

FOREWORD BY MARK BATTERSON

EPIC



CHRONICLES OF A RECOVERING IDIOT

GRACE

KURT W. BUBNA

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *EPIC GRACE*

Epic Grace is a highly readable, intensely practical description of God's grace *in action*. It will expand (and make more readily applicable to your life) the strength, comfort, uplift, and enablement that God's grace-beyond-measure can provide the earnest seeker. Kurt Bubna's near-lyrical storytelling focuses on grace as he's discovered its power to help overcome life's blockades—a grace by which we can live beyond our limitations and experience a deeper fulfillment in life and a healthy alignment with the Father-heart of our loving God.

JACK W. HAYFORD

Chancellor, The King's University, Los Angeles and Dallas

Epic Grace describes the life experiences of pastor and author Kurt Bubna. In this well-written account, he animates his experiences and reveals God's elegant interventions. I was captivated by his life stories and left immersed in the splendor of God's amazing grace.

WAYNE CORDEIRO

Author and pastor, New Hope Christian Fellowship, Honolulu, HI

A cascade of words rushes to my mind when I think of this book: *funny, observant, insightful, genuine*. I found myself smiling a lot while reading it; it was a knowing smile, for Kurt's story is my story and your story too; it is a story of how God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.

JERRY SITTSER

Professor of theology, Whitworth University; author of *A Grace Disguised* and *A Grace Revealed*

I love the way Kurt Bubna loves his readers, shepherding them through the grace of God in difficult, pressing times. He has effectively translated his own trials so he can come alongside all of us in our quest for God's outrageous grace. Full of stories, depth, and affection, Bubna leads us to a life of possibilities.

MARY DEMUTH

Author of *The Wall around Your Heart*

Grace—the positive, loving, and forgiving action of God—is talked about in the Bible only because human beings experienced its stunning effect on their lives and wrote about it. *Epic Grace* guides us to this living water and shows us how to drink deeply. All of us who occasionally mess up in life can learn from it.

TODD HUNTER

Anglican bishop; author of *Our Favorite Sins*

Epic Grace is genuine Christianity. In this gift of the soul, Kurt Bubna invites guilt-ridden prodigals and guilt-tripper Pharisees to experience the crazy grace of God in Jesus. Such grace consumes the idiotic moves we've all made and puts us back on course to live life to the fullest before God. I encourage my fellow prodigals and Pharisees alike to read this book and journey home.

PAUL LOUIS METZGER, PH.D.

Professor of Christian theology and theology of culture, Multnomah Biblical Seminary; author of *The Gospel of John: When Love Comes to Town*

Kurt Bubna dives off the pedestal of sainthood we tend to put Christian leaders on and bares all. With an edgy wit and achingly raw, personal transparency rarely found in "pulpit people," Kurt bravely chronicles how epic grace has transformed his life, his marriage, and his relationships, throwing a life jacket of hope to fellow recovering idiots like me.

RONNA SNYDER

Author of *Hot Flashes from Heaven*

I love this book! *Epic Grace* is funny, honest, gritty, and *helpful*. Kurt reminds us that God's grace overcomes our weakness and stupidity, and makes something beautiful of our lives. His stories and the lessons he learned are grace gems; they will leave you laughing and loving God . . . and better for having read them.

JOE WITTWER

Lead pastor, Life Center, Spokane, WA

Epic Grace is the story of a life well lived . . . imperfectly receiving God's perfect grace. Kurt's disarming transparency is an inspiration to confess and own our shortcomings and live in the realm of God's unmerited favor. I am so glad to have gotten hold of this book and am so grateful that God's grace got hold of me.

MIKE MEEKS

Pastor, EastLake Church, Chula Vista, CA

Kurt Bubna is an inspired pastor who writes the way he leads and lives: with authenticity, transparency, and grace. *Epic Grace* is epic because it is the story of us all. It is the story of how God's grace can transform any weakness into strength. Read it, and you will receive it—God's epic grace.

