

The 5 questions I faced following the loss of my son

GAMEPLAN FOR LOSS

AN AVERAGE JOE'S GUIDE TO DEALING WITH GRIEF

New York Times Bestselling Author

JOE GIBBS

3-Time Super Bowl Champion and 5-Time NASCAR Champion

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A Note from the Coach

I'VE GIVEN A LOT OF speeches in my life, but none was as important or as difficult as the one I had to make on January 25, 2019. I had been asked by my daughter-in-law, Melissa, to give the opening prayer at the memorial service for her husband—and my son—J.D.

J.D.'s fight with a rare degenerative brain disease took place over the span of five years, during which, little by little, he lost everything—first his spark, then his speech, then his movement, and eventually his life. We tried everything to help J.D.—doctors, specialists, consortiums, experimental trials, faith-based healing services, physical rehab—*everything*. But on January 11, 2019, the Lord chose to take J.D. home.

Those five years were the longest and hardest of my entire life. I'd been through difficult times

before. I've had financial disasters, professional crises, and even a few health issues of my own, but watching J.D. slowly slip away and not being able to do anything to stop it was the most helpless feeling in the world.

I have spent my entire professional life geared to win, not lose. During my tenure in the NFL, I was fortunate enough to coach the Washington Redskins to three Super Bowl victories, and as a race team owner, our teams have won five NASCAR Cup Series championships. Between football and racing, I have spent more than fifty years trying to figure out how to win. I can't tell you how many late nights I spent crafting game plans against the Cowboys, the Eagles, and the Giants, trying to account for every possible situation.

The same goes for racing. I realize it may look like we're just driving around in circles out there, but believe me, there is *a lot* of planning that goes into race day—from calculating fuel mileage to figuring out how many more laps you can get on a given set of tires. Even the temperature and the amount of rubber on the track as the race goes on gets taken into consideration.

The point is, whether you're working between

the hash marks or along the oval, if you want to win, you've got to plan for every possible scenario, be prepared for anything, and leave nothing—and I mean *nothing*—to chance.

The same goes for life. As a Christian, I believe God gave us the ultimate game plan for success in the Bible, so a little over a decade ago, I brought together a team of top scholars and theologians to help me write what I called *Game Plan for Life*. In it, we addressed eleven areas that I believe *all* of us need to have a game plan for in order to win at the game of life, because at the end of the day, that's the biggest game of all.

So why am I writing a book about loss? Well, here's the thing. When J.D. got sick and went to be with the Lord, I did not have a game plan for what I went through. In fact, all the scholars and theologians in the world could not have prepared me for what I was about to face. Frankly, I'm not sure *anything* can prepare you for the pain of watching a loved one slowly slip away. And when the wreckage of those five horrible years finally cleared, I found myself struggling with a lot of questions. Five, to be exact.

Why didn't God show up? Whenever I had faced difficult circumstances before, I always felt

as though God was right there beside me, walking through my struggle with me. But during the whole of J.D.'s illness, God just did not seem to be there. I tried. I prayed. I literally begged. But I just couldn't see that he was there.

Are we just living a life of chance? I have always believed that God holds all the power, but J.D.'s illness made me wonder, does God allow bad things to enter our lives for a reason, or do bad things just randomly happen to us?

Why do Christians suffer? I know I'm biased, but J.D. was one of the godliest young men you could ever hope to meet. From the time he could walk and toddle, he always tried to be the right kind of person. Truth be told, he was the real spiritual leader of our family. So why did *he* have to suffer the way he did?

Why do some Christians suffer more than others? J.D.'s battle was not quick, and it was not easy. His wife, Melissa, their four boys, our son Coy and his family, and my wife, Pat, and I watched him slowly slip away over the course of five incredibly long, painful years. It was hard enough losing J.D. as it was. Why didn't the Lord just take him quickly and spare his family and

friends the pain of watching him suffer for so long?

And finally, *Do we really reap what we sow?* The Bible assures us that we do and that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). And as I said before, J.D. lived a godly, Christ-centered life, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not see the good in his leaving us the way he did.

Now, none of these issues caused me to question my salvation or my faith in the Lord. I know He created me and that I belong to Him. But as I stood there waiting to walk onto that stage and lead an auditorium full of J.D.’s family and friends in prayer, all of these questions came at me at once. And if *I* was struggling with them, I figured there was a good chance a lot of other people were struggling with them as well.

