

Hello! Welcome! :) It's wonderful to be here together at this TBC's Women's Conference. God always has His special purposes and blessings in it for each one of us. So let's begin with prayer. Father, we do thank you for bringing us here today and for wrapping us daily in your gifts of grace and mercy. Open our hearts to always receive guidance and teaching from Your precious Word. We are grateful for the depths of Your faithful love for each of us. Use this time we have now together for Your eternal glory. It's in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

I was born and raised in Suffolk, VA, three and a half hours east of Lynchburg. I was blessed with only a dear brother and he is three years younger than I. When I was about ten years old Mom began taking me and my brother to church. A few years earlier as a result of a revival service Mom had invited Christ into her life, repenting of her sins. During this time my dad considered Sunday his only day of rest and so he usually stayed in bed until lunch time. A few years later the Lord drastically changed my dad when he repented and invited Christ to live with him.

After hearing the Gospel many times at church, I began to ask questions and to realize that because of my sins heaven was not going to be my eternal home. One day I told Mom that I wanted to be saved from my sins because I wanted to be ready to meet God. She did not feel comfortable enough in the Scriptures to show me God's plan of salvation, so Mom asked me if she could make an appointment with the pastor's wife to talk it over. I remember saying with disappointment, "There may not be enough time to wait!" I knew the Lord could come at any moment, as Scripture tells us, and I was not ready. When I met with the pastor's wife, she showed me from the book of Romans that I was born into the world as a sinner without Christ, and that the consequence for my sin is death. But Rom.5:8 tells us that God showed His love for us even though we were sinners Christ died for us . He didn't do this because I deserved it but because He loves me. I needed Him because John 14:6 tells us, "He is the way, the Truth and the Life, no man can come to the Father except by Me." Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross, took upon Himself the judgment and condemnation that I deserve, and He offers you and me what we do not deserve – His forgiveness, cleansing and the eternal glories of heaven – if we will repent and place our faith in Him. When I realized that I could be justified, forgiven and made right with God, I repented of my sin, trusting Christ and Him alone as my Savior. Because of His amazing love and the gift of faith, mercy and repentance, He saved me from an eternity in Hell without Him! That wonderful, faithful love overwhelmed me to tears that day, to think that a loving, holy God loved me. If you have not yet believed, and applied Christ's work of the cross, I hope today you will discover and receive God's blessings of riches for your life, His free gift of saving grace through faith. Oh, so thankful Christ came to redeem us from the effects of the curse of sin, aren't you?

The reason I began today with my salvation testimony is because without a personal relationship with Christ there is no way to leave yesterday behind and to not let your past define you. God's invitation is always open to trust Him for salvation and begin following Him. To leave yesterday behind is all about the work of Christ being applied to our lives.

The title of our session today is taken from this book, *Leaving Yesterday Behind – A Victim No More*. I highly recommend it for its practicality and easy reading, and it is full of truth and great illustrations that stimulate your thinking. This book does not minimize the pain of victims, but rather embraces those hurts through the promises of the Word of God to overcome the negative effects of victimization. Then gently, yet firmly it introduces God's process of letting go. Pain takes many forms, but it is often traced to such things as parental issues, alcoholism, sexual or verbal abuse, negativism or a number of other conditions. The good news is that anyone who has trouble with past or current issues in their life can be free from that bondage. Regardless of the situation, the cycles of depression and disappointment that have been there for a very long time can be broken. So the question is how do we leave these burdens behind and prepare for the next ones?

God wants us to understand this process for breaking the bondage and leaving yesterday behind. This works for any current or future trial as well. James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trials..." You have probably heard before that throughout life we are either currently in a trial, just coming out of one, or going into one up the road or around the corner. First I'm going to give a brief overview of the process to gain victory over struggles with victimization, and then more details of the process will follow.

The first part of the process to victory over struggles is embracing the encouragement of God's grace through the challenges in our journey. Just when you think God is not aware of your struggles, it would be good to stop and remember that He knows and He sees not only each sin we commit, but also the sins committed against us. He has a plan to deal with both. The second part of the process (and the goal) is to deal with the issues – or take ownership of them – by learning to change in order to leave it behind :). Then move along, pressing on to live a fulfilled life, growing to be more like Christ, and free from the pain of the past. 2 Peter 3:18 says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..." God gives grace, to grace seekers. So to help us change to victorious living we not only embrace the encouragement of God's grace and take ownership of the issues, but lastly we also learn to change by taking action or having a plan in place to deal with struggles when they come.

