

# Torrey 2003 Severe Mercy

By Dane Swindoll

I appreciate the opportunity to share my heart for ministry as a woman, as a wife and a mother, I grew up a missionary kid, Philippine islands from being a missionary, from being a missionary kid. I went to a small Baptist Bible college in Springfield, Missouri. From there, I married the man of my dreams and we were on staff at a church in Bellflower for about 11 years as youth ministers, children's pastors. God changed directions in our lives, and I found myself having to work full time in the corporate world.

I started working at Siemens Medical Solutions about nine years ago, full time secular world. I thought, oh, God's done with me for ministry for a while. I don't have a vocation as ministry. It's not expected of me. It's not required of me anymore. Didn't take me long to realize what a small light I was in a very dark world. I realized that ministry is not necessarily what you do, but it's how you live your life.

I realize that every day I walked into that office at Siemens, I was walking on a mission field ministry is not always what you do. It's not getting paid for it. It's not expected. It's not a chore. It's how you live your life, because ministry isn't always speaking to crowds. Ministry isn't always making leftovers. Out of five loaves and fishes after feeding 5000, ministry isn't always singing beautifully like that in front of so many people. Sometimes ministry is getting a drink of water from a woman at the well.

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Sometimes ministry is going to somebody's house for dinner that nobody else wants to spend time with. Sometimes the minister is being nice to a woman at work. Who wants your job? Sometimes ministry is loving a child in your elementary school class at a public school that apparently nobody else really loves, ministry is how you live your life. But if you stop there, you're cheating yourself. You need to get involved in a ministry. You need to be involved.

I have a daughter who's played soccer since she was six years old, she started wanting to be a cheerleader and I said being the non-cheerleading mother that I am. I said, Lindsey, do you want to watch people play a game and cheer for them? Do you want to actually play the game? She goes, I want to play the game. My boys play football, they have the skill, the ability, the knowledge, if they don't get to play in the game, they're upset.

We get trained for a job. If we don't get put on the project, we know we can do we get upset? Why don't we? The same way about ministry. We've got the ability. We've got the knowledge. We've got the skill. It's just loving people and serving people. You don't have to wait and take a spiritual gift test to find out if you can do that. We can do that. We've got the skill. We've got the ability to love people and serve people.

Get involved in the game. Don't cheer for people that are doing it. Get involved in the game. I was at Seamans for eight years, was very successful, became the manager over three offices, Seattle, San Francisco and L.A., got to travel, got to go to places. People of my peers considered me very successful. As with every industry, there was a merger acquisition consolidation and I

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got laid off. If the only thing I had done for that eight years was Siemens Medical Solutions, I would have considered that a waste of my life.

But I was involved in ministry. I teach children I have a grace group through my church. That's what's in tact, only what's done for Christ will last. Your calendars are busy, I know you're busy, but I am a full time working mother, you are preaching to the choir. Working mothers are a breed of our own, we know how to cook everything in anything in a crock pot. If we don't, we'll figure it out. We're busy.

You're going to leave this Biola bubble. You're going to fill your calendar with everything our busy, busy, busy. That's the key word. Now we're busy. Everybody's busy. Only what's done for Christ will last. Get involved in a ministry, play the game, put in a position where God will put you in the game and play the game. It's a blast. It's what last. I have two beautiful examples from ministry women in ministry in my life.

My grandmother was a missionary wife from the early forties to her death at 86 when she collapsed of a heart attack, giving her testimony in a gymnasium at Baptist College. Just like this. My mother at 71 years old and is on the mission field today. What is my testimony as a wife and a mother? Nothing spectacular. What do I hope my testimony is as a wife and a mother, that my little girl, when she hears the term women in ministry, will think of her mother as an example of somebody who loved people and served people and shared her life with people.

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Get involved in the game. Thank you, Jacqui, baby. Well, we have a lady who has been involved in the game, her family, her husband, her father, you just look at every side and it cut her and she bleeds ministry. Colleen was a student here years ago when I was Chaplain Colleen as a wife. She is a mother. Mark Deyn, pastors over in Chino Hills. She has children and she has ministry. I've known her for much of her life.

But when I heard her story on Insight for living an aspect of her life that I really hadn't heard about and millions of others heard it, I thought that would be so good to have Colleen returned to her roots and share from her heart what God has taught her as a woman in ministry, a woman and ministry. Colleen Swindoll Deyn, welcome back to Biola. God bless you, as you say. Well, I received a phone call from Rod I about flipped because I thought, I can't even believe you remember I was at Biola.

