

Real Life Stories

Lighthouse Edition ④

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Real People
in
Real Places
with
Real Problems
looking for a
Real Answer

*People so Real that it could
be someone that you know.*

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CHAPTER 1

“Free Gift”

Why am I here?

What is life about? Is it possible to live just to die?

What good is financial success when we must die?

Why do it? Why even be here?

Why do I feel so confused? What is the answer?

Why, when I have so much, do I have a feeling of emptiness?

Many years ago, my wife and I settled down to raise a family. My wife met some great people at the church where we were married, and I believe this was the start of my receiving the “Free Gift” that I am talking about.

Over the years our family grew. We had four wonderful children, a fantastic marriage, financial success, and many good friends. Sounds good, doesn't it? Even though it was good, I had many questions.

Why am I here? What is life about? Is it possible to live just to die? What good is financial success when we must die? Why do it? Why even be here? Why do I feel so confused? What is the answer? Why, when I have so much, do I have a feeling of emptiness?

For 19 years, I strongly believed that my family was the only thing that mattered and I set out to provide for my family with everything the world had to offer. Almost everything I did was geared to provide for my family and generations of family to come. Also, during this

period of time, I searched high and low, trying many things, to fill the emptiness or void I felt: playing softball with the guys and drinking after the games, playing racquetball and drinking after the games, buying campers, snowmobiles, new cars, houses, etc. I tried working extra hours to make more money, buying more worldly possessions, starting a business, investing in and buying real estate, etc., etc., etc.

All of these things gave me a very short-lived pleasure or happiness that would not last! It would leave as quickly as it came.

Fortunately for my family, while I was providing for their worldly life, my wife, Carla, was building the foundation for our eternal life.

I have always believed there was a God and I would occasionally pray when things were so far out of my control that I could not fix them. A couple things come to mind - like when my daughter was only weeks old and we had to put her in the hospital and I feared for her life; also, when my son lay in the hospital with a staph infection; and finally, when my wife was very sick and had an infection in her blood system - the doctor told me that my wife only had a 50/50 chance of survival. The most recent time was when a friend called for our support when his father was very ill. Carla went to help our friend while I stayed home with the kids.

As I laid there in bed that morning, I told God that I felt my friend's father was still needed in this world and that there was much good he could do by teaching God's word to people like me that still needed help. I asked God to please save my friend's father and to give him the opportunity to help others like myself. In return, I promised to try to follow his path, starting with attending church that coming Sunday.

The following Sunday, I attended church with my wife and it was a very peaceful feeling. The people at church all seemed so happy and full of life that it made me want to return the next Sunday. As the service was ending on my second visit, I felt very relaxed and was in no hurry to leave. After searching for the answers to my earlier questions, I came to the conclusion that we could not possibly live just to die. There was no other answer or reasoning to my problems and questions other than believing

in God and having enough faith to accept His Son Jesus Christ in my life, so I did!

The love I saw in all the people “hit me” and it was like nothing else I have ever felt in my life. At that time I was not sure if it was Jesus filling the empty place in my heart or just all the love of the people reaching out to me, but whatever it was, I hoped it would never stop. If I could have one prayer answered, it would be that all God’s people have the opportunity to share the same experiences that I have come to enjoy, need, and want.

Looking back, I know that the Lord was with me every step of the way, and the path He was leading me down was to teach me about the values of the world and temporary happiness versus complete and total joy and the values of the Lord. The Lord blessed me and my family by enabling us to make the right decisions in regard to my investments. I have always based my decisions on what I called my “gut feeling,” but now I know it was my inner spirit leading me to worldly prosperity so that I would some day be able to testify that the things of the world are temporary and that worldly happiness will slip away very quickly.

Even though I was blessed with prosperity before being blessed as a Christian, being a Christian means more to me than anything the world has to offer. Recently, my wife and I were approached by a lady we did not know and she asked us to pray for her heart problems. She said she could see that we were Christians. Being recognized as a Christian was one of the best moments in my life.

If you have any questions or problems I had, don’t try to weather the storm on your own, come in out of the rain and let the Son of God, Jesus, meet your every need. Let Him lead you and guide you, through the Holy Spirit, from now to eternity. Since the writing of this testimony, the empty place in my heart has been permanently filled with the Love of my Savior, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God our Father.

In 1990 I had to quit my job of almost 20 years due to a rare blood disease. The doctors did not know what caused it and said they could

do nothing for me. In January of 1994 the Lord told me He was going to heal me of that rare blood disease. In March of 1994, I took the same blood test that had led to the diagnosis that I had the rare disease. This time the results were negative! My blood had been cleansed by the Blood of My Savior. By His stripes I was healed. Praise God! God can meet your every need, and he will if you do your part. I urge you to read God's word daily, pray daily, praise the Lord's name daily, and go to church every time the door is open.

"If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." John 15:7

Receive the "FREE GIFT"

God Bless You.

Jim

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P.S. - Read my wife Carla's story on the next page.

CHAPTER 2

I Just Wanted To Feel Accepted

I just wanted to feel accepted, to fit in, to be part of the group.

I tried cigarettes to fit in. I tried alcohol to fit in.

Today, my life is full and complete, and I fit in perfectly.

To find out how I found acceptance, continue reading...

I grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania. I can always remember being in church. In fact, at age 13, I was saved at church. I liked going to church. I always felt it was the right thing to do. I also liked feeling accepted and being part of a group. I had a “good-girl” image, and I wanted to live up to that. So being a good-girl meant going to church. The world also had some things to offer. So, if cigarettes meant being popular, I tried cigarettes. If drinking could get me accepted, I tried drinking. There was always that fear of letting someone down. That someone was first of all God, then my family.

My father worked in a car factory, and my mother was a housewife. I had an older sister and a younger brother. My father was very strict, so I definitely did not want to get caught doing anything wrong.

I had an aunt who lived in another town about 12 miles away. My sister and I used to love to stay at her house. My aunt and uncle

would let us stay a couple of weeks in the summer or sometimes, the whole summer. They would spoil us and we loved it.

The summer I turned 13, I was staying at my aunt's when I met Jim. We liked each other and hung out together over the summer. When school started back up, we broke it off. Two years later, Jim called to invite me to a post-prom picnic. I went, and we started dating. Dating was difficult because we went to different schools. We saw each other on weekends and when there was no school. Then we made a big mistake. We became sexually active. I remember at first I didn't want to do it. I was so mad at myself when I gave in.

I knew I couldn't take it back. We had to sneak around to be together because once we started, we couldn't stop. In 1972, I was 15 years old. My dad had been diagnosed with cancer. On September 23, 1972, my father died of cancer at the age of 41. Jim and I continued to date, and a year later we got engaged. Jim was two years older than I, and in 1973 he graduated from high school. He was enrolled at a computer school in Pittsburgh. He had relatives who lived in Indiana and worked at different Steel Mills. They raved about how much money they were making. Jim decided to go to Indiana for the summer and make some money. Once he got to Indiana, he liked it, and decided to stay. After he was out there for awhile, he got homesick and wanted us to get married sooner. I wanted to finish high school since I had only one year left. He asked me to marry him saying I could finish school in Indiana. I was scared. I didn't know what to do, but I gave in and said "Yes."

Over the next year, I went through many up and down emotions about marrying Jim because I was saved and he was not. I knew I had been pretty wishy-washy about being a Christian, but I still was concerned about marrying a non-believer. Jim found a church in Indiana that would marry us. That was hard, not only because I was saved and he was not, but also because we came from two different faiths. We were married June 22, 1974. Before we got married, I told myself that I would pray and believe, and that in a short while Jim would be saved. That short while turned into a long 19 years! A couple of years after we got married, I got serious about being a Christian. I still wanted to be that good girl and do the right things.

I am glad that I never got addicted to the alcohol or the cigarettes. I would smoke and drink on and off to try to fit in, but I always felt guilty. Eventually, with the help of God, I quit smoking and drinking and never went back to it. Jim, on the other hand, was a drinker and a smoker. He went out with his friends a lot. Sometimes, he wouldn't come home until 4 or 5 in the morning. We started a family after we were married 7 months. I did go to school here in Indiana, and I graduated. I became focused on the children and continued praying for Jim to get saved.

Jim and I had four children - one daughter and three sons. I raised them in church. Jim never kept us from going to church. I praise God for that. At times it was hard, because I didn't think he would ever get saved. I remember once in 1980, he went out drinking and didn't come home for two days. After that, he quit drinking and smoking. It was amazing, but he still didn't get saved. The church I was attending started standing and agreeing with me for Jim to be saved. There were times when I would get on his case about being saved, and I knew I was just pushing him away. I tried to reach him by my lifestyle. I did that by being the kind of wife and mother that God wanted me to be. That helped me to see that I didn't need to seek man's approval any more. I only needed to have God's approval. Finally, on March 21, 1993, Jim was saved. Praise God. I do praise God for saving my husband, and for getting me on track.

The hardest part of the story is that I committed all of these sins after I was saved. That bothers me so much, especially the premarital sex. I did repent, and I know I was forgiven because I John 1:9 says *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* I kept feeling guilty until I allowed Jesus to completely set me free. I was forgiven, but Satan tried to convince me that I wasn't. Satan is a liar. Two years after we were married, I was baptized in the Holy Spirit, and it felt like God opened up my head and poured love through me. That really ushered me to a place of wanting to be set apart for God. It was a continuous process that brought me to where I am today. Life is full and complete with Jesus as my Savior. I do not want to live without Him. It is only because of Him that I am where I am. He is my every thing. I love You, Jesus. I thank You, Jesus.

I praise You, Jesus.

Carla

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P.S. Read my husband Jim's story on page 5.

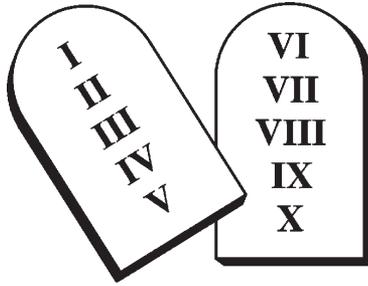
The Truth

The people you have just read about had to come to a place of knowing, understanding, and accepting the truth before their lives could be changed.

As you read through these “Truths” in the pages ahead, take time to think about your life. These truths, when received, invite you into a love relationship with God that will bring you peace, joy, and personal transformation to discover and fulfill your life purpose and destiny.

Throughout the rest of this book, in between the many more “Real Life Stories,” we will share some of these truths with you.

God's Law



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- 1 You shall have no other gods before me
- 2 You shall not make yourself any graven image
- 3 You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain
- 4 Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy
- 5 Honor your father and mother
- 6 You shall not kill
- 7 You shall not commit adultery
- 8 You shall not steal
- 9 You shall not lie
- 10 You shall not covet

Each of the people you have read about had to face God's Law.

Have You Obeyed God's Law?

Are You Sure?

You can go to the next page and read several more "Real Life Stories" or you can skip ahead to our next truth on page 24.

CHAPTER 3

Growing Up I Felt Trapped in a Coffin

In college, the lid blew off my coffin...I rebelled, backslid, became pregnant, and gave my baby up for adoption.

Growing up I felt like I was trapped in a coffin and was not allowed to do much of anything by myself. Raised in a conservative Christian family, I had one sister, four years older than me. She was my identity. I wanted to be just like her. She excelled in everything from physical looks, grades, to wonderful friends in school and church. I so desired to be like her that I even learned to ride a little pony called “Bootsie,” although I disliked being outside.

My sister was a lot more like Mama in temperament. She was Daddy’s “right hand” person. I was known as the dreamer. I loved books and music which became my escape. I read, played the piano and sang. Mama believed, “You can always improve.” So I practiced daily and played the piano three hours at a time. I was always striving, but rarely received any affirmation regarding my talents.

In a good way, I was more like my daddy who loved people and never saw a stranger. I remember my Mama saying, “You are just like Leslie,” who was my daddy. Daddy was my champion and gave me great counsel.

In school, I did not fit in. Kids are cruel to one another, especially those in cliques. I felt alienated from my peers. However, there were always one or two kids at school who were even more isolated than I was. I always tried to reach out and befriend the “down and outers” in society. Truly most of the people I identified with were adults because they were safer.

My family went to church. I believed in Jesus, but I did not feel much freedom there and was cautioned to avoid any emotionalism. So I never learned much about Him during those years. I just knew I believed Jesus was the Son who had died for me. I wanted to pray and talk to the Lord, but I didn't know how.

As I grew older, in high school, my musical talent and singing were recognized. My parents drove me long distances to take voice lessons. Eventually, I won a music scholarship to go to college where the lid on my coffin blew off. I rebelled, backslid, became sexually active and in my junior year, became pregnant. I knew I could not keep my child. So I signed the papers that released my rights to my baby and allowed my child to be adopted. I truly believed this was the best for my baby.

In the midst of the crisis, my Heavenly Father provided a wonderful Christian counselor to help me and my parents handle this emotionally. We remained dear close friends for years. Truly, the Lord provided for every step for my needs, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

After I finished college, I met someone with whom I shared many similar experiences of never quite fitting in and we married. During the first year together, one evening our Pastor came by to visit us. At that time, my husband and I re-dedicated our lives to Jesus Christ. Oh the goodness of our Lord!

Later on, we were blessed with two precious sons. My second pregnancy had complications. I had to be put on bedrest for four to five months. During this time, our local church body took shifts throughout the week to care for our family. On the weekend, my parents and neighbors took care of everything. I was so touched and humbled by all their love and care poured out on us. Once again, “Great is His faithfulness!”

During this time of bedrest, I became an intercessor of prayer for the Lord. This changed and strengthened my personal walk with the Lord tremendously. For me, it was a life changing time in my journey with the blessed Trinity.

When my second son was three years old, he was severely burned by boiling water that accidentally spilled on him. He was hospitalized for several weeks. No one can express how hearing the horrific cries of one's child in such pain affects you. I had to learn deeper truths of praising the Lord to get through it all. Truly, God says, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Due to his burns, my son was scheduled for months of physical therapy to gain full use of his left arm. At the end of a year, he had grown and had just enough free skin to freely stretch out his arm and have full use. The doctor agreed this was a miracle! "Thank you, Jesus!" The power of prayer works.

Life continues to have its trials. Eventually my first husband and I, after many years of marriage, grew apart and divorced. I was saddened by this, but I knew it would be best for both of us. Now we are friends and pray together for our sons and their families.

Later, I met someone else at church. He was a Christian, he was funny and I loved him. But after our marriage, he quickly became emotionally and mentally abusive, threatening to kill me. When we moved out of state, he threatened me two more times. I discovered he had been in Special Ops in the service and his past was sealed. He had some serious problems. When we moved, the neighbors where we lived, knew my husband better than I did. They were afraid for my life because they knew things that had happened in his past marriages. When I fled for my life, they helped me go into hiding. God did miracles to get me to safe places and eventually back home, including providing me all the furniture and things I needed to set up my own place again.

No one's life is perfect either before accepting the Lord or afterwards. But the Perfect One is always with me and helping me, supporting me through the trials. Some of my favorite things Jesus says are these, "In this world, you will have troubles, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Jesus had His own trials, but He helps us to be victorious in the midst of whatever we are going through as we trust Him. Another favorite saying of Jesus is, "I am with you always and will never forsake you." Whatever your struggles are, with Him, you are an overcomer and a winner. I can testify this is true.

