

*Drinking from the
River of Life*

Reflections on Life from a Christian Perspective

C. A. Bustamante

This e-book is provided for enjoyment and meditation. The reflections contained in this book are not interrelated can be read together or apart. They can be used as devotionals.

If you enjoy this e-book and would like to receive our bi-monthly newsletter, which contains short reflections, devotionals, poetry and other information that will aid and encourage you in Christian walk, send an e-mail to: cambustamante@gmail.com

Additional reflections by the author can be viewed at:

www.authornation.com/cabustamante

Contents

Reflection One: Rejoice in the Lord, Always?

Reflection Two: The Reality of the Power of the Blood

Reflection Three: In All Things Be Content

Reflection Four: Why I Believe

Reflection Five: You Can Have The Victory!

Reflection Six: I Know the Thoughts that I Have Towards
You

Reflection Seven: A New State of Mind

Poem: The Master's Hands

Rejoice in the Lord, Always?

Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright. (Psalm 33:1, KJV)

Rejoice in the Lord, O you [uncompromisingly] righteous [you upright in right standing with God]; for praise is becoming and appropriate for those who are upright [in heart]. (Psalm 33:1, Amplified)

This is an utterly amazing Scripture, as is true with most of the Psalms. Here I am, sitting here, fighting an illness that can easily bring me down and cause me to feel defeated; but when I read this passage of Scripture, something happens and I just have to smile.

Why? Because according to the Scripture, praise is becoming to those who are of an upright heart. That means that it is belonging to their character - it defines them, and is adapted to circumstances. Praise isn't just a feel good activity that I decide to do because I am having a good day. Those are the days when raising my hands and thanking God for His blessings is easy. It doesn't take an effort to thank God when I am laying in a proverbial bed of roses without thorns. It is a little harder when I have noticed that in the midst of the roses are thorns, some of them quite painful. And in all that, to lift my hands and offer praise to God for the beauty of the roses in spite the thorns.

When we continue down through Psalm 33, we come to verse 4: **“For the word of the Lord is right; and all His work is done in faithfulness”** (in the KJV, it reads truth). The word translated faithfulness or truth is 'emunah (pronounced em-oo-naw'); literally, it means firmness, while figuratively it means security or moral stability. It is a word indicative of stability, steadiness or truth.

What that says to me is that: I may not understand all that He does. I may even question Him from time to time about why certain things have to happen in my life. But one thing that is certain is that if God is working it in my life then it is truth and it is firm. It is a work wrought in the faithfulness of a God who knows no failure. It is a work that, though painful in the process, when it is finished will draw me closer to Him and it will bring Him glory. When He has finished this work, I will no doubt lift up my eyes toward heaven and exclaim with joy and love - My Lord and My God!

In knowing this, I make the choice today to stand and praise in the midst of the dark nights and in midst of the storms that rage in my life. Because whether the Sun is shining or the rain is pouring down, He is my Lord and my God. He is most amazing in my life.

The Reality of the Power of the Blood

It was Sunday and I was in the evening service at our church. It had been a stressful day and I was quite tired and even a little worn out. It has been quite a struggle dealing with all that is going on in my life; especially now that fighting with this bi-polar disorder has caused me to struggle to just get through the day. If there was ever a time in my life when I needed a reminder of God's hand working in my life and His faithfulness from day to day, then it was Sunday.

As the praise singers began to sing "The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power" by Andre Crouch, I was drawn to the depth of meaning in these words like never before. I was swept away by how amazing the love of God is. And so, I began to think as I sang: "It reaches to the highest mountain/And it flows to the lowest valley/The blood that gives me strength/From day to day/It will never lose its power." I suffer from bi-polar disorder, and for as long as I can remember in my life I have lived on a constant roller coaster. Sometimes the manic episodes are small hills, but many times it is like climbing to the highest mountain. You feel like super-woman, like there is nothing that you cannot do. Then when you get used to be so high above everything and loving the feeling of being able to achieve so much, the ride comes plummeting down to depths lower than any human being wants to go. It leaves you grasping for air, bewildered and looking up just to see the bottom. Quite a contrast!

