

THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE MIND: FACING THE MONSTERS THAT COME CALLING DAY AND NIGHT

Chapter 1

When you'd rather be voted off the island: Learning how to survive the game

(Revised 8/26/05)

Survival is big business these days. Nearly 300 years after the publication of “Robinson Crusoe,” four decades since the film, “Swiss Family Robinson,” and 33 years since Gilligan bumbled his way around an island, Hollywood offered up another Crusoe-like character in the 2000 box office hit, “Cast Away.” They also created a Crusoe-like challenge with the “Survivor” TV series, which has now lasted 10+ seasons.

The 2004 TV season launched another hit series with “Lost” which is another epic survival story. After Oceanic Air flight 815 tore apart in mid-air and crashed on a Pacific island, its survivors were forced to find inner strength they never knew they had in order to survive.

The TV series, “Survivor,” is based on the premise, “Deprived of basic comforts, exposed to the harsh natural elements, your fate at the mercy of strangers . . . who would you become?” Whether stranded on an island in the South China Sea, the Australian Outback, or in deepest Africa, the contestants are forced to band together and carve out a new existence, using their collective wits to make surviving in their rugged primitive environment a little easier.

The Survivors must form their own cooperative tribe—building shelter, gathering and catching food, and participating in contests for rewards or immunity. Those who

succeed in the day-to-day challenges are rewarded with things to make their life more bearable, while those who fail must learn to do without.

The problem with shows of this nature is that everyone wins in the end. While the ultimate winner gets one million dollars, the losers still wind up on the cover of magazines and go on the talk show circuit. The castaways get rescued and live “happily ever after” in syndicated reruns and DVD collections.

Many of us are intrigued by the idea and get caught up in the drama of wondering who will win. We ponder when the main character will be rescued. While we are entertained, we go away wishing our problems were so easily solved.

For far too many of us, our tests last longer than a one-hour episode or a two-hour movie. They don't easily fit into a sixteen-week TV series. There are times when, if we are really honest, getting voted off the island sounds pretty inviting. There are days when we just cannot face another round of immunity challenges.

Have you ever been in the midst of a particularly stressful situation and woke up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat? Were you fearful that you weren't going to survive? Were you unsure of how you'd make it through another day?

Perhaps you are troubled by the rumors of layoffs that are swirling through your department and you're tense, unsure of whether or not you are on the list and if so, where you'll find another job. Maybe you lie awake at night, anticipating the judge's decision that your divorce is final, and you don't know how you are going to provide for your kids financially, let alone meet their emotional needs—or your own for that matter. Perhaps your sleepless nights are caused by the ongoing worries and concerns that come from caring for an aging parent. Regardless of the reason, the constant stress and heavy strain

is making heavy withdrawals from your emotional bank account and you don't know how much more you can give.

How do you learn to survive another immunity challenge when there is no quick fix? How do you maintain your integrity when you'd rather form a secret alliance? How do you preserve your sanity when your island feels like it gets smaller and lonelier with each passing day? How do you stay optimistic when there is no sight of rescue on the horizon? How do you continue the game when you feel abandoned and alone? How do you endure when you don't have the wisdom to outwit, the strength to outplay, or the stamina to outlast? How do you go on when hope is gone?

Several years ago, I was sent into exile. No, I wasn't arrested and given a one-way ticket to Siberia or shipped off to Devil's Island. But I was exiled nonetheless, or at least that's the way it felt. There was no promise of a one million dollar prize or even parting gifts for all the contestants.

I had been serving as Associate Pastor at a church in the Midwest for three years. On a fateful summer afternoon, I was asked to turn in my resignation. The church wanted to go in a different direction and felt that my gifts did not fit their needs. While I had not done anything wrong, neither had I done enough right. The leaders of the church felt that both the church and I needed a fresh start.

I was fired, dismissed without fanfare, put on waivers, furloughed, my department was down-sized, I was canned, given my unconditional release, designated for assignment, my option wasn't picked up, I was part of a permanent outplacement. Regardless of the metaphor, I was now unemployed. My wife and I felt much like Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer in the television version of that children's story where

he was exiled to the land of the misfit toys. In much the same way, we felt like we were sent away into exile. We had been cast adrift on a less than exotic location, with no promise of rescue or reward.

