



Month of October, 2010

Rogue Waves #1

On May 2, 1961 the sailing ship Albatross was traveling in calm waters in the Caribbean Sea. Suddenly, the wind picked up, the waves began to rise, and the ship was hit by a Rogue Wave over 100 feet high. On board was a crew of 4 instructors and 13 students all part of a combined college and sailing program. The Albatross was pushed over on its side and sank almost immediately. Six people died, including 2 instructors and 4 students.

It's unlikely you'll ever face a Rogue Wave at sea. But you have – or someday will - face one here on earth. When you least expect it – out of the blue – without warning – something bad will happen. The phone will ring and you'll find out a loved one has died. Or the boss will tell you, you no longer have a job. Or the doctor will say the test results show you have cancer. Or your spouse will unexpectedly ask you for a divorce. It might be anything – for life is unpredictable. But one thing's certain – no one dies without first experiencing a Rogue Wave.

The biblical character Job certainly was hit by a Rogue Wave. In fact, he was hit with several of them. Job lost his wealth, his children, and his health. Yet he still refused to sin by cursing God. But the story's not over. Job was hit by another Rogue Wave in the form of three so-called "friends" who gave him worthless advice. Instead of helping Job, they actually made things worse. By the end of the story, Job had survived each Rogue Wave, and still hadn't curse God.

What Rogue Waves have hit you? If you can't name one, then wait. There's no doubt that somewhere in your future is a Rogue Wave with your name on it. Why does God allow these experiences? How do you cope with them? And what can we learn from them? We'll explore these questions in the next few blogs. But first ... I'll tell you about my Rogue Waves.

Rogue Waves #2

On December 5, 2003 my wife and I attended a 50th birthday party for a friend from church. Suddenly I felt a weight on my shoulder and turned to see my wife slumped over onto me. I laid her on the floor, she mumbled something, and slipped into a coma. She had suffered a catastrophic stroke in her brain. There was no warning – no sign of a problem. It was a Rogue Wave. Three days later we removed life support and my wife of almost 30 years died at age 51.

In one moment my life changed forevermore. It was like an unpredictable, sudden storm with a Rogue Wave over 100 feet high had hit my life and knocked me over. But it was only the first Rogue Wave. There were more to come.

One month after my wife died, my mother-in-law, whom I loved, died of the very same thing. Three weeks later, I left my job and my career to cope with my grief. Six months later, one of my best friends went to bed and never woke up. He died in his sleep at age 50. Five months later, my 2 children left home to start their lives as adults - and I was left alone. Five months later, my father-in-law, whom I also loved, suffered the same stroke as his daughter and wife, and died a few months later.

But there was one more Rogue Wave still to come. One month before my father-in-law died my Mom called to tell me she had cancer throughout her body – and there was no hope of recovery. Five months later, with her 3 sons at her bedside, she looked at us and said, “I love you all” and went to be with Jesus.

Throughout those dark days it seemed like my world had turned upside down. And it stayed upside down for a long time. But slowly - over time - and with the help of a gifted Christian counselor, my life started to turn right-side up again.

Rogue Waves #3

Rogue Waves are inevitable. No one gets through life unscathed. Each of us takes our turn in the valley of despair. If you haven't been hit by a Rogue Wave yet, you will. Someday, when you least expect it, something will occur that will turn your world upside down. Why does God allow these things to happen? If He truly is a loving God, wouldn't He protect you from these devastating experiences?

God is a loving God. And it's because He loves you that He allows these painful situations to occur. Romans 8:28 reminds us that, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." You know that the Bible is the inspired word of God and without error. Therefore, you must begin with the premise that God not only allows both the good and the bad, but He does so for a purpose.

In the next verse God explains one reason bad things happen. "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). Avoiding the predestination debate, focus on the last part of the verse. One purpose of suffering is so that you may become more like Jesus Christ in your character and conduct.

You know from personal experience that you grow the most spiritually during the hard times. It's at those moments you fall to your knees and cry out, "Oh Lord, help me." But it's in the good times that you tend to struggle most in your relationship with Christ." It's as if you send God to the "bullpen" and call Him into the "game" only when you need Him. You're not alone. All believers do it.

Perhaps the best explanation of God's purpose for suffering is in James 1:2-4. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

After receiving salvation, God's primary goal is for you to become like Jesus Christ. He wants you to do good deeds, but He's more concerned with your character development. Remember: It's not what you do; it's who you are. And nothing will develop your character like the experience of being hit by a Rogue Wave.

