



---

## Audio Transcript

File URL	<a href="#">Ben Chatraw 05-04-14.mp4</a>
Length	58 min
Audio Quality	★★★★★ (Very Good)

There are some that do not believe that God is real. They believe that those of us that think that there is a God are weak minded, that somehow God is a figment of our imagination, made up to comfort our souls in times of need, or to comfort ourselves from the fact that one day we'll all die. There are others that, while they may believe that God is real, they believe that He's distant, that He's not present, that He's not in our circumstances.

But if you're a Christian, if you're a follower of Christ, we believe that God is not only real, but that He's present, and that He's not only present, but all powerful. And in the fact that He's all powerful, He's sovereign and in control of all things; all the things that we see. The reason that we believe that, the reason I believe it, the reason we believe it, is not only because God gives us His Word that tells us that, but we believe because of the experiences and the encounters that we have with God in our lives, where God shows up and He is faithful. And we believe it because of the experiences and the encounters that we see others around us have with God, and God shows up and He is faithful.

So before I begin and start to share my story, which really isn't just my story, I want to pray.

*“Father, thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you that you are faithful in all things. Thank you for your steadfast love. Lord, help us to experience that faithfulness in our lives. Lord, be present here today. Have your spirit in the midst of us, so that we would not only know that you're real, and that you're faithful, Lord, but that we would be encouraged, and strengthened, and empowered by that faithfulness, Lord. Thank you, God. Amen.”*

My intent is not to try to tell all the details of everything that we've experienced. If I sat and talked for 6 hours, I literally would not be able to cover all the experiences and all the encounters that we had with the Lord. When I was invited and Glen and I were talking about me coming and speaking, he gave me one condition. I'm happy I'm going to be able to meet that condition. But the condition was that I go longer than he goes, so that everybody will welcome him back up and like him.

But, I literally could not cover all the experiences and all that the Lord did if I talked all day. The reason for that is there's some things in life that we go through that you just can't fully appreciate unless you experience them. So I'm not here to go through these details so that you can

sympathize, or empathize, or even appreciate it. But my intent is to declare and show you how God has been faithful in my life, and faithful through many of you, and faithful in the lives of others, in hopes that you would be encouraged, and you'd look for those places where he's faithful in your life.

So we're going to look today at 2nd Corinthians 1:8-11. This is Paul's letter to the Corinthians, and he's coming off a really rough period of suffering. It says, *"For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the afflictions we experienced in Asia."*

Here, Paul is saying, we want you to know about what happened. We don't want to hide the suffering that we went through. We want you to know about it. "For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself." Have you ever been in that spot, where things just seemed so bad. The weight of the world's just so heavy. Just full despair, and you say, "Is it worth it? What's going on? Is it worth it, God?"

Paul continues in his letter, *"Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God, who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. Ye also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many."* We're going to come back and look at this, and look exactly what Paul was saying.

My story starts about 7 years ago, shortly after we moved to Dallas. I've got four kids, Kelsly, Raelin, Camden, and lie. Raelin was about to be born. She's 7 now. She was about to be born, and so it just seemed the wise thing to do, the prudent thing to do, to get some more life insurance. I went to the life insurance company I've always got life insurance from, and they said, "We want to take some of your blood and see how healthy you are." A couple weeks later I got this letter back, and it said, "Mr. Chatraw, we're not going to sell you life insurance because your blood tests came back poor." I thought that was interesting. It was the first time a life insurance company wouldn't take my money.

So I thought, you know what, I need to look into this. I went to see my primary care physician, just the main doctor I go to. I'd probably only seen him once every two years -- hardly ever saw him. I went in to talk to him and he reran the tests and they came back the same way. He said, "Your liver enzymes are just slightly elevated, but I wouldn't worry about

it. Don't sweat it. It's probably not a big deal. It's probably because you run and exercise, or maybe it's a benign condition."

I sat down in his office and kind of thought about that for a few minutes. Some people might say it was the Holy Spirit coming over me. I just think it was this thing called common sense. I rationalized and said, the life insurance people are good at math, and they think it's more likely I'm going to die than they are going to receive their money, so something is up here. So right before I fired my primary care physician, I asked him, I said, "If I were going to worry about it, what would I do?" He said, "You can go see this specialist. It is a GI doctor." I didn't know even what a GI doctor was. I had to go look it up.