For months, we endured the roller coaster of emotions, plunging from the highest hopes to the deepest despair. Lying awake at three in the morning, my monster fears would come calling. I found myself echoing their comments as I thought aloud, “What are we going to do? Where will we go? Will anyone give me a job? How are we going to survive? How are we going to live through this ordeal?” We were hanging on for dear life, desperately hoping that the orchestral music would swell and the rescue ship would magically appear on the horizon.

Very few of us will ever be taken into captivity like men such as Daniel or Ezekiel, or in our generation, Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Even fewer will be stranded on a desert island with seven castaways after a three-hour tour. However, I believe that each of us will experience a sense of exile and abandonment at one time or another.

Rather than a knock on the door and the serving of an arrest warrant, your exile may come when you receive a “pink slip” at work, or perhaps when the sale of your house closes and you move away from family and friends. Perhaps your experience as a castaway started with the death of your spouse, child, or some other loved one. Maybe it began when the judge declared your divorce to be final.

Possibly you feel cast adrift by questioning signs or cues from your spouse. Your marriage doesn’t seem to have the same spark or passion and you are beginning to feel abandoned and alone in the outback.

Maybe your turn as a survivor will start with a misunderstanding that leads to a broken relationship. Perhaps being married to a non-Christian leaves you with a sense of being stranded on the beach. Maybe you made some poor decisions or quite possibly you are suffering from the side effects of someone else's sin. Maybe you took a stand for your convictions and now your family, friends, or coworkers have ostracized you and cut your mooring lines and sent you adrift.

Oftentimes, we allow that precipitating event to become a milestone and we mark the rest of our lives by it. We characterize our days as B.C. and A.C. (Before Crisis and After Crisis). Our thoughts become consumed and preoccupied with focusing on the events or situation that cast us adrift and landed us on the beach of a desert isle. It's all that we talk about and we cannot think of anything else.

People who feel a sense of exile, whether it is physical, social, emotional, or spiritual tend to share some common emotions, namely disorientation, discontent, and despair. Sportswriter Steve Kelley expresses it this way:

At one time or another in our lives, almost all of us have . . . taken a new job in a new city, or a new building, or a different neighborhood. For several months everything is strange. . . disquieting. Your new boss is quirkier than the old one. Your word processor speaks Word instead of Word Perfect. You feel like a foreigner in your own country. Procedures change. Your colleagues look at you skeptically. Your hours are staggered. The copy machine gets jammed. . . . (You) thought the move would be as easy as calling the moving van.¹

Besides disorientation, there is a sense of buyer's remorse, perhaps best known as the "If only. . ." syndrome. If only I still had my job . . . If only she hadn't gotten sick . . .

If only they were still alive . . . If only I had listened to advice . . . If only God would . . .
If only . . .

Disorientation leads to discontent and finally to despair, the sense that if there is light at the end of the tunnel, it's probably a train and we're about to be run over. Or perhaps it's like the conversation between Charlie Brown and Lucy in the "Peanuts" comic strip. Lucy said "Life is like a deck chair. Some place it so they can see where they are going, some place it so they can see where they've been and some place it so they can see where they are at the present." Charlie Brown replied, "I can't even get mine unfolded."²

Perhaps the despair that we feel in the midst of exile is best summed up by the skeptic who wrote in his autobiography, "What else is there to make life tolerable? We stand on the shore of an ocean, crying to the night and in the emptiness sometimes a voice answers out of the darkness. But it is the voice of one drowning, and in a moment the silence returns and the world seems to be quite dreadful."³

During our time of exile, I found as if I had been cast adrift on a desert island. Rather than living in a wondrous tree house, my home was in a cave of despair. After several long months of an emotional winter, I was introduced to Jeremiah 29:1-14. In that portion of Scripture, I discovered three principles that proved vital to my health and survival. These lessons helped me to endure my exile experience.

Jeremiah 29:1 - 3 sets the historical context of the exile.

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

(This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.

History tells us that these events occurred in 597 BC, 10 years before the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah 52:28 explains that Nebuchadnezzar took 3,023 Jews with him to Babylon. He took the prophets, the priests, and the royal family, the best and the brightest of Israel's hopes. Among them would have been some teenagers named Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Oftentimes, progress is defined as "three steps forward, two steps back." I don't know about you, but while I love the three steps forward, I hate taking those two steps backwards. But I've come to realize that if I continue to do that, I will eventually make progress. I may not be as far along as I want to be, but I will be farther along than I was.

