

Tried and True:
**GOD'S WORD
BRINGS COMFORT
IN THE CRUCIBLE OF LOSS**

Benson and Rochelle Ngatia

Take it from here:
comfort from God's Word
to shine love through loss
and gratitude through grief.

By D.G. Wynn

THROUGH CHRIST WE ARE OVERCOMERS. THERE IS A DUAL REALITY, HOWEVER, TO THAT PROCLAMATION. BENSON AND ROCHELLE NGATIA—DENVER SEMINARY ALUMNI, CLASS OF 2011—KNOW THIS WELL. THEY LIVE IN THE TENSION OF THE *ALREADY* AND THE *NOT YET* NATURE OF OVERCOMING. IT IS HOW THEY COPE WITH THE TRAGIC LOSS OF THEIR DAUGHTER, HANNAH, TWO SHORT DAYS AFTER HER MIRACULOUS BIRTH.

“IN THIS WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE. BUT TAKE HEART! I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD” (JOHN 16:33).

Rochelle’s pregnancy was fraught with serious complications, starting when her water broke at just 15 weeks and ending with a mandated two-month hospital stay with complete bed rest. At every turn, doctors told Rochelle and Benson that the baby could not survive, let alone thrive, without fluids. But they were wrong.

Baby Hannah was born at 33-and-a-half weeks and was a petite, but healthy, 4.39 pounds. Her lungs, which were of the greatest concern to the doctors throughout the pregnancy, were 100 percent perfect. She was a miracle. There was just one small problem with her bowel that the doctors were going to fix in a minor surgery that would take less than an hour.

In the Scriptures, James warns us that we will encounter trials of various kinds, but crucibles of this magnitude become landmarks—afterward, everything else is defined as having come *before* or *after* that one significant point. For Benson and Rochelle, that time was when the doctors came to them partway through the surgery and said, “We need to talk to you.”

Defining moments reveal, test, and shape the lives of the people who walk through them. The Ngatias’ defining moment had come.

Hannah was God’s gift to them, and they were supposed to give her back to Him.

THE BIG REVEAL

Benson’s background in pastoral care and his education in theology and leadership as a graduate of the MA in Leadership Program have proven to be ministerial assets in his work as a firefighter and paramedic in the Denver Metro Area. He regularly works in intense situations that require emotional distance and a clear head. All that training and experience, however, didn’t help when it came to making a life or death decision about his little girl. It was the Lord moving in him and Rochelle that made the difference.

Upon the realization that Hannah’s bowels had gotten twisted—a problem unrelated to the difficulties of the pregnancy—the doctors laid out a procession of horrible options. The twist had caused her bowel to die, and its removal would require a constant IV drip 18 hours a day for the rest of her life, which they were assured wouldn’t last beyond two years.

“How long do we have to make this decision?” they asked. The doctor said, “She’s still on the table right now, and we need the decision before we can sew her up.”

Benson looked at Rochelle and knew they were of one mind. Hannah was God’s gift to them, and they were supposed to give her back to Him. Whatever hours they had left with her, they’d spend holding and loving her and praising God for the time they had with her.

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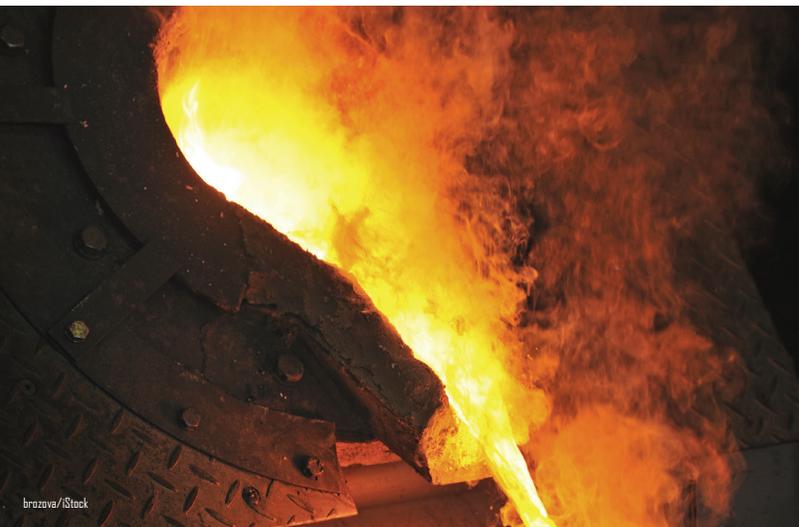
“I have this concept of a spiritual bank account,” explains Benson. “It’s based off a leadership concept that John Maxwell shares. Essentially, every step you take in your faith journey is an investment into that spiritual account. When something as catastrophic as losing Hannah happens, your account takes a huge hit. But if you’ve been steadily investing in that account with every prayer offered, every passage of Scripture read, and every dose of faith given from the Lord, even after a big hit you still have some spiritual fortitude in reserve. That is what you rest in when nothing else makes sense.”