Everyone has a story to tell. Whenever the opportunity arises I share about the darkest night of our life that we experienced in Haiti. Why? Because God's power was on display throughout it and we lived to tell it, for His glory. It would be selfish of me not to declare what He has done. Psalm 96:3 says, "Declare His glory and His marvelous works." Many of you already know what the Lord allowed me and Mark to go through in Haiti. I

will be sharing some of the details throughout this session. We joined the mission board of Baptist Mid-Missions and were sent out from this church as their missionaries. After a year of studying French in Quebec at Laval University we moved to Haiti in 1992 and began studying Creole for a few months. It was a politically tumultuous time in Haiti. Several times we were asked by the embassy to leave due to safety reasons. After living in Haiti off and on for about 2½ years, the most challenging experience we had ever had, happened about 10pm on March 28, 1995. My husband Mark and I were shot with a 45-caliber pistol while in our home. I was then raped. Soon after that, we and our three small children were on our way to the nearby clinic that had been established by missionary co-workers. All of this began many more changes and challenges, but nothing too hard for the Lord! Ps.50:15 exhorts us to, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” Show pic of lighthouse with Psalm 93:4. Sometimes the roaring waves of tribulation come crashing in and it seems like disaster. ....but God... Jesus is the Lighthouse, our protection in the stormy night!

Now we will look at the details of the process of getting victory in our struggles from being victimized, as well as preparing for the burdens that will come next. Through our life journey of many joys and trials, it is very important to know that the key to the strength we need is a better understanding of the grace of God. Show pic of the Grace of God. Here is a quote from the book: “There is never a time in the Christian’s life when grace is not operating.” Isn’t that wonderful? It’s a great encouragement to remember. An example from our experience in Haiti is that during the entire ordeal that night I felt the covering of an extraordinary amount of peace and calmness. It’s really hard to explain, but I was able to think clearly after the initial shock of the first shot that went through my legs grazing the skin of my inner thighs. It shocked me so much that I was not able to speak for what seemed like a really long time, though it was probably less than a minute. Then the peace and calmness of the Lord just flooded my soul because of His presence. Heb.13:5, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Also that night, God gave me His peace about Mark’s well being. He thought he was going to die because his breathing was difficult since his lung was punctured and his blood pressure had dropped really low from losing a lot of blood, ...but God... I knew he was going to be ok. God gave me His overflowing, sufficient grace of strength in every way through every part of this tribulation, and I am humbly grateful for it. Here’s a promise in 2 Cor.12:9 “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’.” This verse reaffirms that God’s grace is big enough to cover every area of our lives. Through my years of getting older and growing in my understanding of grace, it has become so much sweeter to me. The fact is that without His grace (unmerited favor), life would be so different!

Another quote is, “To understand grace is to understand God’s forgiveness.” God gave me a great portion of that toward the thugs. I praise God that He kept me from anger and unforgiveness. I did speak of God’s love to them and pray for their salvation. This was not I, but Christ living in me - His work of grace! And I

am so thankful for that gift. Another quote is, “At the heart of grace is God’s mercy, God’s forgiveness of sinners.” A little caveat here is to **not allow our enemy to plague us with the lie that what we have done or what has been done to us is beyond God’s mercy.** That can never be the case. It would be like saying Christ’s death and resurrection is in vain and that His blood is not sufficient! But praise God Jesus settled all that on the cross when He said, “It is finished!”

There are people who just don’t want to accept God’s grace and experience His mercy. We think, what?! How could that be?! Who would really not want God’s grace and mercy? Well, let’s think about it for a minute. “God has always stood ready to throw aside His anger towards sin and forgive (Jer.3:12b-13a). It is our resistance to confessing and turning from our sin that is the problem because that keeps us from His grace and mercy. Instead we create reasons why we cannot change.” Some of our reasons are very convincing to us, but the real truth is that if we saw ourselves as really forgiven, and admitted to ourselves that we stand in grace right now, we would be without excuse. We would have to change, but sadly some of us love the security of the sin we have always known and don’t give it up - even for God.” Standing grace is found in Rom.5:2 “Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Rom.5:1-6 (on slide) is encouraging. It is God’s grace that enables us to live the Christian life, with willingness to be changed more into His image for His glory. We are His image bearers.

(Picture of 1<sup>st</sup> waterfall) I’d like to share a couple illustrations of grace found in the book where the author talks about waterfalls. They are amazing and beautiful, but perhaps the most intriguing is Niagara Falls. It never runs dry and has been flowing for so many years. The grace of God is like that waterfall – praise God it never runs out! I am deeply grateful for the sustaining grace of God when we learned that both thugs, who had been captured, were HIV positive. I felt the peace of the Lord and at first reacted sarcastically saying, “That’s great.” Later, I had questions like, “Can I kiss my husband and children?” and, “What does all this look like for me until I know if I am positive?” and, “What’s next if I am positive?” They tested me at three months, again at 6 months, and again a year after the incident. During this time of waiting, we experienced the ever-flowing grace of God as we looked to Him for direction, and sought counsel from the leaders of our church here at TBC. After much help and counsel from Pastor and Mrs. Brodie walking through this with us, we decided to move on with life as normal as before. That did not mean that I didn’t think about it often, but it did not plague me. We chose to trust the Lord, leaning on His precious promises. One favorite promise is found in Is.26:3-4, “He will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Him because he trusts in Him. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting Rock.”

