

**Note: This is the introduction and chapter 1 of *He Still Walks on Water* by Gary J. Lewis, developmental editing by Ken Walker. Released April 22, 2024 by Dream Releaser Publishing.**

## Introduction

Vision. It's the key element, the drive, the burning passion within that catapults us to new heights, helps us cast aside minor irritations, and keeps us moving regardless of the obstacles we face. It's the quality that moves us towards a goal we once could only imagine becoming reality. As Hebrews 11:1 puts it, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (NKJV). I think the word *vision* fits hand-in-glove with *faith*. Without these twin qualities at work in our lives, little gets done.

Vision is what led me to lace up my riding shoes on that Saturday morning in May of 2021 as I trained for the state division of our denomination's annual "Ride 4 Missions." Started in 2018, each November a group of two to three dozen volunteers trek nearly three hundred miles over three days from Dothan, Alabama to Jekyll Island, one of four barrier islands along the coast of Georgia whose paved causeways permit vehicle access. All the money raised by bicycling participants (more than \$200,000 in five years) goes to help support global missions. The 2021 project was the Berea Theological University in Zambia. Each rider has a passion for missions and this project specifically. The money collected through pledges raised by each rider goes towards training pastors and teachers from across Africa—who then return to their countries to minister to others' physical, material, and spiritual needs with the love of Jesus.

The reality of missions takes on a deeper dimension when you consider what this college does: train pastors, educators, and church leaders to take the gospel across a continent of nearly 1.5 billion people. Roughly 40 percent of them are under the age of fifteen (compared to a 25 percent average worldwide), meaning some 560 million African children and teens need to hear the gospel. Ride 4 Missions helps build the theological school's dormitories and classrooms, equip ministers, and make youth seminars, church retreats, and marriage conferences possible. Steadily building a nation's moral fiber, instilling the truth in young people, and keeping families intact does more to strengthen a nation than millions of dollars in economic aid.

I set out to train for the latest ride on a typical late May day in South Georgia, with temperatures in the mid-eighties. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and the magnolias were in full bloom. And it was a Saturday to boot. With a holiday weekend upon us, I got ready that morning in an optimistic frame of mind. I checked the air in my tires to make sure I wouldn't wind up walking part of the way home, filled my water bottles to make sure I could stay hydrated, and donned my helmet, ready to ride like the wind.

As a runner, the one thing I will say in favor of bicycles is they can transport you further and faster than would be possible on foot. I set out this day to ride twenty-six miles, just a fraction short of the distance of a marathon. Since I've run nearly ninety marathons, I knew I would have been straining a bit by the time I reached mile marker twenty-three. But this day, I inhaled a healthy gulp of fresh air and smiled as I thought, "Only three miles to home. I've ridden twenty-three miles and have only seen two cars. This has been a pretty good day."

The next thing I remember was waking up in a stranger's pickup truck.

"Where am I?" I asked, glancing at the road rash running down the side of my right leg and blood splashed down my body. "What happened?"

## **Chapter 1**

### **Riding into the Storm**

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame will not consume you.

--Isaiah 43:2 (ESV)

Across the United States, 966 bicyclists died in crashes with motor vehicles the year of my accident, a slight increase over the 948 fatalities recorded during the pandemic season of

2020.<sup>1</sup> Bicyclists in Georgia fared slightly better, with 15 dying in 2021, compared to 32 a year earlier.<sup>2</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 130,000 people are injured in crashes on US roads annually, with the costs of bicycle injuries and deaths from crashes exceeding \$23 billion. Those figures include the expenses for health care and lost work productivity, and estimates for lost quality of life and lives lost. About one-third of crashes resulting in a bicyclist's death involve alcohol use by the motor vehicle driver and/or the cyclist.<sup>3</sup>

In an overview of fatalities for 2021, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reported that although deaths had decreased 4 percent since 1975, they had increased 55 percent since reaching their lowest point in 2010: "Most bicyclist deaths in 2021 (90 percent) were among people age 20 and older. Deaths among bicyclists younger than 20 have declined 90 percent since 1975, while deaths among bicyclists 20 and older have quadrupled. In every year since 1975, many more male than female bicyclists were killed in crashes with motor vehicles. The decline since 1975 was far greater for females than for males (34 percent vs. less than 1 percent, respectively)."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the day I wound up in the hospital with a foggy brain and tried to fathom what had just happened to me, such statistics were vague, meaningless minutiae. I didn't care about the national trend towards more bicycle paths and pedestrian safety, nor the push to increase mass transit usage so there are fewer vehicles on our highways. I was hurting. A careless driver—whether sober or juiced up on something—had smashed into me from behind, literally breaking my bike in two. I'm not sure how long I lay there, but I'm thankful somebody stopped to help. If he hadn't, I might have joined the 2021 fatality statistics.