So as I hear these words: "It reaches to the highest mountain", I understand because I've been there. Then it continues: "And it flows to the lowest valley". I hear these words and I think: wherever I am, He is there also. But not only is He present, as the song says: "It's the blood that gives me strength from day to day". It is His blood that gives me strength when it isn't in me; when I really have no strength in myself. Amazing! But this is my favorite line: "It will NEVER lose its power." It is always enough! Isaiah 53:5 says: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." In the Amplified version, it reads: "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our guilt and iniquities; the chastisement [needful to obtain] peace and well-being for us was upon Him, and with the stripes [that wounded] Him we are healed and made whole."

It is absolutely amazing all Christ has already done for us. Of course, He requires us to do our part. He requires us to be obedient to His commandments. He requires us to seek Him. He requires us to be obedient to the Word as it teaches us how we can apply the provision of Christ's blood to our own life He requires us to repent (and turn from our sinful ways); He requires us to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (applying the bloodshed on Calvary to our lives); and He requires us to be led by His Spirit, which He offers freely to all mankind. But when you do, you will experience in every moment that it is true His blood "reaches to the highest mountain"; His blood "flows to the lowest valley"; His blood is what "gives me (and you) strength from day to day"; and His blood "will NEVER lose its power".

In All Things Be Content

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (Hebrews 13:5)

Hebrews 13:5 is an interesting verse of scripture. I have many times quoted this verse: "for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Many times I have wrote these words, explained these words and offered them as encouragement to others. In moments of anger, I have slung them at God as a reminder that He is supposed to be present in my situation. Yet, I have (I do not recall) never truly noticed the first words of this verse, which hold so much life in so few words - "and be content with such things as ye have".

No matter the situation in your life, this is the instruction of God - "be content". When your life is utter chaos and it seems like it will never be the same; when it seems all that you hold dear is suddenly stripped away and your left with only a bunch of questions without answers; when you seem to have lost your way and you wonder why God doesn't seem present in your situation - in all of these and more, He simply says: 'be content'. And when asked why, he says: "Because I'm right here. I've not left. I will not leave. I am not turning my back on you. I'm here." And that in

itself is answer enough - "I will never leave you or forsake you."
Be content.

Did He say it would be easy? No, but He said He would never leave. Did He say hard times and pain wouldn't come? No, but He said He would be your constant companion and your guide - if you let Him. So go. Be content. Trust Him.

In the 37th Psalm in the Amplified version of the Bible, the word 'uncompromisingly' or a similar word indicating consistency appears nine times. Interestingly, the Psalm is an assurance of the presence of God in your situation. It is the assurance that it will be alright in the end for the one that chooses to walk with God (uncompromisingly).

So the moral of the story: Be content. In all things be content. To be content is not to be in a permanent state of happiness. Happiness is temporal. It is based on externals. Instead, Webster's dictionary gives the definition of 'content' as 'literally, held, contained within limits; hence, quiet; not disturbed; having a mind at peace; easy; satisfied, so as not to repine, object, or oppose'. A closer look at the word 'repine' shows us the meaning is 'to fret one's self; to be discontented; to feel inward discontent which preys on the spirits; with at or against.'

To be content is to be satisfied or at peace in the presence of existing circumstances regardless of what the situation may be. Such contentment can only come from consistent commitment and trust in Almighty God. And such a state of trust and commitment keeps us from viewing our present situation, regardless of what it may be, with discontentment that preys on our spirit and destroys the work that God is trying to do in our lives.

Sometimes God doesn't answer that popular question "why?"
Instead He just says 'I'm here'. And that is answer enough.