KIP JACOB

Pastor, SouthLake Church, Portland, OR

I'm drawn to *Epic Grace* because of its no-frills approach to real-life issues of faith, struggle, and perseverance. Kurt Bubna peels back the layers of his own humanity, and his heart is exposed in the process. *Epic Grace* is a book for everyday people like you and me, craving to know more about God. I loved it.

LISA WHITTLE

Author of *Whole*; Compassion International advocate

I laughed, cried, and fist-pumped my way through this wonderful book. Be careful, though. *Epic Grace* is the kind of book that will force you into the light. Kurt's self-effacing honesty is contagious and inspiring.

JEFF KENNEDY

Pastor of discipleship, Eastpoint Church, Spokane, WA

Refreshing, honest, and uplifting. Thank God this self-proclaimed "recovering idiot" walked the path God intended him to walk. This world can use another grace warrior!

STEPHANIE VIGIL

News anchor, Spokane, WA

Kurt has done a masterful job of expounding on grace and exemplifying it through real stories—starting with his own. After reading *Epic Grace*, not only do I feel the need to magnify and share the grace of God more than ever, I also feel more empowered to share my own story with the confidence that real, epic grace is life-changing for those who receive it.

BRANDON COX

Planting pastor, Grace Hills Church, Bentonville, AR; editor of pastors.com

Let me give it to you straight, like Kurt does. I like this book. Why? Because in reading it, I find perspective, comfort, and the grace to go on. *Epic Grace* is a good book to help you keep growing, because Kurt is obviously a man who has chosen to keep growing.

MARTY BERGLUND

Senior pastor, Fellowship Alliance Chapel, Medford, NJ; author of *Choices of the Chosen*

In a world that fancies mixed images of God, Kurt Bubna describes a heavenly Father of heroic goodness. Despite his own failures, Kurt encounters demonstrations of grace so grand that God pays him in returns of startling kindness. His stories stage a drama of warmly inviting reasons for acquainting ourselves with the splendor of God's grace.

NIKI ANDERSON

Speaker, and author of four award-winning books

Kurt Bubna offers an incredibly honest, humble, and practical look at God's love and what God will graciously do as we learn to entrust ourselves fully to his faithful care, provision, and direction. There was so much with which I could personally relate. Most of all, I felt profound encouragement and gratitude for Christ's unqualified love for us and Kurt's compassionate way of pointing us to the only one who can guide us into life as it was always meant to be.

DR. JIM CORDELL

Counselor, Spokane, WA

Epic Grace is for anyone who struggles with knowing God's love. It is for the person who has warmed the pews for years, as well as for those who may not yet know who God really is. Kurt Bubna looks at life with refreshing authenticity—mistakes and all—and we see how the grace that follows after us is so complete . . . so perfect . . . so epic.

DAYNA BICKHAM

Author of *The Purpose of Chosen*

Kurt Bubna shares from the deep places of his life, his spiritual journey, his marriage, and his weaknesses. It's in these broken places that God's grace and love shine through. I felt as if I had a companion on my own difficult path, and that gave me hope. *Epic Grace* is a vulnerable, yet powerful, invitation to the table of transforming grace. We need this book.

MARC ALAN SCHELSKE

Pastor, Bridge City Community Church, Milwaukie, OR; author of *Discovering Your Authentic Core Values*

Kurt has a way of unpacking God's grace simply and honestly, revealing it in the most accessible way possible . . . through the power of his story. *Unassuming. Raw. Real.* A must-read reminder of God's heart of immeasurable grace for each of us.

AMY AND PAUL MILLER

Creative arts director and worship pastor, Life Center, Spokane, WA

I think my friendship with Kurt continues to grow because we are both just a couple of recovering idiots who are consistently overwhelmed by the epic grace of God. Everyone has a story, but not everyone recognizes God in their story. Kurt does. That's why I believe his book will help you to develop a greater awareness of God's presence in your own life.

WILL McCAIN

Lead pastor, ONE*, Spokane, WA

Kurt Bubna has given readers a remarkably candid view of his life and the subject of grace. I found myself laughing until tears rolled down my cheeks; and before I could turn the page, those tears became tears of sorrow as I felt the deep pain the Bubnas experienced. This is one of those books I will refer to again and again to provide comfort to followers of Jesus as they search for answers to life's hardest questions.