Gay Ann

CHAPTER 4

WHY GOD, WHY?

Growing up I attended a Lutheran Church with my family and the Baptist Church with the next-door neighbor kids. There was a financial advantage in attending the Baptist church while I worked at the local Red & White Grocery Store. The Baptist kids got paid 10 cents an hour more than other kids. At about 18 years old, I drifted away from church until my mid-twenties. From that point on I have pretty much been a steady church attender, quite often participating in extra church activities.

In my late 40's my life started to unravel. My wife filed for divorce. I found myself living alone in a 26-foot travel trailer. At age 50, the complete bottom dropped out, a series of events happened to my business and I found myself out of business and completely broke. I kept asking God, "Why?"

In January, 2006, I went on a week-long mission trip to New Orleans with my church and basically stayed for the next 2 years. I discovered the first 50 years of my life I spent searching for God, thinking I was a Christian only to find I had no idea who God was. In January, 2006, I found God! He revealed Himself to me through miracle after miracle.

God is alive and well. He wants to reveal Himself to everyone with a heart to receive Him. From January, 2006, to the present, I have read the complete Bible cover to cover every year. God keeps revealing more and more to me each year.

Even though I attended church on a regular basis those first 50 years, I question my salvation where I spent 2 hours in church and 166 hours in the world each week. Today I know that I know that Jesus is my Savior! My eternal destination is with Him. My advice to you is to read, read, read and re-read the Bible. God's living word will set you free!

Joel Werner

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CHAPTER 5

LIFE HAPPENS

How did I end up in an abusive marriage with a porn addicted bi-polar husband when my spiritual relationship with God started early?

At nine, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior at church and was called to be a Pastor at age 13. I'd never felt His Presence like that. Jesus became my First Love. Later, He would prove that to me.

But as you know, life happens. As a high school Senior, I dated a young man three and a half years who I had known since Kindergarten. I thought I knew him. After marriage, his abusive bi-polar personality emerged. I had never experienced that. Living with a ticking time bomb, continually walking on eggshells, I said, "Who will come home from work to meet me at the door today?"

I became physically ill at 5 p.m. each day. Living with an enemy who was against me, jealous, insecure, and controlling, trying to strip me of everything that I loved to ensure that I was unhappy, seemed to make him feel better. He repeatedly said, "You're a loser. You're fat. You'll never amount to anything." Verbally, physically and sexually abusive, he attacked everything precious to me, using scriptures against me, even though he was not living a Christian life. He railed that no woman should pastor, preach, or minister in any way. He threatened to kill me and take our kids if I didn't stay with him.

Married 10 years, I discovered his addiction to pornography and other women. I cried out to Jesus, coming back to Him. "Lord, how can I divorce him? You don't believe in divorce." God tried to show me He never meant for me to be abused. This was not a marriage that God put together. I could leave, but it was hard.

After 18 years, I wanted to die; I couldn't take the pain anymore. God protected me from dying of suicide and alcohol abuse. Finally, God revealed my husband was not going to turn to the Lord.

Trying to hide the abuse from our four beautiful children, I found they knew and were being damaged by the marriage. At my lowest point and suicidal, God spoke, "You need to live. I have a plan for you." Courage arose in me to want to live again for my children, for God and for me. Divorced after 20 years of marriage, it's a process to understand how I lived such a life of co-dependency as an abused woman for so long. God was with me during this terrible time. There is life after divorce. My kids and I have started to heal and laugh again. Now God has brought my soul mate He created for me and has called us together in marriage and ministry.

My ex-husband said, "Trina, you deserve the abuse, neglect and rejection." He stated many times he was put on this earth to make me suffer and he would not stop until he saw me in hell." But, I could no longer believe that lie. Instead, my GOD says, "Trina, LIVE! I LOVE you! We have work to do together. I have a beautiful plan for your life. I will never abuse you. I will always be with you. You are mine! I am so glad you returned to Me, your First Love!"

I would say to those who are going through your own struggles, "No matter what you face, hold on. Recognize that your value and worth comes from Christ. It is not a matter of what you are going through, or what you think about yourself or what the world says about you. Be true to your calling from the Lord, even if it doesn't look like it will happen. He has a plan for you. Stay focused on the prize at the end. Anyone in an abusive relationship needs to know it is NOT of God. He does not want you abused. This is not His will for you. He does not require you to stay in an abusive relationship. If you haven't done so, ask Jesus into your life. He died for you. Don't live in condemnation or in the cycle of guilt and silence which partly held me back, and in turn allowed my ex to continue the abuse. If this describes you, I encourage you to take the first step – get confidential help. God has a plan for you. What He did for me, He wants to do for you!

Trina

CHAPTER 6

I DIDN'T DIE

I tell others I came out of Mother's womb into church. Me and my six siblings still at home, sat like stair steps in the pew. At age nine, a holy sanctified preacher described the beauty of heaven and the horror of hell's fires. At home, we told Mother we wanted to be saved. She quoted John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have ever-lasting life." We all accepted the the Lord Jesus. Life was good even with strict rules at home.

At school, I was a good athlete and ran track, but was bullied, called "Skinny," and "Black." My whole family was picked on and teased. At 17, raped by a boy I knew, I became pregnant adding embarrassment to the ongoing taunting I endured and had a son. I was into track, not boys. I told Mother, "I'm done with school." Mom begged me, "Please Delores, graduate from high school. I worked so hard and have done all this to get you through school." I graduated.

At 19, I thought I loved a 30-year old former military man on alcohol and drugs. He had what we would call today PTSD. Visiting at his home, something I said set him off. A fist hit me in the face. Furious, I hit him with an umbrella, saying, "Don't you ever hit me again." He left the room returning with a fully loaded gun pointed at my head. I said, "Go ahead, pull the trigger!" The gun went, "Click, click," but did not fire. Enraged, he checked the gun and fired again, "Click, click!" His brother stepped into the room asking, "What's wrong with your face?" He said, "I'm going to kill her." Intervening, his brother took me home. Realizing the seriousness of what had happened, I rededicated my life to the Lord.

Asleep that night, I had a vision of myself riding in a car with my ex-boyfriend with Police chasing us. I said, "Let me out," and jumped out of the car. I was awakened by banging on our front door. I opened it to find my ex-boyfriend begging me to hide him, exclaiming, "I just shot a man. Take me to Cleveland." I said, "No!" I prayed, "God, take him out of my life." Later he went to prison.

I married, had two children and was divorced. God is so good. I met and married my current husband, the love of my life. I went to Bible College. The visions continued. People thought I was crazy at times and disagreed until the things I said happened.

A pastor asked me to come to Indiana to lead praise and worship. We accepted and served with him five years. The sixth year my husband told me he was going to start a church.

A few years later, I was singing at our church. I felt a shock in my hand. I dropped the microphone. It was a stroke resulting in paralysis of my entire left side. Not able to read or think, my mind raced 100 miles an hour. I prayed, "God, if I can't use my hand or voice, I'd rather go home." Tormented continually, I heard the devil say, "You are going to die." I lived. The only song I could sing all the way through was, "Healing Jesus." I began confessing God's Word, saying, "God, you healed the man's withered hand." Attending a conference, a man sang, "He's healing me and I'm going to worship." I said, "God, I know You are healing me and I'm gonna worship." My paralyzed hand started clapping. Within six months, I got better. My singing voice returned over a three-year period. I resumed singing, praising, worshipping and preaching. I am a walking testimony. I continue to say, "Jesus, You are a right NOW HEALING JESUS, for such a time as this." Receive what you need right now from Jesus. He loves you!

Pastor Delores

Sin

On page 14, we asked if you had obeyed God's Law.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ summarized all of God's laws in two great commandments. *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets"* (Matthew 22:37-40).

Have You obeyed God's Law?

Many people will say, "Yes, I have. I am a good person." But thinking we get into heaven by being a good person leaves the question, "How good is good enough?"

You shall not lie.

Have you ever lied? Told a fib? Maybe just a little white lie? Twisted a story to meet your need? Lied as a child? Lied at work? Lied at work or on your tax return? Lied for your spouse or kids?

You shall not steal.

Have you ever stolen? Taken something from work? Kept something that does not belong to you? How about working for cash and not claiming it as income?

You shall not commit adultery.

What about adultery? Jesus said, "Anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Have you ever looked at another person with lustful thoughts?

CHAPTER 7

MY HUSBAND WAS AN EX-CON WITH NO JOB, NO FUTURE

Feeling invisible as a child, I had no self-esteem.

I saw no other future than to get married.

Drinking and going to bars was more important to my husband than our marriage.

The last straw was when my husband went to prison.

I had to find a job to support my children and me.

I knew of God, but I did not know God. Looking back, I can see that God had His hand on me from childhood. I grew up in the Presbyterian Church. I was lonely as a child. My father drank. Mother was more stable, but didn't know how to show love because she grew up in the kind of family who did not express their feelings. You were there, but you weren't there, because you were ignored. Feeling invisible, I had no self-esteem. When I did accomplish things, there was never any praise or affirmation.

I was a giving child. When a boy in our neighborhood, around 9 or 10 years old, got hit by a car, I said, "Let's go get him a wagon so we can pull him around." The adults chipped in and we got him a wagon, a little Red Rider. But it seemed that whatever I did or gave, I did not receive much in return. Later when I was around 14 years old, I went to church with a friend. At that time, I felt compelled to go up and receive the love Jesus was offering to satisfy the yearning inside me. Jesus helped fill that void, yet it was a process to understand what happened that day.

Our family never encouraged me to go to college. Instead, the expectation was that I would get married and get on with my life. Not feeling worthy to do anything and that I would fail if I tried, I saw no other future than to get married. I have since learned that when a marriage begins without truly knowing the Lord, there is a void which certainly described where I was.

Soon after graduation, I met my future husband when he was in the Navy. After a short courtship, we married, but I did not really know him. Culture shock ensued; big city versus small town as I was from Detroit and he was from a small town in Illinois. Nor did I know his family. I rapidly learned that when you marry someone, you marry the family as well. I felt lonely even though by that time we had two children.

Drinking and going out to bars with his friends was more important to my husband than our marriage. Jobs were lost due to his drinking. He left me twice. Things continued to take a downhill turn. The last straw was when he went to prison, incarcerated for theft.

With no income, I had to find a job to support my two children and me. Jobs were hard to find, plus I had no transportation. I could not rely on his family as they were too unstable to help me. My mother moved close by and bought a small house. I found work in a little restaurant six miles away from my home. One day my mother was not able to come get me, so I started walking home. A police officer stopped and gave me a ride. Later when my mom got another car, I was able to pay her \$25 a week to buy her old car.

Another time, I went to a different restaurant to fill out an application for a better job. While having a cup of coffee and the most delicious oatmeal cookies, the owner hurriedly approached me saying, "Can you start this job tomorrow?" Immediately I said, "Yes!" The Lord was opening doors and taking care of my family and me during this desperate time.

I started attending a Presbyterian Church. I loved God, but I still needed to know Him more and what He could do if I believed Him. My husband had finally served his time and was home. What was

going to happen was a mystery to me. He had no job and no future as an ex-convict. But one day out of the blue, my husband commented that he wanted to go to school for air conditioning and refrigeration.

Not thinking much about what he said, I went to work at the restaurant's coffee shop. Sitting at the counter was a gentleman talking to a young man. I heard a Voice speak to me, "Go ask what that man is doing." Startled, I talked back to the Voice and said firmly, "No." Again, the Voice spoke, "Go ask that man what he is doing." I again replied, "No." The Voice spoke again and this time I knew it surely had to be God and it had something to do with my husband. No longer resistant, I ran up to that man sitting at the counter and blurted out, "What are you doing here; signing people up for school?" "Yes," he replied, "I am here signing up people for refrigeration and air conditioning school." Stunned, all I could think of at that moment was, "Oh, my gosh!" A wave of realization hit me that I had just heard the Voice of God speak to me, not once, but three times, until I finally responded!

Continuing to question the man at the counter, I asked, "Where are the schools located?" He said they were in Indianapolis and Boston. The very next day, which was a Monday, the man I met at the restaurant drove to our house and signed my husband up to go to school in Indianapolis on a VA loan. My husband and I traveled to Indianapolis on the following Wednesday, found housing and moved the following Saturday. That started our new life and a new journey.

After moving to Indianapolis, Sam, my husband, finished his schooling and got a job. But economic times were difficult and he moved from job to job.

I had just given birth to another son and had a dream as I was lying down resting. In the dream, Sam came in and kissed me saying, "I got the job." It was so real. I asked my mother if Sam had been there, but instead he had been at a bar. But when he came home, he found out he had gotten a job with a beverage company.

After getting settled in Indianapolis, I started attending the Free

Methodist Church close by because they had buses which would transport us to church and back home afterwards. There I began to learn more about this God who had spoken to me to get my attention during a desperate time of need. I learned how to pray, both quietly and out loud! It was an awesome time getting to know more about Him.

Yet, at the same time, I remained lonely. I took my children and we attended church together faithfully. Sitting there, I would see many of the other women with their husbands. Once when the minister was talking about marriage, he had the couples stand up in the service, look at each other and repeat their marriage vows. I was feeling so alone, when suddenly it felt as if I was on fire from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. I was hot and thinking I didn't want people to see that I was on fire. In my innocence and lack of understanding spiritually, I didn't know what was happening until later. I realized it was God's powerful Presence touching me, anointing me, and blessing me to know I was not alone, not then, not ever! From then on I was in awe and blessed by this experience. I began to grow in my relationship with God as I learned more about Him. Each year, my relationship with Jesus has gotten better and better.

Even with a good job, Sam continued to drink and fell into what he would identify as his lowest point. He described a time of desperation while sitting in his car staring out the windshield. He got out of the car, walked into the house in a drunken state, and told my mother and me, "I am going to kill myself." At that very instant, God spoke to me, "No, that is not going to happen." My mother and I laughed out loud at him. He threatened to go rob someone so the police would shoot and kill him, causing a "death by cop" scenario. We refused to take him seriously. I knew the Voice well enough by this time; there was no doubt it was God.

My husband went back to his car and passed out. Later, he woke up with the sun shining so brightly in the car, he realized it had to be the Son of God. Sometime during that experience, the Spirit of God prompted him to call the Veterans Administration for help.

When Sam called VA, they asked him about his drinking and placed

him in a 40-day program. His employer kept his job open and did not fire him.

During this time, Sam gave his life to the Lord at home, in our bedroom. Later he was baptized. He still had his ups and downs for a while. He made some bad choices along the way, but God always protected both of us.

During those 25 years of employment before Sam retired, he was promoted to the position of Manager, even though Managers were supposed to have a college degree. Sam ended up supervising forty employees. Yes, God did bless my husband, Sam, who was prompted by the Lord to go to school for air conditioning and refrigeration training. God can give an ex-con a new life and a future! He proved that to us!

Through it all, Sam and I worked out our life together. Even though there have been hard lessons to be learned, what a glorious journey it has been with so many dimensions to our lives.

Recently I bought a picture that had the sun shining brightly with a scripture on it from the Bible, Isaiah 60:1 that said, "Rise and shine ... be radiant with the glory of the Lord ... for your light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." That's when Sam told me about his experience in the car seeing the Son of God brightly shining and that he had later been baptized!

