

Thursday, March 20, 2008

To my dear friends and family,

I have written over a thousand letters, legal documents and e-mails in this last year trying to prepare for tomorrow's court date. None of them are as important to me as this letter that I am writing to you right now. I really hope you will take the time to read the letter and understand what I am saying.

It has become obvious that the government does not have any intention of honoring the agreement that they forced upon me last year; it seems that they set out to deceive me and continued to deceive me in order to get me to do things for them up until yesterday when they revealed their intent by asking for a 5 year sentence and letting my attorney know that they are coming to my hearing as true enemies.

My attorney's demeanor for much of the last year of "don't worry about it" (because he was banking on the government honoring their deal) has shifted to "this is outrageous" and "you need to prepare for a very bad outcome". So that is what I am trying to do today.

What I want you to know, is that at the end of the day, at the end of whatever punishment I am given, I will not only be okay I believe that I will be better for it. I have grown more through this situation (and will continue to grow through the rest of it) than any other single situation in my life. I am being allowed the opportunity to truly look very closely at my life, to decide what parts of it serve me and others and what parts are wasteful or even destructive. I am being allowed to rely on the only thing I have left to rely on, God. I am being forced to choke on my pride and find a better balance between love and theology. All of which is earnestly compelling me to transform myself into something "other" than what I have been for so long. Now I get to truly start over with nothing but my faith and my family. And we get to make careful, deliberate choices about how we want to spend the rest of our lives. Who we want to become, together. I would have never been able to find the space, time and motive to get to this point if my life had not imploded. I cannot tell you how much of a blessing I believe this is really going to be for me and for my family.

But before the blessings are revealed there is the tragedy, the pain, the unfairness, the hurt and anger on all sides, not just mine. And even after the tragedy seems like it is over there will be the lifelong burden and reminder of it because the pain of all those who have been hurt by my actions cannot be erased by prison or even by paying them back. I will still owe people millions of dollars (if not legally, at least morally) and I will probably be paying that debt for the rest of my life. Maybe that will be tantamount to my thorn in the flesh.

This has been a terrible year and it looks to be pretty bad for quite some time to come. I don't want to infer that we have found some miraculous way to be really happy in the midst of everything that has happened and the uncertainty of what might come. But we have managed to get by day to day. To love each other, in fact Wendy and I are closer to each other than we have ever been in our marriage. To be loved and supported by so many people. To love our family with more intent and purpose and to realize that I am not sick, one of us is not dying, we are not getting divorced – all of which are immeasurably more emotionally devastating than what we are experiencing. The hardest part of this, the separation, will be over one day and we will be able to put it behind us.

So, at this point my fate is primarily in the hands of a judge that I have been told on repeated occasions is very fair and very intelligent. A judge that I have been told by several different people understands the complexities of people and of the business environment that I was part of. This gives me hope even in spite of the seemingly insurmountable strategy that the government has employed. And more than that, my fate is ultimately in the hands of the judge and creator of all. Nothing will happen tomorrow that God does not allow; and everything that God allows, he uses for the good of those who love him. It is an interesting thing about many of us (or at least me) that it takes trials like these to really define our love for God and develop more intimacy with him.

God is most definitely a God of grace, deliverance and miracles and I have no doubt whatsoever that he can overcome every obstacle that I face tomorrow and set me completely free if that is his will. And even though at times I pray for this, I do not hold on to the expectation that he will or that he is required to do so in order to fit my definition of a good god. I honestly do not base any part of my faith in God on how good or bad the outcome seems tomorrow. Doing so would not only be absurd, it would also mean that I think higher of myself than of God. That I think I am smarter or more loving than God.

What is often overlooked is that God is also a God of sustenance. That God sustains his children through every trial and tribulation that they go through; through every impossible circumstance and unjust situation. That we are often delivered from our selfish, prideful and destructive natures by the weaning and pruning processes of profound suffering. That God indeed offered each of us total grace by the suffering of Himself in Jesus. That all of this is not by accident, it is by design.

