

Chapter 1

"SOME CONGENITAL ANOMALIES"

In 1979, Judy and I began to want another baby. We had Randy, age 9, and Jennifer, age 6; and, after much discussion and prayer, we decided to have two more children. Soon after our decision was firm, Judy's obstetrician told her that she was pregnant. Those nine months seemed to fly by. This was the happiest of the three pregnancies. Randy and Jennie were excited about having a brother or sister. Everything seemed great until the moment of birth.

When Randy was born in 1969, I had not been privileged to be with Judy during labor or delivery. An attendant wheeled her away while I filled out papers. I was told little as I waited in that "Father's Waiting Room." At last, the doctor came out to tell me that I had a fine son. He led me to a glass window, and I saw a nurse holding a wrapped-up baby. I only got to see Randy through a nursery window until the day I took both Judy and Randy home. In 1972 in Louisiana, the procedure had progressed to the point that I could be with Judy during labor; but eventually, the nurse wheeled her off to delivery while I stayed with friends in the waiting room. In 1979, Judy found that Lamaze was available to us, and I readily agreed. We enjoyed the Lamaze classes and became friends with several other expectant parents in our group. I am still amazed at the principles of pain control we learned in that class. The teacher prepared us well for the big event.

From a tax standpoint, I wanted our baby to be born in December, but we waited patiently and even noticed that Judy was not as big as she had been with Randy (8 pounds 10 ounces) or Jennie (6 pounds 14 ounces). Neither the obstetrician nor we thought that Judy's size might be an indication of trouble. Finally, on January 5, Judy announced that she was having contractions.

Good friends, Micki and Elvin Campbell, came to stay with Randy, Jennie, and Judy's mother while we went happily to Bossier Medical Center to have our long awaited third child. The Campbells were to wait until the baby was born and ready to be seen, and then bring Mom, Randy, and Jenn to the hospital.

Judy's labor was exactly what the Lamaze classes had told us to expect. With the monitor in place, I could tell her exactly when a contraction was coming. She followed our coaching plan perfectly as the pains grew closer.

A Problem is Discovered. The obstetrician announced that the baby was breech, but that Judy would have no difficulty with that problem since this was her third child. Judy and I still had no idea of the shock we were about to receive, and the doctor did not either.

The contractions began to come too close together, and we had to hurry to the delivery room. We rolled past the obstetrician eating tamales, and Judy quickly informed him that she would not forgive him for that smell. The process of birth had turned so fast that Judy could not be given medical help, and she had Chet “naturally.”

As soon as Chet’s body was birthed, the obstetrician looked at me and gave a pained look. Judy’s labor turned to distress. Since Chet was breech and since he had no arms, Judy’s cervix closed on Chet’s neck. I blocked her view of the mirror and called for her strongest effort in pushing the baby out. The attending nurses moved away in fear, but the skill of the obstetrician brought Chet out. Judy lay exhausted and torn badly. The doctor laid Chet on Judy’s stomach and announced softly, “Now, Judy what we have here are some congenital anomalies.” I leaned down next to her ear and told her plainly as much as I could about Chet’s appearance. I told her that our baby boy had no arm on the right side, a short stub on the left, and short legs as if the thigh section was missing. She had to have surgical repair immediately, but the medical personnel let us hold on to one another until the anesthetic had her totally unconscious.



Baby Chet

Since Judy’s medical condition was so urgent, Chet had been laid aside and rather left alone. When Judy was fully asleep, I walked over to Chet and began to talk to him and look him over. Soon the

pediatrician came in and stitched a small cut on Chet's face. Then he announced, "Folks, we are going to the nursery." Both doctors had shown great patience with my questions and my efforts to see and understand what they were doing. Soon the obstetrician was done, and the pediatrician came back to the doctors' lounge. There the three of us prayed.

Now to Tell the Children. While Judy was still under the anesthetic, I drove home to tell Randy, Jennifer, Mom, and the Campbells. I have had few tasks in life that were harder. The three adults knew as soon as they saw me that something was badly wrong, but the children began to jump with joy and asked if we were ready for them to go to the hospital. I sat down on the floor and asked both of them to sit on my lap. I told them that they had a new brother, but that he came to us with some problems. After I told them about Chet's limb deficiency and that since Judy was asleep they could not go to the hospital, they were still happy and excited. Mom took them off to bed, while the Campbells held on to me.