The goodness and the faithfulness of God never ends. It has caused me to have a love for Him that cannot be compared to anything or contained. There may be many valleys in life left to go through, but this I can say, "I give all praise, honor, and glory to God!" I only know more has been promised, and the more the Lord pours into me, much more is to be poured out of me to others. What God has done for me, He can do for you, and more if you will give your life to Him, and mean it.

Grayce

CHAPTER 8

GRIEF IS NECESSARY, BUT NOT AS A COMPANION

After 23 years of marriage and six kids, my wife asked for a divorce.

We didn't deal with personal issues.

We had both been sexually abused as kids.

My wife had an affair with our best friend.

I took all the burden for the failure of our marriage upon myself.

Why should I be allowed to grieve?

It was almost 20 years to the day when my marriage of 23 years finally imploded. We had laid foundations that seemed strong yet were riddled with holes. We didn't deal with personal issues. Both of us had been sexually abused when we were kids. We didn't deal with communication issues. We both had dramatically different ways of dealing with life's failures. We didn't find ways to either deal with or express our anger and disappointment.

As a result, I left doors open that led to my wife having an affair with our best friend. So after 23 years of marriage and six kids, she asked for a divorce. We did things right. We didn't fight or argue. We treated each other fairly, except I didn't learn of the affair for a number of years. The result was that I took all the burden for the failure of our marriage upon myself. I never allowed myself to grieve. I was at fault. Why should I be allowed to grieve? I was the failure. Instead I dealt with the whole thing with tears, in private, and with humor. The one chink in the armor was during church. Each

time the priest would raise his hands, make the sign of the cross, and say, “Blessed is the kingdom”, I would weep. For a whole year I wept in church. It made my heart soft before God, but I never found healing and never allowed myself to grieve.

So fast forward a number of years, still no grieving, but in 2006 I heard God speak to my heart during the Easter season. I was led to forgive my former wife. It was one of those God moments because it was unconditional, not expecting anything in return, and not receiving anything in return; but still a very deep and true forgiveness. The reason I say a “God thing” is because I didn’t know what was to happen later that year. In December of 2006, we received a phone call from the Army. Our son had been injured in Iraq, and they didn’t know if he would make it out alive. This began a month long journey through hospitals in Germany, Washington DC, Minneapolis, back to Washington DC, and then finally a return to home.

For the first six months, I was his attendant, and spent every hour with him. For the first few months, I was sharing a house with my former wife. Because of God’s mercy in that time of forgiveness, we got along well. We had to; we were there for our son and not ourselves. We almost lost our son. Again, I didn’t allow myself either fear or grief. “Is there a pattern forming?” I left grief behind because I didn’t want to fall apart, to show emotion that couldn’t be dealt with, or to be weak. After our son was medically retired and moved back to Indy, I started pulling my life back together. I had moved to a nearby town to court a woman I’d known since college, which became the next step in the journey of grief.

My friend was one of those absolute saintly persons who lit up a room when she stepped through the door. Her beauty was not only in her eyes, but in her heart. She was closer to me than any person I had ever met. She brought out all those things that I loved about myself. She had a daughter who was a true joy. She became as much a daughter to me as if I was her real father. Then on a fateful day in October, 2007, we were getting together to set a date for our marriage. She had a doctor’s appointment for some personal issues.

I was waiting on her porch for her to return home. When she arrived she was shaken beyond belief telling me she had been diagnosed with frontal lobe temporal Dementia. She refused to marry me. When I visited her after receiving the diagnosis, she would be distraught for a week after I left. It became apparent I would need to limit my visits and basically step away. So, here I was losing my best friend ever; someone I thought would be my wife, and a person I could tell my deepest thoughts and feelings. Devastated again! Facing grief looked like a dark rabbit hole. If I went there, I would disappear and never come back. Grief was too deep a place to go; I was afraid of going there. Again, I did not grieve.

It was at this time that I looked around and decided there were some things left undone in my life. I retired early, moved to Terre Haute, and went back to college. I had not finished my music degree when I was younger. Along with that, Terre Haute was where all the good things in my life had begun years earlier. During my earlier college years, I started almost all the important friendships in my life, I became a Christian, and I had my first and second children there.

So, I began again. I thrived. I came back to life and found a group of people with whom I could worship and seek God's face. Playing music in excess of 40 hours a week, and I was being filled again with God's Presence. Gradually, while spending time on campus, I found myself going back over the previous events of my life; those that began there and those events that led me back to the university. I would like to tell you there was this great "aha moment" when the rushing wind and burning bush experience healed me. But, no. Instead, it was like the advent of spring. A little at a time my heart woke up, and is still waking up. A little at a time, things around me gained color; a little at a time my heart opened up and beat again. A little at a time I stopped grieving. Grief is necessary, but does not have to remain a companion.

Two things held me steady through this time. One was a Bible verse out of the book of Job. Job is overwhelmed by all that had befallen him. He finally cried out and said in Job 19:23-25, "Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! That with an iron

stylus and lead; They were engraved in the rock forever! As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives; and at the last He will take His stand on the earth.” The second anchor was an article by a 20-ish young woman who sat with her best friend after her husband had been killed in an accident. She encouraged those who walked with grief to just walk with it; not to have expectations, but to walk.

I spent many years walking with grief. I had let it become a friend who I was familiar with and who had become part of my life. Some grieve in more outward ways. But I, myself, walked until it was no longer a friend. I was able to let it go down a path of its own and not direct my path any longer. I would be unwise to tell you it's forever gone. A song, a line in a movie, a passage in a book, a place, a beam of sunlight, almost anything can trigger its return, but now, I know it will go away. I now know it isn't a lifelong friend. I do not look on grief as evil. I do not look on grief as final. I will forever miss my marriage. I will forever have pain at almost losing my son. I will forever carry both the joy and the loss of my friend who was lost to the world of dementia. These things remain forever a part of who I am. But I know that my Redeemer lives, and so must they, and so must I.

Dennis

Penalty For Sin

One day, everyone will have to pay the price for their sins.

The Bible says: *“For the wages of sin is death [hell]; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*
Romans 6:23

Death, meaning eternally (forever) separated from God. Every person is an eternal being who will spend eternity somewhere. Heaven or Hell. There is no in-between. You will either live with God or the Devil.

The Bible also says: *“... the corrupt, and murderers, and the immoral, and those conversing with demons and idol worshipers and all liars — their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur. This is the second death.”* *Revelation 21:8*

At this point, you may be thinking this is hopeless. “I cannot obey all of God’s Law perfectly.” The truth is you cannot do it on your own. You need help. God created you. He does not want you to go to Hell. He wants you to live with him eternally. He has provided the way of escape.

At this point you can go to the next page to read more “Real Life Stories” or turn to page 46 for the next truth.

CHAPTER 9

TRYING TO FIND LOVE THAT WOULD LAST FOREVER

Attending nine different schools ... I could never put down roots.

A year after graduation, I married ... I joined the US Army to pursue a military career....our marriage lasted four years.

Marrying again ... Still in the Army ... having stomach trouble ... soon I was sent home ... ending my Army career.

The fast lane lifestyle began to take its toll as I tried to be something that I wasn't.

I went from my second divorce into a very bad third marriage.

I had made a complete mess of my life and a mess of so many others lives.

Thoughts of suicide consumed my thinking.

My job was eliminated ... homelessness loomed on the horizon.

Why did we have to move all the time? Attending nine different schools during my childhood meant I could never put down roots. I was not very good in school. I was seen as a lazy, daydreaming kind of student who would not apply himself. My Dad actually thought they would have to burn the school down in order for me to get out of there and graduate.

Dad worked in a grinding room at a local foundry; a hot, dangerous, but good job. Although he worked hard, we never seemed to have enough money, but my older sister, younger brother

and I always had a roof over our heads and we were never hungry. Later, after I grew up, I realized we moved around a lot because my mom didn't handle money very well.

My parents were amazing and they always did their best. They hung in there; working hard to get us three kids raised. Mom developed heart trouble at 37 years old, dying at age 53 when I was 24 years old. I still miss her so much! Mom would read her Bible nightly but I could count on one hand the times I went to church. Mom would take my sister and me to an Easter service, but Dad would not go. That was the extent of my "church" upbringing.

A year after graduation, I married my first wife who I had dated in high school. Right after getting married, I joined the US Army to pursue a military career with orders for Vietnam, but was diverted to the Republic of South Korea. While there, our beautiful little daughter was born. I was able to get home, thanks to the Red Cross, just in time to see her right after she was born. Being married so young was the thing to do in our high school, however, that didn't make it right. Our marriage only lasted a little over four years with my wife swearing I would never see my daughter again. My last memory of my little daughter was at two and a half years old, running down the stairs as I ran up the stairs to sweep her up into my arms. That memory had to last almost twenty years before I saw her again, but, God had a plan.

Marrying again, I sought love and to find love that would last forever. I guess I didn't like being alone. My wife had a son from her first marriage; together we had two beautiful girls. Now I had three daughters. Still in the Army, I began having stomach trouble. The doctors diagnosed it as an ulcer, and soon I was sent home with a Medical Retirement ending my Army career. But God had a plan.

While in the Army, I took courses in electrical wiring. Back home, I worked as an electrician's helper, a maintenance man, and later was promoted to maintenance supervisor. Proud of my promotion, I thought everything was great. Then one day, my job was eliminated. Married, with three kids, I had two weeks of severance

pay and quickly learned jobs were not plentiful.

While I was laid off, I joined the local volunteer fire department where we lived and was enrolled in an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) course.

I discovered that I could get a paying job working as an EMT for an ambulance company which didn't pay much, but at least I was working. Then I discovered there was a higher level of training which paid a little more as a Paramedic. I took the class, graduated and began working as a Paramedic. Really, God had a plan!

I was always looking for "short cuts" to find the good paying jobs. I enjoyed the attention of being a medic, started partying a bit, and chasing the ladies. The fast lane lifestyle began to take its toll as I tried to be something I wasn't. Not being home for my children nor my wife, staying out all night knowing full well, it was wrong, resulted in a divorce after almost ten years. I lost my wife and kids because I wanted the exciting life. It was anything but that.

I went from my second divorce into a very bad third marriage which eventually ended in divorce that nearly cost me my life. This was the lowest of the lows. Having done so many things wrong for all the wrong reasons, I lived for myself and no one else. Now that's always a bad combination. My happiness somehow was tied to the belief that being accepted as one of the "cool medics" was what mattered. Success was out there if I could just land the good job and run with the crowd, I would have it made. In reality, I was living for the devil and doing a pretty good job of it.

At about 40 years old, I had made a complete mess of my life and a mess of so many other's lives. So, I wondered, "How did I get to this point?" The devil had me where he wanted me. Thoughts of suicide consumed my thinking. I figured, "What the heck, it's hopeless anyway!" So I made plans, picking out the tree that I was going drive my truck into as fast as it would go, hitting it head on. In my twisted logic, that way no one else would have to suffer on account of me. Later I realized there were others out there who truly cared, but I couldn't see it at that time.

But God had a plan for me. It was life, not death. God put a person in my path. She was an EMT where I worked. She became a good friend who began to witness to me about the power of having God in your life. She told me about Jesus. Something stirred within me, even as I was still planning my own demise. God used that lady to share the Gospel message of life through Jesus Christ; that He died so I could have life eternal; and be forgiven for all I had done. “WOW!” “You mean all this guilt I carried, all my failures and the hurt from what I had done to so many others could be laid down at the feet of a guiltless Man, who would take the punishment for my sins so I wouldn’t have to carry it?” I knew I had to have what she had. I had to have Jesus in my life.

Soon thereafter, I started attending a little country church, said a prayer and was baptized in the Name of Jesus. An amazing transformation happened. It was a new day! I was a baby Christian starting my new walk. Now I began taking the Word of God inside of me and junk began coming out of me. My pastor’s wife stopped by to visit me soon after I accepted Jesus. Feeling down because some bills were coming due and no money to pay them, I confronted her. “Why do they say when you come to Jesus, all will go your way?” “Where is my job?” “Where are my finances?” I almost threw her out, but she was so kind and continued to talk to me. I was a work in progress and she forgave me.

Now for some really good news! That lady who led me to the Lord? She became my wife! Thank You, Jesus! Mind you, I’m still not perfect. “I am,” as I said, “a work in progress as God continues to work on me.” I have a past; it’s been forgiven! Thank You, Jesus! Later, my wife and I moved to Florida to live and began looking for a church. Hearing about a revival taking place in Brownsville, FL, we went to this huge church and stood in line for hours to get a seat inside. When the doors opened, the place quickly filled up. Something was there, a Presence that was amazing. We had never felt that before or been exposed to the gifts of the Holy Ghost. As praise and worship began, the place seemed to come alive and filled with God’s Presence. We couldn’t get enough and kept attending.

Working as an electrician, I was on a service call at a building supply store. Suddenly, the outside doors blew open. The wind hit a large door waiting to be returned that was leaning against the counter. While talking to my boss on the phone, the door blew over hitting me on the side of my head. My boss described it as the sound of a ball bat hitting a ripe watermelon. But God had a plan. My boss rushed to the store and took me to the medical clinic, I was diagnosed with a concussion that I thought would go away in a few days. Instead, motion sickness developed. Unable to drive for eight months, things were not looking good to get my job back. Debbie and I had to find a cheaper place to rent and money was tight. Homelessness loomed on the horizon. Did I say that God had a plan?

Home one day, stewing about everything, including my former workplace that had just gone out of business, I am in the middle of a “pity party” and I’m thinking, “Woe is me.” Debbie came home after a long day’s work and found a whiny husband complaining about all these messages we’d heard about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost and the healing power of God through the Blood of Jesus. Annoyed, Debbie challenged me, “Why don’t you just go pray?” Dripping with sarcasm, I replied, “Well, OK,” as I went down the hall and slammed the bedroom door.

Someone was waiting for me as I stepped through the door. It was the Presence of God in the Person of the Holy Ghost. I was “put” down on the floor face-down in that Presence of God! A still small Voice spoke that sounded like thunder, “My son, I have a sense of humor, but you will prepare the way!” I knew it was the Lord. Laying there, weeping, crying, sobbing uncontrollably, I received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost and prayed in tongues for over two hours. Debbie brought over our friends who had taken us to the Brownsville Revival. Opening the door, our friends smilingly said, “We know what this is!” I was never ever the same again.

Two days before becoming homeless, we rented a small half double in a not so good part of town where there were drugs and guns. Our bedroom window had a small bullet hole in it. But, it was there I received the call from God to preach! Wow! Did I say God has a

plan? God restored my relationship with all my children, including the oldest one I hadn't seen in twenty years, plus much more.

Once, I lived for the devil. Now I live for Jesus and I'm ten times more passionate than I was before. You see, the proof is evident in the fact that I am still here and still serving the Most High God Who is the Creator of everything!

God loves you and has a plan for your life. Jesus paid the price once and for all. Getting the world out of us and getting God into us is a road less traveled, but a road that awaits you. It is not an easy path, but one that is so awesome to take. Don't think of yourself as worthless. Don't believe the lie of the devil, "God can't use the likes of you." If God, the Creator of the Universe can use me, He can use you. It requires your passion and devotion. I can testify that I am on fire for Jesus, my King. I want to share this Fire with you.