You've been here for just a few years yourself, haven't you? Before I begin, I need to make two announcements. The first announcement is that there is a gentleman who lives, I think, in Thompson, and he is my nephew. His name is Ryan. And ladies, if you would like to have a great date, keep them there. And like other announcements that I think there's a young lady in cinema who also is quite a cat and she's sitting right here, it's my niece.

Her name is Chelsea. Let's hear it for Chelsea. I told you I was going to do that months ago, so I had it planned. It is truly an honor to stand before you and to be in some way used by Christ to touch your heart, to touch where you are in your life as a result of maybe some of the things that

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Christ has brought into my life. Several years ago, a study was done that asked people to list what they wanted out of life.

And our first slide will show the conglomeration of things that were put together, the top seven things that people want out of life. They want to be happy. They want to be healthy. They want to be prosperous, have good family relations. Can't see that very well. Oh, well, we'll do our best, OK, to have good family relationships, to live with hope and to have a sense of peace. If I were to ask you what you would want out of life, I'm pretty sure a few of those would be on your list to have a sense of hope, to be fairly secure, to be prosperous, being prosperous.

You're all here at school being educated in some genre of education. So to be prosperous, to be secure, to have good family relationships, all of those things we desire out of life, I think I would add to the list a sense of justice, possibly fairness and the golden rule. If you're nice to other people, they're going to be nice to you. However, there's an aspect of life that as Christians, it is very, very hard to accept and the fact is that pain is a reality that we each encounter on the process to reaching our goals.

What I want to share with you today is a few of the painful and life changing events that have happened in my life since I left Biola. Had I known that they would be a part of my life, I probably would have done everything possible to prevent them from being a part of my life. In fact, one study says America makes up five percent of the population of the world. Yet we use over 50 percent of the pain killing medications available to us.

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And in America, it's also stated that we're one of the few countries that complain about chronic pain issues. We have this desire inside to be happy and healthy and prosperous, have good family relationships, get along with other people, live with a sense of peace, and yet are not quite sure what to do with the pain that seems to at some way interfere with that goal on the next slide.

Henry Nalan in his book *Turned My Mourning into Dancing*, has said this.

Typically we see such hardships as an obstacle to what we think we should be healthy, good looking, happy, free of discomfort. We consider suffering as a knowing at best meaningless at worst, and we strive to get rid of our pains in whatever way that we can. Part of us prefers the illusion that our losses are not real, that they come only as temporary interruptions. I think if I were to sit down with any person in this room and ask them what has interrupted your process or where you are, what you're wanting to achieve, it would probably be a painful event.

It would probably be something that you didn't count on, you didn't choose to have, but nonetheless, it was allowed by a sovereign God. And that event probably led you to greater wisdom. So in another book that I read by Peter Craft titled *Making Sense Out of Suffering*, Sheldon Van Auken, who wrote *A Severe Mercy*. And we'll talk about that at the end of my talk. Sheldon makes this statement on the next slide. It says, The mystery of suffering.

If only villains got the broken backs and the cancers, if the cheaters and crooks got Parkinson's disease, we should see the sort of celestial justice in the universe. But as it is, a sweet tempered child, lives died of a brain tumor. A young, happy wife sees her husband and child killed before

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her eyes by a drunken driver. And our empathy with the dying boy of the bereft wife and mother. We sound alike. Scream at the stars.

Why? Why is this happening? It doesn't seem fair. And in our Christian context, as I have done for so many years, I kind of think by serving the Lord, by being active in ministry, by training my children up, hopefully in the way that they should go, that life ought to be maybe a little bit better. I want the Lord to put the exclamation point on my plan rather than submitting to his plan. I started learning this about the time that I got married.

My husband and I were married thirteen years ago. He's from Arkansas. Is anybody here from Arkansas? Right there. You're probably related to him. Raised in rural Arkansas, I was raised in this huge city of Los Angeles two weeks after we married, we moved to Trinity where Mark would do his seminary work. I would finish my college education and off we were with high expectations. We had a head full of knowledge because we had both studied hard and diligently and we were prepared to go into full time ministry. One of the things that Mark had said while we were at seminary was that he never wanted to plant a church.

