



He Knows the Way Home

A young pastor was spending the week with his wife and their 13-month-old at a small cabin nestled deep in the mountain canyons. The vacation was Mom's chance for some much-needed sleeping in, so when morning dawned with clear skies, singing birds and sounds of the lake kissing the shore, Dad stowed Junior in the backpack carrier and started off on the three-mile trek through the woods around the lake.

Junior cooed gently in Dad's ear, soothed by the rhythmic up-and-down of his father's long stride. Occasionally he reached out to swipe at leaves tickling his ears, kicking his legs gleefully whenever he grabbed one.

At exactly the half-way point around the lake the sky began a drastic metamorphosis. The mirrored lake went gray as dark clouds drowned the sun. Wind began to taunt the treetops, hinting at the precipitation to follow.

Dad quickened his pace and reached around to pull the hood of Junior's jacket up over his head. The sky grew black, and the wind grew stronger. Soon the rain arrived, with drops getting bigger and heavier until every inch of their bodies was drenched.

Dad could feel Junior's movements get more and more agitated. His hood had fallen off, and the wind was cold and blinding. Junior's world was falling apart. A minute ago he was grasping at dancing leaves. Now he was drowning, freezing, alone. This was his whole world. This reality stretched from horizon to horizon. The world was harsh, unforgiving, cruel. His legs began kicking harder, his whimpers escalated into wails. Daddy had forgotten him. He was unloved, abandoned. He knew this was not where he belonged.

When Junior's tiny howls became audible over the splattering rain, Dad reached around and pulled him from the backpack. He could not shorten the road ahead, but he could provide the one comfort available in these horrid conditions. His voice.

As Dad pulled his scared, drenched, shivering little one to his chest, he pressed his

lips to his ears and whispered, "Hey, it's okay, Daddy's got you. And guess what? Daddy knows the way home." Together, pressed tightly in each other's arms, they made it around the bend.

I heard this story as I was pondering ideas for my Christmas column. I had been thinking of all the delightful things about Christmas. And then I realized; this Christmas season may not be delightful for everyone. There's a big problem in this world, and it's called pain. When God gave us the choice to love him, he also gave us the choice to leave him. The possibility for love introduced the potential of pain into this world. And pain often seems to have the upper hand.

Like the toddler in the story, when we experience the storms of life they fill all our mental space. We don't know where they came from, how long they will last or if they will ever end. Even walking in step with our Father doesn't keep the rain from blinding us—penetrating our skin—freezing our soul.

Yet even when the storms are most severe, we are never separated from the greatest comfort we can experience. The voice of Life. His voice doesn't always stop the pain, but it does help bend our spirit back from fear to safety. It does help us to melt into his embrace, to know that he will never forsake us.

His voice reminds me that "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

I pray that voice rings loudly in your ears this Christmas. That in the midst of the storms life has showered upon you, you can lean closer to his chest as he presses his lips to your cheek and gives you the promise you can bet your life on.

"I've got you. And guess what? I know the way home." □

—Susan Reedy

There's a big problem in this world, and it's called pain.... The possibility for love introduced the potential of pain into this world. And pain often seems to have the upper hand.