Why I Believe

And many more believed because of his own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world. (John 4:41-42, KJV)

Then many more believed in and adhered to and relied on Him because of His personal message [what He Himself said]. And they told the woman, Now we no longer believe (trust, have faith) just because of what you said; for we have heard Him ourselves [personally], and we know that He truly is the Savior of the world, the Christ. (John 4:41-42, Amplified Version)

If the gospel is anything, it is personal. Repeatedly, throughout Scripture we find reference to Christ's desire to redeem every man. We find Him not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to the knowledge of God and salvation. That all would come to repentance and embrace a relationship with the loving God has always been the desire of Jesus' heart.

Many years of dealing with a drug addiction that wore me down and affected every part of my life along with the many resolves to leave it behind and the people on the sidelines pleading with me to find a better way of life have taught me one

thing that I know to be true: a person will only do what they really want in their own heart. I can resolve to change to please parents, for the good of my children, at the request of a spouse or a friend, even because it is a requirement of the job. Yet, that resolve only lasts until things get hard or the requirement that brought about the change is no longer present in one's life, then there is always a return to what is easier, what is known and what is believed to be the correct form of action in that person's life. That may be a I-don't-care attitude portrayed in the face of all circumstances, it may be an addiction to any number of things or it may be a simple backing off - a constant taking of the low (instead of the high) road if you will. Whatever it is, it will always take the place of what I say I value or I believe when my values or my beliefs are based solely on the wishes or words of another.

Our relationship with God cannot stem out of just what we hear or read and be a life-giving, fulfilling relationship or faith. That sort of relationship is best described as dry rhetoric, boring, superficial, empty and worthy of little more than to be tossed to the side when something better comes along. But a relationship that is based on what I *know* and what I *have* experienced and what I *believe* to be true is the sort of relationship that pushes a person into action. It is the sort of relationship that leads a person to abandon things that do little more than hinder in order to know a greater dimension of love given from the One who offered His own life to save us.

I don't know if I have made much sense - just something on my mind. I hope that you are inspired to push past whatever is binding you and take a hold of Jesus in a way that causes you to exclaim: I know, I believe, I have experienced because I have heard Him personally and have been in His presence!

You Can Have The Victory!

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength ... The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just. Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness ... LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us. O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, made all their memory to perish. (Isaiah 26:3-4, 7-9, 12-14 KJV)

There is an old chorus that says: "Without Him, I could do nothing. Without Him, I would but fail. Without Him, I would be drifting like a ship without a sail." The main point that I would like to stress, that is essential to achieving victory in your life, is that the only difference between the crushing that brings

anointing and the pain of defeat is the source of your strength. One must understand that without Him we are beaten, without Him we are defeated. But if we stand on the Rock (Christ Jesus) and He is our Strength, though the waves of adversity sweep over us, we are not defeated. Broken, but not defeated and we will rise again.

Sometimes it feels as if the devil quite literally sits on one's shoulder all week, telling them that they might as well give up and back down. Let me encourage you by saying that if you feel like you have been in this place of discouragement or if you are going through some tough times that have you wondering if the things that you have been promised will ever be a reality, know assuredly that God is still right there and He will do what He has said He will do. Place your trust in Him. This is the first step to rising again.

I have stood in that place of defeat with my heart bleeding from the sheer weight of the pain. I have been hurt. I carry the scars from the deepest forms of pain. I have been broken. I have been cast down, but I have not been destroyed. Through a confident belief in the Lord, who created me, I have been able to rise again and continue on in spite of the adversity that stood in my way. The same will soon be true of you, just keeps eyes on your source of strength the almighty God.

It was February 2008, my then 7 year old son attempted to take his own life. How does a young child get to this point, and what does it have to do with victory? You see, 2007 was a rough year for my son in a year in which he lost a father due to abandonment and an uncle due to death in just a few short months. It was also a year in which he suffered through the

attempted abduction of himself and his friend from behind our apartment building. Clearly, this a lot for anyone to cope with, let alone a child. The emotional torment mixed with the inability (due to age) to express what he was feeling, he did the only thing he knew to do. The good news is he is now a thriving young child with much to live for, including a stepfather who loves him and his first "real" girlfriend. The reality is that being surrounded with people that loved him and possessing child-like faith have been enough to aid him in rising again.