JEFF LAWSON

Pastor, Battle Lake (MN) Alliance Church

If we are sinners and God is holy, then his grace is always epic, grandiose. Kurt Bubna opens wide both his diary and the gospel to reveal how grace prevails. If you have underestimated the power of either sin or grace, this work will be a tonic to your soul.

TIM BUBNA

International worker, Christian and Missionary Alliance

In reading *Epic Grace*, I felt almost as if I were being taken by the hand through the landscape of grace. I am thankful for Kurt Bubna's transparency. Many times there can be an intentional boundary drawn between clergy and congregation. It was refreshing and inspirational to hear Kurt's honest stories interwoven in a message of God's grace.

SARAH REINHART

Ministry director, Eastpoint Church, Spokane Valley, WA

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KURT W. BUBNA



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CONTENTS

Foreword xvii

First of All . . . xix

- 1 The Last Two Miles 1
- 2 Driven by Destiny 13
- 3 Prone to Wander 25
- 4 God's Algebra 37
- 5 The Curse of Comparison 47
- 6 All for a Roll in the Hay? 57
- 7 Modern-Day Pharisees 67
- 8 "Mommy, Why Does He Walk Funny?" 79
- 9 You Don't Want to Read about This 89
- 10 This Little Piggy Went to Market 97
- 11 Learning to Love a VDP 107
- 12 What Those Romance Novels Don't Tell You 115
- 13 Lost! 125
- 14 Wild Hogs 137
- 15 Lessons I Learned on a Scooter 143
- 16 Caleb 155
- 17 Dreams and Darkness and Demons! Oh My! 165
- 18 Bushwhacked! 173
- 19 The Problem with Expectations 183
- 20 What's Love Got to Do with It? 197
- 21 What I Didn't Tell You 207
- 22 If I Should Wake Before I Die . . . 215

Acknowledgments 223

Notes 225

Discussion Guide 227

About the Author 239

FOREWORD

GRACE IS A COMMON WORD TO MOST, even those who have never experienced it. Who hasn't sung the song "Amazing Grace"? As a Christ-follower and pastor, I've contemplated grace, experienced grace, and taught about grace many times. And yet I never get tired of the topic. I never roll my eyes and say, "Really, grace again?" Honestly, I can never get enough of this core truth: Without God's grace, we *have* nothing and we *are* nothing. Grace is *everything*.

One of the things that makes grace so amazing is how multi-faceted it is. It is the unmerited favor of God granting us his love and forgiveness. It is the unearned blessing of God that goes beyond our performance, our strengths, or our abilities. It is the power of God made perfect in our weaknesses. But it is also the touch of God on our broken, desperate lives—a healing touch that gives us everlasting hope.

When people first heard about my latest book, *The Circle Maker*, there were a lot of questions.

Seriously, prayer? Is there anything new that can be said about it? Don't you think that maybe it's all been covered? What are you

going to bring to the table that hasn't already been said many times before?

Like grace, prayer is fairly familiar to most. But I knew God had put something in my heart that needed to be written. I knew he had given me a perspective that changed my life and could change others as well.

The book you hold in your hand, about God's grace, is that kind of book. Yes, it covers a well-known subject, but in it you will find a fresh and insightful perspective on something we can never know too much about.

Kurt's honest, heartfelt, and sometimes hilarious experiences will encourage you to walk in a grace that is truly epic. I pray that you will open your heart and allow his hard-learned lessons about grace to both challenge and encourage you in your journey.

The longer I walk with Jesus, the more I keep coming back to the simple things: *faith, hope, love, mercy, and grace*. As you read this inspiring book, may you for the first time, or the hundredth time, embrace the grace that is yours in Christ.

Mark Batterson

APRIL 2013

FIRST OF ALL . . .

I CAN BE SUCH AN IDIOT.

Really, by the most common definition of the word, I qualify, hands down. Most of what I've learned, I've learned the hard way. And I've made huge mistakes in just about every area of life.

I'm not that smart.

I'm not that polished.

I'm not that deep, profound, poetic, or philosophical.