So I go see this specialist and spent the next nine months getting to know him very well. They would test me and poke me and prod me and stick needles in me, and perform MRIs, and ultrasounds....all of this stuff. After nine months they still don't know what's going on. They said, "We can't quite figure it out. It's not any of these normal diseases. We don't know if it's serious. We don't know what it is. But we've got this experimental medicine that we want you to try."

Once again, Mr. Common Sense, said this just doesn't sound right. This doesn't sound right. See, God is faithful. He's faithful in that He gives us a mind to think with and a mind to use, to make good, rational, logical decisions. Already in this process He was being faithful by putting me on the right path.

So I sat in the room and thought, you know what, I'm not going to start some experimental medicine when we don't know what the diagnosis is. I'm not sure why I said this, but I just said, "Okay, before we start this, who's the best? Who is the best?" I don't know why I said that. I felt like I was in the Top Gun movie. For those of you who know me, you know I love Top Gun. That's a dream for me, being in a Top Gun movie. So for some reason I just said, "Who's the best?"

He said, "There's this doctor. He's by far the best. He's actually here in Dallas. And I'll write you a letter, but he probably won't see you, and even if he does see you, it's going to be months and months and months before you get in. I'll still write the letter and send the letter."

So he sends the letter. Two days later I get a call from Dr. Willis Madrey's office. They wanted to know if I could come in for an appointment that week. See God was being faithful. God is faithful. I went and met with Dr. Madrey, and he was the best. People call him the grandfather of

hepatology. He has formulas named after him. He's on FDA boards. He probably knows more than anyone, literally wrote the book on liver disease. For some reason, he was willing to take me in.

Within 5 minutes he had diagnosed my condition as something called primary sclerosing cholangitis, PSC for short. Very rare, they know very little about it. Dr. Madrey explained to me that there's really no medicine that was FDA-approved that I could take. There was really nothing that they could do about the disease, that eventually it would cause my liver to shut down. The disease worked as an autoimmune disorder by attacking the ducts that run through my liver, and eventually corroding those, and eventually causing the liver to fail. He tells me the disease is chronic, and it usually happens over a long period of time, so it was normal that I wasn't experiencing any symptoms of it.

When I pressed him, I said, "What is it that we can do.?" He said, "The only treatment for it is a transplant." He said, "We can take a liver from someone that's passed away. We can put it in you and it's very effective at treating the disease. In fact, 90% of the time, the disease won't come back if that happens." So I pressed him again and said, "How long?" He said, "I have no idea. I can't tell you. There's a chance you'll just outlive the disease." I said, "Well, how long?" I kept asking. He said, "I can narrow it down between 5 and 50 years." Five and fifty years.

Dr. Madrey embraced me. He promised me that day, the first time I saw him, that he would take care of me and take care of my family. He's been my biggest advocate. He has fought for me over and over again, shown up at the hospital when I'm sick. He's called me, has let me call him in the middle of the night. See God was faithful. God was faithful, even in the early days of this. He was faithful by providing the resource. I can't rationally explain why this prestigious doctor would take such an interest and show such love toward me and my family. God was being faithful.

So for the next five or six years, the disease slowly built in my body. I would experience some symptoms. But they didn't stop me from doing anything I wanted to do. I ran long distances. I ran up mountains, played sports, went to work, built companies. I did the things that I wanted to do. While there was some inconveniences, no one really knew about it, and really it didn't slow me down. Doctors continued to give me that range of five to 50 years before I'd need a transplant.

Then, in early July of 2013, everything, the whole world for me just changed, and I became ill very quickly. Those ducts that were within my liver had just corroded so much that they couldn't function. They started

to cause infections. I spent the next two months, something like 47 to 60 days in the hospital. There were times we would rush into the hospital. I would have a 105-degree fever, and Stephanie would jump in the car and drive me down Harry Hines driving 70 miles an hour, looking over and not sure if I was breathing.

The doctors would treat me and we just entered this cycle. They would treat the infection. I'd go home, and three days later I'd rush back in, and over and over and over again. Suddenly the time frame of five to 50 years had become urgent. The disease had progressed much quicker than the doctors had imagined, in a manner that really wasn't typical. So it was urgent. It was life or death. I would need a new liver to live.

