



The Deep, Dark, Cold Abyss

By Jeff Reich

It was late October, and autumn was in full swing. The weather had already turned cold. Most of the leaves on the trees had already fallen. It was our wedding anniversary, and, as we sometimes had done in the past, we celebrated by renting a small cabin on Lake Pend Oreille (*pronounced: Pon-der-ray*) outside of the small town of Bayview, Idaho.

It was around 8pm when my wife, Christy, and I decided to go for a walk down on the docks to look at all the house boats. The dock is well-lit, and many of the house boats have lights even though at that time of year there was no one around. As we ventured down the docks, we came to a 90-degree left turn. As we proceeded, we noticed the dock lights were not working on this leg of the dock.

It was getting noticeably darker and darker. Suddenly I heard a SWOOSH and SPLASH sound. I was holding my wife's hand, then she was gone - she just disappeared! Looking down into the dark, black water, I saw bubbles. Then her head bobbed up. I grabbed her by the arm and pulled her back up onto the dock! The water was freezing cold! We laughed at this "surprise", as it seemed funny at the time.

What we then noticed, as our eyes were adjusting to the darkness, was that the end of the dock was cut at a 45-degree angle! So, while my feet were firmly on the dock, Christy's went into thin air, and down she went! By the time we returned to our cabin, things were not so funny anymore. Hypothermia seemed imminent if we did not get her warmed up.

We look back at this event and thank the Lord that something more serious didn't happen! Christy could have come up under the dock, making her rescue more difficult. She could have hit her head on the edge of the deck. She could have drowned. She must have gone straight down and back up, which allowed me to grab her.

This event has made us think. Many of us wander through life and then, unsuspectingly, something happens. Suddenly, our lives are plunged into the deep, dark, cold abyss.

Another Abyss

A few years later, also in late October, Christy went in for a "simple" esophageal surgery. The doctor told us she would need to spend the night at the hospital just to make sure things were ok. The next day, the doctor said she was good to go home.

I disagreed. Christy was not making progress - she couldn't even get up to go to the bathroom. I explained to the doctor that we live in a remote area a 14-mile drive from the nearest hospital. If there were complications, it could be a serious, life-threatening problem. The doctor listened to me and agreed. Then he left to go watch football with his friends. He never bothered to examine my wife - to listen to her lungs with a stethoscope, ask her questions, take her blood pressure. Nothing.

That night Christy went into a coma. There were no nurses to be found at the nurses' station. No one answered the nurse's intercom. Finally, a young girl came in to check on us.

To make a long story short, an emergency medical team whisked Christy away to ICU. Soon we found out she had a collapsed lung - her mediastinum had filled with liquid. We thought for sure this was the end.

Nearly a week passed, and Christy remained in a coma on life support. When she finally came to, she was nearly





▲ Christy the day she was admitted too have her surgery.

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unrecognizable. She was on a feeding tube, multiple medication pumps, drains in her chest cavities, and a ventilator. As our October wedding anniversary rolled around, I remembered that eventful night when Christy fell into the lake. It seemed, once again, we were falling into a deep, dark, cold abyss.

On November 1st, we had Christy moved to a CICU at a much larger, more professional hospital. It was a dark time for our whole family. One learns who your friends are and which family members care. We were embraced by so many people who offered to help, asked if we needed money, brought food, called and shared that they were praying and thinking about us. All of these gestures are so encouraging when you are in the deep abyss. What a joy to see family pulling together to build a support team! But greater than that is the unseen Hand reaching down into the cold, dark waters, pulling us back up onto the dock.

Unbelievers simply cannot relate to this. Only those who have passed through the deep, dark, cold abysses of life understand. Unbelievers write belief in God off as a crutch or a self-induced psychological coping state. But those of us who have gone through hard times know there is a real Presence that imparts strength to deal with those deep, dark times.

We are all faced with sickness and death. No one is exempt. Losing a spouse, a child, a parent, a friend

is hard. We hear the words of Jesus: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." And He is.

Nearly three months later, and three different hospitals later, my wife returned home on a feeding tube with a stint in her esophagus. Weeks later the feeding tube and stint were removed! Those who call our ministry often get to talk with Christy, as she answers many of the calls here.

God Smiles on Us!

When my wife fell into the lake that night, as cold and scary as it was, we still rejoiced. She was pulled up and made it. In spite of the careless disregard of a surgeon making two accidental cuts in her esophagus, she also pulled through and made it. Needless to say, we changed gastroenterologists. The replacement was a kind, soft-spoken man from India. Jesus used this man to save my wife's life. He was the one to find the second incision, and he placed the stint in her esophagus so it could heal after so many surgeries.

A few months later, Christy had to have the stint removed. In talking with her doctor, we discovered that he was a Christian. I mentioned that we worked for a ministry and that I had been to India many times over the years. Looking directly at Christy, he asked, "May I pray for you?"

One year later, we were scheduled to go in for a follow-up. I brought a *Laymen Ministries* magazine with me to give to this Indian doctor, as I thought he might enjoy reading about what our ministry is doing in India. This was during Covid, so we all had masks on, but we could see a twinkle in his eyes! As he looked at the magazine, he stated, "You might know my mother-in-law. Her name is Brenda Robinson?"

We looked at him in disbelief then we all started smiling and laughing! Brenda and her late husband,

Bob, were Adventist missionaries in India for many years. In fact, Brenda handled our ministry's funds for our projects there for well over 20 years, as she was employed at the SDA Division office in Southern India. I knew she was now working from home in Spokane, Washington, living with her daughter and son-in-law. The Indian doctor was that son-in-law and he was beaming from ear to ear. And so were we! Yes, God does smile with us after those deep, dark, cold abysses

Please - Take the Pain

I had a most unusual experience one time. Once a week I was having Bible studies with a man who was struggling with alcohol and depression. On this certain day, we were scheduled to have a one-on-one meeting around 3pm.

Earlier that day, I was replacing the cutting blade on a big, lever action guillotine. That is what they call big paper cutters used in a print shop, which we had in our ministry's print room. When I was done, I reached under the blade, which was locked in an open position.

As I was pulling my hand out, my fingernail on my right hand's index finger touched the blade. This spooked me, and I reacted by pulling my hand quickly out. This blade was so sharp that in doing this, I pulled my finger up into the blade, cutting off the tip of my finger and nail. The pain was unbearable.

I ran to the bathroom and flushed it with cold water, cleaned it with alcohol, and then wrapped it in gauze. Every time my heart beat, pain shot up my arm. The tips of your fingers are some of the most sensitive parts of your body. I went straight to the sofa and lay down with a cool cloth on my head, elevating my hand.

There was a knock on the door. It was my 3 pm Bible study appointment. I told my friend what had happened and that I was not able to have a Bible study. He looked at me. "Man, I was really hoping we could do this. I am really down right now and was really looking forward to this."

I told him, "Let's pray - that is the least I can do." As we prayed, I mentioned the name of Jesus and asked Him to take away the pain so we could have the Bible study. Immediately the pain left me!

I stood up and waved my hand around. I looked at my friend and exclaimed, "The pain is completely gone! This is amazing! There is power in the name of Jesus!" And there is.


We had the Bible study that day. The following text came to mind:


"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

May we ever remember the words of Christ:

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"

(Hebrews

4:14-16). 



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