

1 Post-Traumatic Growth

- Can Agony Lead to Ecstasy?

2 “My Life is Over!”

- According to The Washington Post (November 26, 2005), Army staff sergeant Caesar was in charge of a long-range 155mm howitzer — a self-propelled gun that resembles a tank.
- He was out on patrol in Iraq when a roadside bomb exploded. When the smoke cleared, Caesar looked down and saw that his right leg was severed in three places, flipped backward and just dangling by the skin.
- He tried to give his machine gun to a fellow soldier, but discovered it was bent.
- Then he yelled for the howitzer hatches to be closed, and thought to himself, . . .
- “Oh man. This is it. My life is over.”

3 Hilbert Caesar

- But he didn’t die. At Walter Reed Hospital, his missing limb was replaced with an artificial leg of plastic and steel.
- Still, he felt despair about his future. He was in pain and was worried that he’d never be able to run again, or be attractive to women.
- But little by little he began to shift his focus.
 - Caesar met other injured soldiers and heard them talk about their recoveries.
 - Then he began to look for the best and realized how fortunate he was to make it back from battle alive.
- “I’m grateful for that,” he told The Washington Post. “I’m thankful for just being here.”

4 US Citizen

- Hilbert’s family came to America when he was 11 years old.
- He says, “His heart was American, but his passport said Guyana.”
- Four months after his injury he became a US citizen.
- When he walked into the swearing in ceremony, he received a standing ovation.
- “You are a man of honor,” Aguirre told Caesar. “I’m proud to call you a fellow citizen.”
- “I just love what I do... I’m a soldier fighting for the United States,” said Sergeant Caesar.

5 Post-Traumatic Growth

- Caesar now completes marathons in racing wheelchairs and has found a job with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- He sees the loss of his leg as a minor setback and believes that he has come out of the war with more wisdom, compassion and appreciation for life.
- Hilbert Caesar has experienced “post-traumatic growth.”
- A number of psychiatrists and psychologists are beginning to see that not all soldiers return from war with shattered spirits.

- A number are emerging from the experience feeling enhanced.

6 Thorn in the Flesh

- The same kind of thing happened to the apostle Paul when he was given a “thorn” in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7).
- Some biblical scholars have suggested that it could have been anything from epilepsy to stuttering, depression to eye problems.
- What’s important is that Paul originally considered this affliction to be a painful trap or torture designed [by Satan] to take him out of effective ministry.
- For three times Paul prayed to God for this affliction to be removed. (2 Corinthians 12:8)

7 Thorn in the Flesh

- So Paul was stabbed — by a messenger of Satan, he says — “to torment (frustrate) me, to keep me from being conceited” (v. 7).
- He could have given up, assuming that the cost of ministry was now too high, but the Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9).
- God would enable Paul to perform his ministry in spite of his problems and frustration.

8 Power Made Perfect

- As amputee Hilbert Caesar says, “It makes me appreciate life a whole lot more.”
- As Adam Replogle, a tank gunner who lost his left hand in Iraq, says, “Sometimes it takes people a lifetime to realize what it’s all about ... you go through something like this and it grows you up.”
- As Tom McNish, a former Air Force pilot who was a prisoner in North Vietnam, reflects: “There is no question in my mind that the experience I had in Vietnam has had an overall very positive effect on my life.”
 - Not that McNish recommends it for anyone else. Or that he would want to do it again. It was truly a time of suffering.
- But you can’t have post-traumatic growth without trauma.

9 Ted & Karen Cukryznski

- Earlier this year, both were injured when they were struck by a truck, while riding on their motorcycle.
 - Both were significantly injured.
 - One of Karen’s legs was severely broken.
 - Even now with two operations where steel plates were screwed to her thigh bone, Karen may still lose her leg.

- However, in talking with Karen I find no bitterness, self-pity, or malice toward the truck driver who hit them.
- What I find is gratitude and thanksgiving toward God and goodwill and sympathy toward others.
- In other words, I see a lot of evidence of God's grace despite severe hardship and trouble.

10 Spiritual Growth

- Think of a time when you have experienced spiritual growth.
 - A shift in priorities.
 - An increase in personal strength.
 - A renewed appreciation for life.
 - A deepening of personal relationships.
- Have these improvements been the result of smooth sailing and easy living?
- These kinds of growth come from stress, struggle and suffering.

11 Means of Growth

- First, trauma moves us from isolation to community.
 - Soldiers find that they gain strength and inspiration from each other as they talk about their injuries and their recoveries.
 - They become more resilient as they offer encouragement and support.
 - The same is true as we gather in the church to talk honestly about our struggles and to share insights we've gained from our successes and failures.
 - Whether the challenge is raising teenagers, overcoming addictions, managing money or adjusting to the loss of a loved one there is a tremendous benefit in moving from isolation to community.
- Second, trauma shifts us from self-reliance to God-reliance.

12 My Grace is Sufficient

- “Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me,” admits Paul, “but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness’” (vv. 8–9).
- Paul begs that the thorn will be removed, just as veterans of war plead that their pain will end and their bodies will be restored.
- But the message Paul gets is that God's grace is sufficient, in any trauma, in any time, in any situation.

13 Victory

- Sometimes deliverance and victory come by the removal of the source of pain.

- The lesson the Apostle Paul learned is that God will give us deliverance and victory in the midst of the pain!
- In other words, “God’s grace is sufficient,” means . . . that when we are weak He is strong and will give us the power and/or wisdom to deal with any trial we may be going through.

14 Key to Victory

- One of the major keys to Hilbert Caesar’s personal growth was hearing from others that severe setbacks are not life ending.
- Once he was convinced of this, he started to become more thankful for what he had and his whole attitude started to change.
- When others saw Hilbert’s new attitude and how he poured his life into making the most of his circumstances, he was called a hero.
- People respect & admire “over-comers.” Why?
- Because the way they live their life gives “hope” and “inspiration” to others.

15 Our Thorns

- Right now the only thing that might be keeping us back from being admired as a hero is our attitude.
- Instead of counting our blessings, we’re counting our loses and focusing on what is going wrong, instead of what is going right.
- Isn’t it about time, we stop looking at our weaknesses and be thankful with the grace that God has given us.
- As the Scripture says, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Phil 4:13 NRSV)

16 Delighting in Weaknesses

- Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:9-10 NIV)

17 What is a Hero?