When it comes to surviving a sense of exile, Jeremiah tells us where to place our feet as we take those three steps forward. He says that the way to survive an exile experience is to learn that God is in control, to go on living, and to maintain hope. If we remind ourselves that God is sovereign, if we go on with the normal routines of life and continue to grow and serve, if we focus on God's promises, we can survive and eventually triumph over a sense of being exiled.

GOD IS IN CONTROL

The first step forward is found in verses 4, 7, and 14. We must learn that God is in control of the events of history.

In writing to the Jews in Babylon, God took responsibility for the exile. In each of those three verses, God said, **“I carried you into exile . . . I banished you to the nations”** (emphasis mine). He reassures them that they were not a victim of fate and that the attack by Nebuchadnezzar did not take him by surprise. God stated, “I did it. I am in control, even in the midst of what looks to be disaster.”

After you are sent reeling from the initial shock, the first step in recovering your equilibrium is to remind yourself that God is still in control, even though you may not understand how or why. You have to tell yourself that God can be trusted even though he may not explain his reasons. Perhaps it is the only thought that will put us back on our feet and help us to survive the onslaught of a persistent and unanswered question—
WHY?

There have been numerous times in my life when I have wrestled with the **WHY?** question. When my father died of cancer at the age of 65, it gnawed at me. When my 44-year-old brother was killed in an industrial accident, it reared its ugly head. When I sat with the parents of an infant who died, I was faced with it all over again.

Of all questions it is the most searching, the most tormenting. . . . Why? Why me? Why now? Why this? . . . No preparation can fully ready us for such moments. Few thoughts can steady us afterward . . . perhaps only one.

It is the realization that:

GOD IS TOO KIND TO DO ANYTHING CRUEL . . .

TOO WISE TO MAKE A MISTAKE . . .

TOO DEEP TO EXPLAIN HIMSELF.⁴

Realizing that God is in control does not necessarily answer all the WHY? questions. Instead, it draws our attention back to the WHO behind the scene. Rather than the pain of unanswered questions, we focus on a person of unalterable qualities. When we do that, we begin to catch a glimpse of the certainty that God can be trusted, even though we don't understand all of the details. Once we recognize that fact, we can learn to accept and live in a situation that may be less than desirable or one where we don't want to be.

After I was fired and landed at my next ministry, I did not want to be there. It's not that we didn't like the people and the place, it's just that we would have rather stayed where we were. But God would not allow us to hang on to the past, and forced us out the door and into the new plans he had for us. For the first six months to a year, we had to remind ourselves that we were right where God wanted us to be, that we were in the center of his will. But quite frankly, we were not convinced emotionally. Physically, we had moved all of our belongings and unloaded the truck, but emotionally, our feelings were still packed away in storage. Intellectually, we knew that we were in the center of God's will, but emotionally, we felt like we were in exile.

Recognizing and affirming that God is in control and that he can be trusted forces us to come face to face with the question, "Does God have the right to do whatever he wants with my life?" As sovereign God, that is his prerogative, but have I recognized and granted him that right?

That was one of the toughest questions we had to wrestle with. We still have yet to completely answer all the WHY? questions. But we've come to realize and rest in the

fact that God is sovereign and he has the right to do what he wants with us, because we are his servants.

In the process, I had to reexamine my view of God. A.W. Tozer once said, “The most important thing about you is what you believe about God, because what you believe about God determines what you believe about everything else.” Before our exile, I would have said that God does not make mistakes and is not surprised by calamity. I would have affirmed that he is in control even when I don’t understand. However, spending time in the crucible helped transform those beliefs into convictions. Having seen God work has made me more convinced than ever.

GO ON LIVING

Realizing that God is in control, that he does not make mistakes, and that he can be trusted is our first step forward toward surviving an exile experience. The second step is to go on living. In verses 5 – 7, God gives Jeremiah and Israel three distinct instructions. The exiles were instructed to settle into the normal routines of life, to grow and prosper, and to minister to others. They were to prepare for a long stay, rather than an early return. Their test of survival would last longer than sixteen weeks and several reruns. No amount of immunity challenges would get them voted off this island. No rescue would come in two hours from a passing ship or plane.

Jeremiah 29:5-6a stated,

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters.”

These word pictures all refer to the normal routines of life. Build and settle, plant and harvest, marry and have children and grandchildren. The Jews were to settle down and prepare for a long stay, ultimately 70 years. They were to go on living, even though they were strangers in a strange land. The book of Daniel gives us an example of four young exiles, Daniel and his three friends, who did just that. That settled into daily routines, they became involved in government and had an impact on their society.