This book is my attempt to answer these five questions. And while I did consult with several pastors along the way, the revelations and ideas you are about to read are *my* answers to these five questions. I’m not a scholar or a theologian. In fact, I’m about as far away from being an intellectual as you can get. I’m just your average

GAME PLAN FOR LOSS

Joe—a dad trying to come to grips with the loss of his son. I hope some of what I've learned can help you. I know it may not feel like it at the moment, but I promise you, God *is* there, He *is* listening, He *does* have a plan, and He *does* work all things together for good for those who love and serve Him. Believe me. I've experienced it.

Joe Gibbs

1

“I’M TRYIN’!”

AS I WATCHED THE MASS of sweaty bodies pushing, shoving, and knocking each other around in a big, disorganized scrum, one word came to mind—*mayhem*. I’d seen plenty of skirmishes out on the football field, but nothing compared to the chaos playing out in front of me that day.

It was Saturday morning, and my wife, Pat, and I were at the local elementary school watching a bunch of five-year-olds armed with wooden hockey sticks chasing a little orange puck around the gymnasium floor. And smack-dab in the middle of that mob was our son J.D. It was his first organized sport, and like most dads,

I was locked onto J.D. like a laser. And that kid was hustling. I mean, wherever that little puck went, J.D. was right there after it, fighting and scrapping his heart out.

Eventually that mass of kids made its way over to the stands just below where Pat and I were sitting. I put my hands up to my mouth, and as loud as I could, I yelled, “J.D., get it!” That kid stopped right in his tracks, looked up at me, his face bright red, and hollered back every bit as loud, “I’m tryin’!”

Right then and there I knew there was no point in ever yelling at J.D., because no matter what that kid was doing, he was always trying his hardest.

Making an Impact

Before we get to my five questions, let me tell you a little about J.D. so you can see where I’m coming from.

J.D. never did anything halfway. From the moment he gave his life to Christ at age six, it was obvious to Pat and me that he was determined to become the best person he could be. Other kids were just naturally drawn to him—in part because he was drawn to them. J.D. liked

everybody. He didn’t care about social circles, who was popular and who wasn’t. He wanted everyone to feel special. In fact, he used to make a point of seeking out the less popular kids at school to try and make a connection. And let me tell you, when the varsity quarterback sits down at a cafeteria table full of kids he doesn’t know and says, “Hi, my name’s J.D. How are you guys doing today?” it makes an impact.

Pat and I used to host Young Life get-togethers over at the house when J.D. was in high school, and I can’t tell you how many kids, many who had no interest in faith whatsoever, would show up week in and week out at J.D.’s invitation. J.D. didn’t drink or smoke or cuss. He was just a fun, outgoing, friendly guy who loved the Lord and genuinely cared about people. A lot of those kids even gave their own lives to Christ as a result of those get-togethers, including both of J.D.’s best friends, Moose Valliere and Dave Alpern (who is now the president of Joe Gibbs Racing). And do you know what? I have no doubt those commitments meant more to J.D. than any football game he ever played in.

When it came time to go to college, J.D. was offered a scholarship to play football at William

and Mary. That's where he and Melissa started dating seriously. They had been middle school sweethearts, but her family moved to South Carolina right around the time they started high school. Then she came out to Williamsburg for a visit during J.D.'s sophomore year, and the sparks started flying again. Shortly after he graduated from William and Mary, J.D. proposed and she said yes. Now, I've said this before with regard to Pat, but sometimes God just gives you the perfect wife. Well, God could not have given J.D. a more perfect wife than Melissa. You'll understand why soon enough.

My point is, as I said, J.D. never did anything halfway. And though much of this book will focus on him, I can tell you my other son, Coy, is the exact same way.

Coy was five foot eleven, 220 pounds in high school, and he played middle linebacker. His senior year, he was recruited by Stanford, and I told him, "Hey, look, if you go to Stanford, you're going to have to red shirt. You're probably going to have to play special teams before you ever get to play a snap on defense." But typical Coy, he went out there, started the second game of his freshman year, and never came back out. He

played four straight years at middle linebacker. His senior year, the team picked him to do the speech at the closing banquet. They told him he could talk about whatever he wanted. Well, Coy talked about all the kids on the team that showed up for practice every day and worked their tails off but never got a chance to play. That's just the kind of guy he is.

I'm telling you, Pat and I were blessed with two amazing sons.

"Hey, Dad. Let's Start a Race Team."