I hurried back to the hospital, and from Judy's room, late on that Saturday evening, called all the relatives. Each phone call was difficult, but all relatives on both sides of the family pledged total support.

Judy was brought to the room just before midnight, but she was still asleep. Her doctor said that he dreaded telling her about Chet's anomalies. He was greatly relieved to hear that I had told her before she was put to sleep. She later reported that as soon as she awoke, she knew all too well that the birth and our baby's problems had not been a dream. When Judy woke up, we held on to each other and have continued to hold on to each figuratively and literally. The strength of our relationship has given us the strength to provide all Chet has needed for well being and proper development.

Sometime during the night, about two or three o'clock on that Sunday morning, we asked the nurse to bring Chet to Judy's room. She responded hesitantly, "That is most unusual." I noted quietly that nothing about this situation was usual, and they granted our request. Judy gently undressed Chet, and we began to get acquainted with his body and soon with his personality. The nurses cared for us better than we thought possible, and we grew to love them.

Days Too Tough to Tell About. On Sunday morning, relatives and friends in distant states had a host of churches praying for us. I left Judy alone and went to the Airline Drive Church of Christ (where I had been preaching for eight years) with Mom and the children. I had prepared a sermon which, as it turns out, would help me more than anyone who heard it that day. It was based on Deuteronomy 33:27 and entitled "Underneath Are the Everlasting Arms." After I preached, I told the church about Chet and his anomalies. A fellow

minister, Wyatt Kirk, stood with his arm around me as I told them, prepared to speak for me if I could not finish the story. The church was supportive immediately and has continued to be through the years. We will love them as long as we live for their response to our need.

I will speak little about our pain during the first months of adjusting to the cruel blow of having a handicapped child. I do not want us to have to relive those days, and I do not want any reader to lose sight of our basic message because of our report of pain. We had help from friends and relatives and were able to provide everything necessary for Chet and for the rest of the family as those necessities arose.

One day while Judy was crying and I was trying to find words of comfort and encouragement, I found one of the most important thoughts anyone can have regarding another person. I told Judy that Chet will never be able to throw a football fifty yards as the great quarterbacks can, but our other son, Randy, will never do that either. Chet does not have all he needs for this life, but he has all he needs for heaven. That thought has sustained us in several difficult hours, and it continues to be our hope for Chet. He has all he needs for heaven!

Chapter 2

GOD DID NOT DO IT!

The theological problem of pain came sharply into focus for us at the birth of a precious boy with physical problems. We have both spoken several times to audiences since Chet's birth about God's involvement with human beings and our sufferings. Each time, we encounter people who are glad to hear that God is not the source of human suffering and that they do not have to blame God. We know that our son will face many difficulties in life, but God did not cause him to be limb deficient.

Our View of God. Several years ago, an airplane crashed in one of the eastern states, and over half of the people on board died. The plane was torn apart near the center isle. Most of those who lived were on the left side of the plane, and most of those who died were on the other side. While talking to a television reporter, one survivor declared boldly, "God was looking out for me!" What about the people on the other side of the plane? Was God not looking out for them? I am convinced that God gets blame, and sometimes credit, for what we do to ourselves as people.

Some evangelists preach a "health and wealth theology." They proclaim that if people genuinely give themselves to God, He will keep them from the difficulties of life. These evangelists teach that if you are having financial problems, all you need to do is give yourself totally to God, and all your financial problems will disappear. They teach that if you are experiencing health problems, you can be free from your pain by giving yourself totally to God. These preachers teach that relationship problems like those of a troubled marriage will quickly disappear if the people involved will just get serious about Christianity. The basic theology is that bad things do not happen to good people. People devoted to God do not have handicapped babies. Upon hearing about the birth of Chet, one former acquaintance wrote us to ask us to confess our sins and get right with God before another bad thing happened to us.

Remember Job. Job had some friends like that one. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar came to see their friend, Job, when they heard about his suffering. The fact that they sat with Job for a week and said nothing indicates that they were genuine friends. They were not trying to hurt or insult Job. They just had faulty theology, and that theology did not die with them. They took the biblical truth that God blesses the righteous and withholds blessings from or even curses the

unrighteous. But Job's friends carried that thought to such an extreme that they concluded that all suffering is the result of some particular sin. They believed that since Job was suffering, he must have done something sinful because God sends suffering to those who break His will. They kept telling Job to confess his fault, and they assured him that God would take away the suffering at that point. Job kept insisting that he had done nothing wrong. His friends believed that he had to have done something wrong, and the evidence of that wrong doing was his suffering. Throughout the book, readers today know that Job is suffering because he is good, not evil. In the end of the book, God rebuked those three friends for misrepresenting God.