Sometimes I feel completely inadequate and utterly overwhelmed.

I also happen to be a pastor, and no one is more surprised by that than I am. Why God would pick a guy like me to represent him is a great mystery. I'm over fifty years old, but I pray this prayer all the time: "God, please help me grow up before I grow old."

I went back and forth on what to title this book, but I knew two words had to be included: *grace* and *idiot*. Both describe my life so well. Everything I have, everything I am, and every good part of me exists because of the unbelievable grace and

goodness of God. His grace is truly epic. It's larger than life and beyond my imagination. And that is a good thing, because too often in my life I've fallen into idiocy like a meteorite falling from the heavens, fast and hard with an explosive blast of burnout at the end.

I know that using the word *idiot* may not be politically correct. At times, it's hard to keep up with what's okay and not okay in our rapidly evolving cultural lexicon. That said, I assure you no offense is intended. As you read on, you'll discover I am extremely honest about some ugly past failures in my own life. So, politically correct or not, the word *idiot* just fits. It perfectly describes me and the way I've lived all too often. On the other hand, I'm an idiot saved by the heroic, sacrificial, and epic grace of God. So, in that sense, I'm a *recovering* idiot, trusting God one day at a time.

Despite my many failings, and even with all my stumbling, God, in his mercy, has taught me much about how to discover his good purpose in my life. You see, as a grace magnet, I haven't just *gone* through struggles; I've *grown* through them as well. Most important, I've learned that God deeply loves idiots—including the one behind the face I see in the mirror each morning.

I'm no one famous. Believe me, with a name like Bubna (that's right, it's pronounced *boob-na*), you would know if I were. So why should you care to read about my life? Why should my stories be of any interest?

Good questions. *Great* questions!

Here's my best answer: If you've lived long enough for life to have knocked you upside the head a few times, I suspect you might see some of your own story in mine. Not every detail or

circumstance, of course, but maybe enough to learn from what I've gone through.

Maybe you share my tendency to learn lessons the hard way.

Or my predisposition to choose my own will more often than God's.

Or maybe you've known the reality of a broken heart or a broken life that desperately needs the healing touch of God.

Someone once told me that out of great pain rises the possibility for great ministry. I believe that's true. I hope by the time you're finished reading this book you will believe it too. These "chronicles of a recovering idiot" are written for those who've made some really stupid mistakes in their lives and have wondered, *How can any good come from this? How could God ever use a person like me for anything of worth?* Read on and you will see.

My friend Wayne Cordeiro, who also happens to be a pastor, author, speaker, and college chancellor, says, "We can choose either wisdom or consequences to be our teacher." I hope you will wisely learn from the consequences I've experienced. We don't always have to learn the hard way.

Maybe as you read my simple story, God's grace will win your heart. Maybe you'll discover that he can and will use anybody along the way, even idiots like you and me. Maybe you'll find out, as I have, that God delights in re-crafting our sorrows, failures, and missteps into trophies of his epic grace.

1

THE LAST TWO MILES

*I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be naked
when I leave. The LORD gave me what I had, and the LORD
has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!*

JOB 1:21, NLT

SOMETIMES LIFE IS HARD. I don't mean "having a bad hair day" hard. I mean the kind of hard that knocks you down and kicks you in the teeth without any mercy. Though I've had plenty of high points in my life, I've discovered that life's most valuable and lasting lessons are often learned in the dark valleys of defeat and despair. Believe me, I wish it were not so.

I'll be honest: *Perseverance* is *not* one of my favorite words. Nobody likes to hear, "Suck it up, Buttercup." To persevere means to carry on, regardless of hardship. It's like the ant I once saw carrying a captured Frito five times its size from under a picnic table to its nest. Perseverance means you just keep going, no matter how hard or how big the challenge.

Unfortunately, we can't talk about perseverance without coming face-to-face with *suffering*. And who likes to suffer? There are so many different types of suffering. There is emotional

and psychological suffering, like being verbally abused by your spouse. There is spiritual suffering, like what you experience when you're tempted to do something really bad or when you're persecuted for your faith. And there is physical suffering, such as when you struggle with a disability or an illness. All suffering brings some kind of pain.