Mike

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CHAPTER 10

THE UGLY DUCKLING, CONTINUALLY PICKED ON

I heard, “Shut up; you’re stupid; you don’t know what you are talking about.”

It took many years to discover and overcome dyslexia.

A neighbor boy molested me ... Who would believe me or even care?

After a string of men and failed marriages, I was living with a man.

I heard a Voice say, “GET OUT OR YOU WILL DIE!”

Lying there severely beaten ... my boyfriend came to himself.

Did you know that babies can hate? According to my mother and from my own experiences from the time that I could first remember, my twin brother seemed to hate me. Hearing stories of how he would crawl over to me as a toddler to hit and bite me drawing blood was so perplexing to my mother who was aghast at what was happening. With the Pediatrician’s advice, she was able to curtail some of his destructive behavior at that time. But later, when we grew older, when no one was around, he would force me into a dark closet and lock me in. Other times, I can remember the panic I felt when I was forcibly wrapped like a mummy in blankets and could hardly breath or move. He had an almost fiendish personality.

My mother tried to love me the best she could. My Dad provided for me, but gave no affection or affirmation. It is hard for parents

to give their children what they themselves did not receive.

During this time, I felt like the ugly duckling who was continually picked on. It seemed as if every time I turned around, I heard, “Shut up; you’re stupid; you don’t know what you are talking about!”

These experiences of mental and physical abuse at the hands of my twin brother, his friends and later, my younger brother who imitated my twin, were terrorizing. As soon as I was able, I carried a baseball bat with me. My younger brother did finally get the message.

I was alone and isolated with no close friends, and added to my chaotic upbringing, I was dyslexic. At school, they pressured my family to put me in the class with those who had disabilities. My mother stood by me and refused to do so.

The results from a lack of affection and affirmation from my brothers, my father, plus my mother’s inability to protect me from the abuse, left me wounded, insecure and fearful.

I attended church with my family which mostly taught the message of “hell fire damnation, repent and be saved.” While I had little understanding of the Bible or what anyone was saying, I was drawn to the Lord Jesus and accepted Him. When I asked my Sunday School Teacher to tell me about God, she said, “Read the Bible!” I couldn’t read and struggled to get to know Him. To read from the Bible or any book, I had to turn it upside for my eyes to see words which I had almost no comprehension of what they meant. But as much as a little ten-year-old girl could, I tried.

There was little help in church or in school for my problem. It took many years to discover and overcome dyslexia learning how to manipulate the words so I could read them and understand.

Another severe trauma occurred between the ages of ten to twelve years of age when a neighbor boy molested me. I didn’t bother to tell anyone. Who would believe me or even care?

Although I didn’t trust men, I was still looking for someone to love and validate me. My first marriage ended about five years after my second daughter was born. We were on a hunting trip in the truck

with a toddler between my husband and me plus holding an infant on my lap. There was already a pattern of abuse, physical and verbal, including the day I came home from the hospital with our second daughter. But this time was different. He became enraged and grabbed a loaded gun, pointed it at me and pulled the trigger. The gun did not go off. I was terrified, but spared from death.

After a string of men and failed marriages, I was living with a man who I thought I loved. He was a musician who played the piano for night gigs. Although he had asked me to marry him twice, each time he pulled back. Later, I found out he was cheating by having relationships with other women. In spite of the physical abuse, I stayed with him because I had no family to help me and no place to go. One night he came home after work and as usual, he had been drinking. In a drunken rage, he beat me so badly that it caused a blood clot in my leg. Three times during the beating, I heard an audible Voice which I knew had to be God. It was a loud Voice that said, "GET OUT OR YOU WILL DIE." As I laid on the floor curled up in a fetal position, I begged him not to hurt me anymore. I knew what God had spoken was true and I did not want to die. While lying there severely beaten, sobbing and terrified, my boyfriend came to himself and stopped beating me. As soon as I was physically able, I asked someone I knew for help and he rented me a small basement apartment which became my safe place to recover.

During the time I was still living with my last boyfriend, I bought myself a pair of cowboy boots and went out dancing while my boyfriend worked in the evenings. He didn't want me to accompany him on his gigs anymore. That is when I finally realized he was being unfaithful to me. I remained faithful to him, but I loved to dance. I met the nicest man when I went dancing, whose name was Jim. I was terrified of Jim and did not want any relationship other than to enjoy dancing. Once, Jim gave me a ride somewhere and showed me what a gentleman was like by opening the car door for me. I kept my hand on the door handle, ready to jump out if he made any advance. He remained a perfect gentleman at all times. That really impressed me. There was something about him I liked, but with my past failures with men, I had no trust in anyone, including him.

Months later after living on my own, Jim had to leave town for his last tour of duty in the military. He asked for his first kiss from me before he left and said, “pray about us.” “What about us?” I immediately replied and I’m thinking, “There is no us!” I did not want to hear those words.

Each week, at the base where he was stationed, he would stand for two hours waiting in line to call me on the phone. Before each conversation ended, he would say, “I love you.” My thoughts swirled. At first, I didn’t want to be hurt anymore, even though I knew Jim was a Christian. By the end of the second week, I was able to surrender my life to God in new ways and realized that marrying Jim was God’s will. My love for God and Jim overcame my fears and we married.

Our marriage began the journey of healing. In our first year of marriage, I was diagnosed with heart problems and brain cancer. I chose to go the natural route of a strict diet, herbs, and other natural healing methods and I was healed of both of these ailments. Miracles began happening.

As Christians, we attended church together. We began to grow individually and as a couple in our faith. As I began to know more about God, I learned to overcome and discovered God’s abilities and His capacity to help me in new ways.

I still had questions like, “Where were you Jesus, all that time I was suffering so greatly?” Then I remembered as a child, there were times that I would literally “zone out” and go to the most beautiful place, like a paradise of sorts, with a gorgeous beautiful crystal clear river with blue flowing waters. I saw trees with lush shining green leaves which reminded me of a Bradford pear tree’s leaves on earth that paled in comparison to what I was seeing in my special paradise. This place was inviting, peaceful, refreshing, and perfect with living colors, not like here on earth. As an adult who was beginning to work through the horror of the abuse I had suffered, I realized I had seen glimpses of Heaven. After my marriage to Jim, I went through a ministry time for inner healing. I had tremendous relief pour over me as I saw Jesus

holding my hand, singing to me, showing me that through all the difficult situations, He was there helping me and keeping me alive from the evil that was attacking me.

Today, I help mentor other people to walk in their own callings. Here is what I want to say to anyone who reads my story, “No matter your obstacles, you are important. You have a plan and a destiny in God. Turn your eyes to Him. You will get there.” Personally, I was at death’s door more than once.

Call out to God for help. He hears and will continue to lead you through your most difficult situations. Keep this saying in mind, “the shouldas, wouldas and couldas are hindsight.” You have to keep going forward to get to the other side of where you might be now in your journey to freedom. If I can get there, you can get there to your place of healing. Don’t give up!

Judy

God's Love

“For God loved the world so much, that He gave His only Son, so that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:16-17

God loved His creation (you) so much that He sent His Son to earth to pay the full price for all sin.

Jesus did not come to the earth to do away with God's law. He came to fulfill it.

Jesus came as a man in the flesh and did not sin. Not one time. He obeyed the commandments, God's Law fully. He did for you what you could never do. He was beaten, tortured, and hung on a cross. While on the cross, the sins of the world (your sins) were placed on his shoulders.

Jesus died for you and with your sins, but death could not hold Him; the grave could not contain Him. He arose from that grave paying the full price for every person's sins who accepts Him. It is a free gift He offers to all who will receive it. (That includes you!)

It is only through God's Love, God's Mercy, and God's Grace that we can escape the curse of the law.

From here, you can go to the next page for more “Real Life Stories,” or skip to page 55 for more truth.

CHAPTER 11

ABANDONED

I was called by God to be a missionary.

I married my college sweetheart.

My husband said one night, “I really don’t love you anymore...I’m leaving.”

My dream world crumbled.

I was diagnosed with a blood cancer

In eighteen months I lost my health, my husband, my job, my home, and the children.

I understood a beautiful verse in the Bible at the age of seven. This verse, John 3:16, states that God loved all of us so much, he sent his only son for us and that if we believe in him (Jesus), we will have eternal life. I realized that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of my sins and that he offered forgiveness and salvation. I prayed at the altar of our little country church and gladly received God’s gift of salvation.

“Who wants to go with me today?” My dad would smile with his Bible and car keys in hand on Saturday mornings.

My sisters and I began to take turns going out to share the Gospel with Dad every Saturday. My Dad pastored a church, had a full time job, and ran a small farm, but he always made time for his most important work - going out to search for people who would be receptive to hear about the Lord. His love for sharing Jesus in a natural and friendly way was inspirational and the joy we shared in seeing people come to Christ are precious childhood memories. From a young age he inspired me to share what I knew about Jesus and His salvation with others.

I was called by God to be a missionary at the age of 13. I married my college sweetheart and for many years, life was sweet. We worked for five years in a homeless shelter in Seattle, WA, and my passion for sharing Jesus grew as I served the poor in America's skid row. Adventures were common place while living and serving in the worst part of the city! As we ministered, God came in power and miracles happened. People were saved and delivered from alcohol and demon possession. Once a demon possessed man hurled books at me with all his might but they would drop harmlessly a few feet in front of me. I believe an invisible angel was deflecting the books and taking the blows.

Numerous times we prayed and God provided food and funds when the ministry had no resources. Once we had no food to feed one hundred hungry people and while we prayed for food, the phone rang telling us that 10,000 Snickers candy bars were at the Seattle docks just waiting for us to come and pick them up.

Over the years my family grew to include four children and God called us to East Africa as pioneer evangelists and church planters. I loved that season of life! We lived out in the bush and hunted antelope and warthog to supplement our diets. We encountered snakes, lions, witchdoctors, and suffered persecution from Muslim fundamentalists. But again, our greatest adventures were found in taking the Gospel to people who had never heard it before. We were the first to carry Bibles into remote villages and many people were born again. God healed the sick and won battles against witchdoctors, often proving He is the One True God.

We came home in 2003 and I began to teach mission classes at a small Bible College. The Lord also called me to reach girls trapped in the sex industry and I founded a ministry called, Light in Darkness, to reach them. Again, we saw miracles happen and many women working in strip clubs were brought to Christ. We saw customers brought to the Lord as well as a club bouncer, a security guard, and even three members of an organized crime family. God proved his power to penetrate the darkness with his light and love!

Things were going so well, I think the devil just had to try to stop the work. One night the Lord sent me a dream in preparation for what was to come. I dreamed that I was walking in a lovely meadow when I saw Jesus walking toward me. I ran toward him calling out, “Jesus!” I jumped up to hug him. Jesus picked me up in his arms and began to carry me along. I rested my head on his chest and felt so peaceful. Suddenly before us was a mountain of sharp gray rocks jutting out in every direction. They looked razor sharp but Jesus never missed a step and continued to carry me right up the side of the mountain. I began to look down at the rocks and I said, “Oh, Jesus this is too hard for you. You should let me down and let me walk. I’m too heavy for you and I can do this myself.” Jesus looked incredulously at me and began to laugh, a great big belly laugh! “Oh my little one,” He finally said smiling at me, “Let me carry you!” Then I woke up with a start. I wondered what it could mean and all too soon I began to understand.

Shortly after that dream my world crumbled and an adventure of horrific proportions ensued. First, I was diagnosed with blood cancer and needed an immediate bone marrow transplant. My chances to live were less than thirty percent. While cancer treatments were ongoing, I had another terrible shock.

“I don’t really love you anymore,” my husband said to me one night. “I’ve just been faking it with you and faking it in the ministry for a while now and I’m sick of it. I never want to go to church again. From now on, I want to do what I want to do and I’m leaving.” I was so shocked and crushed it felt as if a grenade had exploded in my chest! Within a few weeks he left the ministry and abandoned me. I found that he had been living a secret life of sin. He was having an affair and was misusing money from the ministry he was leading. Soon after, the Bible College closed so I no longer had a job. I couldn’t pay bills and my home soon started going into foreclosure. Then my husband told me that he wanted complete control of our two children still at home. He bragged and threatened that he would lie and do whatever it took to turn them against me.

It was a year and a half from the time of my bone marrow transplant to the day my children left with their Dad. In eighteen months I had lost my health, my husband, my job, my home, and now even the children. My whole world was gone! Through those dark days I clung to the Lord and He faithfully carried me. I could sometimes faintly hear His voice reassuring me of His love. "I will never leave you nor forsake you," He whispered softly. Now I knew the meaning of the dream. My life had become that mountain of dangerous, hurtful, sharp rocks but I knew that I was being carried by my Lord and Savior!

My Dad lovingly stepped in and offered to take me back home to our family farm in Missouri. He took care of me and began to take me to see a Christian psychologist for several months. The doctor put me on heavy doses of anti-depressants so that I could even function as a normal person. I began to try to work through grief and loss but had made little progress.

One day the Lord spoke to me and told me to go to a Christian conference for ladies that was coming near my town. I didn't want to go, but was compelled to go by the Lord. The speaker was from South Korea, and was a complete stranger to me, but she gave me a powerful message from God.

She said, "God is saying right now - You are filled with great sorrow and suffering. You are carrying such pain and grief. But the Lord is saying right now - I, the Lord, will deliver you, my daughter, from depression!" Instantly the joy of the Lord flooded into my body and I was delivered from depression! It felt as if a pitcher of warm water was being poured over my head, and my joy and strength were totally restored. I wanted to sing and dance and laugh all at the same time! When I got my joy back, I got my strength back and I immediately dove back into the ministry of reaching women who are trapped in the sex industry businesses.

The Lord has beautifully given me beauty for the ashes of my life. My ministry, called Light in Darkness, has grown to 32 teams ministering across six states. I am also a full time missionary again and joined a foreign missionary sending agency called, One Mission Society.

I assist in launching church planting movements in several nations in Asia and they have given me the honor of being one of their missionary trainers. Most importantly, the joy of the Lord continues to carry me every day and I cannot cease to praise Him!

Followers of Jesus are not promised a bed of roses in life, but we are promised that the Lord will always be with us every step of the way, through good times and bad times. He is faithful!

Carolyn

CHAPTER 12

MY WORLD WAS SMALL

Growing up in Tennessee, I was the youngest of eight children born to a hard working farm family. My life began in a happy, secure atmosphere of faith, since my parents and grandparents were believers. We had very little in the way of material wealth, but were rich in family and faith.

My six older sisters and one brother provided plenty of mentoring, which I was eager to receive. I did well in school, but lacked confidence and was shy as I never quite knew who I was or what I could do. I guess you could describe me as compliant and not adventurous.

At age ten, two of my sisters decided we should all go forward that evening and give our lives to the Lord at our little country church within walking distance of our home. But when the time came for us to all walk forward, I did not go. Instead, I waited until the next night. I have always been glad I decided to make my own decision and not do something because the others were going to do it.

My world was small. I never traveled more than fifty miles from home until I was a teenager. I attended a small Christian junior college and completed my teaching degree at another relatively small campus in Nashville, TN. The year I graduated, I got my driver's license, my first car, my first teaching job and met my soon to be husband, Bill.