I don't know how many Talbot students are in with us today, but planting a church is quite an ordeal. So Mark said of all the things we're going to do, we can live anywhere in the nation. But I really do not desire to plant a church following seminary. Mark did not get the position that he desired and worked in another ministry for several years, which was our first kind of little interruption. That wasn't quite what we wanted. But nonetheless, we adjusted, had two children, moved eight times in six years.

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And at that point I was thinking this is not part of my little happy plan. When I got out of college and he got out of seminary, my plan was kind of to go to school, be in a church and stay put. That had been my experience for my life. When I was sitting on a box, we had just moved for the eighth time with two little kids. I was sitting on the moving box still yet to be unpacked. And Mark called and said, there's this great opportunity that I want us to check into. Well, I heard it was out of the city where we were living, which meant I would have to do another move. So in my complete submissiveness, I said, I don't want to hear about it. I'm not interested. And that will be the end of it. But if you feel like we need to look at that, then I will be open to what you want.

Mark proceeded to tell me that this was planting a church in a four percent church population area. Seven churches had been attempted to be started. They all had failed. We would probably live on about a third of the income in the second most expensive city in the nation. They could pay our salary for three months, but after that we weren't quite sure what to think about it. I'm sitting on this movie, but hearing all of that going, I want to hang up the phone right now.

However, we drove up there to check it out because of the passion in his heart, the leadership in our home and his desire to do as God wanted him to do. He was further down the road on that than I was. I was much more self-focused. I wanted to be happy and healthy and prosperous. And these little interruptions in my life were not fitting into that plan. So we moved again, got the church started, and thank the Lord it did really, really well.

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We were there for about a year, had another child and decided a vacation was necessary because we had been so very busy with doing all of the church planting work on the vacation back in Illinois, Mark started feeling a little bit, not well. And the next morning he woke up. I woke up and he was on the floor in the bathroom, having been vomiting all night long and was a little bit yellow, which is not the normal color. And I called the doctor back at home and said, I think he's got something and I don't know what to do. We went off to a hospital that we didn't have the directions for because we were new in the city. And the doctor did a spinal tap and said he has spinal meningitis. And I want you to know one in ten die, one in seven have brain damage. I'm thankful to say one out of two isn't bad these days, as we say to one another.

But the prospect of him doing well is not looking really good. As you know, spinal meningitis attacks. The brain Mark had studied and wasn't was a great academic student. And of course, our concern was what will this do to how he can recall things, how he can process? We spent five days in the hospital. I was holding our brand new son, Jonathan, with Marc on the other side thanking Lord. This now is I don't really have a category for these pieces of life that you have allowed to be in my life.

Some of you sitting here today may have a piece or two of life that has kind of invaded and you don't have a category for it. And I want to encourage you by saying it's all a part of his plan.

Accept it and know that it is very difficult, I. We understand Mark did recover, returned a few days after I had returned to be with the other two children, Jonathan, our third our third child, my second son, I had observed in him his lack of development.

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He had several digestive disorders. He was not able to keep food down. So I had to hold him upright about an hour and a half after every feeding. He did not sleep through the night for I think years literally. And I kept thinking, I've done you know, I've got two children. I know how to do the infant thing, but he isn't he's not fitting into that category. Jonathan would continue to be developmentally very delayed, not turning up or not walking, not talking.

Those of you who have children know his parents. We look for those developmental things and we cheer of them on when they start to walk. Jonathan was over a year old and weighed about 13 pounds. He had had three respiratory infections, which almost also took his life. And I was beginning to feel in my face questions that I had never questioned before. Like Lord, as I face this, where are you? We're planting churches, we're doing Christian ministry, and it's just getting harder and harder.

And I felt so out of control to help that the child that I loved as only a mother can love. My father called a year into Jonathan's life and said he was also going to be planting a church. Of course, no, we said we'd never plant churches. So he said, you want to come and help us get this started, saying that you've done this before? Well, you know, when Chuck Swindoll when all calls and ask if you want to help him start a church, you kind of go, sure.

You know, we'll do that. So we moved out there. Mark was just hugely busy getting the church started. I was starting the children's ministry helping in the women's ministry. I mean, you name it, it was we were doing this all the while. Jonathan is continuing to be sicker and sicker and I'm

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finding myself more and more helpless to know how to help him. In January of the year that we moved, I took him for another doctor's appointment.