Before we go any further, let me address something you might already be wondering: "What do suffering and perseverance have to do with grace?"

The short answer? *Everything.*

Typically, when we hear the word *grace*, we immediately connect it to *sin*. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. . . ." And that's good, because—without question—we all need the kind of grace that covers all our sin. But we also need God's grace to sustain us in the midst of our struggles. In fact, much of the grace we experience happens in the context of suffering.

God's gentle grace comforts us when we are deeply wounded.

His larger-than-life grace covers us when we are wrestling with hardship.

His empowering grace helps us to stay the course when the going gets tough.

And God's epic grace shows us how to rise above our pain and circumstances with enduring hope and faith in him.

So what does God tell us to do in the midst of suffering? He urges us to persevere—which is only possible by his grace. Look at these rather challenging Scripture verses:

Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of
Christ Jesus. 2 TIMOTHY 2:3

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

HEBREWS 10:36

If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. I PETER 2:20

Endure. Stick with it. Hang in there. Persevere. I'd really rather not, thank you. I'd much rather quit. I'd rather complain like a cranky baby with a dirty diaper. I'd rather blame somebody—*anybody*—else. Sometimes, I would rather just take a nap or numb my pain through excessive amounts of TV or violent movies; but God says that enduring hardship and suffering is *commendable*.

So let me say it again: To survive and even thrive in the midst of our suffering takes grace—often in epic proportions.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is the account of Job. Job had it all—a great family, a great job, and a great home. Then one day he found himself with a great loss. In fact, he lost everything except his complaining wife. I encourage you to read the full story of Job in the Old Testament, but for now let's focus on the tidal wave of suffering and loss that hit him on one horrible, unbelievably bad day:

One day . . . a messenger arrived at Job's home with this news: "Your oxen were plowing, with the donkeys feeding beside them, when the Sabeans raided us. They stole all the animals and killed all the farmhands. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: "The fire of God has fallen

from heaven and burned up your sheep and all the shepherds. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

While he was still speaking, a third messenger arrived with this news: “Three bands of Chaldean raiders have stolen your camels and killed your servants. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: “Your sons and daughters were feasting in their oldest brother’s home. Suddenly, a powerful wind swept in from the wilderness and hit the house on all sides. The house collapsed, and all your children are dead. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship.

JOB 1:13-20, NLT (EMPHASIS ADDED)

What? He fell to the ground to *worship*? Am I the only one who’s thinking that *worship* is probably the last thing I would have on my mind at a time like this? Grief . . . anguish . . . suffering, yes. But worship? This can’t be right. Job was a righteous man. He was a good guy who lived a good life without any cause for this kind of trouble, but trouble came calling nonetheless. And it didn’t stop there.

In the next chapter of Job’s story, God allows Satan to attack Job’s health with a terrible case of boils from head to foot. Then three of Job’s friends show up and add insult to injury by implying that Job’s problems are a result of his sin.

What absolutely amazes me about this man is that he never blamed God. Instead, he said, “I came naked from my mother’s

womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The LORD gave me what I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!” (Job 1:21, NLT). Later, he added, “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (Job 13:15). In other words, even if this struggle—or God himself—kills me, I still choose to trust in him.

I don’t know about you, but I think I would blame God. And yet somehow, Job kept going. He persevered. And not only did he keep moving forward, he found it in his heart to *worship*. Somewhere along the way in his lifelong journey, Job figured out that persevering through life’s struggles is better than quitting—and cursing God in the process. That’s grace.

A Taste of Job’s Sorrow

I wish I could tell you that I have no idea how Job must have felt. I really wish I could, but I can’t. I know the agony and grief that pierces the soul and plunges it into a deep and dark emotional fog. I know how heartbroken Job was over the loss of his precious children.

On Saturday, March 15, 2008, my wife and I found out that our daughter-in-law was in premature labor—just seven months along—and that an ultrasound had indicated complications with the baby. We quickly packed, jumped in the truck, and drove as fast as we could from Spokane to Portland, where our kids live. It was dark and raining most of the way. Laura and I talked very little during those five hours. We simply prayed. A lot.