In his book, *Winning Life's Toughest Battles*, Dr. Julius Segal said that one of the keys to surviving and growing through a crisis is in gaining control. By creating a familiar routine, one discovers that they can still help themselves. Rather than focusing on the things that are out of our control, we focus on what we can do and control. Simplify your routine. Get back to the basics—build and settle down, plant and eat, marry and raise a family.

During the months when I was in between ministries, a friend counseled me to do these very things. He said that I should have a daily schedule, whether that included exercise or merely going to the library to read and study. We painted our house and did repair projects that we had put off. I tried to schedule time each day to write and journal and exercise. We went on long walks as a family. Since we did not have a basic routine and rhythm, we tried to establish our own.

The end of verse 6 instructed the exiles to continue to grow and prosper. “Increase in number there; do not decrease.” Far too often, those who feel as if they are in exile tend to become focused inwardly and sometimes are consumed with self-pity. Rather than shrivel up emotionally, we need to approach our exile like the Swiss Family Robinsons. We need to continue to learn and grow. On days where we struggle for

survival, we need to remember the pithy statement, “Pain is inevitable, misery is optional.” Even though we may feel exiled, we don’t have to be miserable. Instead, it should be a time of growth.

Rather than sit back and feel sorry for ourselves, our family used our time of exile to read and study and see things we had not taken time for previously. We went camping, sightseeing, and did other tourist activities. We attempted to fill our days with meaningful activities instead of whining.

Jeremiah also said that we are to get involved in the lives of other people in order to minister to them. In verse 7 he wrote, “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” Jeremiah pointed out the truth of the statement that we find healing through helping. We grow by giving.

This is where we took one step backwards. As a family, we stopped going to church for six months. We hid behind the excuses of not wanting to put our children in a different Sunday School class or nursery room each week or that we knew people in various churches and did not want to have to explain why we were there. We worked harder on having family devotions and having “church” at home. The reality was that not only did we remove ourselves from the healing community of other believers, but we stopped serving and giving.

There are two women who provide a stark contrast in learning and applying these lessons. Beth and Jennifer were women who were full of joy and well respected by the congregation. Beth’s husband was chairman of the elders while Jennifer’s husband was the church’s business administrator. Within a few short months, however, the stained

glass window of idyllic family life was shattered as both of their husbands left them for other women. The blow of an affair sent both women reeling.

Jennifer never recovered from the shock of her husband's affair. She began to dry up and shrivel emotionally. She went back to nursing and gradually complained more and more about the long hours and how hard it was to be a single parent. Before the divorce, she had a beautiful voice and was often called upon to sing in church. Afterwards, her voice gradually took on a harsh quality and she sang less and less. She had a hard time just doing her daily tasks and became more and more dependent on others. Once joyful and outgoing, she became more and more withdrawn, critical, lonely, and miserable. With each day, she strengthened the walls of self-pity and reinforced the bars of her exile.

Having never worked before, Beth was thrust into the job market without any skills. And yet she was determined to learn to be independent and to provide for her two teenage children. She found a job and began to learn new skills and a new career. She read books and tried to stretch herself intellectually. Determined not to feel sorry for herself, she opened up her home to others and tried to share what she had. She got involved in a small group Bible study and discipled other women. Serving other people unlocked the bars of her exile and she began to bloom and blossom in new ways.

When your circumstances change, whether it is a job transfer, a change in housing, a death in the family, an illness, or some other change, acknowledge God as the sovereign Lord who is in control despite the circumstances. Resolve to trust him even though you may never have all the reasons. Settle into a new routine as soon as possible.

Get to know your new neighbors or coworkers. Build friendships and strong relationships. Get involved in ministry. Share your life and experience with others.

One of the best examples of someone who mastered this lesson is a couple who attended our church for only two years. Joel and D'aun moved to Seattle on a short-term job assignment and knew that they were going to return to family and friends after two years. But rather than pine for Dallas, TX, they settled in and got involved in our church. They became mainstays of our music and drama programs, got into a small group, and developed many deep and lasting friendships. They gave of their lives and invested in us. When they left, we hated to see them go. They had enriched our body.

MAINTAIN HOPE

In addition to trusting God because he is in control, and settling into the routines of life, Jeremiah warned the Jews to beware of people who painted rosy pictures of the future.

“Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the Lord (29:8-9).