(Picture of 2<sup>nd</sup> waterfall) Now let’s think about the waterfall in a different light. Have you ever stood in a waterfall? It’s very refreshing! Think of the water as God’s grace that never runs out. Now picture yourself at the

bottom of the falls. When we think of the water as the grace of God, we are standing in it and it is always flowing and enveloping us. “The problem comes when we use an umbrella and divert the flow of grace. It’s all around us but it’s not saturating or refreshing us.” To stop the flow of grace in our lives sounds silly, but we do it when we allow fear, anger and anything else to control us. We divert the flow of grace by doing things our way, living in the flesh, not the Spirit, and this disobedience stops the flow of grace. Instead we should be meditating and memorizing the promises and commands of Scripture because the Word of God is powerful (Heb.4:12). And this is how He strengthens us to please Him and bring God glory through any situation. Living in grace is when we are obeying Him in increasing measure, so if we are not living in grace we are living in what the Bible calls the flesh (Rom.8:3-4). This makes me think of one of the moments during our incident in Haiti. It was after Mark was shot and we were in the hallway of our house trying to stay away from any of the windows where the shots were coming through. I saw him lean against the wall with his face against his arm saying, “Lord, I don’t understand, but I thank you.” This is because He knew that God was not only still with him as the promise of Heb.13:5 tells us, “I will never leave you or forsake you”) but also the promise of Rom.8:28, that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. **Psalm 50:23, “The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies Me...”** God bringing His truths to our minds is a wonderful reminder of His saturating grace.

So how does accepting God’s grace of doing things His way make a difference in leaving yesterday behind? First, there is no other way. It’s God’s grace that breaks the hold of paralysis from being victimized, when we live standing on the promises of God. Then He grants us forgiveness for any bitterness, and a renewed relationship with Him. Through this process He enables us to live in the reality of His favor toward us and empowers us to live pleasing to Him as He desires. This is walking with Christ and living victoriously. Being who we are in Christ is how grace leaves yesterday behind. Don’t allow Satan to tie your identity to what has happened to you. The reality of your identity is who you are in Christ.

The second part of the process to have victory over our past is to take ownership of the issues and learn to change to leave it in the past. For ex., I may not be responsible for what happened to me or when (fill in the blank like growing up, in my family, with my friends, after I was married or left home, etc.) (in Haiti), but I am responsible for what I do now and how I respond to the situation. “It might be much easier on the ego to blame others for our problems. If we can shift the blame then we can become victims and as a victim it is much easier to garner sympathy for our plight. But people who remain victims never fully mature.”

Gal.6:7 says that a man reaps what he sows. Often times we live as though we don’t believe God and we pay a price when we break the laws of God. For example we know not to challenge the laws of physics by being in the path of a speeding vehicle or try to defy the law of gravity and walk off a tall building. Why then do we think

there will be less severe consequences when we neglect the laws of God? We just need to do the right thing by obeying God even when we don't feel like it or when it's difficult. Why is this so important? Because obedience draws us closer to Him. Here is an example. I was going through some depression symptoms while healing from the trauma. I owned that fact instead of ignoring or overlooking it. We decided that I would exercise instead of taking depression pills, but I did not want to go walking and I certainly didn't feel like doing it. It was a daily struggle, but I did it anyway, not only to receive the benefits of getting over the depression, but to submit to the authority of my husband that God graciously gave me. I also did not want to go to church and be around people. I knew the command not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together so I pressed on in the grace of the Lord. God clothed me with His amazing grace to make those changes when I repented of my attitude and refrained from shifting blame to my husband or others. That's how God helped me in the step by step process of leaving yesterday behind. **This looks impossible when we look at it from the perspective of what we can do, but God looks at it from the perspective of what He will do when we entrust it to Him.**

In all of our hurtful situations in life, we must identify the source of the struggle and focus on the biblical solution (Heb.12:1-3). Once we understand our problem, own it and accept God's grace we can strive to handle things in God's way for His glory.

