

open-heart surgery

May 2006

When the intellect engages with a fact, the fact is stored as truth, and belief results. In contrast, the heart believes only what it experiences. We were created to establish belief through two pathways—cognitive and experiential. Only when both pathways are engaged does belief become complete.

—Judith Hougen
Transformed into Fire

You may remember this quote from our November letter. For us, it has taken on deeper meaning since Paula's death, because through our loss we are learning so much about death, heaven, and our hope of resurrection. But it still seems strange to say that we are limited to trusting only what we experience. After all, Hebrews 11:1 tells us that "Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see." The very definition of faith is believing in what we can't see. However, faith is not always belief in what we have not experienced. For example, we cannot see the love of God, yet we have experienced it. But many times we *want* to have faith in what God says, but we struggle. What gives us "proof" of faith, to help us trust God for the unseen?

Faith is not always belief in what we have not experienced.

I believe that trust is dependent on our personal interaction with truth. A truth that is learned with accompanied experience (living proof) and emotional engagement (life impact) becomes etched on our hearts. The brain may remember impersonal truth, but the heart will only partially trust it.

More often than not, we have to push ourselves to obey impersonal truth through an act of the will. This can be an appropriate step of faith. But eventually faith should take us beyond self-discipline and self-control, to the realm of trust. God desires to change not only our minds and our actions, but also our hearts.

We don't have to go through hard experiences to learn from them. Our hearts also learn by vicarious experience, which is why we love to hear other people's stories. In sharing their life experiences, we get living proof and life impact through our emotional identification and engagement with their struggles, and our faith is strengthened.

Urgent Prayer Request

Paul is having open-heart bypass surgery this Thursday, May 25. Last week he had a catheterization, with the expectation that he would have stents placed, but the cardiologist decided that the blockage was too great and that open-heart surgery was required. Please keep him in prayer during surgery and recovery.

All of us need to hear the struggles and stories of others. In letters and conversation Paul and I are motivated to share intimate looks into our hearts so that others can see the work of God in progress. God has called us to more than kindness and politeness in our relationships. The struggles of our hearts are the true drama that helps others engage with God.

In our grieving Paul and I mourn the loss of being able to share life with our daughter, now and in the future. We agonize over whether she is happy in an unknown place, separated from family and friends. We relive the shock of her tragic accident and broken body. Those who love us want to comfort us with Scriptural truths, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, that the promises of God are as true today as they were yesterday.

But going through our process of wondering, crying, rejoicing, and grieving cannot be shortened, no matter how much we would like it to pass quickly. And grieving is not the antithesis of believing. Our process of grief is the operating room of God, where He does the work of healing—and changing—our hearts. Our heads have to let our hearts go through their own process of faith affirmation, because faith is not complete until the heart trusts it.

Through Paula, our hearts are vicariously learning what it is like to experience life after death. Through questioning and researching what her life in heaven may be like, we increasingly place our hope in our real home. In agonizing over whether she is happy, we are allowing God to fill holes in our trust of Him. Even in doubt and pain, our hope that grieving will ultimately increase our trust in God legitimizes our grief as a positive experience which springs from faith, not from unbelief.

Jesus is God's own Son, but still he had to suffer before he could learn what it really means to obey God.

—Hebrews 5:8

Contemporary English Version



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You have been a great encouragement to us through your generous extra gifts. Thank you!

a father's ramblings

Peggy and I want to express once more how honored we have been by your outpouring of love to us. These continue to be some very sad days. We miss our "little girl" dearly. The grief and sadness sneak up on us with the speed and accuracy of a bullet to the heart.

This has been a hard week for us with Mother's Day behind us and Father's Day before us, but we were blessed to have several of Paula's friends and Adam, Paula's boyfriend, send special messages of love and care to Peggy on Mother's Day. We enjoy seeing Paula's friends returning from college and are glad for them, yet are sad for the loss we are experiencing. We know that others have walked this way before us, but the finality of this loss is like running into a concrete wall day after day. There is NOTHING we can do to change it.

*Remember your word to your servant,
for you have given me hope.
My comfort in my suffering is this:
Your promise preserves my life.*

—Psalms 119:49-50

My daughter, as some of you know, tended to push the envelope more than a little. At the mall, she had a strong perfume designed for her, named "Paula's Revenge." One of her friends said that Paula's philosophy on the use of perfume was that it should announce your arrival before you enter a room and that it should stay around to help people remember you after you leave. That aroma lingered in her room and her car for a very long time, bringing sadness, joy, and many memories as it slowly diminished. This was tangible evidence that we are now left with only memories. It makes me wonder, though, if the aroma of Christ lingers in people's hearts and minds after I have been with them.

Through the years, I have talked with folks about making their lives count, because we do not know what tomorrow brings, and now the truth of that reality is more real to us than ever before. A year ago we were celebrating David & Jen's wedding and making plans for Paula to attend college. This year we are grieving the loss of our daughter and planning my heart bypass surgery. Lord willing, I will recover to serve God and harrass my family and friends for a few more days.

*You are good, and what you do is good;
teach me your decrees.*

—Psalms 119:68

I don't claim to fully understand it, but in some way we are involved in God's transcendent purposes. As believers, this gives us hope for our confusing side of reality, but we truly don't know all that God is doing in His eternal plans. Two of my favorite people in the Bible are Job and Joseph. Their hard times and the outcomes of their lives help me to persevere in trusting God when everything in me cries out distrust. God is always at work in changing our hearts. May we work with Him, not against Him.

Paul



Paula Quotes (According to Her Friends)

1. It always takes at least two hours to get ready to leave the house...even if it's just for a quick errand.
2. Animals are cuter in large quantities.
3. One can never have too many purses and/or pairs of shoes.
4. Petland is a free sample of what it's like in heaven.
5. Your perfume is meant to announce your entrance (even before you arrive), and remind people that you were there (even after you've gone).
6. Always buy the extra-large size of whatever it is you are looking for...you'll use it eventually.
7. You're never too old for coloring books.
8. Fashion is an original statement about who you are inside, and should never be about who you want to be on the outside.
9. Just because you're white, doesn't mean you don't got soul...
10. Shopping is a group activity meant to be done with your best friends.
11. Normal is what you decide it to be.
12. Nobody is a stranger.