One must never forget that God is Gods always! And He is the Strength that keeps us going when we would otherwise cave into defeat and be destroyed. Victory is an attitude! You choose to be victorious! That is not to say that you will never be broken, hurt or crushed; but as the saying goes: the real failure is the one who makes no effort to get back up again once he has fallen. The devil cannot take your victory! He cannot make you give up or back down! He cannot defeat you if you do not let him! Why? Because you are not defeated until you stop fighting and that is a choice that you make!

Today more than ever I believe that it is possible to impact this world and make a difference in people's lives. I believe more than ever that if God gives you a promise then He will fulfill it in your life! If He has called you to it, then He will give you the strength to do it and open the doors so that you can! I believe the Word of God is always truth! No, I know that He never lies and He never fails! You just have to choose to trust Him when logic is telling you not to! When everything says back off and things will get easier, march forward with determination! Why? Because sometimes a setback is just a setup for a comeback; and you never know when someone will need the support and strength

that you have become acquainted with through your pain. How do you know God can if you never give Him the chance? How do you know that He is your Refuge if you refuse to walk through the storm? How do you know that He is more than enough if you refuse to rely on anyone but yourself? How do you know that He will keep you and guide you and protect you if you refuse to step out of your comfort zone?

I challenge you to take that step that you have been hesitant in taking! I challenge you to ask those questions that you haven't dared to ask; and trust Him for the answers! I challenge you to step out and trust Him!

I Know the Thoughts That I Have Towards You

How many times have you found yourself wondering what God is doing or questioning Him about the way that He was working in your life? If you are anything like me, and I suspect you are, you have at some point wondered where God was or have questioned His timing when you did not see Him working things out in your life as quickly as you would have liked. I went through a time like this shortly after my children's dad left us and the untimely death of my brother. Things in our lives had changed drastically in just a few short months. That is until I received a wake-up call sort of like a message from God that He knows best, and that even when it is bad, it could be worse yet.

It was a chilly morning in the fall of 2008. I had woken up late and decided to go the grocery store. As I was leaving the house, I ran into a Hispanic lady that I had worked with previously she needed assistance with something. Being the type of person I am, I obliged. After giving the lady a ride to the post office and helping her send a package, I continued on my way to the store.

I wasn't in the store very long, perhaps 15 or 20 minutes; however, when I arrived back at my house, I discovered that the apartment building down the street was in flames they were shooting out of the upstairs window. The fire department had already been called, so all that anyone could do was wait. When the firemen did arrive, it was a half hour after they had been called leaving no hope of salvaging the building.

The apartment where the fire had started was occupied by a single mother and her five children. In reality, they were moving into the apartment that day. They had just gotten ready to go back out the door when they noticed the flames, which were later determined to be the result of faulty wiring.

In the midst of this situation, I found myself standing on the porch of my own apartment building with my mind racing with thoughts regarding the situation that I was living in financial problems, the stresses of being a single mother of three children, the stresses of being in a place where I have no family and many other things. All things that I was unable to comprehend things that had caused me to repeatedly ask God: "why?"

As I am writing this, I am reminded of the scripture in Jeremiah: "**For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end**" (Jeremiah 29:11).

I had only recently come back from Iowa to this place that I had learned to half-love, half-hate. In spite of my feelings though, I had come back determined to make a difference and to impact my world for the cause of Christ. It was out of the sheer mercy and grace of God that I had come back sooner than I expected completely through the provision of God and here it has been a constant struggle.

Still, when I am tempted to wonder why God does not work the way that I think that He should, I must think about that day and the apartment that burnt because of faulty wiring. You see, that apartment was supposed to be mine. Everything had been arranged. I was to see the apartment, sign the papers and it would be done. Only at the last minute the maintenance man had

received a call from the office "show her the apartment down the street, not 1319". So it was that I ended up in probably the nicest apartment out of all those in this run-down neighborhood in one of the worst areas of my city. And yet, I cannot help but think that it should have been my home that burnt my stuff that was lost and my family put in danger but it wasn't. (Not that I am glad that it was someone else, my heart goes out to the family that lost all they had.) It is because of this that causes me to sit in awe of a God that, even as I struggle from one day to the next, has not left me alone. Truly, He walks with me every day.