We came up with a plan, because I had a problem. The problem in receiving a new liver is that the way organs are allocated to those in need in the United States is based on a scoring system. So it's different than other organs. You may be more familiar with the kidney transplant process, where you get on a list, and effectively, you wait in order on this list, and it's an amount of time. With the liver it's a score. It is a very simple test, and they run it through a blood screen. They attempt to award livers to those who are most in need, which is defined by the people that are closest to having their liver fail.

My problem was that my liver was not close to failing. Although I had this disease that was very, very serious, I was more likely to die from an infection. So while I was in urgent need, I was nowhere close to qualifying. To make matters worse, the state of Texas is one of the more challenging places to receive a liver in the United States.

So we came up with a plan. The plan was to temporarily relocate to North Florida, to be treated at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville. At the encouragement of my doctors we contacted the Mayo Clinic. The Mayo Clinic there in Jacksonville is one of the best facilities in the world for liver transplants, not only in terms of the numbers they do, but in terms of the success rates. They have phenomenal doctors. So our plan was to relocate there. We worked to get an appointment, and even with the urgency, the best we could do was six weeks down the road. So we scheduled that, and I continued to stay in the hospital, and when I was released home, I would always find myself heading back after only a few days.

The day before we were scheduled to fly to Jacksonville to become listed and hopefully wait on an organ there, I became very ill again. Some of the bacteria had moved into my bloodstream, which is a very, very dangerous

condition known as bacteremia. So we rushed back into the hospital and I was going to be too sick to travel, and we were going to lose our appointment. But God was being faithful even in that. We had a plan, but His plan was different. Even in that He was being faithful.

Then I thought God had delivered the miracle of all miracles. As I arrived in the hospital and they ran through my blood screens, I had become so ill that the scores that I needed to receive a liver had jumped up so high that I was actually likely to be eligible to receive one in Texas. This was the lifesaving operation that I was going to need, and it sure seemed like it was coming at just the right time.

The doctors told me this, and they rushed me through the process to qualify. The catch was that the scores would only last for one week, so I only had seven days in order to receive a matching organ. The days ticked down while I was in the hospital. On the seventh day at 11:00 p.m., I got a call. I was in the hospital bed, and they said, "We have a liver for you." I really, really believed this was God's miracle. He had cancelled this trip to Florida so we could be here in Texas. This was it. This was it!

We prepped for the surgery. At this point, we had many people praying. Many of the people in this room were praying. They scheduled a time for it, and we spent six hours getting ready. They do all kinds of stuff to prepare you in the hospital. The time frame rolled around, and it got pushed back. Doctors came in and they said, "Don't worry. Don't worry about it. It has never actually happened until it happens. There's always the chance it could get cancelled. But I'm telling you, Ben, trust me, it's going to happen. You don't need to worry."

I hadn't slept in a couple days, but spent that evening just praising the Lord, just so thankful for His provisions. As the time of the surgery approached, they continued to push it back, and continued to push it back, push it back, push it back. They finally came to get me, and they rolled me out. I thought I was going into the OR. I had lines in me and thought I was going to be rolled right into the operating room. I was rolled into a room and then I looked around. Stephanie was there, and my father was there with me. I thought, "this is not what I think an operating room looks like. "

We were in the waiting area of the operating room. All the nurses and the technicians came in. They made me sign all the papers that said all the bad things that could possibly happen, and walked me through the surgery, and told me what they were going to do. Then the time of the surgery came, and they moved it back again. Then, they moved it back

again. Finally, after about 20 hours of waiting, we were five minutes from the start time. People were already praying, believing I was in surgery. Messages were sent out to our friends and family.

The surgeon came in, and he put his hand on my shoulder and he said, "I'm sorry. This liver's not good for you. The surgery's not going to happen."

My seven days had expired. I was nowhere close to receiving a liver. Even in the middle of that, God was being faithful.

That was the darkest of nights for me. It was dark because I believed God had provided. I believed that He had changed the circumstances to provide this miracle, and then boom, it was gone. It was taken away, and I didn't understand what in the world God was doing through that. But He was faithful, because He had a plan, and it was better than anything I would have imagined, and it was for His purposes. God was being faithful, even in the midst of that dark hours.