In the next few postings we'll take a look at other reasons God allows you to go through hard times. Meanwhile, don't be anxious about the possibility of "impending doom." Instead, focus on developing an intimate relationship with Christ. He will carry You through the hard times. Consider the sufferings Jesus experienced; yet through Christ's suffering He brought glory to God and eternal life to you.

Rogue Waves #4

For centuries mariners have told stories of gigantic waves appearing out of nowhere and capsizing their vessels. Until recently there was no video evidence – until now. Several ships on the Discovery Channel’s hit series “Deadliest Catch” have been rolled over by Rogue Waves. Click on this link, [Rogue Wave video](#), to witness firsthand the power of the sea as the crab ship Northwestern is hit by one. This Rogue Wave is estimated to be 50 feet high and 100 feet wide.

We don’t need visual evidence to prove that “Rogue Waves” hit our lives. Without warning, everyone is hit by one sometime in their lives. Bad things do happen to good people. These negative life experiences come out of nowhere, blindsides us, and affect our lives in dramatic ways. It may be a financial reversal, a health issue, a relational conflict, or any one of a number of life-altering events.

The last posting described how God often uses these events to transform our character. It’s at life’s most difficult moments that we tend to turn to God for help. Through the storms of life He slowly molds and shapes our character and conduct to make us more like Jesus Christ. In fact, character transformation is His number one goal for Christ-followers.

But God has other general purposes for allowing bad things to impact us. This posting will examine how God often uses these experiences to expand our hearts to develop greater compassion to those in need.

In 2003 my wife of 30 years passed away unexpectedly. Although I didn’t realize it then, God used this experience to make me more sensitive to others who have lost loved ones. Before my wife died, I felt badly when someone died, but it didn’t grip my heart. After her death, I experienced the heartbreak and loneliness that accompanies loss. I went through times where my emotions were frozen, I was angry towards God and my wife, I became disoriented about my life, and I became anxious about a future without my wife. Now ... I get it.

God explains the tenderizing our heart in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” When we go through a time of loss, we experience God’s comfort in a very real way. Then we are better equipped to comfort others when they go through times of trouble.

In the midst of the storm it's impossible to see – or believe – that eventually the storm will subside. At the time, all we know is that we are in pain. But through God's comfort, and the comfort of others, over time we begin to experience healing. It doesn't happen overnight, but at some point we begin to move forward with our lives. It's only after we are experiencing our own healing that our hearts begin to be drawn to those who are going through similar experiences. Moreover, when we begin to help others deal with their pain, our own pain lessens even more. We gain a new perspective on life and loss, and that new understanding is a lifeline to those who are in need.

Rogue Waves #5

One other reason God allows suffering is to open your eyes to people's needs all around you. Many Christians find their calling through a Rogue Wave.

A funny thing happens after a Rogue Wave hits your life. You'll never be the same again. It doesn't matter what it was or how severe the blow might have been. The experience changes you. When you've gone through a Rogue Wave, you tend to want to help others who are just now being hit by a similar Rogue Wave.

Perhaps you've gone through a bitter divorce. At times the pain and heartbreak has been overwhelming. But much later, after the wounds have begun to heal, you're likely to want to help others going through divorce. So you get involved in a divorce recovery program and lend a helping hand to others with a more recent trauma.

Maybe you've struggled with an addiction for years. Through a Twelve Step program and a sponsor's help, you begin to experience sobriety. This life-altering experience becomes something you want other substance abusers to experience. So you start a Twelve Step group or step into a leadership role in an existing group.

Or it may be that you spent money recklessly, piling up debts you can never repay. You've been harassed by debt collectors or the IRS, and had the bank foreclose your home. In fact, maybe you were forced to declare bankruptcy and slowly rebuild an acceptable credit rating. When the dust settles, you tend to develop a desire to help others learn sound financial practices through budgeting and avoiding credit cards.

Whatever the Rogue Wave might be, chances are good that some believer who has endured the storm is now helping others in similar circumstances. Although the Rogue

Wave was a devastating blow, God has a way of turning our tragedies into triumphs. Romans 8:28 (NASB) explains, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

In December, 2003 I was devastated when my wife of 30 years unexpectedly died at age 52. The pain and grief were almost unbearable. In the midst of my sorrow, God called me to go to Angola, Africa. I went with a grief that seemed overwhelming. Then I met people who knew true grief – far beyond anything I had experienced. As a result of a 27 year civil war, the Angolans lost everything! They fled for their lives to neighboring countries and lived in makeshift refugee camps. Their only goal was to eat their next meal. Many of their loved ones had been killed in the fighting. Some were permanently disabled with arms or legs blown away by land mines. You want to talk about suffering? The Angolans ate, slept, and lived suffering every day for 27 years!

