

A NEW BEGINNING
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'You choose, Dad!'

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Thursday, July 24, 2008, was the most devastating day of my life. The unimaginable happened.

We never think about our children leaving this earth before us. But it happened when my son Christopher was suddenly called to heaven.

At first, I couldn't comprehend the news. It was like the worst dream I had ever had, and I wanted to wake up. But I couldn't. [Friends](#) and family were immediately at our side – loving, hugging and holding us.

But in the end, there are no answers for a situation like the loss of a son.

In accepting God's will, Job said:

*Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked shall I return.*

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord. (Job 1:21 NKJV)

In acceptance, there is peace, but not always answers. God grants us "a peace that passes understanding," not one that necessarily gives understanding. There is no "why" in the midst of our pain, just "what" and "who."

I loved my son with all of my heart, but I have to say, he gave us some hard moments.

He was just a rascal at times, and he brought us to our knees more than once.

But his mother and I always loved him and prayed for him. He knew that, and we know he loved us.

The last years of his life were glorious. He had committed himself completely to the Lord, and wanted to serve God with his talent. And he was so talented.

People would often come up to me and say, "Greg, your son Christopher is an artist just like you!" The truth is, he was a far greater artist and more talented than I ever was.



He designed much of what we see around us in this year's Southern California Harvest campaign, including bumper stickers, posters and flyers. This is how he was serving God, by creating beautiful art that pointed people to the beautiful message of the Gospel.

If there is one thing I'd ask people to do to pay tribute to Christopher and to serve God in this particular moment, it would be to make sure you get a Harvest Crusades bumper sticker on your car, and put up posters around Southern California.

There is a selfish reason for me asking this, for Christopher – or "Topher," as we called him – poured his life into that design. In fact, he designed my personal website, our Harvest webpage, almost all of my book covers, and so many other things. Every time I see one of those stickers on a car, I point it out to whoever is in the car with me and say, "Topher designed that!"

But the reason he designed these stickers and all of the other art he designed or had a hand in was to use his gifts to serve God. He wasn't called to preach specifically (though he could speak effectively and persuasively when he wanted to).

Christopher's calling was to use his artistic skills to glorify God and point others to Christ. He also poured his heart into the design of this year's Harvest Crusades event at Angel Stadium, as well as the crusades to come later this year in Philadelphia and New York City. He loved to see people come to Christ, and that is why he did what he did – and why I do what I do.

When we were in Israel several months back, Christopher made a public proclamation of his new dedication of the past few years by being baptized in the Sea of Galilee, where our Lord began His [ministry](#). I had baptized him in the Jordan River in Israel, when he was a young child, but this time he was doing it to acknowledge what God had been doing in his life.

Christopher and Brittany had recently begun hosting a Bible study in their home for others to grow spiritually. We were marveling at what the Lord was doing in their lives.

I cry for my son every day. Sometimes, every hour. Sometimes, every few minutes. I miss him and I wish I could take his place, but I can't.

My wife, Cathe, is grieving with me. She is the most godly woman I have ever known. I cannot imagine why the Lord allowed me to have such a wonderful wife.

My son Jonathan has been our rock, and has helped me to think through the many decisions we are facing in this difficult hour. God is going to use him mightily.

My daughter-in-law Brittany is a sweet and lovely woman of God. She is trusting God through all of this, and opening her heart to whatever His will may be. And Brittany's [family](#) has been an amazing source of support to their daughter every step of the way.

In the midst of this tragedy, I have been reading and thinking about 2 Timothy, the fourth chapter in particular. I felt that there was a part for both Christopher and me. My part (and really our part) begins in verse 2:

Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.

For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths.

But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at bringing others to Christ. Complete the ministry God has given you. (2 Timothy 4:2-5 NLT)

Those are my marching orders, and that is what I intend to do by God's grace and with His help with even a greater commitment and [passion](#).

Christopher's part is found in the verses immediately following, beginning in verse 7:

I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me – the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return. (vv. 7-8 NLT)

No life is an incomplete life.

Christopher completed his task. He finished his race (he used to be quite the runner when he was younger, too!), and he is safely in the arms of [Jesus](#). But I will be honest with you; I still deeply, deeply miss him.

My wife, Cathe, was the greatest of all mothers to Christopher, from the time he was little through the years of his young manhood. She never stopped praying for him.

Christopher would make us beautiful cards by hand each year, be it for our birthdays or Mother's Day or Father's Day. For his mom, whom he loved so much, he created a special shadow box

with a photo of him, an image of a cross and a little piece of paper with a statement by President Abraham Lincoln, which said, "I remember my mother's prayers, and they have always followed me. They have clung to me all my life."

There is a story I have often told about a time I took Topher shopping for Star Wars figures in the late '70s. I had told him to pick out one he wanted. He thought about it a long time and finally decided on one of the small figurines from the bottom shelf, which as I recall, was the Han Solo one.

Meanwhile, I had been looking three shelves up at Solo's spacecraft, the Millennium Falcon. I said, "Well, why don't we get this to go with your new figure?"

His little eyes lit up. "Dad! Thank you!" And he gave me a big hug.

We would come home from the toy store with some big new prize like this, and sometimes my wife would roll her eyes, because we really couldn't afford it. But then Topher and I would run upstairs to his room, plop on the floor, open up the toys and play with them together.

Looking back now, I don't regret any of it. Nor does my wife.

After a while, Christopher learned that when we were in a toy store and I asked him what he wanted, his best bet was to say, "You choose, Dad!" And I would always get him something better than he would have chosen for himself.

I have often used that as an illustration to point out that we should let God choose for us and never be afraid to commit an unknown future to a known God. God's plans for you will always be better than your plans for yourself (see Jeremiah 29:11-13).

Now in this moment of crisis, I am the son and I am in the place where I am saying to God, "You choose." It's not the choice I would make, but I believe He has chosen well, and I rejoice that my son is in heaven with Jesus Christ.

My heart is broken, but I also know I will see him again. This all has made heaven closer and earth less attractive to me. It has increased my burden for people who do not know the Lord. I have a personal investment in heaven.

Thank you for your prayers – and even for your expressions of personal pain. People have written me from all around the world with such beautiful, touching, encouraging words. I have been called by great men and women of God who have spoken into my life in ways I have never heard before, about what the Lord will do through these days of loss and grieving.

It is a luxury I do not deserve.

Many of you knew our Topher and loved him, too. But this we know: Our faith is real. There is Life – Life with a capital "L" – after death.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25 NKJV).

And then He must have looked His friend Martha right in the eyes, and said, "Do you believe this?" (v. 26)

I do believe it.

Jesus also said, "I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life" (John 5:24 NLT).

Thank God for that hope. I trust you have it, too. If you don't, I invite you to go to [a site my son designed, where you will find out more.](#)