It is now helpful to come up with a plan to overcome the negative with a positive. An example here is when Mark and I had the opportunity to go back to Haiti for the trial after our shooting. During that phone call we were asked specifically to consider this because the US was trying to teach the Haitians how to proceed in a court of law and our attendance would be very helpful. Woosh! Fear and doubt drove in (the negative), but we immediately and earnestly sought the Lord through prayer wanting only to fear Him! (the positive). Pr.29:25 says, "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe." This was working to renew our minds. We later learned that the father of one of the thugs said that if he were to ever see us he would personally kill us for getting his son in jail. As we prayed about attending the trial we knew the Lord wanted us to do it. While there, we stayed a couple of nights with some missionary friends and co-workers who lived about forty minutes up the road from where we had lived. Knowing we would struggle with fear, we knew that the solution was the Word of God. There are many verses on fear that I wrote on cards for us to review and use as needed. Many times these were recited and the Lord brought His sweet peace. Needless to say we were grateful He granted us His covering of grace to get through. "The Lord is near or attentive to all who call upon Him in truth." Ps.145:18. Oh yes, as a result of the trial these two thugs were put in prison for life. We are so thankful that we did not allow fear to overtake us in making the decision to take the trip for the trial, and of course we were very thankful to get back home and with the kids. Also, Pastor Brodie and Judy graced us with their love to stay in our home and take care of our three littles while we were gone.

In review, to gain victory through struggles is a process as we strive to leave yesterday behind. First, we embrace the encouragement of God's grace throughout it all. Then we identify and own the issues, making changes to obey Christ seeking to grow more in His likeness. Lastly, we learn to change by taking action in a plan to deal with the struggles. To make significant changes, we must have a plan for change. To have the right attitude to follow Jesus on the road to change, tell Him you love Him, will follow Him and ask for His grace. **God's way leads to replacing the negative with a positive (Eph.4:22-24)**. There are three things the Scriptures tell us to do to change. First, we must prepare our minds to think biblically – which happens as we study and learn His ways in the Scriptures. Then we are enabled to react properly when confronted with tough situations like the death of a parent, spouse, or child, illness in oneself or those we care about, financial problems, personal disability or personal appearance that may weigh heavily on us. With Christ's help we can identify the source or root of the problem and keep our focus on doing things right. This reminds me of the truth that I had been meditating on before this incident happened to us in Haiti. Providentially, I had been reading about the fear of God and looking at the Scriptures that talk about that. I knew that was what God wanted for me so I began to pray asking Him to give me that proper fear of Him. How grateful I am that He was preparing me for what was coming. Secondly, to change we need to be self-controlled regardless of how we feel. We may not feel like doing the right thing, but we do it because we know God expects it. II Tim.1:7 says, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (fear), but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (self-control)." We not only prepare our mind biblically and be self-controlled, but thirdly, Peter tells us to focus on Christ's work for our salvation (I Peter 1:13 til end of chapter). If you know Christ, think of how lost you were without Him and how different life is now. We have to speak the truth to ourselves and believe God's truth over and above all else. "We can trust God enough to obey Him." And we obey Him through the grace of God renewing our mind to put off the old self and put on the new self (Eph.4:22-24). This is replacing the negative with the positive. And Col.3:12-17 is a list of what to put on and here's a few of them: compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, and above all put on love. Then in verse 15, "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which you were called in one body. And be thankful." Verse 16 says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly..." Verse 17 says, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." It's clearly the Word of God that renews our minds, equipping us to leave yesterday behind, a victim no more.

So what is the purpose of these painful situations of life? First of all, we know they are sanctifying experiences that show us how much more we need Him, His mercy, strength, forgiveness, grace, peace, comfort, etc., etc. So we are learning to know God in a deeper way. This brings us to more prayer which is a great privilege that we often underestimate. Eph.3:20 says, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than

all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.” Because our Lord is sovereign and always there for us, difficult situations just bring us another opportunity to love Him with all that we are so then He who is worthy gets the glory. I Peter 3:17 says, “it is better to suffer for doing good if that is God’s will, than for doing evil.” We are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind. In Ps.119 we are called to trust and learn from His judgments – the Psalmist says, “I will keep Your judgments.” He has not called us to understand all His ways, therefore He does not expect that, but we are called to love and trust Him. If we just do what we know to do is right, He will work out all the rest. Phil.2:13 says, “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose.” Our Creator has a purpose and design for each of us and our purpose should be to fulfill that in doing whatever He says. Here’s a quote from the book, “At times we will suffer, at times we will experience pleasure, but neither suffering nor pleasure is the goal. The goal is to love God across the whole spectrum of our lives.” This brings the unexplainable love and joy deep in our soul. To fulfill His purpose it is imperative to keep our eyes focused on the goodness of God and the power of the Gospel – His love and forgiveness enduring the cross even while we were sinners . Leaving yesterday behind is really all about our intentional focus on the cross and what the work of Christ means for us. So I guess I’m here today to show you what God’s grace can do for you. Let’s make it our purpose to praise Him by making Christ the treasure in all our ways and situations of life. Heb.12:1-3 says, “Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”