I learned what true grief looks like, and my experience paled by comparison. God instilled within in me a deep desire to spend the rest of my life helping people in developing countries. I never would've chosen this path for myself. But God, in His infinite wisdom and grace, worked all things together for God to bring me through my own Rogue Wave. And he instilled within me a passion to help those suffering in insufferable conditions. And I couldn't be more grateful.

What Rogue Waves have happened in your life? What new sensitivities have you developed because of your experience? What passions are stirring in your heart to help others who are just beginning to face what you faced? Perhaps, like me, God is leading you on a new path, one filled with meaning, purpose and a sense of fulfillment. Why not take a moment right now to reflect on your own Rogue Waves? Then listen for the still, small voice of God whispering in your ear.

Rogue Waves #6

So far in this series we've learned that everyone - including you and me - are hit by Rogue Waves. Some how ... some way ... some day ... something bad will happen in your life. It might be a health issue, a financial reversal, a relational breakup, a career mishap, or any one of a thousand other things. If you haven't been hit by bad news yet - totally out of the blue, you will eventually.

Why does God allow these events to happen? First, God uses hard times to develop our character and make us more like Jesus Christ. Second, a painful event develops within us

greater sensitivity to others going through the same thing. We comfort them with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. Finally, it's often through the most painful experiences of life that we find our life purpose. Like a magnet, we are drawn to people who are hurting like we hurt, and we want to help them cope with their difficulties.

Through God's grace alone, I've survived many Rogue Waves - especially over the past 7 years. In the next few posts I want to share what I've learned about surviving Rogue Waves. In this post I'll summarize the three things I've learned. Then I'll unpack these truths one at a time in the next 3 posts.

First, I've learned that tears bring healing. Everyone grieves in his or her own way. Some spend all day - every day - doing nothing but crying. And that's OK. When the tears come, let them fall. Don't try to stop them, no matter where you are or how embarrassing it seems. Let them fall. It's God's way of releasing the pain trapped within you, and replacing it with his love for you.

The second thing I've learned is to ask the right question. When the Rogue Wave hits there's no point in asking God "why, why, why?" If you do, you'll never heal ... because there's no answer to that question. Instead of asking "why," start asking God, "What now?" Ask, "Lord, what do you want me to do, now that the Rogue Wave has hit?" Jeremiah 29:11 says, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" Do you believe it? Until you do, you will not heal.

The final thing I've learned is that faith is a choice. You can either choose to wallow in self-pity ... or ... you can choose to have faith in God. For a long time I chose self pity. "Oh, woe is me. How could you do this to me, God?" But there's no way you'll heal until you choose to have faith in God.

When the Rogue Wave hits – and it will – don't push it aside. Don't pretend it didn't happen. Instead, be sure to grieve – to really grieve the loss. And please remember the three lessons I have learned: 1) Tears bring healing - so cry; 2) Ask the right question – so ask); and Faith is a choice – so choose.

Rogue Waves #7

When the Rogue Wave hits – when the bad news comes – our first reaction is always shock. One minute life is unfolding as usual; but in an instant – without any warning – life becomes anything but usual.

The degree of shock depends on the magnitude of the Rogue Wave. If the news is merely distressing, the shock will last for awhile, perhaps a few days. But if the news is truly devastating, the shock may last for weeks, months, or even years.

When a hundred foot Rogue Wave hits, God has designed us to move quickly from shock to surrealism. In those moments, life becomes dreamlike. We tend to say things like, “This can’t be happening to me.” Or, “This all must be a bad dream.” Except it’s not a dream; rather, it’s reality become a nightmare.

When we experience a tremendous shock, God has designed our emotional system to shut down. We quickly move from shock to surrealism to emotional numbness. This automatic process is an emotional safety valve so that we aren’t overwhelmed by overwhelming grief. We literally don’t feel anything. Our emotions become frozen. This too may last for quite awhile.

Eventually the numbness wears off and we start to feel our emotions flowing once again. It’s at this point that tears begin to pour out like a fountain. Voltaire wrote, “Tears are the silent language of grief.” Someone else added, “Tears are words the heart can’t express.”