They now know us in the emergency room and just walked us back to our room, which I think we probably paid for three times over because we were there all the time. And the the doctor, the pediatrician looked at me and she said, Mrs. Dean, we need to start doing some terminal tests. And it was about as quiet as that, because I had never thought that terminal would be a part of my life and my child's life, and I didn't know how to respond.

So I just cried and I cried out to the Lord, who did at times seem very, very silent. Jonathan did not have cystic fibrosis, but we would continue to do a battery of tests on him coming to find out he had an immune system delay. He was delayed in every area of development. At about 18 months of age, he weighed 16 pounds and was functioning at about a three to six month level. Keep in mind, all this other stuff is going on.

And in my heart, my questions of God are getting bigger and bigger and bigger because I'm feeling like he's very absent. Where are you, Lord? When I'm holding my child in my arms who is dying and I'm asking you to help and I don't sense that you're helping. One of the longest days that we had in the hospital with Jonathan was a 10 day stay. He was totally covered in all kinds of infections and we barely survived that, only to have him fall out of his crib, break his arm in two places two months after we got out of the hospital.

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At that point, all of our friends were saying we would never want your life. I scooped up Jonathan, his arm, kind of like this right in the middle off. We were going to the hospital. Mark took Ashley and Austin to school that morning, and my daughter is six years old at the time who thinks like her daddy. And she said, Daddy, I just want to know why God seems to help everybody else's family, but he's not helping our family.

That's kind of a tough pill to swallow in our Christian environment, because we want to say Christ is always there and he will help us and I offer to today he is helping, but it's probably in a very, very different way or in a different direction from from where you're looking. It was about a year after that when Jonathan was three, the specialist, which we were now seeing, seven of them for Jonathan, they said, I think we need to look into some neurological challenges.

We need to check out the autistic spectrum disorders. And those for those who are unfamiliar, as I was at the time, there are neurological disorders that are for the rest of the child's life. Those are things that we don't grow out of. So I read everything I could on autism. I, I did all the research that I could and all the while I was trying to settle with what God had allowed in my life. And quite frankly, I became so angry, angry at the Lord because I justified my behavior by saying, we've served you, we've done what you want us to do.

And and it's just gotten worse. Lord, and you've allowed this. There's a wrestling with one's faith as it grows to a deeper level. Some of you in a room with this many people I can imagine are wrestling with some of the why questions that you have of God. And I want to tell you, stay in

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the game, keep going to him and saying, God, I, I don't have a category for this. And so I'm going to keep talking to you and tell you that I'm angry.

I'm I'm distraught. I don't know what to do. And somehow, in some way, I believe that you will help us out. The most important part of allowing pain to be a part of our lives is realizing it is a pathway to wisdom. Had I not experienced the challenges that we faced and continue to face with Jonathan, who does have atypical autism, who does have asthma and allergies, one of the things that I continue to face as Lord, you are growing in wisdom as a result of this.

So I do not resent this any longer, but I accept this really as a gift from your hand. Paul Brandon, Philip Yancey have written a book titled The Gift of Pain. And in it he relates a story about a young girl named Tonya, who's four years old. At the time, Paul Brand studied leprosy and pain issues in three different countries, and he talks about a diagnosis called congenital indifference to pain. Tonya's mother brought her in to see Dr.

Brand because she obviously felt no pain at all. Here's what Dr Brand has to say about his his experience with Tonya. Tonya seemed very unafraid. She sat on the edge of a padded table and watched impassively as I began to remove the soil bandages from her legs and her feet, testing her swollen ankle. I found that her foot rotated freely as a sign of a fully dislocated ankle. I found grossly infected ulcers on both of her feet, and ever so gently I prodded and pushed through very easily.

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The soft tissue revealing the white bone underneath all of this had no response from Tonya. She felt no pain. Her mother told me that as an infant, Tania seemed rather fine until she left Honea alone one day in a playpen while she went to answer the phone and to make some dinner a few minutes later. I walked back in and found her sitting on the floor of her playpen finger painting with red swirls on the white plastic sheet. The tip of Tonya's finger was mangled and bleeding, and it was her own blood that she was using to draw on the sheets.

In the months to follow, Tonya's parents would attempt to do anything and everything to correct and train a child that had no pain problems. Spankings didn't work, and they found that Tonya, she was going to get in trouble. She would just lift her finger up to her mouth and could bite off the end of it and feel nothing. How horrifying.