After getting hit, I don't remember anything until I woke up in a pickup truck, wondering why McDonald's wrappers and other trash was strewn around the floor. Since I didn't have my senses about me, I didn't know what was going on. When I asked what had happened, the driver replied, "You've been hit."

"Where are you taking me?" I asked.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Traffic Safety Facts 2021 Data: Bicyclists and Other Cyclists," National Highway Safety Administration, June 2023, <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813484>.

<sup>2</sup> "Traffic Data," Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety, <https://www.gahighwaysafety.org/traffic-data/>, accessed September 8, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> "Transportation Safety: Bicycle Safety," Centers for Disease Control, May 4, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/transportationsafety/bicycle/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> "Fatality Facts 2021: Bicyclists," Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, May 2023, <https://www.iihs.org/topics/fatality-statistics/detail/bicyclists>.

“I was going to take you to the hospital.”

“No, don’t take me to the hospital,” I said, shaking my head. “Just take me to my house. I live close to here.”

Although I don’t recall much from that morning, I remember asking, “Is my bike messed up?” and his answer: “Your rim was bent a little bit.”

A little bit? My bike was broken in half, with the back smashed and part of it broken off from the frame! I thought it looked like a little ball.

Only about a mile from our house at that point, I directed him through several turns until he pulled into our driveway. The only reason I remember I had ridden in a pickup truck is the driver had thrown my bicycle in the truck’s bed.

“If you remember where I got hit, I don’t have my phone,” I said.

“I’ll get your phone for you,” he said with a wave of one hand. “Don’t worry about that.”

After leaving my bike lying in the middle of the drive, he drove away. I never saw him again. He never retrieved my phone and never checked back to see how I had fared after this mishap.

### **Picture of Panic**

Of course, when I walked through the door with a torn shirt, road rash down my right side, and blood spatters across my body, my wife reacted as you might expect.

“We’ve got to go to the hospital right now!” Lori yelled. “I’m calling an ambulance!”

To add to the picture of complete shock, Lori didn’t even know I had gone for an early-morning ride that Saturday. She had gotten up, put on her pajamas, and headed downstairs to brew a cup of coffee and watch a little television. Imagine a total picture of relaxation and the next thing you know your husband is standing there a complete mess as he says, “I got hit by a car.”

After her frantic reaction, I replied, “No, I don’t need an ambulance.” Then I headed for the bathroom to wash my face and get some of the blood off myself. When I finished, Lori fussed as she guided me toward the car. Gesturing with my hand at the bike, which I had hauled into the garage before walking through the front door, I said, “Look at my bike. They destroyed my bike.”

“I don’t care about your bike!” she said, shaking her head. “Get in the car!”

In the spring of 2021, COVID protocols were still in place, so when we reached the hospital we had to first enter a tent in the parking lot for preliminary screening.

“If this was a hit-and-run, I’ve got to notify the police,” the nurse said.

“That’s fine,” Lori replied with a wave of her hand.

Once that matter was resolved, the nurse started (as the old expression goes) wearing Lori out for not calling an ambulance to transport me there. Suddenly, with the initial rush of adrenaline subsiding and every ounce of energy draining from my body, I interrupted the nurse’s lecture to say: “I’m getting ready to pass out.”

The woman quickly stood up and rolled her chair around the table for me to sit down. Orderlies quickly brought a gurney and placed a neck brace on me before wheeling me inside. After doing an MRI, they brought me back to the emergency room (ER). Finally a doctor came to the waiting area where I was resting. He told me I had suffered too much trauma for their small town hospital to adequately treat my injuries.

“We’re going to have to send you to the trauma center, ” he said, referring to a hospital just over a hundred miles to the north. “If it were just one thing we might be able to deal with it here. But your back concerns me and your eye is cut. We don’t feel comfortable doing the stitching on your eye. We think you might have a lacerated liver too.” After listing a few other issues, he added, “I think it’s too much for us.”

I had to admit: I was a mess. I had blacked out after getting hit so hard that it broke my helmet. For the next three weeks I would periodically see little black dots dancing in front of my eyes. One of the doctors who treated me explained that head trauma builds up fluid behind the eyes, the source of those maddening dots.

### **Good Samaritan?**

Before the drive to the trauma center, a police officer showed up to take my statement. After I related the whole story, he asked, “Do you think the guy who picked you up is the guy who hit you?”