I was mentally and physically and emotionally and spiritually exhausted. Everything was just gone from me. I went back into the hospital the next few nights, still very ill, but now with only a remnant of hope left. Horrific dreams followed. I don't normally dream. Dreams with demons that were chasing me. It was clear I had an enemy, and the enemy was trying to kill me. Those dreams were vivid and the intent was crystal clear to me.

Doctors came in the next day. I don't know why, but there were probably 13 doctors in the room. Imagine a little hospital room, and Stephanie and I were in there, and all these doctors in there. We wanted to know what the next step was. What's the plan from here? Our appointment at Mayo had been cancelled. Stephanie had tried to get another one, and they said, "You know, we can make an exception for you and get you in in November," which was two months away. I didn't have two months.

We're sitting in that room and the doctors were talking about their plan. Their plan was just to send me home again. We'd done this six times, send me home and I come back. We walked through the plan. I remember Stephanie in the room. She let them finish and she says, "Is that the plan?" They said, "Yes." She said, "That's a really bad plan. I don't know if that's the best you can do, but that's a really bad plan." I recall looking up at thirteen doctors quieted by my wife's comments, looking into their eyes, and seeing no hope.



It was at that moment that God flipped the switch on again. There were two things that happened almost simultaneously, which were absolutely miracles. The first thing is, we got a call. Stephanie got a call. It was from one of the fathers in my oldest daughter's class. They go to Providence Christian School, another community of Believers that have just loved on us and prayed for us in ways I can't even articulate and describe, just like our church.

He had sat down with another father. They weren't even aware of all the circumstances. They had a conversation. They said, "Well, if we can get Ben a flight to Florida, will that get him there? Is that good?" He was calling to Stephanie to ask, "If we can get Ben on a private plane to Florida, would it be helpful? We will put you on it. You just say the word."

An hour after that, Stephanie got a call from the Mayo Clinic. They said, "We have an opening, and it's in two days. If you can be here tomorrow, we can go ahead and get you in." There was a question about whether or not I was well enough to travel. There was some risk involved in that. Frankly, I struggled with wanting to accept help. I told myself, "I don't need people to give me anything. I don't need a private plane." If anybody saw me at that point, you would just be cackling now. I don't need things from other people. I was being prideful. I was an idiot. I was an absolute idiot.

God spoke to me in those moments, and he was very clear. He said, "Ben, I'm going to provide for you and your family through other people. If you turn them down, you're turning me down." So from that point forward, Stephanie and I said, "We're going to say yes. If people offer to help, we're going to say yes." For the next four months, six months, up until today, it's been like manna from the Lord. People would come and they would offer things. At times, we don't even think we need them. We say yes, and then the need would come up the next day. Miracle after miracle of God showing His faithfulness through the body of Christ in the provisions that He gave, the blessings that He gave through so many. It was like manna.

We rushed to Florida on the private plan. There's another miracle involved in how all of that came together, which is a story for another day. After I arrived and showed up for my first appointment, they immediately admitted me back in the hospital. They said, "You're too sick." We'd expected Florida to be the answer. We thought this was what God was going to do, and this is how He was going to heal me.

We were just met with disappointment; disappointment after disappointment. The scores in Florida had moved up. I was nowhere close to being eligible to receive an organ. Then to even get accepted in their program involved climbing steep mounts, because I had been hospitalized. There were so many doctors and tests and procedures, and they couldn't do them while I was in the hospital. Time seemed like it was running short, and we were just delayed and delayed. God was still faithful, even in the midst of that.

There were two occasions where I was going through this process of trying to qualify for their program. They'd run a test. On two occasions we sat down with doctors and thought that the doctors were going to tell me that I either had a terminal cancer or cancer that would disqualify me from eligibility to receive a liver. So there were some hard moments in there, but God was still faithful. God was still faithful through all of that.

Then, as if things were not bad enough, they seemed to get worse. We went in in late November, went in for a follow-up appointment and started asking a lot of questions to the doctors. It became evident to me through what the doctors were telling me that I was not going to qualify to receive an organ under the normal system in Florida. My score was nowhere close enough. They had attempted on four occasions to go to a committee to appeal my score. There's a committee in Southeast that can override scores in extreme circumstances. The doctors were optimistic, maybe even somewhat confident, that the committee would make an exception for me, and four times that committee said no.

Now you see, even in this, God was faithful. There's no committee that gets to decide whether we live or we die. It's only our Creator. It's only the Lord who has that authority.