Rochelle searched the Scriptures throughout her pregnancy, looking for hope that Hannah would be okay. But in that process, she realized God doesn’t promise that. Rather, He promises to give peace that passes all understanding, that He will never leave your side, that nothing can separate you from His love, and so much more. Those promises came back to Rochelle and brought her comfort in a whole new way after the Lord took Hannah home.

“The experience with Hannah—theologically it changed us,” says Rochelle. “We had to hold the sorrow and grief in one hand and, in the other, the joy of all the things God has blessed us with and has allowed us to go through with Him.”

The whole experience revealed to them a much deeper theology and peeled away any superficial readings of Scripture they might have had. “There was a foundation of faith we both had that got us through,” says Benson.

They experienced a deep peace that came from letting go, leaning into God, and trusting Him.



“It’s almost as if He were a chair that you intellectually know should hold you. But it is so different when you actually sit back and lean into Him,” says Rochelle. “It requires you to really believe that He is who He says He is.”

FROM TESTING TO A TESTAMENT

Both Benson and Rochelle have seen how the Lord has used Hannah’s short life as a blessing—and as a challenge—not just to themselves, but also to those around them. “The whole situation called us to take a serious look at our lives and to evaluate if we were really living what we said we believed,” shared Rochelle. In the midst of their grief and shock, they wanted to be a light and a witness to the doctors and nurses as they showered Hannah with love. That uncommon response of praise to God in the midst of grief opened up conversations with numerous staff members.

She realized that theology isn’t a disconnected, intellectual pursuit of God. Rather, it dictates how you live out your daily life.

Now they see their daughter’s short life making an impact in their careers. Rochelle works in the field of addictions counseling. She received her MA in counseling at Denver Seminary, and her lesson in letting go and leaning into God to overcome the seemingly impossible has a lot of relevance to her clients. She can now express that message with a depth of feeling that equips her to help those struggling to climb their own mountains.

Benson, who has started a new business venture teaching private CPR classes to clients such as Bethany Adoption Agency parents, imbues each class with the importance of learning the methods to hopefully avoid the crushing weight of losing a

child. It has given him a whole new perspective in the field as a firefighter and paramedic on how to comfort and relate with people who face death. He says, “So many people that I ride with or meet on the job don’t know how to deal with death.”

SHAPED BY THE MAKER

These defining moments test a person’s character, faith, and perseverance. “That is why what you believe about God matters so much,” says Rochelle. She recalls a conversation from early in her seminary experience about a simple question: *What does theology have to do with real life?*

She pondered that question over and over until she realized that theology isn’t a disconnected, intellectual pursuit of God. Rather, it dictates how you live out your daily life.

“If you believe God is good, that shapes how you view things. If you believe that you have to work to win His favor, that colors your motivations for doing good, doesn’t it? What you think about God matters.”

Through her pregnancy and after, Rochelle has meditated on the Psalms. Though she didn’t understand David’s grief and sorrow before, now she gets it. Sometimes, as she revels in the comfort of David’s words, it feels like he gets her as well.

It’s been less than a year—Hannah passed on May 25, 2014—and the lessons are still coming. Waves of grief break over them, but because of God’s great love, neither Rochelle nor Benson is consumed. Through Christ they are overcomers, daily learning to overcome.

Benson and Rochelle Ngatia

ALUMNI

Benson has an MA in leadership and Rochelle has an MA in counseling, both from Denver Seminary. Benson is currently a firefighter in Denver and owner of keepbeatingcpr.com. To read more of their experience, visit Rochelle’s blog at rochellengatia.wordpress.com.