Growing up, both of our boys loved all things motorized—Jet Skis, go-karts, motorbikes. If it had an engine and went fast, J.D. and Coy were all over it. Truth be told, they probably got that from me. As a kid, I was more of a football, basketball, and baseball fan, but when I was sixteen, we moved to California, and back then, Southern California was all about hot rods and drag racing. That's when I fell in love with and started working on cars. They weren't expensive hot rods, which was probably a blessing, because I had no idea what I was doing. In fact, Pat and I used to joke that we got towed out of every drive-in in Southern California because

once I got through working on a car, it was never the same again.

Anyway, I used to take J.D. and Coy to the races, and before long, they both developed an interest in all kinds of racing. Then right about the time J.D. was set to graduate, he and Coy started prompting me to start a race team.

Now, you could have fit what I knew about starting a NASCAR team into a thimble, but one of my biggest regrets is how much of my boys' lives I missed because of football, and I figured starting a race team would give us an opportunity to spend more time together. So I made a few calls, somehow managed to convince Norm Miller at Interstate Batteries that I was a good risk for sponsorship, and in 1991, while Coy was off playing football at Stanford, my good friend Don Meredith (not the football player), Todd Meredith (Don's son), Dave Alpern, Jimmy Makar, J.D., and I started Joe Gibbs Racing. Don and I had started several ministries together, and he was instrumental in helping us get Joe Gibbs Racing (JGR) off the ground.

J.D. started out working in the pits as a tire changer, but before long, his people skills, steady

demeanor, and sharp business mindset made him a natural fit to take over as president of JGR.

J.D.'s passion for the race team was unparalleled, and he never shied away from voicing his opinions. In fact, he and Dave used to get into scraps all the time about everything from drivers' contracts to marketing budgets, but true to his nature, J.D. was always diplomatic, he never took things personally, and he never held a grudge. And he *always* cared about our people and thought of them as family.

I remember back when we stopped building our race team motors and had to lay off ten people in our motor room. Unbeknownst to all of us, J.D. had set aside some money for those guys—a *lot* of money, actually—and then he followed each one of them through their transition process. He had a huge heart for people and felt very strongly that everyone should be treated fairly.

From time to time, questions would come up like, *Should we try to hire somebody from another team?* Well, there's a right way of doing that and a wrong way. J.D. was always adamant that things be done the right way, and he held everyone else to that standard as well. In fact,

it's because of J.D. that we have several chaplains on staff at JGR and Bible studies every Wednesday. J.D. also instituted a giving ministry at JGR that currently supports more than fifty different ministries around the world. Let's just say, if something good was happening at JGR, odds were, J.D. was behind it.

As the race team continued to grow, so did J.D.'s family. He and Melissa had four sons—Jackson, Miller, Jason, and Taylor—and just like everything else in his life, J.D. was committed to being the best dad he could be. He and the boys were always off somewhere hiking, skiing, mountain biking, or playing football, basketball, or baseball. And as dedicated as he was to the race team, he never let work get in the way of spending time with his boys. We could be smack-dab in the middle of a crisis, and J.D. would look at his watch and say, “Well . . . if it's not this, it's going to be something else.” Then he'd just walk out the door. Later that day, I might ride by his house and see a full-blown football game going on in the backyard.

Of course, as I already mentioned, J.D. was passionate about Young Life, and that continued beyond his teen years. He and Melissa would

take the whole family to Young Life Family Camp every summer. He even served on their national board of directors.

His entire life, whatever J.D. did, he did 100 percent. That's why, in the summer of 2014, we all knew something was wrong.

A Sudden Shift

Midway through our 2014 season, we started noticing changes with J.D. He became quieter in meetings, less engaged. Instead of taking part in the discussions, he would just sit there quietly. And instead of making the rounds through the shop every day, visiting with and checking in on employees, he would sit in his office for hours working on his computer. I figured he was going through some kind of midlife crisis, that maybe he had just grown tired of racing and wanted to do something else. I mean, running a racing team is a *lot* of work, and J.D. had been going at it full tilt for twenty-three years. But whenever I asked him if anything was bothering him, he'd just say, "No, I'm fine." Then on August 19, we held a press conference to announce that Carl Edwards would be joining JGR in the 2015 season to drive our new #19 car. J.D. was normally

a bundle of energy at media events, speaking off the cuff, working the crowd, and joking with the press. So when he got up there and had difficulty with his speech, I *knew* something was wrong.