Several months into this Florida journey I sat with a doctor who shared some hard truth with me after I pressed him hard with questions. He told me I was unlikely to receive a liver, that realistically it probably was not going to happen, that the infection, that my body, that the ducts in my body had pretty much shut down, and that it was likely that sometime in the very near future I would get an infection, and at some point it was unlikely they would be able to stop that infection from spreading. I could see in his eyes that he thought I was going to die.

I looked at him and said, "Well, isn't there anything we can do?" He said, "No." I said, "How long?" He didn't want to tell me. I said, "Come on, how long? What do you think?" He said, "I can't tell you. I don't know. I can't guess." I said, "Just give me your best judgment. How long?" He said,

"Four weeks." I said, "Four weeks?" I was thinking months. He wasn't God, and I knew that. He didn't get to dictate what that time period would be. He couldn't predict it. But I recognized that things were much more urgent than we had realized, and I was thankful for a doctor that was speaking his honest opinion to me. There was a new sense of urgency. We went and we confirmed that with another doctor. Her prognosis was even worse. But God was still faithful. He was still loving me in the middle of that.

At this point, we had a decision. I had a decision to make. The decision was, whether or not I become fatalistic and accept the current circumstances, and effectively just sit back and say, "You know what? I'm tired. I'm not going to do anything else, but just believe in God and believe He's in control. I'm going to trust Him, but I'm done fighting." Or, we could choose to fight for life, to do everything that I could do, that we could do, that the community around me could do, to live.

It wasn't a lighthearted decision, because I didn't want to panic. I didn't want to be in a place where I was trying to take things into my own hands and take them away from God. But at the time, there is something about backing up the faith that I had with action. I concluded that it's honoring to God to fight for life, that that honors God. Fighting for life is being faithful to Him. I concluded that we should do everything that we can in our powers that is ethically and morally correct to fight for life. God made us to do that.

I think to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and if you remember, that's the story of those three refusing to bow before Nebukaneezer, and going into the fire. I think we should do everything we can medically, everything we can physically. We should be praying to fight for life. We should believe that our God, in whom we serve, is able to deliver us. We should believe that He will deliver us. But if he doesn't deliver us, we should still have faith in knowing that God is faithful. Believe that He will. Believe that He can, just like they did. But if He doesn't, know that He's faithful. Have faith that He's still faithful.

At this point, there were many, many people praying for me, many people coming and asking what they could do. There was frustration that there was not a whole lot other than prayer that we thought needed to be done. But at this point, I took nine men that I called the A Team. I was at a place where I was too sick to do much for myself. But these nine men came together. They were from different networks and different aspects of my life. I said, "Guys, here's what's going on." I said, "We have two

options. There's two ways. God can do anything, but there's two ways tangibly that would allow me to live."

These nine men came together, and like no team I've ever seen or experienced, pursued those options and made phenomenal progress. God was being faithful in working in the community that was around me, and working through them. They did amazing things. Their mission was really simple. The mission was to help Ben find a liver. They worked. They worked seamlessly and worked hard to let others know, and to empower others to pray, and then to help pursue these two options.

One of the two options that we had was something called a living donor donation. A living donor donation is when someone that's healthy gives half of their liver. They take the half of the liver, and they place it in the recipient's body. The liver is the only organ in the body that will regenerate on its own. After about 3 months it is completely regenerated in both the donor and the recipient. But it's a dangerous surgery. Something like between 1/2% and 1% of perfectly healthy people that donate livers die in the procedure. There's risk of complications, and the recovery time is significant. It's three or four months. I'd been really hesitant about pursuing this option. I didn't want to pursue it, didn't want someone else to go through it.

Then the guys on that team started to be tested. Several of them were matches and volunteered and said, "Ben, we think you should pursue this, and if we qualify we want to be the first ones." So we began pursuing that, found and were connected with a team here at Baylor who has an incredible transplant program and do living donations, living transplants.

Word began to spread that I was in need. Not only that I was in need, but that it was urgent. The team at Baylor was saying, "This is going to take some time." We would say, "We don't think we have time." They'd say, "It's going to take some time." So the biggest challenge they typically have is that even if there is a donor, and they said usually there's maybe one or two people that will volunteer, even if there is a donor and they're healthy and they're a match, only 30% of those will ultimately qualify through the testing. Each time we process one it takes two to three weeks. Two doctors had just communicated to me that I might only have four more weeks to live, so the math wasn't working in my favor.