In his sermon one Sunday, a pastor explained that he had seen the sign, “Free beer tomorrow” in the clubhouse at a golf course. People would read the sign and come back the next day expecting to receive free beer, only to discover the sign read “Free beer tomorrow.”

The mindset of “When things get better tomorrow” is dangerous because it can stunt my growth. Rather than moving ahead, this “rescue mentality” shunts our train off to a side track where we sit and wait. If I believe that my exile ends tomorrow or that my

parents will bail me out of this difficulty next week, I will not learn the lessons God has for me today. I will not attempt to discover who else is in need so that I may minister to them. I will neglect my daily routines because they will be different tomorrow.

If I anticipate I will receive a new job tomorrow or next week, I will let my work habits slide and will ignore or neglect building a team among my coworkers because “I’m out of here.” If I cling to the belief that a weekend away will solve my marriage problems, I will neglect improving my communication and listening skills or seeking a long-term solution. Believing I’m going to win the lottery or waiting for my inheritance will derail me from finding a better job or learning how to budget my income.

The fantasy of “tomorrow” stunts my growth. If I wait for the change to take place out there, I will never make the change in here. If my circumstances will change soon, why worry about changing my character?

Instead of holding on to false hope, I need to take my third step forward by discovering God’s purpose and his promises. Verses 10 - 14 tell me that God’s ultimate purpose is blessing and a closer relationship with himself. Keeping that hope in mind will help me to grow rather than shrivel up emotionally.

“When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. **You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,**” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. **I will gather you from all the nations and places**

where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which **I carried you into exile**” (emphasis mine).

Even in the midst of exile, God demonstrates his grace. He assures us that the exile is part of his plan to give us a hopeful end. The pain is there for a purpose and when that purpose is complete, we will be restored.

I would be a fool if I said I understood completely why God allows us to experience pain and exile. I don't. But I catch a partial glimpse of one of the reasons in verses 12 - 14. Jeremiah indicates that God allows us to go through exile in order to have a closer relationship with him. In doing that, he sometimes uses pain to arrest our attention. C.S. Lewis stated, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, and shouts in our pain. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”⁵

Samuel Rutherford explained how God can sometimes use pain to draw us closer to himself when he wrote,

“If God had told me some time ago that he was about to make me happy as I could be in this world, and then had told me that he should begin by crippling me in arm or limb, and removing me from all my usual sources of enjoyment, I should have thought it a very strange mode of accomplishing his purpose. And yet, how is his wisdom manifest even in this! For if you should see a man shut up in a closed room, idolizing a set of lamps and rejoicing in their light, and you wished to make him truly happy, you would begin by blowing out all his lamps, and then throwing open the shutter to let in the light of heaven.”⁶

God in his grace, blows out our lamps and opens up the shutters in order that we might see him more clearly. He desires that we would seek him, that we would come and

pray, that we would call upon him and listen to him. He wants to bring us to a point of repentance so that we can enjoy greater fellowship. He removes all the shiny things that distract us so that we might focus our attention on him. He takes away our crutches so that we might lean and depend on him.

I need to spend time in his word, to get to know him better, to understand his plan and purpose for my life, to know what his promises are so that I might cling to them. When I feel like a castaway on a desert island, I need to go to my knees, asking God to strengthen me and to help me to endure. A sense of exile should be a signpost pointing me to the Savior.

CONCLUSION

I believe that exile is inevitable. Each one of us either has, are, or will experience a time in our lives where we have to survive a stint on a desert island. That experience is not there to defeat us, but rather to stretch us and cause us to grow.

When you feel like you cannot face another immunity challenge and you'd rather be voted off the island, take three steps forward that will enable you to survive and triumph. The first step is to realize that God is in control. Because of that fact, he can be trusted. Give him the right to do whatever he wants in your life.

The second step is to go on living. Settle down and take charge of the routines of life. Continue to learn and grow. Try to understand what God is attempting to teach you. Don't become so inwardly focused that you no longer see the needs of others. Reach out and minister to those who are hurting. In helping, you will discover healing.

The third step is to maintain hope. Cling to the presence and the promises of God.

If you do those things, you will endure and triumph. You will survive the challenge. If you find yourself taking two steps back and feeling sorry for yourself all over again, repeat those three steps forward. Over time, you will gradually grow and walk through and out the other end of your exile.

And don't worry, God will be with you every step of the way. He wants you to triumph and succeed even more than you do.