The next day, while J.D. was at work, I went over to his house to talk to Melissa. “Listen,” I said to her. “Something’s off with J.D. He’s been a lot quieter lately, withdrawn. He just seems disinterested with everything that’s going on at work, and I’m wondering if maybe he’s going through some kind of midlife crisis.” As soon as I said that, Melissa looked up at me. Realizing what I’d just implied, I quickly added, “I mean, I know J.D. loves ministry work and that you two have talked about going into it full-time someday, and if that’s what he wants to do, that’s . . .”

“I know what you’re talking about,” she said, cutting me off midsentence. “I’ve noticed it, too.” Then she paused for a second. “I think it could be something physical.”

I had never even considered that. But once Melissa told me that J.D. had been acting differently around the house for the past several months as well—not spending as much time playing with the boys, keeping to himself, and obsessing over simple chores like doing the

dishes or folding laundry—I started to think she might be right.

Looking for Answers

Two days later, J.D., Melissa, Pat, and I flew out to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, to see if we could find some answers. Over the course of the next two days, they ran every test you could think of on J.D.: CAT scans, PET scans, MRIs, blood work, verbal tests, cognitive tests, neuropsychological tests—the whole nine yards. I was optimistic. I told Pat, “Once we know what we’re dealing with, we can fix it.”

Unfortunately, the diagnosis wasn’t quite what we were expecting. In fact, it wasn’t really a diagnosis at all. After two solid days of testing, all the doctors could tell us was, “We’re not really sure what it is.” They suspected it was some kind of degenerative brain disease—possibly early onset Alzheimer’s—but they couldn’t say for certain. All they could say is that he would likely decline over time. When we asked about next steps, they just said, “Get lots of sleep, eat a healthy diet—and prove us wrong.”

I was devastated. I mean that’s not what you want to hear from a doctor. Here I was, asking,

“How do we fix this?” and basically, what they were saying was, there is no fix. And this was Mayo. These were supposed to be the best medical people in the world. I don’t think I’ve ever felt so discouraged.

And so, we went back home, and for the first few weeks, we were resigned to the fact that there was nothing we could do but wait and pray for healing. But as J.D.’s condition continued to worsen, the fighter in me took over. If the doctors weren’t going to find a way to help J.D., we would.

A friend of Melissa’s made us aware of the Tau Consortium in San Francisco. Tau is a protein inside the brain, and when it becomes “tangled,” so to speak, you end up with things like chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), Alzheimer’s, dementia, and other neurodegenerative disorders. The Tau Consortium consists of over thirty doctors, all of whom are doing research exclusively on tau, and we figured, if anyone would be able to help J.D., it would be them. So J.D. and I made the trip out to meet with them.

By this point, J.D. was starting to have trouble with his motor skills and needed a little help dressing and undressing, so we got adjoining

rooms at the hotel. The morning after we arrived, I went over to J.D.'s room to get him, and he wasn't there. I panicked. I immediately went down to the lobby, and there he was, sitting at a little table, trying to write a happy birthday card to his youngest son, Taylor. Now, J.D. always had horrible handwriting, but to see him struggling the way he was, trying to fight through it . . . it just broke my heart. My mind flashed back to that scrappy five-year-old chasing that hockey puck around the gymnasium floor, and it was all I could do to keep from crying. God bless that boy. As always, he was *tryin'*.

The Trial

When we met with the team at the Consortium, we learned that two scientists there had developed an antibody that they hoped might be a cure for tau-related diseases and that a big pharmaceutical company had purchased the antibody and was getting ready to start a clinical trial.

When I heard that, it was like an answer to prayer. I thought, *Maybe this is the reason J.D. got sick.* Maybe God was using J.D.'s illness as a way to say to everybody in the world, "Hey, there's something here that could really help people."

Surely God was going to use this trial to cure J.D. All we had to do was get him into it.

But when we appealed to the pharmaceutical company running the trial, they told us J.D. could only enter under a “compassionate use waiver.” In other words, we had to prove that this antibody was his only hope for survival. I tell you, I’ve never been more upset. When the best doctors in the world tell you there’s no hope, and then you find out there’s a possible cure, only to be told you may not qualify . . . talk about being disappointed.

I went to every high-profile person I knew who might carry some influence and asked them to intervene on J.D.’s behalf. I also had all his medical records sent over, as well as all the test results and the prognosis from Mayo. Getting J.D. into that trial became the most important thing in my life.

Finally, one day, the phone rang. It was the CEO of the pharmaceutical company running the trial. He said, “Joe, you have got to stop this. I promise you, we’ll look at J.D.’s records, make the appropriate decision, and admit him if he qualifies, but you have got to back off.” Well, that got through to me. I backed off and just prayed

with all my heart that J.D.'s medical history would be enough to get him in.