“Probably,” Lori interjected. “Because for one, why didn’t he call 9-1-1? Common sense would dictate you don’t move a body at the scene of an accident. If this guy had picked him up out of the goodness of his heart, he would have taken Gary to the hospital or stayed at the house to make sure Gary was okay, not just left the bike in the driveway and drove off.”

“We’ll probably never find him,” the officer said. “An isolated road like that and no witnesses or security cameras? Not likely.”

In the months that followed, several friends asked if there were any security cameras in the area or at our house that might have captured an image of the motorist who ferried me home. But there wasn’t any. Whether the man had a warrant out for his arrest, was afraid we might sue him for everything he owned, or didn’t have any insurance, we’ll never know. But Lori is still thankful that he didn’t leave me out there on that country road. I never would have made it those last three miles with my body bruised and battered and my bike destroyed.

A woman who lived in our neighborhood talked with Lori a few weeks after the accident. Married to an attorney who specialized in personal injury cases, she said, “If your husband wants to find out who hit him, my husband can find him.”

When Lori related the conversation to me and asked what I thought, I replied, “No. To what point do you want to ruin somebody’s life? I don’t think it’s worth it.”

### **Facing Obstacles**

That discussion and my reaction are part of the hindsight of my accident. On that Saturday—just like that—I found myself in the turbulence and shear of a storm, not knowing what was going to happen next. The chaos broke my body, stirred up countless questions in my mind, and sent fear coursing through my veins. How will Lori manage? How will our children react when they find out what happened? The grandchildren? Will I need surgery? Am I going to recover? How much pain will I have to endure? Where was God in all this? Didn’t He know that this was my first day of bike riding practice for the year as I prepared for the next Ride 4 Missions? Is this how my efforts to help His work get rewarded?

I don’t know why bad things happen to God’s people, or to anyone for that matter. But of this much I am sure: sooner or later in life, we will all face obstacles. The toughest ones can look like trying to scale Mount Everest. We can find ourselves suddenly battling fear, guilt, and taunts from the devil, who is always trying to convince us that an all-knowing, all-seeing, all-loving God just doesn’t love us. Satan may sneer, “God doesn’t really care. If He did, would He have let this happen?”

Vicious, nasty, dark clouds of despair can overwhelm us without a second’s warning. That’s exactly what happened to me on that pleasant Saturday morning, when I had no idea I was about to ride into a storm that would change my life forever. As the cobwebs cleared from my

brain once we reached the trauma center, I felt somewhat like Job on the day his children were enjoying a feast at their oldest brother's house. Then, like a tornado that swirls over the horizon, a succession of messengers bring the prophet the worst possible news about them:

- The first told him an enemy had attacked, killed some servants, and made off with the oxen and donkeys.
- The second said the fire of God had fallen from the heavens and burned up the sheep and other servants, and he alone had escaped to relay the news.
- The third brought word that other enemies had formed three raiding parties to swoop down and steal the camels and put other servants to the sword.
- Finally came the revelation that turned Job's guts into a churning mess—while his sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine, a mighty wind had swept in from the desert and struck the oldest brother's house. The four corners had collapsed and killed all of them, with only the messenger surviving to tell about the disaster (see Job 1:13–18 for full details).

One danger of casual Bible reading is missing the full picture of what happened to the characters in Scripture, regardless of the person. I must confess in my younger years that I sometimes treated Job's anguish with a shorthand version of reality. You know: "Poor Job, he lost some of his possessions and really had it hard." But let the details of that awful day sink deep into your spirit. Job had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and numerous servants. Plus his pride and joy: seven sons and three daughters. And *just like that*, he lost it all. Anyone who has suffered through the death of a single child knows the awful, sinking feeling of agony and dismay that overwhelm any parent. The kind that leaves them gasping for air and asking the universal question, "Why did this have to happen to me?"

Once you better understand the magnitude of Job's multiple losses, you may better appreciate his reaction to the parade of bad-news messengers: "Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.' In all this Job *did not sin nor charge God with wrong* (Job 1:20–22, emphasis added).

Job didn't allow the storm to steal his worship. Every storm brings with it a spiritual battle, a clash where faith struggles to prevail over fear and praise fights to drown out pain. Hope wrestles with helplessness. Love struggles to overcome loneliness. Only when we are equipped with vision and faith can we say as Paul did, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:57–58).

### **More Suffering**

There's more to Job's story than meets the eye for many people. Chapter 2 describes Satan (and remember, God permitted the devil to do this) afflicting Job with painful sores "from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (v. 7). Imagine that: suffering so bad you sit with a shard of broken pottery and scrape yourself with it while sitting in an ash heap as your spouse tells you to curse God and die.

