

His plan or mine?

By Dr. Gregory Wiens

I recently read the book, *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand, which is a biography of Louie Zamperini. The name is meaningless to many of you; however, he was a world-class Olympic runner who fought in World War II. The story involves the time he spent adrift in the Atlantic Ocean for 47 days with no food or water, followed by two years of torture in captivity by the Japanese.

As I read the book, I was struck by two main things: first, I was reminded again at how fortunate I am to have never endured such powerful, traumatic forces; and two, I wondered where was God in the midst of all of these painful experiences. I was deeply saddened to read of Zamperini's broken life and poor decisions that followed the end of the war and the end of his captivity. His story caused me to reflect on the events of my life.

Theologically, we know that God is always with us, no matter what happens. He was with Louie during his abuse and torture and he has been with me throughout my life as well. We know that God is in control -- even when events don't turn out like we plan. I know He uses every experience, weaving them into the fabric of our character and calling. It is often through the most difficult times that our calling is forged.

In the book of Mark, chapter 5, we read about the life of a demoniac who was miraculously healed by Jesus. Overjoyed and now in his right mind, he asked to stay with Jesus, joining the disciples. Jesus said "no" and told him to return to his family. To me, it would have made sense for this person to go with the group, making a solid witness to Jesus' transforming power. But in spite of this man's willingness and obedience, Jesus tells him to go home.

God often chooses to do something different from what we want or what would appear to make sense. The Scriptures (NIV) states that this man *begged* Jesus (verse 18), but Jesus said no. So what does the man do? He goes home, shares his story and impacts many lives. Why? Because he was faithful to the place God provided.

I don't know about you, but there have been times that I've wanted to trade places with someone else and experience their blessings. I have begged God for years to do certain things that simply haven't materialized. But, He has provided a place for me to minister and I know He wants me to be faithful with a little (Luke 16.10). Like this man from the Decapolis, we are all given a place where we can be faithful and serve.

I have seen too many leaders and pastors become bitter because God didn't do what they wanted done. They were more into leading the church rather than following the God of the church. Some have left the pastoral ministry, while others simply became

grumpy old men (or women). I know it sounds ridiculous, but often we -- the created -- become pretty cocky and tell the Creator what we want to be -- like the pottery telling the potter what he should make.

At times, I may not like where I am or what I am facing, but I know that God is near, using it all to shape my character and calling according to His perfect plan. That is, IF I will only respond like our friend, the ex-demoniac, who was faithful in the place that God provided.

By the way, *Unbroken* has a surprise twist in the end; it is well worth the 400 pages!