Before I was even registered in the program, before I was even officially qualified, Baylor called us up and said, "We've had over 40 people call in that say they are matches for you, that they want to donate a part of

their liver." Over 40 people. I know there were many in this room, some in this room were among that. I don't know the names of them all. They came from all aspects of my life, some that I didn't even know. See, God was faithful.

I got calls in the middle of the night. I remember two in particular from long-time friends from high school. They were tearful calls at midnight, woke me up, and said, "I've been praying, Ben, and really feel like that I'm supposed to donate my liver to you." What do you say to that? I don't know what to say to it. Where else, other than the body of Christ, are so many people willing to lay it all on the line, to risk their lives, potentially lay their lives down, for someone else. I dare say, you don't find that in any other sect of society, other than the body of Christ.

So we pursued that. At the same time, there was another option. It was called a designated donation. Designated donation is when the family of someone who has passed away in a manner that would allow the organ to be donated, designate a specific individual to receive that organ. So in their time of crisis, in their time of tragedy, they make a decision not only to donate the organs, but they say, "We want this liver to go to Ben." It was a miracle we even knew about that process. It's not known, not discussed in the medical community. It was another example of God's faithfulness that months before we had discovered it.

I did a little bit of research and I haven't been able to confirm this, but I knew the statistical probability was very slim. I was told that in the last five years there have been five livers that have been received with a designated donation. I'm pretty good at math and probabilities. I ran the numbers. There were a whole lot of zeroes after the decimal place, in terms of the likelihood that I would be able to receive an organ this way.

In fact, when Stephanie would call to get information and try to determine what the process is, people wouldn't know about it, and those that did said, "You're wasting your time." They said, "Don't. You need to focus on keeping Ben well. Don't even think about this. Yes. Yes, it's a law. Yes, congress passed a law. Yes, this is how it works. But in my 15 years, I've never seen it happen. You're wasting your energy. You're wasting your time."

So in the midst of all of this and visiting hospitals, my team aggressively spread the word about these two options. And then, we finally get a call. We get a call that someone had designated a liver to me. We were in Atlanta at the time visiting with doctors at Emory and we rushed back to Florida. We rushed back to Florida and once again went through the

process to prepare for the surgery, thinking and believing that this yet again was the miracle that God was providing. My brother came down, and once again we waited and waited and waited, and once again, the liver was not appropriate for me. So we continued on.

During our time in Florida, God's faithfulness showed up, and it continued to show up through others. We had so many blessings. We were blessed with a family there that took us in, helped us to find a house to stay in. Our whole family was there, all our kids. Blessed by family members, my parents, Stephanie's parents, and others that would come and help us care for the kids while we were at the hospital all day. Blessed by prayers and letters. In the midst of this, word began to spread. I started receiving cards and emails and posts from literally all over the world of people that were praying for me. Thousands of people, six continents, were praying for me.

So I found myself in the hospital again. We were rushed back in. I was in the ER and had spent some time there thinking I had another infection. It was 2:00 in the morning, and then the most difficult decision of my life was placed in my lap. We got another call. It was a second miracle, the second time in a week and a half, someone else had designated a liver to me. But we received this call from another hospital. Upon a little investigation, we discovered that the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville had declined the organ. They had declined it because the manner in which the donor had passed away made it too risky, in Mayo's opinion, to put the organ in me. They're one of the most aggressive centers in the country, but they're saying no, this is too risky.

Yet another hospital was calling me, and they're saying, "Ben, get on a plane and come. This is it. This is it." So we had about 15 minutes at 2:00 in the morning after being up for 48 hours in the ER to decide, what do we do with this? I didn't know if I would get another chance. I didn't know if this was it. We'd already, God had already, defied the odds. I didn't know if this was the place where my faith should be in God working through the circumstances. I didn't know if I passed that up if I'd even live, or if I did live, it seemed likely that I'd have to make someone else go through this procedure.

So we prayed about it, and then I called two advisors and got them out of bed, 2:00 in the morning, asked them their opinion. People that God had put around me that were experts, that were sages, that had wisdom, and I could not get a peace about going through the procedure. So I turned the organ down. The hospital that called, they thought I was nuts, thought I was crazy. I thought I might be nuts.