If that weren't bad enough, Job has to endure the insults of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, who essentially place Job under a microscope for the purpose of saying in effect, "What have you done wrong, buddy? Why have you sinned and brought this curse on yourself?" There's a reason similar second-guessers today carry the label: Job's Friends. And yet, after this series of charges and condemnations, Job is able to proclaim, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25–27).

Not only was Job a wealthy man of faith, but he was also respected, generous, and known for helping the poor, widows, and orphans. Long before James wrote, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27), Job was doing just that.

In between the tragic news brought by the four messengers, the miserable comfort offered by Job's friends, and God finally answering Job's questions in a whirlwind, a number of qualities about this great man appear in chapter 29. As he writes in verses 7–12: "When I went out to the gate by the city, when I took my seat in the open square, the young men saw me and hid, and the aged arose and stood; the princes refrained from talking, and put their hand on their mouth; the voice of nobles was hushed, and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth. When the ear



heard, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw, then it approved me; because I delivered the poor who cried out, the fatherless and the one who had no helper.”

In verses 13–17, he goes on to describe helping widows; wearing righteousness like a suit of clothes; striving for justice; helping the blind, lame, and needy; taking up the cause of strangers (in modern parlance, illegal immigrants); and intervening to help innocent victims from wicked people. In a commentary on Job, Dr. Art Lindsey—vice president of theological initiatives at the Institute for Faith, Work & Economics—writes: “Job cared for the poor, the widow, and the orphan. He was an advocate for justice and righteousness. He must have helped many people. How many blind people would you have to help to call yourself ‘eyes to the blind’? How many lame people would you have to help to call yourself ‘feet to the lame’? Likewise, father to the needy?”<sup>5</sup>

### **The “Why” Questions**

Still, alongside Job’s words of faith emerged the struggle with the “why?” questions. Why is all of this happening? What did I do? Where are you God? In Job’s book, he asks the Lord three specific questions:

1. Why was I born? (Job 3:11).
2. How can a man be just with God? (Job 9:2).
3. If a man dies, shall he live again? (Job 14:14).

Pain pushes us to question, just as storms cause us to doubt. God answers Job’s pleas and wonderings with a series of questions. Through them, He establishes His sovereignty. Regardless of the severity of the storm, God is still on the throne and He holds us in His hand. Whenever we get to feeling, “Woe is me,” He is there to say things like, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth and issued from the womb; when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band; when I fixed My limit for it, and set bars and doors; when I said, ‘This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!’” (Job 38:4–11).

---

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Art Lindsey, “Job: Putting the ‘Righteous’ in Righteous Rich,” Institute for Faith, Work & Economics, January 18, 2016, <https://tifwe.org/job-righteous-rich/>.

By this point, I would have been cringing in embarrassment as the Lord laid me out and “read my mail.” God didn’t stop there, either. His soliloquy goes for another thirty verses in chapter 38 and all of 39 before pausing at the beginning of chapter 40 to ask, “Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further” (vv. 4-5).

In response, the Bible describes the Lord speaking out of the storm: “Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me: would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor, and array yourself with glory and beauty. Disperse the rage of your wrath; look on everyone who is proud, and humble him. Look on everyone who is proud, and bring him low; tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together, bind their faces in hidden darkness. Then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you” (vv. 7–14).

Honestly, none of the Job lessons or insights came to mind as I lay there in the trauma center, shockwaves still periodically coursing through my body. It would only be later as I reflected on this experience and what God wanted to teach me that I developed a deeper appreciation for how Jesus can help us through any tough season of life, no matter what the loss, how crushing the defeat, or paralyzed we might feel at the moment life takes a U-turn.

To grasp God’s goodness, we must contemplate the full story of Job. Too often we can get hung up on the losses he suffered but forget the end of this ancient saga. Sure, Job walked through unimaginable grief and suffering, but he also came out in better shape than before the storm hit. This is the part of Job’s story worth remembering—that whatever losses, whatever grief, whatever setbacks, whatever obstacles you are facing—God is right there, walking through the storm by your side.

If you think of this as some kind of happy talk or empty promise, consider the blessings God bestowed on Job at the end of the book: “Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. ... After

this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days” (Job 42:12–13 and 16–17).

The best news is that Job isn’t some ancient figure whose relevance has faded with the passage of time. The same promises of restoration and blessing live on today through God’s Son, the Savior Jesus Christ. Just like He did in the story described in Matthew 14:22–33, Jesus still walks on water. He still takes our hand and guides us through gut-wrenching, fear-inducing, nerve-rattling setbacks.