Two weeks later, a doctor with the Tau Consortium called. J.D. had been admitted to the trial. It was one of the most emotional days of my life. We had all been praying so hard for healing. Surely, this was the answer we'd been waiting for.

The trial took place at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Once a month, either Melissa or I would take J.D. over there, and he would receive the antibody intravenously. Because this had never been tried before, we had no idea what to expect. So while we waited for the antibody to do its work, we began an aggressive approach of our own between infusions.

Melissa arranged for a team of caregivers to come out to JGR every day and work with J.D. We had both a speech and a physical therapist, as well as a personal trainer, each of whom would work with J.D., and then we would go out for long walks with him in the afternoon. Meanwhile, Melissa was consumed with researching neurological diseases and monitoring J.D.'s progress. If that disease was going to take J.D., it was going to

have to go through us first. And we were going to fight it every step of the way.

We were twelve months into the trial when J.D.'s physician said to us, "I think we need to end the program. I'm sorry, but as far as we can tell, nothing is happening with J.D."

We asked him if he would please give it a few more months. Pat and I had both been praying like crazy for a miracle, and I was convinced this antibody was it. We just needed to give it more time. He agreed to give it two more months, but when the final two infusions failed to make a difference, J.D. was officially dropped from the trial. I was devastated. I thought for sure God was going to heal J.D. But not only had the antibody failed to work, in spite of all the therapy we had been doing, J.D.'s condition had continued to decline.

Waiting on God

We still firmly believed God could and would heal J.D., so Melissa began researching different Christian healing ministries. There were several she had heard about, and there were a lot of people claiming they worked. We went to several churches, to revivals in the Carolinas, and

even to a California church known for healings. They were very intense, emotional events. Pastors and congregants would lay hands on J.D. and pray over him. They would say things like "He's healed." Or "It may take a while for the healing to manifest." Others would say, "I can feel the power coming through J.D." As much as we prayed for those words to be true, week after week passed, and there was no healing.

When the healing services failed to bring about any results, I became even more adamant about increasing J.D.'s therapy sessions. But one day, J.D.'s doctor pulled me aside and said, "Look, J.D. wouldn't want this. You're fighting every inch of the way to keep him going, and I understand why you're doing it, but it's not what's best for J.D. right now, and it's not good for you, either."

I came to find out it was Melissa who prompted the doctor to talk with me. Melissa and I had differing ideas on how to proceed. I wanted to increase the therapy, but Melissa knew where we were headed, and her approach was to have J.D. at home, with his therapy more family centered. She loved J.D. dearly, but she was also able to see what I couldn't—that this

disease was taking J.D. to a point of no return. And all the time I was spending on therapy and last-ditch efforts to bring him back was making it harder on J.D., Melissa, and the family. There were several times when Mel had to sit me down and remind me that she was and should be J.D.'s main caregiver.

“Look,” she said to me, “I know where this is going. I just want J.D. to be comfortable and to take care of him as best we can with what time we have left.” Melissa took her role as a caregiver very seriously, and there was never any question that taking care of J.D. was her number-one priority. While we may have disagreed about what that should look like, her unconditional love for J.D. and the way she took care of both him and those boys was incredible.

She wanted their lives to continue. She didn't want J.D.'s illness to take away any more from those boys than it already had. And J.D. wouldn't have wanted that either. So she made a deliberate point of keeping their lives as normal as possible. Even when J.D. was no longer able to walk or communicate, she always included him in every family outing and activity. And because Melissa set the standard, the boys adapted to

an otherwise impossible situation. They openly accepted their dad's condition, and they were never once embarrassed by it. They would still have friends over to use the pool, eat dinner, and spend the night. Heck, Miller always had at least two or three guys hanging around the house.

Thanks to Melissa, they somehow had the ability to say, "This is our life. This is what we do." And whenever Melissa called on them to help with J.D., they were all in. They never grumbled, never complained. They just did whatever their mom—and dad—needed them to do. Words cannot express how grateful Pat and I were for that.

Saying Goodbye

We spent the next two and a half years watching J.D. slowly slip away from us. Little by little, he lost more and more. To watch someone you love fade away day by day . . . there really aren't words. J.D. had always been so full of life, and what this disease did to him was horrible. I kept praying, *God, if you're going to take J.D., please take him now. Don't let him continue to suffer like this. Don't make his family—his boys—go through this.*

I arranged my schedule at JGR so I could spend as much time as possible with him. Though he was unable to communicate, I enjoyed just sitting with him. Honestly, I felt like I loved him more when he was sick than I did when he was healthy. It's hard to even put it into words. I respected him so much—the way he lived his life. I just wanted to be with him, to hold him, to hug him, and to love him.