Bill was from Michigan. He traveled, having served two years in the army (one year in Korea) and was working as a fraternity jewelry salesman. His family, unlike mine, were fairly well off. Bill was confident, self-assured, socially adept, a take charge person-my

opposite. We fell in love and married the following year. We moved immediately to Michigan where I began teaching. My world was expanding. As time went on, I became uncomfortable struggling to know who I was. My identity had been hidden in my family and now in Bill. Generally, I was happy but didn't have a grasp on what my purpose was.

We lived in Michigan two years and in Illinois ten years where our three children, two girls and a boy, were born. Church was always a part of our lives and where most of our friends were. I became a stay-at-home mom, having left my teaching career when we started our family. I was grateful to be home with our children in their developing years.

An opportunity to purchase a vending company brought us to Indiana. We immediately looked for a church. I had a growing hunger for more in my spiritual life. Although we were prepared to shop around, we never left the first church we visited. There we met a precious, spirit filled lady, Florence. She mentored us for several years, teaching our Sunday school class.

Later Florence invited us to a conference on the Holy Spirit in Indianapolis. I couldn't wait to go and attended all the sessions. Accompanied by Florence, I received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The hunger I had been experiencing and the subtle fear and anxiety disappeared. Immersed in God's love—nothing and no one could make me mad.

When Bill learned of my experience, he felt threatened, fearful that we would grow apart. The Holy Spirit helped me assure him that my love for him was stronger than ever, and that nothing could separate us. With a little skepticism, he began to notice changes in me and soon desired a similar experience.

It was at this time that we met Larry and Lanette who were leaders in the Methodist Charismatic Movement in Indiana. We soon became involved as well and began to grow in our understanding of life in the Spirit. They introduced us to the ministry of Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship. We attended their monthly banquet meetings for many years, gleaning from the many powerful testimonies.

My mother, who suffered with a lengthy illness, became a partner with the Oral Roberts Ministry during the eighties. She passed on to us some of the literature from the ministry that had ministered to her. We became partners also, and were invited to attend a partner seminar

in Tulsa, another life changing experience, which God miraculously provided the means for us to attend.

That same year, we attended a Full Gospel convention in Indianapolis, where Charles and Frances Hunter were speakers. At the end of the convention, they ministered on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and releasing of the prayer language. As a result, both Bill and I received, and separately spoke in our new language on the way to work.

At a second Oral Roberts seminar on healing, we met a couple who introduced us to the ministry of Women's Aglow Fellowship. I connected with a local group and eventually became a leader. I was like a sponge, soaking up the teachings and testimonies, further helping me learn my purpose and training me for leadership.

Our business grew very quickly and was very profitable for a few years, but changes in the industry and more changes in the parent company ownership, began to create severe financial challenges. Our faith was being tested. Isaiah 26:3 was a scripture I held on to during that time, "He will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."

Twenty years after purchasing our business, we were able to sell it through several miraculous interventions from the Lord. We were blessed with strong prayer support from our family and prayer partners. In addition, God blessed us with the ability to college educate our three children and provided for two beautiful, low budget weddings during the height of our financial struggles.

Aglow International has continued to be a major source of my spiritual growth and opportunity for service in the kingdom. To those who read my testimony and are going through your own struggles, "Focus on the Lord, keep a strong group of believers around you and never give up." I praise God for His faithfulness and for daily demonstrating His unfailing love. He wants to do the same for you.

Frances

P.S. Read my husband Bill's story on page 75.

Judgement Day

The Bible promises us a final judgement:

“And I saw a great white throne and the one who sat upon it, from whose face the earth and sky fled away, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before God; and The Books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in The Books, each according to the deeds he had done. The oceans surrendered the bodies buried in them; and the earth and the underworld gave up the dead in them. Each was judged according to his deeds. And Death and Hell were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the Second Death—the Lake of Fire. And if anyone’s name was not found recorded in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.”

Revelation 20:11-5

At the judgement, books are opened. The Books contain every good or bad deed of every person. The book of Life contains the names of those who have put their trust in Christ to save them.

When God judges you, will you be found guilty or innocent? Will you spend eternity (forever) in Heaven or Hell?

To read more “Real Life Stories,” go to the next page. For the next truth; skip to page 64.

CHAPTER 13

FROM VIOLENCE TO PEACE

I grew up in a two parent home, the oldest of four children, two girls and two boys in Northern Indiana. From the outside looking in you would think we were a normal happy family.

Home was filled with constant yelling and fighting between both parents as long as I can remember. One fight was so bad me and two siblings hid in our room until dad opened the door telling me to clean up their bloody mess. Mom was nowhere to be found. Then my sister, brother and me were told to walk to Grandmas two blocks away down a dark alley full of bums. Grandma, as usual, had questions, knowing this was “the normal” for my parents. Next morning, my mom was there waking us up to go back home to the “war zone”.

Several years later, we moved to another town. Around the second or third grade, I wanted to let my guard down. My parents still fought, but not as much. Mom continued yelling and fussing about things not done as they should have been. When dad came home from work, it was like walking on egg shells, but I learned to cope. I enjoyed our new home even though we were only one of three African American families in this “wonderful” neighborhood. I had not been affected by prejudice until one day me and my siblings were walking home from school. Where I lived before, every race got along. But this day, words were said and before I knew it, it felt like I was fighting for my life. My siblings tried to help. One of them ran home to get mom. After the “beat down” my parents tried to speak to parents of both boys. One family was more civil than the other. Shortly after that one little boy’s family moved out of the neighborhood.

The result of all of this plus the past years meant I “bottled up” even more. I tried to hide the fact I hated my life, surrounded by violence at every turn, day in and day out. The fighting slowed down a bit; the fights were not as violent; just yelling at each other. By this time my mom starting making us go to church more. Later, one little boy approached me while I was playing in the neighborhood. He apologized for participating in beating me up. I forgave him and let it go. We did become friends up to high school before his family moved from the neighborhood.

By high school, I was getting high with a friend from church. I needed something to hide the fact I was miserable, angry and dead inside. Alcohol was easy to get. My dad had a full bar, my free liquor store. I was drinking and lots of it. With all the getting high plus drinking, I’m surprised I was able to function in school. Needless to say I was really acting out. I didn’t care anymore about the consequences I would face from my parents.

My parent’s fights lessened over the years, but the arguing and yelling continued. During this time, my dad felt church was getting in the way of our family time. When we did things together, it was great and we always did something fun with dad. Other times we went with mom doing youth events which were fun too, but dad didn’t like that. My sophomore year I met my first love. Trying to keep my crazy home life separate, I would try to hang out with him wherever he was. I became pregnant twice before my senior year; one miscarriage and one abortion.

My parents divorced after my senior year. A few months after graduation mom insisted I move to Texas with my uncle. She was scared I was going to end up like her. She felt my boyfriend and I were getting too serious. A couple of years later I returned home, soon after I was pregnant with my first son, even after my mom tried to separate me from him. Over the years, I lost another child and that same year I lost my grandmother to cancer.

We were married four years before I got tired of his infidelity and tired of me fighting him about it. During those years of our separation, he had two daughters by two different women. But during that separation period, God changed my husband. My husband tried to show me that God had changed his life. I didn't want to hear it. I was full of anger and full of hurt. I continued to drink more and more because of my broken dark heart, which my boys had to live through.

On my up days, I made up for it by doing family fun stuff just as my dad did with us. It was during this time, I began paying attention to how God was changing my husband. But I still wanted to hang on to all the hurt and anger. A friend asked me to go to church with her, so my boys and me accompanied her to church. Then I began to go to church on my own. God began slowly removing the need to party, drink, and smoke. God was working on me and my husband, separate but together. I learned to forgive my husband for all the cheating and the two children he had outside of our marriage. God began showing me how to love for real, and to love myself. For a long time, I didn't. I couldn't. My heart was hard because of all the different types of abuse from my past years. It caused me to doubt myself in every way. I felt for a long time I was ugly and not worthy. But giving my life to God taught me to love myself, and my family, even to forgive my dad.

Years later after giving my life to Christ, my faith was tested. Within one year, I suffered great loss and received the most scary news of my life. My one-year old nephew drowned in my mom's pool, the worst day of my life. My heart was broken. Two weeks later I received news that I had breast cancer, the deadly disease that took my grandmother's life. I was scared thinking I was going to die, but God saved my life. After radiation treatment and two surgeries God healed my body and during that struggle, my heart. Over the years my heart was healed, my life was saved, God gave me strength to be strong for my family and to love myself and my family. That year my relationship got better with my father. So now I see all that I went through made me stronger to handle different situations in my life. In

the past I would have drunk myself to death. But with God, He gave me strength.

There will always be some kind of struggle in our daily lives, but with God He gives us the tools to get through our life's trials. Now my life has changed from violence to peace. I know He can do the same for you.

Donna

CHAPTER 14

NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR ANYONE OR MYSELF

He called me, “Peg Legs” and “Crippled.”

I dreaded every day of school and dropped out in my junior year.

I carried around toxic shame for years.

I grew up in a home with an alcoholic father. My mom went to church. The church we belonged to had strict rules. The move from a suburb to the country when I was in 5th grade was a dramatic change in my life. I moved from a hundred and five fifth graders in three classes to only 12 in my total class with both the 5th and 6th grade!

The spiral downward in my life began at that point when people started making fun of me for the way I walked. I inherited my mother's deformed feet. I had very high arches hammer toes and my ankles turned out with no support. The physical education teacher used to make me run around the gym so she could watch me run and make fun of me. There was a guy on the bus that I always tried to avoid because he called me, “Peg Legs” and “crippled.” I dreaded every day of school. I dropped out in my junior year.

When you internalize pain and live out of that, pain becomes toxic. It will affect the way you think and act about everything. I carried around toxic shame for years not feeling I was good enough for anyone or myself because of the way I walked and because of the guilt of divorce. Even as hard as I tried, I never felt I was good enough for

God. I struggled inwardly all the time. The shame stayed with me. We didn't attend church very often after we moved because we lived so far out in the country. I didn't really return to God until after I got married only to find my husband was not as interested in attending church. He became an alcoholic. There was a lot of verbal abuse during the marriage. He quit several jobs. His addictions became worse. He started using more drugs, stopped working and became violent at times, so the children and I left.

My church didn't believe in divorce and remarriage. I remarried quickly so I wouldn't feel the guilt or have anyone put guilt on me, only to find out what a mistake I had made in not waiting on God. I went to church with my girlfriend and was feeling so ashamed of my decision. My husband had left me two months after we were married. I closed my eyes during the service and opened my heart to God. When I did, I heard him speak to me. He said these words, "Whose child are you?" I said softly out loud, "I'm a child of the King." He spoke with a loud clear voice and said, "Then you pull up a chair and sit at my table." I was never the same after that. I wanted to learn so much about the Lord. I started going to the ladies group and attending church. Then He began to use me. I've led several people to the Lord. One was my dad, who was saved two months before he died.

I still carried around the toxic shame for a number of years until finally one day I let go of it. I realized, "I'll never be good enough, no one is." That's not what God wants. He just wants me to come to him anytime, anywhere, just as I am. Then I am at peace and He can teach me and use me.

I raised my children on my own. I had three jobs at one time; small paying jobs. I was on food stamps a few times. But the lord always provided. I never thought I could get a house but I prayed and the Lord gave me a house on a government loan. I paid \$200 down and got that back when I moved in. The owner paid for the closing costs and all that needed to be approved of before I moved in.

Later I was hired at a publishing company as a customer service representative. I didn't even think I could get that job. When my boss, the Customer Service Director got fired, the Marketing director called me into his old office one day, as I had been in there before, showing her some of things he did. She told me to have a seat. When I started to sit in a chair she said, "No, behind his desk!" I got his job! When she left, I started cutting and pasting, making flyers. I had never done anything like that in my life, and guess what! I got her job and his job!!! The Lord has used me in so many ways that I never thought possible.

My department closed after 14 years so I started my own business. I am now helping people in the marketplace to use their gifts for God. I still have the same feet but I don't have the shameful thoughts about them anymore. God can use anybody in any situation if you just let Him. All He wants is a willing heart. He will change situations and put you in places you never dreamed of. God doesn't remember our past sins. People do. But I believe the reason is so the Lord can show others how He has changed your life.

God doesn't want us to live out of shame or guilt. He wants us to live out of the gifts that He gave to us. We all have gifts from God! It's so much more rewarding letting Him use us. He gets all the praise for it. A quote I use often is, "I believe every person has exceptional gifts just waiting to be rewarded."

So the next time you feel you're not good enough or you carry around guilt and shame for your past mistakes or even physical defects, let this be a reminder that God doesn't look at any of those things. He just looks at how much He loves you and at all the wonderful things that He can do in your life. He is a Gift Giver. GOD IS LOVE.

The more you embrace His peace and love, the more you will start seeing through new eyes and have hope for the calling in your life and find purpose. Don't worry about what it is. It will just happen. Just be you. Once you find God, He teaches you what love really is. You will learn to love yourself and let God love through you.

Everyone has something that they don't like about themselves; but the people who will accomplish more and are at peace, are the ones that let go of what they cannot change and what they regret. The Bible says, "TODAY IS THE DAY OF SALVATION." Let this be the day of no more toxic shame, no more guilt, no more regrets. See what it feels like for one day. I guarantee, you will want to live the next and the next and next, the same way.

I had one person say to me, "I have faith in you." That was huge for me. No had ever said anything like that to me before. And I never said it to myself. I never understood why I couldn't overcome and do things like other people. I always had that guilt feeling on the inside. But now after letting go and letting God take my pain and shame, I look forward to my dreams, working and living for God.

Whoever is reading this, I want to say this to you, "I have faith in you!" But even greater, our God created you and He has such awesome plans for your life. Much more than you could ever imagine!! Let God be your peace. Release any guilt or shame to Him. He is our peace. Even say out loud... "God is my peace!" And you can't think negatively when you think on these things as the scripture says, so practice thinking in this way. It will increase your faith. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things."

Be Free! John 8:36 So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free! And lastly begin to dream. Let the dream out of the box, (the guilt and shame box) and your gifts will make room for you to accomplish great things. Let God use you and be at peace. Proverbs 18:16 A man's gift [given in love or courtesy] makes room for him; And brings him before great men.

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Standing on the Fence

I was standing on a fence, and there was an incredibly large group of people assembled around it.

On one side of the group stood a man, Jesus. On the other side of the group stood another man, Satan. Separating them, running through the group, was the fence I was standing on.

Both Jesus and Satan began calling to the people in the group and, one by one, each having made up his or her mind, each went to either Jesus or Satan.

This kept going on, and eventually Jesus had gathered around him a group of people from the larger crowds, as did Satan. But I joined neither group. I stood on the fence. Then Jesus and his people left and disappeared. So too did Satan and his people.

And I was left alone, standing on the fence.

As I stood there, Satan came back. He appeared to be looking for something that he'd lost. I said, "Have you lost something?"

Satan looked straight at me and replied, "No, there you are. Come with me."

"But," I said, "I stood on the fence. I chose neither you nor Him."

"That's okay," said Satan. "I own the fence. You belong to me."

You may go to the next page for more "Real Life Stories," or skip to page 74 for more truth.

CHAPTER 15

YOU MEAN GOD APPOINTS US GIFTS?

I wanted to be a nun ... I always believed in God.

I watched as my parents argued and fought ... they divorced.

My dad moved to another state and remarried without our knowledge.

My mom believed she was a lesbian and took a female partner.

I had to grow up quick.

