

Sitting on FAITH

A LENTEN
REFLECTION

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Here I sit at the beginning of Lent. I hope I did not forget anything before I sat down. I hope I can reach everything from here. Getting up and down leads to fatigue and fatigue leads to pain.

Here I sit. The pain will be horrific if it comes. It can come at any moment. Did I choose the right chair? Will I be able to get up from here when I want

to move? Is there an arm on the chair, a counter, a table, something that I can use to pull me up when I need to move from here?

Here I sit figuring out what I will do next. Yesterday, I made the mistake of standing at the kitchen counter making a sandwich for my lunch. I won't do that again. The pain came back and troubled me for two hours.

IF THOSE DISCIPLES DID NOT GET LIFE THE WAY THEY WANTED IT TO BE BECAUSE JESUS WAS IN THEIR LIFE, WHY DID THEY BELIEVE AND FOLLOW HIM?

When I leave our house will I use my wheelchair or my cane? I know I cannot stand in one place for more than a minute. I know I cannot walk but a short distance. So, which will be harder, walking with my cane or getting the wheelchair out of the car and wheeling it around? Then, will I find the strength to put the chair back in the car again?

My life, my body has not always been this way. I thank the Lord for the privilege of serving him for thirty-three years: preaching, planting churches, and teaching in three seminaries. Now at the end of my eighth year as pastor of Grace Covenant Church in Lakewood, Colo-

rado, pain and crippling muscle weakness have required me to leave full-time ministry.

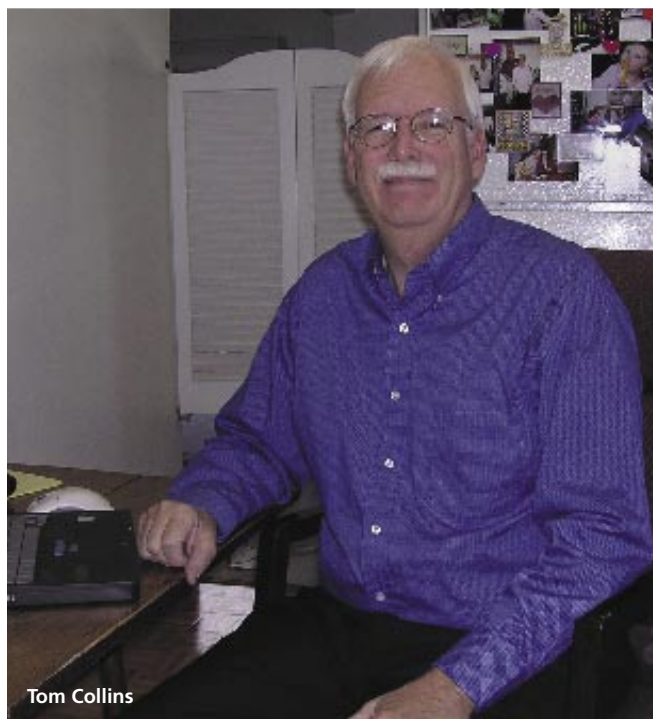
Life is so very different now. In the past, I could run through the day in order get everything done. Now I first have to ask, "What will my body let me do today?" It may not be very much. I never know but from hour to hour.

Doctor after doctor has tried to identify the source of my troubles. Each time the diagnosis comes back the same: "It isn't this. It isn't that."

My wife, Lynda, and I are left wondering, "How can we make things better when no one knows the source of the problem?"

So we go to doctor after doctor. I try one pain remedy after another, searching for the one that works best. I battle with the muscle weakness, the fatigue, the pain, and the side effects of the medications that may make my day a little better but never the best.

Recently, two people asked me how



my illness has affected my faith. I have asked myself that same question. When my body has been at peace, I remember the pain, wonder when it will come back, and ask myself if this suffering will weaken or strengthen my faith in Jesus Christ.

In Acts 1:1-3, Luke tells us that after Jesus's suffering, he presented himself to the apostles, "appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."

Life was not easy for the disciples once those forty days were up and Jesus ascended. In Acts 4, Peter and John are thrown in jail; in chapter 5 all of the apostles are arrested, and soon after that, Stephen is stoned to death. I imagine the suffering and the troubles that followed in the coming years when they went from place to place sharing the good news of Jesus, ending with each of the apostles being martyred.

If those disciples did not get life the way they wanted it to be because

Jesus was in their life, why did they believe and follow him? Then I think of what was happening during those forty days with Jesus, who had been dead and buried in the grave for three days, then rose from the dead. He came to them day after day to be seen, touched, and heard. Who else in all their lives had ever done that? Who else in all of history had ever done that?

That was enough reason to believe he is who he said he is—the Christ, the one chosen by God to lead and bless them from that day through eternity.

Here I sit thinking about all these things. Am I getting all I want in life by believing

and obeying Jesus?

Not so far. In the past twelve months, Lynda has experienced life-threatening cancer and lost one of her kidneys. The church I have served for eight years is reaching its zenith of growth, yet I cannot continue as pastor. We are still not certain that my newest doctor can make me better physically. I am still waiting to hear from our insurance company about disability income.

Has my faith been strengthened by my suffering? I believe so.

I do know this—whenever I read about Jesus appearing to his disciples after the resurrection, my faith and trust in Jesus is strengthened. I remember that being a disciple is not all about what Jesus can do for me. It is about who Jesus is—the risen son of God, the Christ and Savior for all. □

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