When the tears start to flow, you have a choice. You can let the tears flow freely or shut off the faucet instantaneously. It’s your choice. But choices have consequences, and this decision is no different. Tears expressed will bring eventual inner healing to your soul; but tears suppressed will bring eventual inner damage to your body.

If you do not cry – and stay in your sadness – you will ultimately make yourself sick. You may develop colitis, an ulcer, anxiety attacks, or a number of other ailments. Unexpressed grief will cause serious internal damage that might have long-term consequences. We were not designed to suppress sadness. One thing is certain – grief will always find a way to be expressed – either positively or negatively.

The healthiest choice is to allow your tears to flow whenever tears begin to fall. Don’t force them to come; rather, allow them to overflow whenever they begin. It doesn’t

matter where you are - in public or in private – let your tears flow. If you're in a public place, move to a more private location. But above all else, don't stop crying once your tears begin to fall. And as your tears begin to subside, don't force yourself to continue. The key point is to listen to your body and respond accordingly.

Pastor Charles Swindoll wrote, "A teardrop on earth summons the King of heaven." Once your tears have stopped, invite God to be part of the healing process. Tell Him about your pain. Share with Him your sorrow. And pour out to Him your grief. Claim God's promise in Psalm 34:18. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." He will never leave you nor forsake you. The Lord is near and will bless each fallen tear. For tears bring healing.

Rogue Waves #8

What have we learned so far about Rogue Waves? First, a Rogue Wave is bad news we receive unexpectedly. Everyone experiences a Rogue Wave at some point in life. If one hasn't hit yet, it will someday. The magnitude of the Rogue Wave determines how much pain you'll experience and how much time it'll take to recover.

Next we've learned that God allows Rogue Waves for positive reasons. They force you to draw closer to Him thereby developing more Christ-like character within you. Rogue Waves also make you more sensitive to the pain of others who are going through similar experiences. You then comfort them with the same comfort you yourself received from God. Finally, you often find your life purpose through a Rogue Wave. You want to help others by walking with them through their own Rogue Wave.

In the last post we began talking about how to survive Rogue Waves. The first necessity is to let the tears fall. Tears bring healing. In this post we'll focus on the second requirement: Ask the right question. Edward Hodnett wrote, "If you do not ask the right questions, you do not get the right answers."

Every person naturally begins by asking, "Why?" Why did this happen? Why did it happen to me? Why did happen now? Why? Why? Why? Phillip Yancey addresses this tendency in "Where Is God When It Hurts?" He points out that people who continually ask the "why question" will never heal – because there is no answer. God explains, "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8). Job understood this truth. He lost everything he owned, including his

health. Yet he refused to sin by cursing God. Instead, he told his wife, "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (Job 2:10b)

God is God; you are not. He does what He does to fulfill His plan for your life. Most likely you'll never know on this side of heaven the answer to the "why question." But someday in heaven you'll know the whole story. Then you'll fall to your knees and say, "Oh God, I had no idea how good you truly are. Thank You, Lord."

Phillip Yancey suggests that instead of asking "Why?" you ask "What now?" When bad things happen, you wish with all your heart that things could go back to the way they used to be. But that will never happen. To move on with life you must accept the reality that life will never be the same again.

The next step is to ask God the right question, "What now?" I can tell you from personal experience that there is life - a good life - after the Rogue Wave hits. Although the Rogue Wave turns your "ship" upside down, eventually your life will right itself again. When you resurface, your life will be headed in a new direction. This directional change will ultimately bring you blessing.

In Job 42:12 there's a truth that's so wonderful it could only come from a loving and compassionate God. "The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first." In fact, God gave Job twice as many possessions as he had before the Rogue Wave hit. Verse 17, the last verse of the Book of Job, is equally reassuring. "And so Job died, old and full of years." One important key to experiencing this blessing is to ask the right question.

Rogue Waves #9

In the last two posts I've outlined two things I've learned about surviving Rogue Waves. The first is that tears bring healing. My advice is to let the tears fall whenever and wherever they come. The other is to ask the right question. There's no point in asking "Why?" because there's no answer. Instead, ask "What now?"

In this post I'll discuss the final thing I've learned - faith is a choice. You can either choose to wallow in self-pity ... or ... you can choose to have faith in God.

For a long time I chose self pity. I was angry at God that so many loved ones died in such a short period of time. I was angry at my loved ones for dying. I was angry at my friends for not being more supportive. I was angry at myself for being angry.