I was so angry that I became a wrecking ball destroying myself.

Gifts, you mean God appoints us gifts? Somehow as a young person, I felt God helped me define the gifts He had for me early in life, but it has taken the rest of my life until now to realize that was what was happening. Raised Catholic and attending Catholic grade school, my biggest desire at that time was to be a nun. I always believed in God. I knew Jesus was there. But at 10 years old, life was not so much fun anymore. I watched as my parents argued and fought. I saw my mom falling down a flight of stairs, my dad's badly cut up finger, and then there was the gun! They divorced. Things kept deteriorating in my family that I didn't understand. My dad moved to another state and remarried without our knowledge.

I could have been angry and bitter, but Jesus started teaching me the gift of taking "bad" and turning it to "good". So I accepted that I

had gained a new stepmom who had a good heart. She showed my brother and me that we didn't lose a dad, but instead gained a new family.

My mom believed she was a lesbian and took a female partner. My mother became very ill with Lupus and was difficult to be around. Her new partner helped us to stay stable. However, my mom took lots of medicine which made her dysfunctional. I had to quickly grow up. That's when new gifts of mine came forth – caregiving, running a household and, along with my brother, we became kennel kids to over 30 dogs.

My escape became high school. My brother was able to go on to Catholic high school on a grant. My parents felt I wasn't smart enough so I entered the public high school that was laced with drugs, and found myself trying to fit in somewhere. Here is the miracle; Jesus was guiding me patiently to good friends, great teachers, and my high school sweetheart who I later married.

Married life was good, providing stability as well as two "new parents" who loved me unconditionally. Jesus blessed us with two beautiful children to raise for Him!

After being married about 15-17 years, temptation came my way along with doubt. I realize the devil couldn't stand it any longer. I believed him and made regretful decisions that became harmful to me and to those I loved dearly. The devil also brought feelings and I began to believe that Jesus personally took my mother, my stepmother, mom's partner, and hardest of all, my father-in-law, when they died. I believed the lie that it was my punishment because I had sinned.

I was so angry that I became a wrecking ball quickly destroying myself by doing things I never thought I would do.

But because of Jesus of love for me, He sent my best friend's father to help me realize Jesus truly loved me and that satan had lied. Receiving that revelation, I chose to believe Jesus loved me and to reject the lies of the enemy who only wanted to destroy me and all I loved.

I returned to church. Opportunities opened up for my family to start a Pawn Shop business. When my children left for college, I felt the call from Jesus to adopt. My husband and I were obedient to that call.

It was very scary leaving the country and although some bad things happened, our faith was strong. We were rewarded with two more beautiful children to raise for Him!

However, working and raising the children at an older age took its toll on me. Once again, the devil saw an opportunity. I crumbled from all the pressure becoming unable to handle raising the kids and all the related responsibilities. I became isolated from other adults and friends feeling so alone and stagnant. In retrospect, I see that I was continually pouring out nurture to the children, but was not being replenished within myself. I felt dried up inside. The result was my 30-year marriage ended.

With the love of my family and friends, I started repairing the damage I created. It has taken a few years and good people around me to learn how to appreciate my relationship with my Heavenly Father.

Once I started reading my Bible again and surrounding myself with everything my Heavenly Father desired, I truly realized my gifts! I am finding my purpose! I am a child of GOD'S! The good news is, you are too!

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived,
what GOD has prepared for
those who love Him. "

1 Corinthians 2:9

Just Believe!

Pam
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CHAPTER 16

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Nicknames ... as terms of enslavement

I was the seventh of eleven children raised in a poor, alcoholic, and abusive family.

Because of dad's drinking, we were forced to move 17 times in 18 years.

I cast aside my dreams and desires of marriage. God would suffice for me.

“Peanut”, “Pooh Bear”, “Buddy”, “Jack-a-Doodle”; nicknames, those little terms of endearment given to children as they grow up. Sometimes, they fade away as the years pass, but often, they last for a lifetime.

Now, imagine you were called “Bucktooth”, “Black Neck” or “Shit Rat”; also nicknames, but terms of enslavement. Such was the case for my siblings and five-year old me.

I was born deep in the beautiful mountains of West Virginia. I was the seventh of eleven children raised in a poor, alcoholic, and abusive family. Our nicknames, given in cruelty, not compassion, speak of the neglect and the lonely lives that we felt as children. We were just kids, to be seen but not heard.

I have experienced many dangerous, violent outbursts. From the physical threats at times, we saw the gun pointed at my mother's head or my father would threaten to shoot himself; to the emotional abuse, while I was watching my mother being physically threatened by my father with a knife to her throat. Crying, I passed out from the stress of my emotions.

Because of dad's drinking, we were forced to move about 17 times in 18 years, often into houses with no running water and heated by an old wood burning stove that doubled as the oven for cooking.

At twelve years old, I was invited to go on a double date by a person that I should have been able to trust. Yes, twelve years old! My "date" on this ill-advised rendezvous was a 22 year-old man. The absolute perversion inherent in an adult male who knowingly was getting into the back seat of a car with a preteen age girl never occurred to me. In fact, I thought, based on what I had seen modeled by my family, that this was what was expected of girls my age. In order to be "loved" this is what would be required. It didn't take long for the situation to get heated up to the point of an attempted penetration. Now, I can say "Thank God, it failed!" Back then, I was left wondering what was wrong with me.

Once, I missed the school bus on the first day of high school, and dad accused me of "playing hooky" to be with a boy. He was going to tie me up to a post to whip me. I pleaded with him, begging him to believe I was not guilty, but he would not. My neighbor came by and explained that he had gotten a phone call from the school saying that a teacher would be bringing me home because I had indeed missed the bus. That neighbor saved me from the physical consequences of my father's lack of faith in me, but the emotional damage was already done. There was anger indeed, but greater than the resentment I felt toward my dad, was a gnawing pain in my soul caused by my broken heart that he did not believe me. There must be something in me that was faulty.

On another occasion, my father was told by a doctor that I was experiencing bloody noses because I was likely doing drugs. Once again, I told my father that I didn't do drugs. Once again, he did not believe me. I felt so frustrated that I actually considered going and doing drugs. After all, my reasoning went, if I was going to be punished one way or the other, I might as well be guilty.

These stories could go on for a long time, but at the core of my being, this lifestyle caused many hours of unrest, never really having known peace night or day. I resented my father and wished him away from us.

At 16 years old, I had just gotten my driver's license. Freedom at last! One evening while I was out driving around, I happened to pass an old fashioned tent revival. I felt drawn, almost compelled, by a feeling deep inside my being to go to this meeting. That was the night I asked Jesus to come into my heart and to be the Lord of my life. True freedom at last!

I wish I could say that everything went perfect after that night. I had given my life to Jesus, but it took many years to recover from all the brokenness.

I was in a sexually active relationship at that time with a young man with whom I thought that I was in love. However, through the Scriptures and the "still, small voice" of the Holy Spirit, I knew something was not right.

Obedying the prompting that I felt in my spirit, I broke off my relationship with my high school sweetheart. Obedience has a price! My heart was crushed, and because of the emotional pain of letting him go, I ended up in a mental ward. While there, I experienced either a vision or a visitation by an angel. Whatever it was, it was real. During this time, I was told, "You are going to get better, and you are going to go home soon." When I turned to ask more questions of this being, it was no longer anywhere to be found. The very next day I was released.

After I graduated from high school (the first in my family to do so), I felt that I should go to a Bible college in a small town just outside of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. To do so would be to break away from the incredibly strong forces that tried to keep me bound to that backward lifestyle in the West Virginia hills. Eventually, I followed the persuasive voice in my mind and heart, and at the age of 20, I made it to Bible school. I was a college student (another first in my family).

By this time, I had accepted as fact that men would be around only long enough to get what they wanted, and then they would leave you empty. I was never going to give my heart away again to have it returned to me used and broken. So, I cast aside my dreams and desires of marriage. God would suffice for me.

I have since learned that was exactly what God was waiting for. He often waits for us to surrender our dreams to Him so that He can fulfill them in His way and His time.

Midway through my first year, I came to know a young gentleman named Steve, who was different from any man I had ever met. I honestly thought that he was a bit “strange.” I went out with him, at first anyways, only for something to do. I discovered, to my amazement, that he only wanted to have a relationship based on Biblical principles; principles that included abstinence and honor. He believed, and lived before me, that there was a love that transcends the sexual and an intimacy based not on physical bonding, but on emotionally and spiritually knitting one another together. I had never had this kind of lifestyle modeled to me, so I could not believe this was possible.

Another young man at the school named Mike, who was far more interested in me than I was in him, approached my new young suitor and expressed his displeasure that Steve had been going out with me. Steve told him, “Listen, I’m not going to fight you for her. If she chooses you or another, I’ll walk away.”

I was so mad! “What do you mean you won’t fight for me?!? I quickly told him, “That’s what a man is supposed to do!”

Steve took me by the hand, calmly looked me straight in the eyes, and said, “Pat, you are not a trophy to be won by the victor of a fight. You are a treasure to be forever cherished by the one you choose to give the key of your heart. To fight for you would cheapen the gift that God has placed in this world - that is you.”

Wow! I knew by now that I had value to God. But here was a man of flesh and blood who esteemed my thoughts and wishes above his own.

I was scared for a while, thinking, “Could this really be true?” I even tried to push him away, positive that eventually he would show his “true colors”. Through it all, however, he persisted with a quiet unshakeable love that I could no longer deny. I ultimately said, “Yes,” to his marriage proposal. In 35 years of marriage to this wonderful man, he has proven time and again that his words on that day

were much more than a fantastic “pickup” line. They were his very heartbeat.

There have been times of joy and sorrow in the last three and a half decades. Joy in the birth of our three children and two grandchildren. Sorrow in the death of my dad and mom, Steve’s mom, and a fire in 1999 in which we lost everything. However, even in the worst of times, there has been a security and stability firmly rooted in unflappable love that I never experienced growing up. In 35 years, we have had three homes. Two years in a little apartment in West Virginia, 16 years in the mobile home that the fire took away, and now 17 years in a wonderful house that God miraculously provided after the fire.

My husband has never raised his hand in anger against me or our children even though we have argued. Believe me, we have had a few heated “discussions” over the years! But, I have never felt unloved.

We had remained sexually pure before our marriage and I can happily say that we have stayed faithful to each other since. I have found that

one of the main secrets in a long term strong marriage was to be brutally honest with my spouse about the things that I had done and faced before he came into my life. Silence may be “golden” but it is “fool’s gold”. Breaking that silence was not an easy or quick thing to do. It took several years, a bit at a time, to unravel the shame I felt in all that I had done, and face the fear that I might be rejected for it. However, the transcendent love that my Steve had shown me when we were dating was still central to our relationship. Without a trace of condemnation, after every confession, he would simply hold me in his arms until my tears of grief dissolved the chains that I was still carrying. I have come to peace with my family history and have forgiven all those who offended me.

Today, my name is The Honorable Clerk Treasurer, Patricia Eloise. “Patricia” means noble one, honor. This speaks of who I am since I turned my life over to Jesus some 40 years ago. I want to wear my new name with true gratefulness.

On the wall over our bed is saying “Every once in a while in the middle of an ordinary life, Love gives us a Fairytale.” I don’t really

believe in fairytales, but I do believe in miracles, because I wake up every morning living one.

Oh, my nicknames now? “Bob” (my son had just gotten his tooth worked on and he tried to say “Mom” and “Bob” is what came out.), “Mammaw” (to my grandkids), “Patti” and “Patti pie” (to my friends), “Beautiful” and “Sweetheart” (to my husband) and, most importantly, “Beloved Daughter” (to my God.)

Feel free to contact me.

Pattie

pattipie1959@gmail.com

Day Of Redemption

Jesus gave His Blood, His Life, so all your sins could be forgiven. Jesus paid your penalty for sin; in full.

Now it's up to you to accept or reject what Jesus has done for you.

God is inviting you into a personal relationship with Him as your Heavenly Father and Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Jesus came to show you the way because you are passionately loved and wanted. Jesus, before He was resurrected, said to His disciples, “...*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*” *John 14:9*

If you repent for breaking God's Law and put your trust in Jesus, when God looks at you, He will not see you as a liar, a thief, an adulterer, or a law breaker, but He will see you as a son or daughter who Jesus has redeemed from the curse of the Law, one who Jesus has paid the full penalty for sin. God will see the Blood of Jesus that has washed you as white as snow. Only through Jesus can you be right with God.

You may go to the next page for more “Real Life Stories,” or skip to page 82 for more truth.

CHAPTER 17

CHURCH ATTENDER, NOT KNOWING MUCH ABOUT GOD

Suffering in agony, Grandmother prayed and laid the Crucifix on my foot Immediately the pain left

Driven to succeed, I worked almost nonstop.

Soon I was running my own business ... It grew fast ... So did the bills and the work.

Growing up in Michigan, my parents took us to church every Sunday where I heard about God. Even though I attended on Sundays and believed there was a God, I didn't know much about Him.

At 11 years old, I was staying with my grandparents while my parents were gone for a few days. Playing outside, I stepped on a nail. My foot was bleeding and throbbing with horrible pain. Grandmother didn't know what to do. There were no urgent care clinics or emergency rooms available where we lived. Suffering in agony, I tried to find some relief and hopefully go to sleep for the night. My grandmother, being a devout Catholic, prayed using her rosary beads. Finally, in desperation, she gently laid the Crucifix she was holding on my foot. Immediately, the pain left. Exhausted, I fell asleep.

I have never forgotten that experience. Now I knew something about God that I never knew before. Jesus heals, just like in the stories of the Bible. Another thing we as children were taught by my parents was the value of hard work. I learned that lesson well.

Growing up at home, I cut lawns, stocked shelves, had a Sunday paper route with 1500 customers. I worked in my dad's business running machinery in his factory where they made kitchen faucets, and for a contractor who had me doing electrical wiring for him. It was all preparation for my life's work. I just didn't know it at that time.

During my Junior year of high school, I went on a youth retreat. It became clear to me during that time, I needed to accept Christ personally. I prayed a prayer asking Him to come into my life. Now I not only knew about Him, but it set me on a life long journey learning to know Him as my Lord, my Friend and as the One who is always walking with me.

After graduating from high school, I went to college and quickly found that I did not like studying. It was not the right path for me. Soon after dropping out of college, the Army drafted me on April Fool's Day. The irony of that decision was that Uncle Sam proceeded to send me to three different schools where I had to study the subjects they chose. Then they sent me to Korea with the Core of Engineers where I served 13 months and one day. In retrospect, it was all preparation for my business career that would be part of my life later.

Happy to get back home, immediately I was job hunting. Instead of one job, I worked three. Driven to succeed, I worked almost nonstop.

It was around that time, that I applied for and was hired by a national company selling fraternity and sorority jewelry. I was assigned to a three-state territory. Being employed with this particular organization was in itself a miracle because the company did not normally hire anyone without a college degree. But the fact that I was working three jobs sold them on my ability to succeed as one of their salesmen.

Traveling in a three-state territory, I met my beautiful wife, Frances, two years into the job. After marriage, we moved back to Michigan, then Illinois, where the company had me manage a jewelry store on a college campus.