Several years later, Dr Brand says, I received a phone call from the mother. Tonya, now 11 years old, was living in a pathetic existence in an institution. She had lost both legs due to amputation. She had lost most of her fingers. Her elbows were dislocated. She suffered the effects of chronic infections from ulcers on her hands and her amputated steps. Her tongue was lacerated badly because of her continued habit of just chewing on her tongue. That is a very, very yucky story about pain.

However, what it communicates is that pain is a part of our lives to tell us that something is not right, to tell us that in some way God is growing you and may in wisdom and trust in knowing that he is sovereign. And usually that comes on the pathway of pain as I work through my own faith issues with God, I came up I didn't come up with I believe that the Lord led me to two

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fundamental truths that I hang on to every single day of my life, because every day is pretty different with a child who has autism, atypical autism, with another child who has learning challenges, and then another child that is in the gifted program.

God has given me three children that span the spectrum and I hold on to these fundamental truths every day. As you leave today, as you go out to whatever ministry you have, these truths will apply to your life every single day. I encourage you to incorporate them in your life and to live by them as you minister. To those the Lord brings you to. The first fundamental truth is that we have confidence in the character of God, which gives us an attitude of hope, a byproduct of painful situations.

And distress is a lack of hope. If any of you have been in a long waiting process or in a long, difficult process, it's very evident that we start to lose hope. Hello God, where are you? And if it continues, we start going. I don't have hope that this is going to change. The thing that will lift your spirit like nothing else is remembering the character of God in God's word. It tells us that he is perfect.

He has no faults. He is all knowing he is not out of touch with who you are in his character. He loves you with an unconditional love that you and I cannot even fathom. In Romans. It tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Therefore, when my circumstances are not as I desire them to be, I rest my hope on the character of an all knowing, all loving, all true, all faithful God.

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And this is what He has allowed in my life for a reason. Having been in church all my life, I learned all of the Bible stories I learned about Jonah and Noah and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all those stories. And in a child's mind, they end pretty happily ever after. That's kind of the context of a child's mind. However, I carried some of those concepts with me. As I've said earlier in this talk, Lord, we're doing all these things.

How come it's not happily ever after? And I learned in studying the character of God, I was relating to my Bible stories rather than the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible allowed Joseph to be treated unjustly for year after year after year after year. I'm not telling you all a story that you probably can't repeat chapter and verse, but remember, I don't think at least it's not recorded in the text that God sat down with Joseph and said, OK, buddy, listen, you're going to get thrown into the pit.

You're going to have some problems along the way. But this is where you're going to end up. All Joseph knew is that he was treated unjustly and twice the passage says at the end of Genesis, God was with Joseph. God is with you. God is with me. Even though we don't know the end of the story, the God of the Bible told Noah to build a ship in a place that hadn't even rained and a hundred years he's working on that thing.

That's a long, long time. That's the God of the Bible. His ways are unfathomable. His ways we cannot comprehend. Isaiah Fifty five says his ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts as far as his ways are different from our ways. He he is so far beyond putting into this

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little box. That's the God of the Bible. When Abraham was told to get up and take off, I don't think that the Lord said, OK, to Abraham, you know, this is what you're going to encounter.

In fact, here's a little map that you can follow. And if you follow this just right, then it's going to go well. Now, God told Abraham, get up and go. Leave it all. That's the kind of God that you and I worship. He sometimes will not tell us sometimes. Well, never revealed to us the end of this story. The text that I have read through, Joe, does not ever say that God finally had a conversation with Joe saying, well, Joe, you know, this little conversation occurred at the beginning of all this between Satan and so really the celestial war has been going on.

And I'm sorry you've been caught in the middle of it, but it's going to be better at the end. Joe didn't have a clue. One day he is so successful and then he ends up on the trash heap in a city dump. That's the God of the Bible. As I say, these things that I didn't want to face as I face what God allowed into my life, I realized I serve a God who is limitless in his abilities, who is unfathomable in his ways.

And if I just rest in his character, I will have hope. You will have hope as you go out and get jobs, as you graduate with a fine education and go look for jobs. Something may happen that does not fit into a category that you anticipated or expected. Shortly after we moved to Dallas, there was a Dallas seminary student, a darling young man and his young wife. They were set to go in ministry, found out that she had cancer.

