things differently than most people. I always felt I was different from my peers and I always wanted a different family. This lonely shadow of darkness started then for me. In the years to follow, I opened up verbally through partying and socializing. In 1980 I started a local contracting firm which grew by leaps and bounds. But my partying and alcohol caught up to me in 1986. I was involved in an alcohol related accident and almost killed someone. I shared very little of my pain. I was too embarrassed and devastated. I took the walk alone through the valley. No God, few friends, and I shared very little with my family. In 1988 I again began looking for answers in all the wrong places. I was in a psychic's office in Laguna Beach. After several sessions she told me I needed to find a church. I began attending Saddleback church regularly and began

growing out of the darkness, little by little. I gave my life to Jesus Christ. In 1990 I married my beautiful bride and was on top of the world. I had my God, my beautiful wife, a wonderful family, a thriving business, a beautiful home in Mission Viejo, I had the Mercedes in the driveway. I had it all. Or did I? About a year ago every aspect of my life seemed to be falling apart. First I began to notice changes in my relationship with my wife. I sensed that our marriage was collapsing. But the harder I tried the more my wife pushed away. I prayed for a miracle to happen. This past December my wife moved out of our home. She simply said she didn't want to be married anymore. My heart was broken. What makes valleys so painful is the helpless feeling that you can do nothing about it. A few weeks later my business was losing money at the rate of \$1000 a day. Where was my God when I needed Him? I felt like I was being dangled over the edge of a cliff and God was saying "It's OK. Trust Me. Let go. I will trust you." Since things were beyond my control anyway, I did let go. I gave all my worries to God and God was there. He started guiding me through the dark valley step by step. I realized I didn't need to know where He was going but that God was guiding me. I joined a small group at Saddleback for separated men. The purpose of the group is not to complain or have a pity party but to focus on becoming the man God wants us to be. We ask ourselves, "What does God want us to do right now in this situation?" God has used this group to remind me He will guide me if I'll just listen. Through fellowship with these men I have shared my pain, my tears, hurt to a level of honesty and intimacy I have never dreamed about. Jesus said, "The truth will set you free." The miracle is that God is taking this macho man and transforming me into a tender, loving Godly man. With God's help I am now trying to walk the talk with integrity in all areas of my life. I slip and stumble and fall but I know God is there to pick me up and dust me off. I am still walking through my valley but in the middle of it, I have a joy and peace as never before.

Ps. 34:19 "The good man does not escape all troubles -- he has them too. But the Lord helps him in each and every one." From these stories today it's obvious that Christians go through valleys just like everybody does. Christians have disappointments. Christians get sick. Christians experience tragedies. Christians lose loved ones. Christians have financial problems. God's people have family problems. Believers go through valleys just like everybody does. But there is a difference and it's a big difference.

The difference is that while believers and non-believers go through the same valleys of life, the difference for the Christian is not the absence of the shadow but the presence of the Shepherd. God is with you.