I must recognize that just as good is always the enemy of best when all we see is how bad it is, we never see how much we are spared nor do we see God's hand pulling us out of what could have been.

In the book of Exodus, we find the miraculous dealings of God with Israel how He saved them but their response was always the same: they murmured, they complained, and in their hearts they were always headed back to Egypt. As I wrote in my book, "Where Are You, Lord", the valley is never the option. We all will go through the valley, but the option is what you do while you are there the option is whether you will murmur against the Lord or whether you will truly praise Him in spite of your circumstances.

In the book of Deuteronomy, we find several times in the first couple of chapters where God tells the Israelites that they have been on the mountain long enough "turn", he says, "and go into the wilderness". The thing to remember is that God does not stop providing for them there, God was always there; and it is the same today.

"And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:20-21).

Trials will come. Peter said: "though we be tried as with fire". There is a reason for adversity, it makes you strong. It hurts to lift weights, but in the end you notice the results. In this case, those spiritual weights cause you to trust God it draws you closer to Him. Keep your head up. Thank God that He is always there He never leaves. If you do not understand your situation right now, trust God and believe that one day it will all make sense.

.A New State of Mind

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. (Isaiah 1:18-20)

The last several months have been a learning time for me. It would seem as if I have been placed in the school of learning alongside of many others, and yet, all alone. Indeed, I am the only student in my class. And in that class, I am the subject. Notwithstanding, it is not as something that is to be gloried in. No, it is something in which broken and humility are wrought. Still, I do not desire to be the subject of this article I could never be a worthy subject. And in spite of this, I know of a subject that is worthy of mention, of discussion and of so much more. He above all else is worthy of our praise, our worship, all of the honor and all of the glory. Indeed, He is worthy to be exalted. He is so high above us, and yet, He stoops incredibly low because He loves us. His name is Jesus and He is God!

I was in Chicago a few months back. We got lost on the way to the church where we were expected to assist in a conference that was being held in an inner city neighborhood. On the way, we drove past countless stores and businesses with bars on their doors and windows. It reminded me of another place where I had once lived that place is Rockford, Illinois. There, in the south part of town, there exists a run-down business section which houses

mostly businesses owned by Hispanics and other foreign business owners. For several blocks, both sides of the street are lined with stores that have, in addition to bars on the doors and windows, the top of the line in security systems. In this district, doors to businesses remain locked all day. Should a customer decide to enter, they must be buzzed in. And this only when they can be clearly seen by the clerk inside and the clerk is able to clearly see that they are not carrying weapons. Then when the customer is determined (by appearance) to be non-threatening, the door is unlocked and they may enter.

Thinking of this place brings to a mind another place where I also have lived perhaps for far too long. It is not a physical place. You will never find it on a map. It is a place that only God can see. And still, it is a place where those closest to me know they will find me. Perhaps you have dwelt there also. Perhaps are dwell there now. It is a place of reservation. It is a place of always longing for something more, and at the same time, one of hesitation of never opening the door when something does come along. It is a place where we stand inside while Christ stands outside and waits to be buzzed in. He has rung the bell. The bars on the windows and doors have not kept Him away. Not even the reputation of this neighborhood (your heart) has been able to keep Him away. He is not intimidated by the past you have led none of your hurts, fears or failures have caused Him to want to turn around and run.

Even now, you find yourself in this place, looking contemplatively out through the bars. You are able to see the look on His face it is one of love, one of security. You look attentively at His hands. You are able to see the nail scars and you know what they mean. In spite of everything, you wait

thinking, considering. "What is He carrying?" you ask. "What does He want?" you ponder. And while you contemplate His presence, He waits. He rings the bell, but you are not quick to let Him come in. There is much to be weighed out: What are His motives? What will ask of you? In the end, if that which He brings is what you desire, you will open the door. If it is not intimidating, then you will let Him in. If not, He will wait and He will be ignored. He is too much of a threat to your lifestyle to your state of mind.