What is also often overlooked is that God also provides some of our deepest joys in the midst of our most profound sorrows as he tells us over and over and over again in his word. A lot of us don't realize this because we don't spend enough time contemplating God's Word and for some reason (hmmmm) this part of God's Word does not sell enough books or draw a big enough crowd so it is neglected by many who seek to interpret God's word for us.

God can and does use these situations to grow and mature his children into the people they are created to be. Maturity is not developed by getting everything you want; I believe that is how spoiled people are often developed. Because I am a follower of The Christ, a child of God, I know that no matter what happens tomorrow, God will use it to bless me, to bless my family and to bless others. Most importantly I believe that God will use my situation to draw me closer to him, to draw my beautiful wife closer to him, to draw my wonderful children closer to him and hopefully even draw my friends and others closer to him.

Do I deserve to spend five years in prison for what I have done? No, I believe that would be incredibly unjust. On the other hand, have I escaped judgment time and time again for all the terrible, selfish and ungodly things that I have done in my life? Yes, absolutely! And I promise you that five years in the worst prison you can imagine would seem like amazing grace in the face of the combined weight of these deserved judgments.

So what do I do to prepare for a very bad outcome tomorrow, I make sure that I truly understand that God has a purpose for my life and it is to his glory that I may be able to live for that purpose. That I can admit to myself and others that I am indeed a broken, selfish, proud and rebellious child of a wonderful king that

wants to give me all that I need in exchange for all that seeks to destroy me. If I could just be so bold as to hold out my hand.

I am going to have dinner with Wendy, call my children and tell them that I love them immensely, watch Celebrity Apprentice (probably too much information?) with Wendy, pray and then go to sleep. In the morning we are meeting with a group of men that I love and trust to pray for us and then we are driving in to Seattle to go to the hearing where I am going to pray some more....

Thank you all for your love, generosity, prayers and support. You are the richness in our lives and we are humbled by your kind words and obvious concern for us!

Joe Lavin

PS – Here are two songs from Jason Upton (out of 50 that are incredible!) that I have been meditating on as of late....

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I will not fear as I wait for the dawn
If you'll keep on holding my hand
Though I'm crying out from the depths of my soul
With words I just can't understand

You have set my feet upon a rock that's not moving
You have placed a song of hope in my heart
and I'm singing, I'm praying

Lord, do not hold back your loving kindness
Lord, do not hold back your mercy
You are the way and the truth that guides us
Everyday you are the one who preserves me

God the great artist designed you and me
With His will and purpose in mind
But I keep on striving and trying to be
Someone I've made with my pride
Now the fires of hell burn hot and try to
destroy me
But I run to your will Oh God
I know you'll restore me, and reform me

I trust in you, I trust in you, I trust in you....
Trust in you, trust in you

In The Silence

Tired of telling you, you have me
When I know you really don't
Tired of telling you I'll follow
When I know I really won't
Cause I'd rather stand here speechless
With no great words to say
If my silence is more truthful
And my ears can hear how to walk in your way

In the silence, You are speaking
In the quiet I can feel the fire
And it's burning, burning deeply
Burning all it is that you desire to be silent, in
me

Oh Jesus can you hear me?
My soul is screaming out
And my broken will cries teach me
What your Kingdom's all about
Unite my heart to fear you,
To fear you're holy name
And create a life of worship
In the spirit and truth of your loving ways

PSS – What a tragic waste when people turn away from the Calvary Road of love and suffering. All the riches of the glory of God in Christ are on that road. All the sweetest fellowship with Jesus is there. All the treasures of assurance. All the ecstasies of joy. All the clearest signs of eternity. All the noblest camaraderie. All the humblest affections. All the most tender acts of forgiving kindness. All the deepest discoveries of God's Word. All the most earnest prayers. They are all on the Calvary road where Jesus walks with his people. Take up your cross and follow Jesus. On this road, and this road alone, life is Christ and death is gain. Life on every other road is wasted. **John Piper, Don't Waste Your Life, Page 76**