Thirty-six hours later we get a third call. Somebody else had designated an organ. This seemed like it was going to be a perfect match. They called me in the hospital. We started to go through the procedure again. The surgeon came in the room. His name is Dr. David Lee, Dr. Lee. He was younger than I expected him to be. He began to talk about some things that were different in terms of how the procedure would be done. Then he said something, I'll never forget this. He said something, just turned over and looked at me and said, "I need you to trust me."

I thought for a second and realized that God had put him in that place, at that time, for me, and that trusting him was the same as trusting the Lord. It was very easy to do.

So I did. I trusted him. He explained to me that there was a problem with the organ. The organ had way too much sodium in it for me to receive it. I don't know this for sure, but the likelihood is that the sodium was placed there in an effort to revive and save the life of the donor. He explained that if they took a liver that was high in sodium and put it in my body, it would be like putting new wine in an old wine vat, that it would literally just explode, which didn't sound too good to me.

But they were going to retrieve the liver. The Mayo team got on a flight. You're not going to believe this. They had to make an emergency landing because of weather. So the team makes an emergency landing, and then they hop out and they get in a van. They rent a van somewhere and they're driving to this hospital to receive the organ. The time that it took them to drive and the process of the emergency landing gave the liver enough time for the sodium to work itself out, so by the time it was received it was perfect. See God was faithful. He was being faithful.

So they rushed back with the organ. I'm in the hospital room, and they finally brief me and tell me what's going on. They said, "The organ you're going to receive is literally coming down the road, and so we're going to move you into the OR." I was rolled into the OR, and I remember seeing Dr. Lee working on the organ that was soon to save my life.

The surgery itself took place on December 10th. It lasted about 9 hours. After the fact, Dr. Lee told me that my procedure was more technical than most, and more risky, because of the anatomy of my body, and because of some other circumstances related to the disease. But he performed it flawlessly. God was faithful. God was faithful in the midst of that.

When others found out that I was in surgery, that I received the liver, there was a lot of rejoicing. I saw the messages, and I saw the posts on social media and the phone calls. There were many, many people that were praising the Lord for answered prayers.

I thought that was going to be it. My expectations were I'd come out of surgery and I'd have some pain, but then I would recover, recover quickly, as most people do, many people do from liver transplants. But I was not emotionally, psychologically prepared for the next two months.

God wasn't finished working. He wasn't finished being faithful. There were times in that process I was certainly thinking, "God, if this is how you work, then I want you to be done working. If this is what it takes to make me like gold, I'm happy being copper." We went through infections, because my immune system was suppressed. Went through rejection, where my body attacked the liver because it recognized it as foreign. Went through another rejection. Went through a period where they thought that there was scar tissue and they may have to go back in and do another major surgery to correct something that had gone wrong. Went through a period where they talked about the possibility of losing the organ, and once again needing another transplant. Those were hard, hard times, but God was faithful. He was faithful through all of that.

So in March of 2014, we returned home. Today, everything is as perfect as it possibly could be. God has been faithful. He's been faithful. For this time, he's chosen to heal me, for now. But whether he healed me, or he didn't, he'd still be faithful.

There's so many heroes in this story. I'm not the hero. I was just sick. There's the dozens and dozens of medical technicians and doctors and staff that tended to me and took care of me. There's the donor's family that made the incredibly selfless decision to donate the organ of a loved one so that I could live. See, somebody else had to die so that I could live. There's a church body, thousands and thousands of people that were praying for me. There are many in this room that have told me they have prayed for me more than any other person in their life. They are heroes. There's my family, and Stephanie, who did everything, who was sustained by your prayers. People were doing things that I couldn't even articulate or describe. Most of all, there's God. God's the protagonist. God's the hero of this story, always working for the good of those who love Him and are called according to his purposes, and He is always faithful.

I want to close up by reviewing the scriptures I mentioned earlier. I want to talk to you about just very briefly four things about God's faithfulness



that I've learned through this experience, that are just transparent in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. So if we could jump to the next slide and put those up there. So this is again Second Corinthians 1:8-9.

