

WELCOME JOHN AND DONNA BISHOP

For four decades John and Donna Bishop and Johnny and Barbara Pope have been friends and shared ministries together. We have so much in common. John and I are within a month of each other's birth. This past June, the Bishops have been married for 42 years. In less than two months my wife and I will have been married 42 years. My mind goes back to the early days of Triple S Christian Ranch and the many young people who have given their life to Christ or surrendered to the call of God upon their life at this great youth camp. We have admired as well as shared in much of their ministry together. After all these years and through all the trials, we still share our lives and ministries. We were able once again this past summer to preach for one of the weeks at the youth camp now hosted by their youngest son, Luke. And everyone appreciated the great ministry of their son, David and the good he has done for the last couple of years with our Fall Festival.

In October of 1995 John woke up from a trance and had no idea who he was. In fact, he didn't know anything. He didn't know that his name was John Bishop. He did not know he had been married for 24 years to Donna, and they had three sons. He didn't know he served as pastor of the Cleburne County Baptist Church in Heber Springs, Arkansas or they lived on the grounds of a youth camp in Rose Bud, Arkansas they had started. But this was more than amnesia. John was suffering from aseptic meningitis, and for whatever reason, the disease wiped away all of his memory. John didn't know how to read or write. He didn't even know how to walk, talk or chew food. Everything was blank. John remembers absolutely nothing from that fall day in '95 and before. He says, "Everything I know is what my wife taught me." He humorously adds, "How many of you wives would like to say you taught your husband everything he knows?" John says, "When I woke up from meningitis, I did not know her. I did not know me, my name. I didn't know anything." And for Donna, it's the story of a wife who basically lost her first husband, and had to decide what to do with this grown man who, at first, had to be cared for and taught as though he were an infant. She kept thinking John's memory would return, but it never did. She had to teach him how to eat again, starting with baby food. It took two years for him to walk well. He learned to speak by reading lips and matching the words he heard with the way a person's mouth moved. (In fact, even after

13 years, John is still learning to improve his grammar and syntax as he speaks.) "It was almost like I had four boys instead of three," Donna says. She had to assume all responsibilities for the family. Yet she never wavered in her commitment to John. "My parents had a good marriage, and I was always taught that when you're married, you're married for life. When you say for better or for worse, in sickness and health, you're in for the long haul. I never even thought about divorce."

How do you explain the concept of marriage to a man who doesn't remember you and doesn't even know what marriage is? At one point, when she felt John had progressed enough to understand, Donna told him, "You're John, I'm Donna, and we're married. That means you belong to me, and I belong to you." "You're my Donna?" he asked. At that moment John grasped the concept. And ever since then he has called her "My Donna." "It was so easy to love her," John says, "she loved me so good. I tell everybody she taught me reading, writing...and my favorite subject, kissing." John still suffers from a variety of health problems--seizures, cluster migraine headaches, an injured back, even much of his eyesight. But the impact God has had through him because of this long struggle may be greater than anything before 1995. He and Donna began God Is So Good Ministries to testify to the goodness of God even in the midst of an incredible struggle. John says the ministry name is inspired by something God taught him during a time of depression and discouragement after his new life began. "I really loved the book of Psalms, because David been through trials too.... He kept saying God is good." He remembers laying on the couch one night after a difficult day. He read Psalm 34:8, which says, "*O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!*" John prayed, "God, I gonna believe You're good. If I never get better, I still gonna believe You're good because that what Your word says. Lord, this must be what faith means...believing You, even when I don't feel like it."

As much as anyone I know, John and Donna personify II Corinthians 1:3 and 4, "*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*" There are so many things I have learned or have been reminded about from the Bishops. Allow me to list three things:

1. God is good and God is always right.

John even wrote the chorus we sing around here with those very words. Job said, *"...What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips"* (Job 2:10b). If God is good (and He is) even that which God allows that we may consider evil may be interpreted as good. Psalm 119:68 says, *"Thou art good, and doest good..."* In the margin of my Bible next to this verse I have written, *"He cannot do otherwise."* John and Donna have personalized Romans 8:28 that promises good things for those who know and love God! *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

2. God is always in control.

Suffering takes us to a place where many of us are very uncomfortable -- a place where we are not in control. If we don't eventually learn to say with Job, *"...The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD"* (Job 1:21), our life will be filled with discontent and worry. Giving the reigns of our life over to the Lord will give a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). Paul found such peace through his sufferings that he was able to say, *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"* (Philippians 4:11). He came to the conclusion that sufferings were not a set back, but a set up for a furtherance of the Gospel. Paul said, *"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel"* (Philippians 1:12).

3. Grace is available to the obedient.

In the very outset of Job's trials we read, *"In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly"* (Job 1:22) *"In all this did not Job sin with his lips"* (Job 2:10b). Paul does not blame God or unleash a diatribe against the Lord.

In obedience Paul even learned to glory in his trials, *"And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"* (II Corinthians 12:9).

The same grace is available to all who will love and trust God through everything he permits to come our way. Today I hope you will listen to Brother

John Bishop with an open heart and mind. *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing”* (James 1:2-4). When the troubles come, count it joy and let patience have her perfect work. Obey God and don't give up. Confidently accept the promise of Philippians 1:6, *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.