About an hour outside of Portland, the cell phone rang. It was my son, Nathan. He could barely speak as he told us through his tears that his newborn son, Phineas, was gone. The

little guy had survived the delivery, and he was beautiful; but due to complications beyond anyone's control, and because his lungs were underdeveloped, he lived for only about an hour.

Laura and I pulled off the highway and just wept, more deeply than we had ever wept before. I wept for my son and his dear wife. I wept for Laura and myself. I wept for Phineas. I had never known that kind of pain before. It was like a Mack truck was crushing my chest and I couldn't breathe. It was unbearable.

When we walked into the hospital room, Nathan was holding his lifeless son, and the pain in his eyes broke my heart anew. At that moment, I would have done anything to change what had happened. Without hesitation, I would have exchanged my own life for that of Phineas, if only I could have. I grabbed my son, and for one brief moment father, son, and grandson embraced.

I kept thinking, *This isn't the way it's supposed to be. This isn't right. God, how could this be happening? No grandfather should outlive his grandson.*

For a long time, I agonized over this tragic loss to our family. God and I had some very long talks through tidal waves of tears. By God's grace, our family survived, but it took a while for me to come to the place where I could fall on my face and worship.

In the weeks that followed Phineas's death, I learned that God can handle my pain and anger. He drew me very close and held me tight, even when I was furious with him and confused. The depths of his grace sustained and carried me when all I wanted to do was crawl into a deep hole and hide.

I discovered that he really is "the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). He knows how hard it is to lose a Son, so he knows how best to encourage us through the agony of death and loss.

During this season, I also experienced the power of true

friendship. Many dear friends stood by us during those dark days. Unlike Job's friends, who offered little more than spiritual platitudes, our friends embraced us with a love that said, *We're going to stick with you, no matter what.*

I also rediscovered the power of fixing my eyes on Jesus in the midst of great struggle. What I can never do, he has already done. What is impossible for me in my own strength and wisdom is HIMpossible through God's grace.

Years before the loss of my grandson, Nathan and a friend had joined me at mile twenty-two in my first marathon. I had hit the wall and was ready to quit. My mind and body were screaming at me to give it up and call it a day. Nathan could see the defeat in my face. He knew his dad pretty well.

What he did next will forever stand as one of the greatest father-son moments in my life. He said, "Dad, you can finish; just fix your eyes on me and we'll get through this together."

Before I could even respond—and a few choice words *did* come to mind—Nathan pulled right in front of me and paced me to the end. I don't even remember that last couple of miles, but I do remember locking my eyes on Nathan's feet and literally taking it one step at a time.

When we want to quit and everything in us is *D-O-N-E*, fixing our eyes on the "author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2, NKJV) will get us to the finish line. We are not running alone.

Margaret, My Hero!

I have a friend named Margaret. We actually haven't been in contact for many years, but I still consider her my friend and

I will never forget her. Margaret has cerebral palsy, and she has suffered more than any other person I've ever known.

Getting out of bed in the morning is a struggle for Margaret. Getting dressed is hard. Brushing her teeth is difficult. She needs help getting into her wheelchair. She needs help in the bathroom. Getting food from the plate to her mouth is an unbelievable battle. She is extremely bright and has amazing insights into life, but talking is hard too. And at the end of the day, she needs help getting ready for bed and getting into bed—only to start the whole struggle over the next morning. Over the course of my life, I've gone through my share of struggles—both miniscule and mammoth. But I have never been through as much as Margaret goes through every day of her life. I thought the last two miles of a marathon were tough, but they are nothing compared to her struggles.

Margaret will never be famous. Her pool of friends is actually quite small. She will never win any athletic awards or trophies. Nevertheless, to me she is a hero. She is, without a doubt, one of the greatest and bravest people I've ever had the pleasure of knowing.

We were part of the same church for several years when I was younger. She always sat in the back left-hand side of the auditorium in her wheelchair.

One day I came in late, as the congregation was singing the old chorus that goes, *"I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you, O my soul, rejoice!"* and here's what I saw—it is an image burned into my soul for all eternity: Margaret was in her usual spot, but she had her crippled and shaking hands as high in the air as she could lift them. She had a stream of saliva flowing from her lips (which was a normal part of her condition)

and tears pouring down her face, which bore a crooked smile. Her eyes were closed, and she was singing with all her heart.