Paul says, *"For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength." And then he goes on from there later on and he says, "But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God, who raises the dead."*

See, one of the reasons God puts us through suffering, one of the things He does through that suffering, is sometimes He makes it more than we can bear on our own. He promises that He's not going to give us more than we can handle, but sometimes He gives us more than we can handle on our own. See, I was there. It was more than I could possibly handle. He tells us He does that to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God, who raises the dead. **Who raises the dead.**

The greatest physical accomplishment in my life, in my opinion, was when I ran up Pike's Peak. I thought that was pretty cool. I thought I was pretty tough. I thought, "Man, a look what I can do." Running up Pike's Peak. Raising people from the dead. Running up Pike's Peak. Raising people from the dead. See, when we rely on ourselves, we can't do anything. Even if we think we can, we control so little. God's teaching us not to rely on ourselves, who really can't do anything at all in the big picture, but to rely on Him who raises people from the dead. So sometimes in our suffering He gives us more than we can handle, so that we learn to rely on him.

Paul goes on, *"He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that He will deliver us again."*

The second thing that I learned through this is that sometimes he puts us through this suffering to increase our faith. Right? "He delivered us." Flip back one more. *"He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us."* He's done it once. We've seen, I've seen him deliver me once. It's easier for me to have faith that he's going to do it again. *"On him we have set our hope."* So, sometimes we go through this suffering, because it increases our faith.

Let's go to the next section of Paul's letter, *"You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many."* This is the most important thing that I learned. Here Paul's saying, "Could you please pray for me, because we will be granted blessing through the prayers of others. But, it

won't stop there. When we receive those blessings many others will rejoice."

When many pray, when thousands pray, God hears those, and he answers those prayers. I am alive today because there were thousands and thousands of people praying for me. So when we go through suffering, we need to rely on the prayers of others. God answers the prayers of many.

Then the last one. "You also must help us by prayer so that many will give thanks." See, when many are praying, and when you're emotionally connected through prayer to a situation, and diligently praying, and God answers that prayer and delivers someone, you praise God. You thank God. God receives the glory, and your faith is increased. So He puts us in these circumstances. He wants many praying, because when those prayers are answered, the faith of others are increased. Right?

So I don't know where each of you is at individually today. Maybe you're at a place where you're not in a season of suffering. That's not you today, in this season. If that's the case, you can still experience God's faithfulness. You can personally experience that, by giving selflessly to those that are suffering around you. So pray for them. Become emotionally connected to the person that is suffering. Pray for them. Let them know you're praying for them. Engage others to pray for them. Give selflessly to them. Help them by meeting their needs. Do things for people that you don't even know, if you can. Sign up to be an organ donor. Give selflessly.

But there's some people in here that are, right now, in that season of suffering, and you're feeling that weight of that world. Maybe it's health, but maybe it's not. Maybe it's family or relationship. Maybe it's a job. And that burden is just too deep. So engage others to pray with you. Ask people to pray. Don't try to hold it in. Don't be so prideful. Don't be so selfish that you don't engage others to pray. The most foolish thing you can do in a period of suffering is to not let others know, to not let them be praying, to not let them know your needs. Allow them, allow others to meet your needs. Allow God to work through them.

Then most of all, if that's you, look in your life, and look in areas where God has been faithful, and is being faithful, where you can see that in a tangible way. Then just cling onto those things, like you're on the side of a cliff. Just dig your fingernails in and cling to those, like they're the very breath of life. Because then that faithfulness is how we maintain our

faith. Seeing God's faithfulness is how we maintain our faith. So cling to those and maintain your faith.

Somebody else had to die in order that I might live. In the same way, if you don't know Jesus and some of the stuff I'm saying is foreign and you're trying to figure out what is a faithful God, what does that mean? What does that look like? How can I experience that?

Somebody else died so that you could live. Not just today, but eternally.

See, God in his ultimate act of faithfulness, sent Jesus, God in the form of man, sent Him to earth, lived a perfect life, died on a cross, was dead, was buried. But then three days later he rose again. See, that's the power of God. It's God who raises the dead. Jesus went through this, and He rose again. He tells us, He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except by me." Jesus says, "I'm the only way to God. I went through this so that you can come to the Father, so that you can experience that faithfulness."

Later on the Bible tells us, "Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your hearts that God raised him from the dead, and you will be saved." That's how we know God's ultimate faithfulness. That's how we know it.

God is faithful. He is faithful in all things, at all times. He's been faithful to me. He's has been, is, and will be faithful to you.