Are you familiar with this place? This is a place of bargaining with the Almighty God. It is a place of relenting a little, but of never giving all that He asks of you. I know this place. Too well you might say. But it is a place where things never get better a place, where like the business that never opens its door, things only get worse. Before you know it, you bankrupt, you are empty and you are alone. Will He knock forever? Just how long will He continue to wait? Will He return once more to your heart's door? Surely, He will return again and again. And yet, a question remains: how many times will He return? How do we know for sure when will God will say "this one won't answer"? Do you really want to know?

I hear God whispering softly in my ear. He is saying, "you want to live in this place". I know that it is true, but He is not talking about a physical spot on a map He means spiritually. The thought brings tears to my eyes, because the words that I hear louder than those of all of the world's greatest preachers, louder than all the philosophical debates and psychological explanations are the words of my Lord: "But I want to give you something better". "I want to give you green grass and still waters, Fresh breezes and the beauty that I have created. I want

to give you hope. I want to you to have peace. I want you to feel safe in my arms. I want to give you liberty."

Liberty? This is an interesting word. Especially here in the land of the free, where most of us are bound -bound by addictions, fears, inhibitions and the like. Liberty? Yes, the Lord says, liberty the liberty to cry and not be ashamed, the liberty to dance before my Lord without fear of ridicule, the liberty to love the one that has hurt me, the liberty to hold up the hands that have held me down, the liberty to trust and the liberty to be truly free. And it is this liberty that is only found in Jesus, because He was nailed down so that you and I do not have to be. He was bound to make us free.

To this, I come, I bow down and I say: "Lord, give me that new state of mind. The state that is not bound by ideals, judgmental glances of the crowd, fears, memories or any other thing. Give me that state of mind that says I am free because Christ has set me free." I want to open the door and no longer consider what He has for me. What about you? What choice will you make?

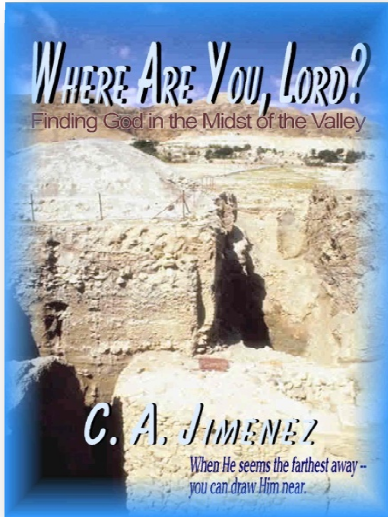
The Master's Hands

When you look out the window and all you see appears to mirror
what's inside,
When there is no refuge from the storms that rage in your mind,
When the rain falling outside seems to hit harder than the tears
that you hide,
When you wonder if the future is any different than the past
you've left behind,
There is hope in the Master's hands.

When you cannot seem to continue on this rugged road,
When there is no place left in which to stand,
When the weight of life becomes an unbearable load,
When your feet feel like they're stuck in sinking sand,
There is hope in the Master's hands.

When you falter and when you fall,
When brokenness is all that you've come to know,
When there seems to be no point to it all,
When you have nowhere left to go,
There is hope in the Master's hands.

There is hope in those hands that bled,
There is hope in those hands that were nailed down,
There is hope in those hands that an old rugged cross once held,
There is hope in those hands that were bound,
The Master died for you.



**Books by the
Author**

Childhood memories that never seem to fade... Sudden illness... The unexpected loss of a loved one... Many things can cause our world to seem like it has come crashing down around us. If you have ever wondered where God is in times like these, then this book is for you. *Where Are You, Lord?* is a journey through heartache to the throne of God, where you will find that the trials in life are not meant to tear us away from God; instead they become the instruments that draw us closer to Him.

Purchase this book from:

www.authornation.com/cabustamante