Since hard work and business were in my background, I was confident I could run my own company if the chance presented itself. I changed jobs and worked as a zone manager for a company that supplied its

products to the public through vending machines. It wasn't too many years until an opportunity arose for me to buy my own distributorship in Indiana. Soon I was running my own vending business franchise sending trucks across Indiana to deliver products and collect monies. It grew fast, doubled, then tripled in revenues. So did the bills and the work. We added employees, vending machines and trucks to cover the routes. Again, I was working long hours keeping everything running. But by then I had acquired the skills to do multiple things and was quite handy. My wife worked with me in the business running the office. Everything seemed good for a while.

It was during this time that Frances and I went to Tulsa, OK for a healing seminar. I knew I was not walking with the Lord as I should. Work was my master. I went to church, but all my time and attention went to my work and family. I knew this was not right. I needed to get things into the right order – God first, family and lastly, work. When they gave an altar call, I went forward and rededicated my life to the Lord.

Frances and I attended a local church and made lifelong friendships. It was the start of a new journey in learning about this God who was my Lord and Savior. I soon discovered this amazing God on earth today in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Frances received the infilling of the Holy Spirit first, then a couple of years later, after observing her life, I received the Holy Spirit infilling me.

But in my business, as in many businesses, cash flow became an issue. Struggles arose that seemed insurmountable no matter how hard I worked. The challenges remained, but there was a peace that passed all understanding that abided and remained upon Frances and myself throughout those years. Eventually I sold the vending business and started my own Handyman services.

Here are some lessons I learned. I made it a point to put God first. I always tried to quit work at a decent hour. That left time to give God and my family. As a result, I participated in the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International for many years serving as the President for 20 of those years, and traveled to meetings and conferences in Indiana plus hearing many outstanding Christian

conferences in Indiana plus hearing many outstanding Christian leaders.

One of my guiding principles in business has always been to make friends – not customers. I prayed with and for them. I led many to the Lord.

Another guiding principle has been to seek the Lord. Do what only you can do and let Him do what only He, God, can do with and for you. There is nothing to fear. He will always lead you, care and provide for you, and ensure your needs are met.

I want to leave this encouragement with you as you go through your own struggles. Just when you think you can't make it any longer or there's not enough, He will take care of you. You can trust Him.

Bill

P.S. Read my wife, Frances' Testimony on page 52.

CHAPTER 18

SEARCHING FOR TRUE IDENTITY

My life spun out of control on alcohol and drugs.

I totally gave up on myself and everyone else gave up on me.

Alcohol and drugs caused a lot of pain in my life. At first it was a learned behavior that I had seen through mentors and people that I looked up to. I started using drugs and drinking to mask the pain that was in my heart from my youth. My choices kept digging me deeper and deeper into depression and trouble, but it never really solved the problems of my heart. It only continued to cause more pain and hurt.

I had been in a lot of trouble from drugs, hurt a lot of loved ones from drinking, and spun out of control on meth until eventually I totally gave up on myself. It took hitting the absolute bottom and everyone giving up on me before I realized that I needed to change my destructive pattern. I didn't realize that what I was doing was only hurting myself. I just knew that I was tired of living the life I was living. So I started going to A.A meetings and started changing the choices I was making.

I was clean and sober for four years. Feeling it was time to start a family, I met my wife. We had our son and got involved in church. We bought a house and I even went back to school to receive my bachelor's degree.

This was the first time I had ever been involved in anything like church. Doors were opening for us. We started a drug and alcohol meeting named P.A.T.H ministries, "People Addicted to Hope." It was created to help others who had been through the same addictions that we had been through. We even became part of the leadership team.

Life was good.

I was learning a lot about God and finally, making right choices. As we grew in the church, it was placed on my heart that I didn't believe in some of the standards that were being taught. It became confusing. We ended up leaving the church causing us to feel heartbroken. This was a very hard decision, but it was one that I was certain God wanted us to do.

I really felt God wanted us to focus on having a true relationship with Him at home. I didn't want to bring my family into another church. There needed to be healing. There was a feeling of separation between me and my wife. A few months later our marriage ended. I lost everything that I had fought for, including my family, my self-worth and my sobriety. I turned right back to the things that I knew would mask the pain - drugs and alcohol. For a year and a half, I had the battle of my life. I was grief stricken, in despair, and upset with God. I turned from Him not realizing that He was there for me, carrying me through the storm the whole while.

During this period God really started showing me my true identity. Through a series of events, the Lord put me in the right places until eventually He point blank told me who I am and showed me what I was searching for. He said, "Jason, it is not confusing!" He told me that He loved me, He had always been here, He wanted a true relationship with me, and that He was proud of me.

Looking back, I can see the events that happened in my life that caused me to search in the wrong areas. My parents weren't perfect, my wife wasn't perfect, my pastor wasn't perfect, and I wasn't perfect. God has shown me that in my youth I was filling a missing void through women, drinking, drugs, and friends. In my mid adulthood I was filling a void through material prosperity, religion, and stature. Those things do not matter as they can be taken away in the blink of an eye. He wants a real relationship with me - nothing more; nothing less. He showed me that what I'm searching for can't be filled through drugs, drinking, food, money, friends, church, or any kind of works. What I am searching for is the knowledge of who I am in Christ.

If you are reading this book, then you understand that there will be storms in our lives. Some of these storms will be caused from other people's choices; some will be from our own choices. Although there is a lot of uncertainty in this life, I am certain of one thing. Jesus Christ loves you and He has a calling in your life. You have a choice and here is your choice, "Are you going to try to do it on your own or are you going to give Jesus control of your life?" It's not that confusing. Just know that He loves you.

Thank you Father,

Jason

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Day Of Salvation

How do I get saved from the curse of the law? How do I get saved from being forever separated from God? How do I get saved from the Fires of Hell?

1. Admit that you have broken God's Law.
2. Ask God to forgive you.
3. Confess Jesus as the Son of God.
4. Confess that Jesus died on the cross for your sins.
5. Confess that Jesus arose from the dead.

The Bible says:

“For salvation that comes from trusting Christ — which is what we preach --- is already within easy reach of each of us; in fact, it is as near as our own hearts and mouths. For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord, and believe in your own heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in his heart that a man becomes right with God; and with his mouth he tells others of his faith, confirming his salvation. For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect; they all have the same Lord who generously gives his riches to all those who ask him for them. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Romans 10:8-13

This is GOOD NEWS!

For more “Real Life Stories,” turn to the next page. To get saved, go to page 92.

CHAPTER 19

ALWAYS AN OUTCAST UNTIL CRACK TOOK ME IN

Crack took me to hell, jail, and back, all because of Crack.

I was selling ... 45 years old ... facing eighty years of prison time.

The outsider, the outcast, with low self-esteem; yes, that was me. School was horrible. It left me feeling lonely. I even tried to bleach my skin to look like the others in my all white school and my all white neighborhood in which my African American family had moved for us to live a better life.

How could this be? I was always trying to do what I was supposed to do and was raised in church where I found others who looked like me. I knew there was a God. I knew about Him, but did not know Him.

My home life was good. I couldn't ask for better parents. Daddy's little girl, spoiled and loved just as I was. Home was my safe place. But I quickly learned even within my family, especially with my extended family, there seemed to be comparisons: light skinned versus dark skinned.

I never shared these things with my parents and I never asked God, "Why me?" I was not angry at God, but hurt and confused which later turned into painful anger, rejection, depression, and shyness that plagued my childhood, throughout my school years.

After graduation, Mother sent me to modeling school and that helped me overcome my inhibitions. My mother designed beautiful clothing which brought out my natural beauty and I received lots of praise and affirmation. I was told that Black Models were more stunning. I was good at modeling. That praise and affirmation felt good. I began looking for acceptance from the world.

Eventually, I married. My husband and I had two beautiful children. Miracles occurred during that time. Once, I woke up in the night when our house was on fire. Awakening my husband, we grabbed our two children and somehow found our way through the smoke and flames. The firemen couldn't believe we got out. Another time, a drunk driver hit my car. I spent three months in a neck brace. My forehead took 36 stitches. Again, my life was spared. Another miracle occurred when I was healed of Crohn's disease. Later my husband and I divorced.

Throughout this time, I was trying to find Christ and joined with a group of others whom I thought were legitimate seekers. It all sounded so good in the beginning, but turned out to be a cult whose aim was to make followers and control us. My brother knew it was not right. God finally opened my eyes, showed me the truth, and I left.

At age 31, I became a successful business woman with my own beauty shop, my own line of makeup, and did well financially.

One year later, I met a man whom I previously had known. He gave me all the attention I could have ever wanted or imagined from a man. It took a while for me to understand that it wasn't me he cared about, but it was what I had. I had a home and a constant income to support his crack habit. Soon, I was smoking, also. I would make the money, he would go out, buy the crack, and we would smoke it.

Crack took its toll. When I stopped paying the house payments, Mother asked, "What's going on?" Soon, I put him out! I went to rehab and got clean. After being clean for a year, the cycle started again. Only by this time, I became friends with the dealers and began selling for them to support my own habit. The dealers liked it because

I wouldn't smoke up the dope they gave me to sell and sometimes they would bring food. I would cook a big dinner and they would hang out at my house. That's when I met my next husband. When we met, I was selling crack and he was selling weed. After we married, he decided to take over the crack business also. After several abusive words and controlling actions, I decided I wanted to be clean. He flew off the handle, threatened me and to shoot up the house if anyone came around. I lost my business. It was just my kids and me. We had no friends. I had to go into hiding because his attitude was, "If I can't have you, no one else can."

Eventually, it all died down and I went back to my home. My kids grew up. I had my needs met as I was selling again. The drug dealers protected me. Life was good, or so I thought. But the day came when I was babysitting my grandson who was six months old. I had just popped some dope, oblivious to the fact that I was under surveillance by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). To escape the more severe charge of dealing, I never bagged the drugs up until I had an order. But this day, I told my drug dealer to bag it up because I didn't have time to do it. The DEA was watching as he delivered it to my house. BUSTED! The charges mounted including a charge for dealing drugs from my house which sat beside a private school. At 45 years old, I went to court facing seven Felony counts totaling eighty years of prison time.

But my worst fears were not realized. When I went before the Judge, all the charges were dropped but one. He sternly said, "Don't let me see you here again. If I see you again, you will get twenty years in prison!" Since I was dealing drugs beside a private school, I had to give up my house and was placed on probation for a year. Upon release from jail, I wanted to be different. I started going to church and gave my life to Christ. I did everything a good Christian was supposed to do. I was on the praise team and singing in the choir. I was faithful in church attendance. I was doing everything I knew to do. How could anything go wrong now?

While still on probation, driving down the road after being clean for

a year and a half, I have no memory of what happened. But, when I came to myself, I was in a dope house, took some drugs and relapsed. I had never been angry at God before. Now I was enraged. “God, I gave my life to Christ. I am doing everything right with You! Why did you let me relapse?”

On that very weekend, I was called in by the probation officer for drug testing. Drugs were found in my system, a violation of my probation. Sent to jail, knowing I was facing twenty years in prison, I anxiously waited for a court date to be set. Each week I called on the jail’s phone to check for my date. Week one – not in the system; week two – not in the system; week three – not in the system. By week seven, I was perplexed. What was happening? The other prisoners I was with, were addicts, prostitutes, and gang bangers in for assault, check fraud, etc. As amazing as it sounds, a group of them watched over me. I prayed for them. They were drawn to me. Actually, it was like I was in the ministry in jail. Was I lost in the woodwork? So far, I had stayed in good spirits. Now, something came over me. Why was everyone coming and going, but not me?

Soon, a day came when sadness, depression and a desolate miserable feeling of forlornness overwhelmed me. I cried from the depths of my being. I sobbed off and on all day and night. I didn’t clean up or get dressed. No one bothered me. I asked God, “Why are You ignoring me. Why after all I am doing for you, are you not paying attention to me?” It was like I gave up. All the past rejection, negative emotions, and lack of joy in life crashed in on me.

My friend, whom I used to get high with, put money in my jail account weekly. I bought a head phone and listened to the radio at night. Crying all day, totally exhausted, I fell into a troubled sleep. Generally, my bunk mate would reach over and turn off my radio. But this night, she did not turn it off. It was 2 A.M. I sat straight up on my cot. A song called, “I Understand”, was playing by Smokie Norful.

That was a life changing moment. Before the song played, I could not understand what was happening. After the song ended, there was no doubt. It was God speaking to me answering the questions I had. I

felt peace like never before. Promptly at 7 A.M., I was called to go to court. When my lawyer stood up before the judge, the judge leaned back in his chair and said, “Get her out of here!” Seventeen hours later, I walked out. Time served!

So now, how do I live my life? I live with the awareness that I was guilty. They had an open and shut case. I sold drugs to a confidential informant. No one could understand how I walked out of that courtroom, including my lawyer.

Now I live like the “one leper” out of the ten in Luke 17: 11 – 19, where Jesus healed the ten lepers. Nine ran off to tell what Jesus has done. But the “ONE” came back and told Jesus, “Thank you for healing me.” I am that “ONE!” Now the Lord has given me a passion for the lost, the addict and the incarcerated. My way of reaching people is through the ministry of dance and sharing my testimony every chance I get. The Bible says, “They overcome by the word of their testimony and the blood of the Lamb.” I could have been locked up or dead. But I’m alive. What God has done for me; He can do for you.

Kathy

CHAPTER 20

UNDER A GENERATIONAL CURSE, DOOMED TO FAIL

Mom was in prison fourteen years.

Dad was in prison twelve years ... he later overdosed and died on Father's Day.

It all started when I was just a young child. My mother had been taken to prison for a total of fourteen years. My father had spent a total of twelve years in prison as well. After he got out, he ended up back in a rehab center where he then overdosed and died on Father's Day. In the world's perspective, I was doomed and did not stand a chance at success.

I was "raised" by my grandmother and her husband, who was an abusive alcoholic. On my grandfather's drunken nights, I often took blows from him for sticking up for my "worthless" mother among other abuses that I do not want to mention. I was full of hurt and anger due to growing up without both of my parents. I was even more enraged with things that were happening at home.

On New Year's Eve in 2003, my grandfather came home drunk and began abusing me. I ended up stabbing him with a knife six times in self-defense. At fifteen years old, this was my first criminal charge. I was facing attempted murder. To me, life seemed so unfair. It was him that should have been locked up, not me. After being sent to a juvenile center for a year and sitting there all alone in solitary confinement, I got out and began trying to fill all of the voids that were in my heart. I ended up pregnant and dropping out of school. As a sophomore in

high school, I used meth throughout my entire pregnancy. Then, I gave birth to a very healthy baby, by the grace of God, and got to take him home. Shortly after bringing the baby home, I began using meth through a needle and this went on for many more years. I had another child five years later and I took a break from using drugs. Thereafter, I was back using drugs again. My IV drug use of meth, opiates, heroin, and any other drug that I could get my hands on went on for many more years. I acquired several more felony charges in the meantime. These charges were battery, assault, drug, and reckless paraphernalia charges. I was running wild and I confessed with my mouth that I was serving Satan. I realize now that every event in my life that had taken place ultimately stemmed from hurt and anger. I was full of evil and wickedness. I attempted to take my daughter's dad's life. I stabbed him two inches from his heart. I do believe that God was with me then. He lied to the police about the situation and told them that he had gotten jumped. The Lord again, saved me from many more years in prison as He did while I was in several drug busts where the houses were raided.