Everything Margaret tried to do was a struggle. But she knew how to persevere, and nothing was going to get in the way of her love for God. Nothing was going to keep her from giving him everything she had.

As I stood in the back and watched her, I wept. In fact, even now, just thinking about it, tears are coming to my eyes. I was amazed by her magnificence. No model on a runway could ever compare with her beauty. No queen on earth could ever measure up to her grandeur. I was blown away by her love for God. I was humbled by her ability to press through all the physical issues as she worshiped. I was awestruck by this wheelchair-bound woman walking in the fullness of the grace of God.

After church one day, I stopped Margaret on her way out. I got down to eye level with her and said, “Margaret, how do you do it? How do you deal with what you deal with and keep on going?”

She smiled her crooked smile, looked me in the eye, and said (struggling with every word), “Every day is another day to show my Jesus how much I love him.”

She didn't get bogged down in the struggle.

She didn't focus on the hardships.

She wouldn't allow herself to grovel in self-pity.

She refused to be defined by her loss.

Instead, she saw every day as another day to show *her* Jesus how much she loved him.

Now, for someone whose body more or less works the way it's supposed to, Margaret's response might seem unfathomable. But it's a perspective wrought on the anvil of a daily

commitment to draw close—and stay close—to God. Margaret was well-acquainted with suffering, but more than that, she knew God’s grace. She lived it, breathed it, and radiated it to everyone she encountered.

Joy, Patience, and Faith

There are many things I still don’t understand. But I refuse to be one of those guys who says, “Just grin and bear it!” I’ve had enough times when I didn’t want to grin and I really didn’t want to bear it, because it hurt too much.

I struggle from time to time with the canned Christian clichés about “a greater purpose” and the sovereignty of God. I know God can bring good out of any evil, but when you’re in the middle of the evil, the darkness can seem pretty overwhelming.

I know we live in a broken world with broken people, and we can’t blame God for the consequences of evil or our sinful choices. I know what the Bible teaches about suffering, but my heart still aches with the all-too-often real downside of life on this planet.

Why did my grandson die?

Why didn’t God answer my prayer the way I wanted it answered?

How could a good God let a good man like Job suffer so horribly?

Why was Margaret born with cerebral palsy?

Why is there so much suffering and despair in the world?

I don’t know the answers to these questions. And this side of eternity, I may never know.

But here’s what I do know; here’s what I hold on to; here’s

what keeps me going and persevering: It is the simple truth from a children's song I learned in Sunday school a long time ago: *Jesus loves me*.

Maybe that sounds like a pat answer or just another Christian cliché, but let's go a little deeper: *Who* is this Jesus who loves me—and loves you? The Bible says he's "a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. . . . Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. . . . He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed" (Isaiah 53:3-5, NLT). This Jesus who loves you and me knows what it means to suffer—and he carries our sorrows. That's why we want to stay right on his heels and close to him; that's where we can know and experience his epic grace in a way that is beyond our ability to fully fathom.

Some time ago, my son and daughter-in-law took my granddaughter Adelle to the doctor for her very first set of immunization shots. She cried. It hurt. Mom and Dad cried. It hurt them to see her in pain. I cried just hearing the story. Our love for Adelle is so strong, so deep, and so compassionate that her pain caused us pain.

I think that must be how it is with God. When we hurt, he hurts. When we ache, he aches. *It's what love does*.

Are you hurting right now? Does it feel like you can't go another day, another step? I know from firsthand experience that the last two miles of a marathon are the hardest. But we have to keep going. Life is brutal sometimes, but you can take your pain to the One who loves you more than his own life, and fix your eyes on him.

As you learn to persevere, stay close to God. Take to heart the apostle Paul's encouragement: "Be joyful in hope, patient in

EPIC GRACE

affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:12). Above all, remember this promise from the One who carries your sorrows: “I will never fail you. I will never abandon you” (Hebrews 13:5, NLT).