During the final weeks of J.D.'s life, I finally accepted that he was not going to win his battle. Still, I could not understand why God didn't intervene. Why He was letting J.D. go through such a long and difficult struggle. Or why J.D. had to go through it at all. Pat and I spent many nights sitting up late talking, praying, and crying. Honestly, going through those last days . . . nothing could have been more painful.

Melissa, Jackson, Miller, Jason, Taylor, Pat, and I were all there when J.D. went to be with the Lord on January 11, 2019.

Melissa immediately set to work planning the service to honor J.D.'s life. The service took place a little over two weeks later at John M. Belk Arena at Davidson College. Dave Alpern joked in his eulogy that it seemed fitting that J.D.'s memorial

would take place in a gym. Honestly, it was probably the only place big enough to hold all the people J.D. had impacted during his forty-nine short years here on Earth. Melissa was adamant that the service not be a time of weeping but a celebration of life that would honor the Lord, and hopefully, lead others to Christ as a result. After all, that's what J.D. would have wanted.

The service featured godly music, testimonials, and eulogies by his friends and his brother, Coy. Jackson, Miller, Jason, and Taylor all read excerpts from J.D.'s daily journals, and I was charged with opening the service in prayer.

I started by thanking Melissa for taking such wonderful and loving care of J.D., and then I thanked God for letting us enjoy J.D. for forty-nine years. I thanked Him for making J.D. a little boy who loved life and for making him a godly father, husband, and friend with a caring heart, who was always helping others in need. I thanked Him for giving J.D. the right priorities in life—God first, then his family, and then others. And I told Him how excited I was that J.D. would continue to influence others through his boys and all the other people whose lives he touched, and I said how much I looked forward

to someday spending eternity with J.D. in heaven. I closed with one final request—that God let J.D. know how much we all looked up to him and missed him and to please take care of him until we come home.

We made a point of directing everyone to a special website we set up in J.D.'s name, jdgibbslegacy.com, and we invited anyone with questions about dedicating their lives to Christ to reach out to us via e-mail, letter, text, or phone. We also posted the full memorial service online, and to date more than nine million people have viewed that service. In the days and weeks that followed, we received hundreds of e-mails and letters from people telling us what an enormous impact J.D. had on them. A lot of men wrote to tell me that listening to J.D.'s boys read from his daily journals inspired them to spend more time with their families. Many even commented that they planned to start their own daily logs so their kids would have something to remember them by. Honestly, the response was a little overwhelming.

I'm Tryin'

As wonderful as it was to see the impact J.D. was continuing to have on others, I was still

struggling. For five years, I had dedicated myself to fighting this horrible disease to the point that it became my whole life. Now that it was over, as I mentioned at the start of this book, I was left with so many questions.

Why didn't God show up? Every other time I'd faced adversity in my life, God had always shown up. And yet for five long years, I prayed continually for God to intervene, and He never did.

Why J.D.? Why would a godly guy like J.D. be forced to endure such long and horrible suffering? I know people would probably say, "You're his dad; you saw him through rose-colored glasses," but I'm telling you, you can talk to anybody who knew J.D., and they would tell you the same. So why did this happen to *him*?

And why didn't God just take J.D. home quickly? Why make him go through such a long journey?

Before J.D.'s illness, I'd always had a confidence that if I lived a godly life, then God was going to be there for me. All my life, I've heard preachers say that we reap what we sow and that everything works out for those who love the Lord. J.D. loved the Lord and lived a godly life, but did

J.D. really reap what he sowed? Did things work out the best for him in the end?

I mean, if something like this could happen to someone like J.D., what about my grandkids? I had always believed that God was in control of everything, but now I had questions. Is it possible that our lives here on earth are lived solely by chance?

As much as I tried, I couldn't reconcile what I'd just been through with what I'd always believed as a Christian. Those questions just kept circling around in my mind. J.D.'s journey may have ended, but mine had just begun.

I spent the next several months studying the Bible, praying for clarity, and meeting with different pastors, trying to find answers to these questions. Again, I'm not a theologian or biblical scholar. I'm just a dad trying to come to grips with the loss of his son. But if what I've learned can be of any help to you as you work through your own grieving process, my journey, difficult as it has been, will have been worth it.