I'd go to church and we'd sing "Blessed Be the Name of the Lord." I'd cringe inside when we got to the words, "He gives and takes away; He gives and takes away; my heart will choose to say; blessed be Your Name." Well my heart wasn't blessing His Name. It seemed to me that God was doing a whole lot more taking away in my life than He was giving to it. I refused to sing those words.

Every day I held my own personal pity party complaining about the unfairness of it all. "Oh, woe is me. How could God do this to me?" Eventually, I'd had enough of God, the Bible, and the church. So I stopped going to church ... for a year! Looking back I imagine myself as a two-year old throwing a temper tantrum. "OK God ... you want to hurt me? Well two can play that game. I'm going to hurt you right back. I'm not going to church anymore. Take that!"

I'm pretty sure my temper tantrum didn't rock God's world; but it did mine. I grew increasing isolated, sullen, and self-absorbed. The less contact I had with others, the more I blamed them for not caring about me. "If you cared about me, you'd know how much I'm hurting. But since you never call, it's obvious you don't care about me at all." Of course, I never reached out to call any of them first.

One day a friend sat me down and said, "Steve, I'm tired of you mumbling and grumbling about how terrible life is. So I'm going to ask you 4 questions:

- * "Is there a God ... or not?"
- * "Does He love you ... or not?"
- * "Does He have a plan for your life ... or not?"
- * "Will you trust Him ... or not?"
- * "It's your choice."

Her words hit home and I was convicted of my sin. I asked God to forgive me for my selfishness and lack of faith. I recommitted myself to Him and felt a huge weight come off my shoulders. Now when I sing "Blessed Be the Name of the Lord" I sing it as loud as possible as a victory cry. "You give and take away; You give and take away; my heart will choose to say; blessed be Your Name."

There's no way you'll heal until you choose to have faith in God. When the Rogue Wave hits you, ask yourself: Is there a God or not? Does He love me or not? Does He have a plan for my life or not? Will I trust Him or not?

It's your choice.

Rogue Waves #10

Rogue Waves will come. There's no way to avoid or stop them. It's part of life to experience both the good and bad, the highs and lows. But you can prepare yourself for the aftermath. In this final post of the "Rogue Wave" series I'll make some practical suggestions for dealing with Rogue Waves. I also want to leave you with hope for life after the wave subsides.

First, don't isolate yourself. It's the worst thing you can do because hard times are when you most need emotional support. Reach out to people through phone calls or over a cup of coffee.

Second, talk about what happened and how you're reacting to it. You'll have to bring up the topic because people assume you don't want to talk about it. The truth is that the more you talk about it the more you process the events intellectually and emotionally.

Third, join a support group of people who are undergoing or have undergone the same experience as you. There's nothing better than to know that you are not the only one going through your trial.

Fourth, if you become "stuck," go see a Christian counselor. Talk to your friends or pastor and ask them to recommend a counselor. The best people to ask are those who have gone to counseling themselves.

Finally, remember that life will go on. Eventually the storm will ease and the waves will be calm once more. Above all else, remember that God doesn't waste any experience. Perhaps He's clarifying the direction your life will take or leading you in a brand new direction. I know this is true from personal experience.

Job 42:12 states, "The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first." God gave Job seven other sons and 3 other daughters – the same number he had before the

Rogue Waves. He also gave Job twice as many sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys as before. God blessed Job twice as much in his second half of life.

At age 58 I'm well into the second half of my life. And I can tell you from personal experience that when the Rogue Wave hits ... and after you recover ... God blesses you twice as much in the years ahead. Although I would give anything to have my wife and loved ones back, God had a different plan ... and it's a good plan.

Shortly before my wife died God unmistakably and surprisingly called me to go to Angola, Africa. When I told my wife she said, "I know He is. And If He's calling you, you better go." She died a week later.

In the days and months following that first Rogue Wave, the one thing that kept me going was that for some reason God had called me to go to Angola, and my wife had commissioned me to go. So I went, and my life will never be the same again.

Since that trip God has sent me to Angola a second time, as well as to Zambia, Honduras, and Germany. And most recently God sent me to Russia to videotape a seminary course about spiritual gifts that will be distributed to 22 countries. I never expected to be serving overseas, but that's where God has been sending me – and I'm grateful to Him for this ministry.

You serve a good and gracious God who loves you more than you could ever know or imagine. He is with you in the good times ... and when the Rogue Wave hits. In the midst of the storm say these words aloud: "I am a treasured child of the Most High God." And when times are good, remind yourself again: "I am a treasured child of the Most High God." To God be the glory, Amen.