

## 「 Introduction 」

*“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)*

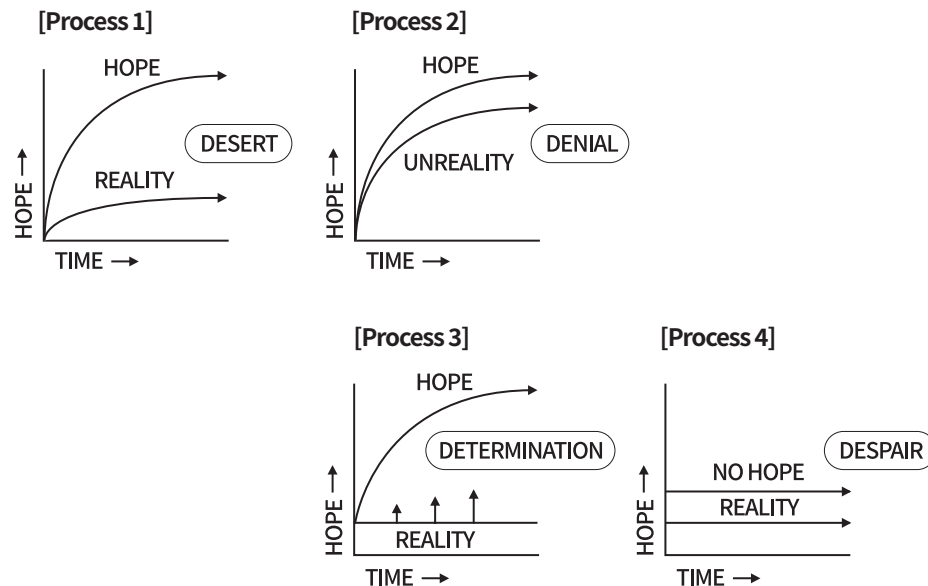
Jesus is the author of faith. He is the author who creates stories of faith in us. He places us in a grand story, helps us persevere, and brings us to glory without fail. God delights to see our faith grow in us, and He continues to write the stories of our lives.

## The Miller’s (the author) story

When Jill (the author’s wife) was pregnant with Kim (who has developmental disorder) she prayed using Psalm 121, asking God to keep her baby from all harm. But when Kim was born everything went wrong. Kim was born blue; from the beginning she looked different. The news that Kim’s condition might have been due to the medical staffs’ error made everything worse. We, like most parents of disabled children, were operating in the dark. We were overwhelmed with the number of problems Kim had. And new ones just kept coming. Her muscle tone was floppy. Her eyes didn’t focus. She had pneumonia. She had trouble breathing, especially in the winter becoming listless when we turned on the heat. Her breathing problem was so pronounced that we used the last of our savings to convert to electric baseboard heat. For the next twenty years we lived paycheck to paycheck. It was agony, especially for Jill. She had prayed that God would keep Kim from harm, but we were holding a harmed child. The promise of God actually made it worse. It hurt to hope. [from A Praying Life]

## 「 Going Deeper 」

### (1) Between hope and reality



**[Process 1]** Every part of your being wants to close the gap between hope and reality. We will do anything not to live in the desert. But it hurts to face that reality is often different from hope.

**[Process 2]** It describes the denial approach to suffering. It is filled with hope but doesn’t face reality.

**[Process 3]** After you’ve gotten over the initial shock of suffering, a determination often sets in to fix whatever is causing the pain. You have faced enormous obstacles before and overcome them, and you are going to do the same with this. You leave no stone unturned. Money means nothing to you. You are convinced someone somewhere knows how to fix this. By the sheer force of your will, by mobilizing prayer, you are going to make this happen.

**[Process 4]** It’s a short trip from determination to despair, where you realize that you aren’t going to change the situation, no matter what you do. It hurts to hope in the face of continued failure, so you try to stop hurting by giving up on hope.

## (2) The desert is for everyone

The hardest part of being in the desert is that there is no way out. You don't know when it will end. There is no relief in sight. A desert can be almost anything. It can be a child who has gone astray, a difficult boss, or even your own sin or foolishness. Maybe you married your desert. God customizes deserts for each of us.

The Father turning his face against you is the heart of the desert experience. Life has ended. It no longer has any point. You might not want to commit suicide, but death would be a relief. It's very tempting to survive the desert by taking the bread of bitterness offered by Satan.

**[Sharing]** If you feel like you are walking through the desert, which of the four processes above can you relate with?

## (3) The desert becomes the greatest hope

God takes everyone he loves through a desert. The desert brings the sense of helplessness. You come face-to-face with your inability. Life is crushing you. The desert burns away the false selves created by cynicism or pride or lust. You stop caring about what people think of you. It is at this point that we are finally able to pray sincerely to God. The desert is God's best hope for the creation of an authentic self. The desert becomes a window to the heart of God. He finally gets your attention because he's the only game in town. The best gift of the desert is God's presence. That's how the desert becomes our greatest hope.

*O God, you are my God;  
earnestly I seek you;  
my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land  
where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1)*

## (4) The desert blossoms

God used Kim to wake our family up spiritually. And in the winter of 1983 we started World Harvest Mission together. It would not exist without the gift of Kim. Autism and developmental disorder helped us publish many Bible study materials. Kim is the reason Jill and our daughter Ashley became special-ed teachers.

Years later when Kim was about twenty, I was sitting at the dining-room table writing a Bible study on Psalm 121 that I was going to teach to our small group. I looked up from the table and said, "Jill, God did it. He kept us from all harm. He did Psalm 121." We had thought the harm was a daughter with disabilities, but this was nothing compared to the danger of two proud and willful parents. Because Kim was mute, Jill and I learned to listen. Her helplessness taught us to become helpless too. Kim brought Jesus into our home, as the King of our home.

## 「 Conclusion 」

When we don't receive what we pray for or desire, it doesn't mean that God isn't acting on our behalf. Rather, he's weaving his story.

*Continue steadfastly in prayer,  
being watchful in it with thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2)*

Watchfulness alerts us to the unfolding drama in the present. It looks for God's present working as it unfolds into future grace. Watch for the story God is weaving in your life.

## [Sharing]

1. Have you experienced a desert bloom in your life like the author? Please share a story with your members.
2. Let's think about why we need to "continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2) even in despair. Am I ready to participate in the grand story God is weaving into mine? Let's share on how we can specifically commit to prayer.