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Doctors felt like it was going to be treatable and not a problem. She also found out she was pregnant, delayed her chemotherapy treatments, had the baby, and then went back into a huge series of chemotherapy treatments. And I would love to tell you that she survived. And they have a wonderful ministry, guys. She died and that young man had to look at God and say, God, I don't know why you have taken my life, but I know that you're good and I know that you're fair and I know that you're just so in my humanness.

Will you please bring me along in this? Because I have such sorrow in my heart. The second fundamental truth that I rest with every day is absolute surrender to the sovereignty of God gives me an attitude of humility as I surrender to a God whose character is beyond what I can understand. My walk of faith calls me to surrender and to give everything over to what he brings into my life. I really struggled with this because before we had kids, I read probably eight or nine books.

I mean, I was going to do it right. I wanted to know exactly how to be a mom and how to raise children and what their developmental things were. God threw a child into my life. He doesn't fit any category. God, I surrender to your will and I have no idea how to do this. It has been one of the most freeing things of my life. But surrender calls us to rest on God and not on our own abilities.

It is so easy when, as each of you in here are capable and academically strong, intelligent, productive people, it is so easy to begin to kind of take ownership of that. And yet we serve a God who is sovereign and that's not ours to hold tightly. Shortly after Jonathan was diagnosed

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with atypical autism, I visited a place in Houston, Texas, called Brookwood and Briarwood Centers. It's assisted living for those with special needs and handicaps. And as I walked around, I was meeting all kinds of people that I just think are heroes of this world.

That crash helmet, they limbs are missing or it's just unbelievable. And as one gentleman struck me very, very interestingly, because he sat working on a piece of jewelry, what I found out about him was that he had been one of the world's most well known jewelry makers. He was in a car accident that left him for three days, isolated with a car upside down as a result of that, almost dying, suffering severe brain damage and will have seizures every day of his life.

Who would have guessed this incredibly gifted, financially successful man now works at a little desk on a little piece of jewelry, because in the sovereignty of God that is where he's he's been put. And you know what happened in that in that time, I was so impacted by this man because I saw my own pride in wanting my own abilities to kind of propel me through life. One of the things that I wrote about Jonathan when I was I might have left it in my notebook as I was observing my son Jonathan.

Let me get it from my no. But of course, children with autism have all these little behaviors that are just kind of out there. And I watched him one day and was trying to incorporate the fact that forever I will live well, as long as the Lord allows him to be in my life, I will live with this little guy who doesn't fit into any category. And so I wrote a few things down that I'd like to share with you.

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When Jonathan cannot move as quickly as the other kids, I am reminded, Lord, that you take time for me that you were patient with me and you do not hurry me when he cannot speak to tell me what his needs are. I'm reminded that you already know my needs before I speak. Then when Jonathan falls down so easily and gets hurt so repeatedly, I am reminded that you are there to pick me up when I fall down, and that you comfort me when I get hurt.

When others look at him and see that he is different, I am reminded that you see my frailties, you see my inner disarray, and you still say I am fearfully and wonderfully made. When Jonathan feels anxious about his day because anxiety is a part of his world, I am reminded that you are close to the brokenhearted, that you remind me to live one day at a time when he is quick to forget or slow to remember the tasks that seem so simple to me.

I am reminded of your gentle patience that I too am quick to forget and slow to remember the truths that you have told me all of my life. That's that's what being humbled is about. It's being reminded God, regardless of what I bring into this world, regardless of what you have allowed me to experience in my heritage, in my family life, you owe it all. You you owe my children there. I'm just borrowing them from you, my mind, my body.

God, it is all yours. And as you surrender the right to take that from him, he uses you in ways that you will never imagine. But it most likely will come through a very severe mercy of God. I want to share with you a story, stories I told you a minute ago, a book written by Sheldon Vannak. And some of you have heard his name. He was a dear friend of C.S. Lewis and he fell in love as a young man with a woman named Jean de Jean Davis. He called her Davy. They had a

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love that was absolutely incredible. They he was a pilot. They would go flying at the dawn. They would take long walks. They had what they called the shining barrier, which was the boundary for their relationship, how they could stay close and stay selfless in the relationship. They even had what was called the navigator's council. I mean, this pretty incredible relationship. They would come together once a month or so and just talk through the issues of their relationship and what needed to be improved on and what needed to be worked on and where they were enjoying join one another. Their travels led them to Oxford. They studied. They were bright and by all by looking at the whole thing, one would think that relationship is going to last. It was just an incredible relationship. I want to share in closing the story and how it ends. Sheldon writes this book, and I encourage you just to sit back and listen, it's a little bit long, but I think it's vital to understanding the severe mercies of God. Shortly before I was to leave a new teaching position.