In the first two chapters of Job, Satan is presented as the accuser of people and as the one who hurts people. In Job 2:3, God does accept responsibility for Job's suffering because God is the one who sets limits on Satan. However, Satan is the one who destroyed Job's possessions, killed his children, and destroyed his health. God did not do it!

Remember the Man Born Blind. In John 9, Jesus and his disciples encountered a man who had been born blind. The disciples asked a theological question, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" (John 9:2, ASV). Jesus said that the blindness was not the result of a sin committed by either. There is some debate regarding verse three. I believe that he is not talking about the reason for the blindness, but is saying that it provided an occasion for the glory of God to be seen in Jesus' restoring of sight to the man. *The Message* translates the verse the way I believe it should be understood. Peterson represents Jesus as saying, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do." The faulty theology that was seen in Job's friends is seen in the apostles' question and again in the Pharisees' words at the end of the story. They threw the man who had been born blind out of the synagogue saying, "You were born in sin." Their evidence for saying that he had been born in sin was his blindness at birth.

Remember Paul. Surely the "health and wealth theologians" would not tell Paul that he needed to be more devoted to God. Paul had a "thorn in the flesh" which he asked God to remove, and God refused to remove it. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul called that thorn "a messenger from Satan." Notice that Paul felt that God had turned the problem into a positive benefit, but it came from Satan.

They asked "Why did God...?"

Several years ago, I was called to the hospital when good friends had lost a baby. Because of a toxic condition of the mother, the baby was born at seven months and lived only a few minutes. The young couple was in great anguish, and they still hurt today. In the middle of

her crying, the young mother asked loudly, "Jim, why did God do this? Why did He take my baby? I don't understand! Why? Why?..."

I made a mistake that day. I gave a theological answer to her cry of anguish. I explained that God did not take the baby. Her health condition was not a punishment from God, but an accident of nature, just like Chet's anomalies. The mind of that young couple was so troubled that they did not hear my theological discourse. They just hurt! I think that I should have held them tight and encouraged them to tell me about how their hearts were breaking. Perhaps many anguished cries are not intended as intelligent questions, but just hurting people trying to tell a friend that they hurt badly.

Our God Is Big. Don't you think God understands when hearts are breaking? He would not rush to answer a plaintive cry like that one of the young couple, and especially answer it with a deep explanation. In John 9, the disciples had a theological question when they saw the man born blind, but Jesus thought of healing him.

Psalm 46:1 announces, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (KJV). God is one who helps us, not the one who hurts us! Remember Deuteronomy 33:27, "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (NIV). Add Psalm 103:13 which tells of his concern for his people. The psalmist wrote, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed..." (NIV).

If we cry and complain, God understands! Our God is big enough to let His children beat on His chest when they are in anguish.

No Answers. The book of Job does not answer the question of why good people suffer. When God spoke to Job, He asked a question which caused Job to say that he had spoken of that which he did not understand. Job seems to have been satisfied with his encounter with God, but God did not answer his questions. God is not going to answer our questions about Him! At least, this basic question of human suffering is not answered in the book of Job, and neither is it answered anywhere else by God.

Some experiences of suffering in the Bible do have causes named. However, none of these named causes are applicable to all situations. Job suffered because he was good. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den because he was good. However, the people of Israel suffered forty years of wilderness wanderings because of sin. Care must be taken before naming the reason for any suffering. Our greatest need in the face of human suffering is for more modesty and humility to be able to say that we do not have answers. No one scares me more than the person with clichés and quick, easy answers. We need to learn from Job's friends to come to the side of the sufferer and sit in

silent, loving care, but we need to learn from those same friends to be slow to speak and slow to blame.

Chet's birth sent me back to study the Scriptures. I do not understand why God does not choose to get involved with some life situations. The renewed study has been valuable and has reinforced my view of God as loving and merciful. I do not have all the answers I would like to have regarding Chet's anomalies, but I am sure that God did not do it.

Chet, a
little
older