Scripture often portrays us as sheep and God as the Good Shepherd. In his book, *Family Survival in the American Jungle*, Steve Farrar gives a pointed illustration of how God cares for his sheep.

Sheep need restoration because sheep have a tendency to stray. Stubborn and strong-willed, a sheep can wander off the path the shepherd is blazing for them. When that happens the shepherd must restore them to the right path.

When a sheep wanders from the right path it is in tremendous danger. . . A wild beast can suddenly appear or the sheep can take the wrong path and suddenly find itself on a precarious, rocky ledge. One false step and that sheep will become lambchops on the jagged rocks hundreds of feet below.

Every night at twilight, a good shepherd will count his sheep. If one sheep is missing, he will go and find that sheep before night falls. The shepherd knows what can happen to a wandering sheep during the night. So he will find the sheep and restore it to the flock.

Every once in a while, the shepherd will notice it's the same sheep who strays night after night. This little sheep is prone to wander, a very bad habit.

After this happens several times in a short period, the shepherd will go looking for the sheep as usual, but on this evening he will do something unusual.

On this evening, the shepherd will find the little sheep, pick it up, and firmly hold it with one arm while positioning his strong staff against one of its legs. Then with a swift and strong motion, he will snap the sheep's leg with the staff. On this particular evening, the Shepherd breaks the leg of the little sheep.

Now, why would a loving, caring shepherd break the leg of a defenseless little sheep? How could such a committed shepherd do such a cruel thing?

Haddon Robinson provides the answer:

Back in the fold the shepherd makes a splint for the shattered leg and, during the days that follow, he carries that crippled sheep close to his heart. As the leg begins to mend, the shepherd sets the sheep down by his side. To the crippled animal, the smallest stream looms like a giant river, the tiniest knoll rises like a mountain. The sheep depends completely upon the shepherd to carry it across the terrain. After the leg has healed the sheep has learned a lesson: it must stay close to the shepherd's side.

To break the leg of a poor, defenseless sheep seems almost vicious, unless you understand the shepherd's heart. Then you realize that what seems to be cruelty is really kindness. The shepherd knows that the sheep must remain close to him if it is to be protected from danger. So he breaks the leg, not to hurt it, but to restore it.

Sometimes the only way God can break our legs is to break our hearts (and send us into exile). It may be the loss of a child, the loss of a business, the

loss of a marriage, the loss of a ministry, or the loss of our health. That too, seems almost cruel. But it's when our hearts are broken that we learn the lesson of staying close to the Shepherd. That is a lesson we must learn. . . . The only way to stay on that path of righteousness is to stay close to the Shepherd. That's why he will break your leg. That's why he will break your heart. He wants you to stay close to him as you walk through life.⁷

Has God broken your leg? I know that he has broken mine. That's why spiritually speaking, I walk with a limp. Although it was painful, I'm glad he did it. Now I am mindful of staying close to the Shepherd. Most of us would not choose to have our legs broken. But that is much better than the alternative.

The next time your monster fears come calling at night and leave you wondering how you are going to survive and live through the experience, remember God's answer for surviving an exile. Three steps forward, two steps back.

WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID YOU CAN'T SURVIVE THE TEST,

1. Remember that God is in control
2. Go on with the normal routines of life
3. Maintain hope

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU TURN ON THE NIGHT LIGHT

1. Have you ever experienced a time of exile, or feeling like you were a castaway?

What were the circumstances that led to that situation?

2. What lessons did you learn from that experience? What helped you to survive that time of life?
3. What does the phrase, “God is in control” mean to you personally?
4. Can you think of a time when you saw God demonstrate his sovereign control in your life?
5. What promises of Scripture do you find especially meaningful at your current stage of life? Why? How have they encouraged you?

¹ Kelley, S. (1992). "Fight or flight? Struggling hitter picks wrong approach to woes." *Seattle Times*, Wednesday, May 20, 1992, p. E1.

² Green, M. P. (Ed.). (1989). *Illustrations for biblical preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, p. 219, # 778.

³ Green, p. 104, # 337.

⁴ Swindoll, C.R. (1983). *Growing strong in the seasons of life*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, p. 91-92.

⁵ Cited in Green, p. 256, # 940. (Lewis, C. S. *The problem of pain*, New York: Macmillan, 1978).

⁶ Cited in Green, p. 364, # 1344. (Samuel Rutherford, *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*).

⁷ Adapted from Farrar, S. (1991). *Better homes and jungles*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, p. 176-8.