David was recovering from a virus that had left her very weak and tired. We decided it was best for her to undergo extensive testing before we moved. Following the testing, I chose to visit the doctor quietly and on my own. I asked him what did the test results? What are they? In a very somber look. The doctor said, Sheldon, it's her liver and she does not have long. It is way past the point of return.

She will die either in a coma or from internal bleeding. As I left his office, I took the long walk down the corridor to David's room. I realized my entire world had turned over. In one sudden moment, I couldn't even speak. I didn't have the words as I entered David's room. So I simply hugged her, smiled, told her that I loved her and said I would return in the morning. By the next morning, I drove to her room and I told her this will be the parting that we never expected.

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Even our shining barrier was not able to protect us from death itself. With David's hands in mine, I said, Darling, this is going to be the end of us. She leaned over and in her husky little voice said, Let it be all according to his perfect. Well, I kissed her wet cheek and we just held each other. In the days to come, we face the impending death with as much courage and hope and love as we could.

We prayed from our Book of Common Prayers. We read through our journals, we record. We reflected on the flights that we had taken at dawn, that the sun rising in the morning, the sailing on our ship called the Great Goose. We visited all of those pieces of our memories slowly as Davy was dying on a crisp autumn day, I arrived at dawn giving my recognition signal end of the window. But there was no reply. Of course, she's probably visiting the doctor.

But as I entered her room, her bedrails had been raised. She was entering her coma. I said, Open your eyes, darling. She smiled, a faint smile. But that was all. Open your eyes there shut. And I can't see you when your eyes are shut. I sat there after, after, after hour after hour, holding her hand against all predictions. She came out from the coma, but only for a few days in the dead of winter.

At three in the morning I received a call that David was finally dying her. Her pulse was slowing and there was nothing more that could be done. I raced to the deserted, icy streets and upon arrival found that David was in no pain, just slowing to a stop. Then I prayed. Light in our darkness, we beseech the Lord, and by your great mercy, defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. I struck your hand, looked at her face and said, David, I will love you forever.

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She whispered, Oh, my dearest. And then there was a very long silence, only broken by David's words. Oh, God, please take me now. I knew at that moment she was dying, and I simply said, David, go under the mercy of God. Her arm came slowly across my face, touching my brow and my hair and then I and then my mouth, her fingers move to each corner of my mouth, as we had always done.

I gave her short little kisses and then she said goodbye. Suddenly she was no more. She was just gone. I closed her mouth. I closed her eyes. I stood up and I said all will be most well, and I kissed her, still warm now. Suddenly I felt the room totally empty. I looked at day for the last moment and I walked out. In the months that followed, I was filled with wordless grief. The shining barrier that we had raised against any intruders of our relationship had been breached unprotected.

From the final moment movement. I realized there was no protection from this loss, only hope in where we would end up. In my correspondence with my dearest friend C.S. Lewis, I was to learn that these times of grief and loss were really a severe mercy from the hand of God. As Lewis stated in one of his letters, it was death, Sheldon Davis's death. That was a severe mercy. In one way or another, the earthly love had to die for you, serve a jealous God, and you too are jealous of him.

So from losing Davey, it will ultimately lead you to the satisfaction of your soul. The death so full of suffering for both of us suffering that still overwhelmed my life was indeed as severe mercy of God. As I close our time together, I want to recall what I started with. The list of things

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that we want in life to be happy and healthy, to have good relationships, to live with a sense of hope and peace. And I.

I would challenge you to take an incredibly courageous step and put on that list that you would receive the severe mercies of God, because it is what final resting place our soul finds ultimate satisfaction. I'm going to pray and then I want to play a song Inclosing, just for a time of meditation to think on where the Lord has brought you, where he's bringing you, and where you may be in the days to come. Almighty God, gracious father, there are no words to say how difficult pain is, and yet it is purposely used by your hand to carve our souls as you want them to be.

I pray that you continue helping me know how to surrender to you, to walk in humility. I pray for every student and faculty member in this room that the mercy of your hand would come graciously and carefully, but in all love. Thank you again for this time in Christ name. Amen.