

FOREWORD BY

Stan Pegram

When I became the pastor of BMZ Church back in 1999, my vision was to find a way to connect the people of southwest Wisconsin with Jesus. I knew that at least 75% of the regional population did not attend a church on any given Sunday. I wanted that percentage to decrease now that BMZ Church was in the neighborhood.

In order to do that, I understood that we couldn't do church like church had been done. To be effective at introducing people to Jesus, we needed to focus on Jesus and not religious traditions. And we needed a model for how to do that. So I went back to the ultimate model – Jesus himself. As I study the life of Jesus according to the Gospels, what I see over and over again is Jesus first meeting the needs of hurting people with healing, feeding and teaching, and then inviting them to get to know His Father. As I experienced life in the communities around Boscobel and Mt. Zion, Wisconsin, my eyes were opened to an incredible amount of hurt, difficulties and storms.

Part of the vision of BMZ became to meet needs and help people through the storms in their lives. Just like you, I

understand storms — balancing marriage, children, hours at work, as well as friends and extended family. My wife, Sarah, and I, along with our four daughters, have been through some rough waters. We lost a child pre-birth. Our oldest had heart surgery as a sophomore in high school after we discovered a hole in her heart. Our second daughter had hip dysplasia surgery as a six-month-old and had to be in an almost full-body cast for twelve weeks. Our third daughter, three years old at the time, had to have two broken teeth surgically removed after losing a confrontation with a coffee table. I'm guessing that at least some of these experiences dim in comparison with what you've been through.

But, I think some of our roughest times were the loss of our parents. Let me tell you about the first time that 'storm' hit us.

My dad, Rev. R.A. Pegram, was a long-time pastor in Wisconsin and my mom, Frances, was the power behind the throne, so to speak. She had an incredible servant heart and made sure my dad was as effective as possible in ministry. So, when my dad retired from full-time ministry, my mom and dad moved to Florida and planned on spending as much time as they could on the road in their RV.

Less than two years after retirement, my mom found out that she had an aggressive form of brain cancer. I received a call from my dad on Mother's Day afternoon and he told me that we had to pray because my mom wasn't going to be with us much longer. When I got off of the phone, alone in my house, I cried hard and yelled at God and told Him how

wrong He was for allowing such a great woman to suffer with brain cancer (By the way, God can handle us being angry with Him and yelling at Him.). Three months later, she was gone.

Fortunately, I was able to be with my mom for the last few days of her earth-life. She had lost use of the left side of her body because of the brain tumor. She had to be in a wheelchair to move around the house. I wish I had the words to express the bittersweet feelings of watching my mom suffer. As some of you know, it's hard to watch the one who raised you with unending strength, wisdom and energy suffer. It was unnerving to have to feed her because she couldn't even lift her own spoon, but at the same time, I was honored to serve her.

On what turned out to be her last evening before slipping into a coma, I was helping get her to bed. With the few minutes we had alone together, I asked her to pray like she did when putting me to bed as a kid. She said, "I'm not sure if I have the strength, but I'll try." She proceeded to pray for the next five minutes. What I heard was an unshakable faith. She didn't pray for herself. She prayed for me and my siblings. She prayed that we would have an impact on this world for the sake of God's Kingdom. She prayed for her grandchildren — again for impact for the Kingdom.

My mom had an intense understanding of what was important in this life. Her brain had been attacked by cancer. Her body was weak and half limp. She knew that her time was limited. And yet her faith in Jesus didn't waver.

Daily I am reminded of my mom's unshakable faith in God. I'm reminded of my mom's prayer that I would put my whole trust in Jesus. As I face the happenings of life, financial stress, death of loved ones, family and career challenges, doubt and temptation, I continue to practice that trust in God. I hope and pray that you will too.

Here's what I know, first-hand: Storms are a part of this life. It's not "if," it's "when." We can't stop the storms. What we can do is learn how to stand strong when those inevitable storms come. The other thing I know first-hand is this: You can trust God when life seems to be crumbling around you. I pray that the book you are holding will be a compass for how to stay on course as the waves sweep over the bow of your life.

On the Faith Journey with You,
Stan Pegram