I was very violent and reckless. The Department of Child Services were at my door. I often had other cases with them. The good Lord was on my side then too! I was not worthy to be a mother to my children and did not deserve to have them in my care. I taught my son how to curse and scoff at the authorities. I often left bags of drugs, pipes, and needles laying around. The only points of sobriety in my life besides now, is when DCFS (Department of Child and Family Services) were involved in my house. God protected my children throughout these situations.

After a few years, my daughter's father and I separated. It was around this time my father overdosed on Fentanyl, on Father's Day. My life was a mess as it had always been.

One day when I was dropping my kids off for a visit, there was a fight that broke out between myself, my ex, and his girlfriend. The police came and we were all arrested on the spot. Then, social services came and took my children away. I felt hopeless and lost. This is where I began to get worse. I started selling drugs for the first time in my life. I

was making trips out of state to buy and sell the drugs. I was also taking part in an interstate retail theft in between my drug running. I gave up on life and thought there was nothing else left to lose.

Six long months after losing my children and running crazy, God showed up to me like he did to Paul on the road to Damascus. He removed the scales from my eyes and revealed Himself to me. He carried me in His loving arms into the front doors of Mission Teens. From there, my life, the good Lord had changed forever. There, I began my road to sobriety. I reflected back on all the events that has happened to me. It helped me realize how heart broken and traumatized I really was. I did some soul searching there and truly sought the Lord out. I had to come face-to-face with my demons. I realized the things that I had done and the consequences for my actions. One thing that I had to accept was that I gave up my children rather than losing them and that I might have let too much time go by to get them back. I realized all I had left was the Lord, but that was enough.

I found out I was pregnant with my third son. After arriving at the House of Hope, I could not believe God had given me another chance at being a mother. I admit, I was very nervous and scared. My other children had been removed from my care. I had not heard a word about them for six long months after being there. Finally, after the six months being at the House of Hope, one year after they were removed from my care, my daughter walked in the door for a visit. Also, I got a visit with my son which took place shortly after that. Both of them had been separated and put in foster care. The caseworker told me I would be lucky to get them back. I kept seeking the Lord and praying.

On a Monday night, a few months later, the caseworker called to tell me they were not going to take my rights away. PRAISE THE LORD! I kept doing what I was doing. God had started giving back to me what was taken away, stolen by the enemy.

About two months later, I left the House of Hope and went to a homeless shelter where a new journey began.

I was ready. It was time for me to come out of seclusion and begin making a life for myself. I got a new job while one of my dear friends helped with babysitting and helped lead me spiritually. I continued to grow in the Lord and started living my life as a new creation. I got married in May of 2015. I also got pregnant with my fourth child.

In July 2015, I got full custody back of my daughter. I have now been sober and saved for two years and five months. I am now happily married serving God and leading my children in the Lord. My oldest son is in the custody of his father, but we get visits on the weekends or whenever we want. The other three are in my constant care being trained up in the Lord. My life now is beyond blessed. To the world, it looked like I was a lost cause destined to live a life in prison or even death like my parents.

In conclusion, God had something much bigger in store for me. He gave me hope and a future beyond what I could have imagined. The generational curse was broken. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. God has always had His hands on me. He was only allowing me to go through preparation. I would love to encourage people with my life story and give them the hope that Jesus gave to me. In the darkest moments, He is there, and if you call upon Him, He will hear you and deliver you out of all your troubles.

Kayla

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It's Time To Pray

If you have already confessed your sins and cried out to God, you are saved. If you have not, it's time that you do. Please pray this right now:

Dear God,

I acknowledge You as the Creator of all things. I admit that I am a sinner, and I deserve the Fires of Hell. I kneel at Your feet and ask for Your mercy and forgiveness of my sins. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your son. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins and I believe that You raised Him from the dead. Jesus, please come into my heart and fill that place in my heart that belongs only to You. Jesus, I declare You Lord of my whole life today. I ask you to show me my life purpose, plan and destiny for which I was born. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and with all the gifts you have for me. I will confirm my salvation by telling others what You have done for me. Thank You for saving me and giving me abundant life!

Pray this prayer to your Father from Matthew 6:9-13:

My Father in Heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as *it is* in heaven.
Give me this day my daily bread.
And forgive me my trespasses,
As I forgive those who trespass against me.
And lead me not into temptaion,
But deliver me from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

For more “Real Life Stories,” go to the next page. To find out what to do now that you’re saved, go to page 103.

CHAPTER 21

DRIVEN TO WORRY

I had driven myself to worry about things constantly to stay ahead of life.

It became too much ... I found myself in the hospital with a stroke, brain aneurism, and coma.

God, who I hoped was real, revealed Himself to me.

By the year 2000, I had become a high school graduate who had made it to a high level management position with a good salary. Along with the job came plenty of difficulties. With tight deadlines and difficult customers, came long hours and weekends away from home to stay on top of the workload.

I was ready to be faced with many storms in my life that would lead to tragedies. In 2003 my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer which scared the entire family. I needed to explain to my two young children what Mommy was going through as her treatments caused her to lose her hair and make her very sick. Death was a part of our lives as the boys wondered and asked, “Is Mom going to die?” It is hard to explain how this made me feel.

As the leader of the household, I believed it was my responsibility to hide fear and be the strength. I would answer my kids’ questions as well as I could, but they heard the same things from friends and family who would talk with us and show genuine concern.

After making it through the treatments and surgery we were looking forward to some relief as life started over. I continued to work demanding jobs. As the boys grew up I took the time to coach their sports. I loved my family without condition.

My temper started becoming short even though my life included my children. Bills were piling up. In 2006 we were devastated once again when we were told during a routine doctor visit that the doctor saw a new mass in her lungs. It was stage four breast cancer which doesn't carry a high level of confidence towards a high mortality rate.

Once the series of doctor bills for these procedures were added to the first ones we started falling further and further behind in our bills. One night we pulled into home after a trip to town and realized something was missing from the driveway. "Where's the boat Dad?" asked my younger son. I answered him in a way that would lead him to believe I was unsure, but I knew. We had been receiving notices on all of our bills as we were falling further and further behind to pay them on time. The good income had led to several worldly possessions that we were on the verge of losing.

We filed bankruptcy shortly after my wife's second illness to get out of debt. It was a very emotional time for us as we faced humiliation. I started to increase my praying to God that we would be taken care of. My prayers would often lead to asking for my wife to stay alive long enough for the kids to graduate because I didn't want to lose her. I loved her so very much. The part about graduation was a selfish prayer because I didn't want to face life alone.

Prayers were being answered because shortly after the bankruptcy we were led to a Christian woman who lived in Portland with a house in our home town. She was willing to take a chance on us and offer us a land contract. We left all of our stuff behind and started over.

We pressed on. As I searched for the "golden carrot" in my career that was going to lead to financial security in our lives, I had taken a job with a large company as a contract Development Manager making a very good wage - but it didn't come with good insurance. I ended up in the hospital with Cellulitis, a disease that caused blistering and pain in my legs. Two weeks in the hospital led to yet another round of impossible medical bills but we had learned our lesson, made payoff arrangements and were paying it back.

We were both believers in God. But speaking for myself, I would classify myself as a "hopeful believer" with uncertainty, even

considering the work He did in us to find a house.

I had left the job behind and started another good one with a long commute. After four years at this job, in June of 2013, I was pulling into work while on the phone with a bill collector making arrangements for a payment. I wanted to make the prior month payment which wasn't automatically taken per the agreement and give her the current month. I was told "we have a problem". My credit card had expired nullifying the agreement leading to a higher payment and possibly court. My temper erupted on the phone. I couldn't help thinking, "After this entire struggle to get a little bit ahead – NOW THIS?!"

After I screamed at the bill collector, as I was parking my car I started to feel dizzy. Something was happening. Was it a heart attack? Was I dying? Without understanding what was taking place I made my way into the office and passed a coworker at his desk. "Something's wrong with me," I said as I made my way to the desk. I sat down. Sweat started to pour from my face. I called out to him, "Get help."

It wasn't long and the first responders appeared at my desk. As they stood around me I can remember one of them with her hand placed on my back saying, "This is not good." I was clearly in trouble as my boss and the General Manager stood there with the same concern on their faces.

EMS showed up and I started to tell them, "I'm okay, what's everyone worried about?" I was taken to the local hospital and released with vertigo and a medication to help it. I went back by the office and called my boss to tell him I would be fine; that vertigo was a treatable thing.

I wasn't going to be fine as I sat in my house with a terrible headache leading me to ask my wife to take me to the large hospital in Fort Wayne.

Tests were conducted to show that I was a four hundred-pound man who had a stroke. As I was recovering from the stroke my brain started bleeding. A Surgeon was on call over the weekend from another hospital that knew how to perform a rare procedure where

platinum coils are placed into the ruptured vessel to stop the bleeding.

My family was terrified as the surgeon performed the procedure with his team. My kids were once again facing death of a parent. This time it was their dad and they weren't sure I would come through. My friends and family knew of the grave situation I was in.

The procedure was finished and I spent weeks in an induced coma. Then a couple of months later I started rehabilitation learning to walk, think, and talk again.

I was visited by my mom's pastor and wife who prayed for God to bring me angels to fight. My life turned around on this day as God's presence was very clear. I had a vision of a very large cloaked angel in my room that I saw more than one time over the course of my stay in the hospital.

I was transferred to a rehabilitation facility where I started learning I was sharing space with God. I would tell my wife I was going to be okay and that God was with me. By the end of 2013, I was released to go home. It was an amazing feeling of freedom as I started over.

During my home rehabilitation I had joined my second two mile walk where I ran into an ex-football coach who walked with me. I shared my experience with him. It had become an experience and relationship God wanted me to have because a couple of months later on the golf course, the coach and I engaged in a conversation about God. He asked if I had ever been saved? I didn't know what it meant. He explained "You can ask God to walk with you and show you things that you wouldn't see otherwise." "All I have to do is ask?" I questioned. He pulled out a Gideon Bible that he had brought that day and opened up the back cover to read scriptures to me that led to the part about making a commitment to live forever with eternal life. I thought it was silly to not want to live forever. I knew God was real because of my experience in the hospital with the angel and the peace that was given to me and the strength to push through the rehabilitation from a person who could not lift a leg to a guy playing golf just a year later. I was being healed by God!

I prayed the prayer because I wanted a change in my life. I wanted the change to take place in my heart. As I sit here a couple of years later I can say – it has! I'm no longer a man of worry. My ill will towards others is gone. I love humanity and I realize I am living in a spirit filled world both good and bad. People aren't difficult to face but some are led by wrong spirits and are lost.

Whenever the enemy attempts to intervene in my life I command
“Stop, in the name of Jesus who died for us!”

Now I am a man who is anxiously awaiting heaven. But there is work to do here to grow the kingdom of God.

There are parts in this book that will allow you to pray for God's direction, but take my advice if you pray; pray from your heart. God knows what you need and how you feel.

Enjoy your journey and share the good news of Jesus and what He will do for us.

God bless you - Mike

CHAPTER 22

DESPERATE FOR APPROVAL

I did not grow up “in church,” though my parents did teach and follow the Ten Commandments.

My paternal grandfather sometimes preached at the Pentecostal church, but my parents never attended there. The people I saw there seemed angry and intimidating to me. I remember visiting a couple of churches with my family around the holidays, but it was never a regular part of life in my home.

A good friend invited me to go to church with her and her family, so I attended a Nazarene church for a couple of years, until I was about 14. My friend’s parents went out of their way to pick me up and take me home when I know it must have been inconvenient at times. I was able to thank them a few years ago.

I begin my story here because it may be important for you to know that my salvation, though complete and everlasting, did not bring about a relationship with God that I could feel and depend upon as my life went on.

I asked the Lord into my heart during a Sunday school meeting. The thing I remember most about the experience is how self-conscious I felt. I did not feel any closer to God after I was “saved” than I had felt before. After I started high school, class choices varied. I was unable to spend as much time with my church-going friend and slowly stopped attending church.

I am the second of four children and the only girl of my siblings. I was a shy child. My personality seeks to establish agreement and collaboration in any circumstance. This is true to such an extent that I have gone to great lengths at times to avoid confrontation. It is my

nature to be helpful. I enjoy laughing loudly and can chat with nearly anyone I meet, but I am not “the life of the party” and I am rarely the one to begin a conversation with someone I don’t know.

Circumstances in my life caused me to become nearly desperate for approval. This applied to every aspect of my life, from school, to parents, to friendships. My sense of my own value as a person was totally dependent upon what I saw as my own “desirability” in the eyes of others.

I worked hard in school, my grades were good. I did my chores at home and never had any disciplinary problems. I required very little attention from my parents. Seeking approval also means not making waves, not complaining when times are tough, and not saying “I need help.” My last two years of high school were difficult. I struggled with depression, missing my older brother who was away at school, and just trying to find a direction for my life. My brother’s roommate committed suicide. Friends died in two separate car crashes, one of which gravely injured my middle brother. My parents separated during my senior year. Even though I had some good friends, none of them were aware of my struggle and none of them were close enough to be aware of how much time I spent alone.

I tried to find hope or guidance from the Bible but it just seemed foreign to me. I could not see myself in the future. I considered various methods of suicide. I remember one night I was contemplating the aftermath of my suicide as the deciding factor in my choice of means - what is least messy, while still fool-proof? As I mulled-over these questions I thought to myself, “I should not do this. Things will get better.” The memory of this thought was so clear, I still remember it today, forty years later.

So I just kept going. My parents eventually reunited. I met a young man who loved the music I loved, shared my sense of humor, and had eyes that melted my heart. We were married two days before our first daughter was born. We had some very lean years early in our marriage. As our daughters grew, both suffered episodes of major depression. My husband and I both worked full-time jobs, faced the challenges of life with its ups and downs individually, and as a couple. My husband

had grown-up in church but had been estranged from the church since his late teen years. As our children grew, we allowed them to visit church with their friends at times, but never had an experience which led us to seek a “church home.”

Unexpectedly, my older brother died of a heart attack while alone on his lunch break at work. At 42 years old, he was the picture of health. He was a truly generous person and spent a lot of time with my grandmother, who lived nearby. He helped my dad with various construction projects, including the building of an impressive garage at my parent’s house. He had a gentle spirit and an understated, incredible sense of humor.

At that time, he was also the only member of my family who had altered his life in an effort to be the person God wanted him to become. His heart had been broken as a young man and he never married. While moving his belongings out of his house, I could see how big a role God played in his life. He had his Bible on the coffee table with notes from scripture studies he had done. He had tithed faithfully to a ministry which was televised, allowing him to remain connected when he traveled for work.

His death left a hole in my heart. My parents struggled to come to grips with his death. We tried to support each other. My husband and daughters were very understanding as well. My parents started attending a grief support group at a church near them. Since they live about two hours away, we spoke often on the phone but were not able to spend much time together in person. I continued to live day by day, doing alright, but just barely, and I knew it. I felt like I was hanging-on by a thread. I had a vision of sorts, just a picture that came to my mind, of me sitting alone in a row-boat with no oars in the middle of a lake. It was dark and somewhat foggy. I could see lights from houses on the shore and I could see that there were people because they would sometimes pass in front of the lights, but they were very far away. I knew that they would never hear me, even if I screamed as loudly as I could.

This picture captured the way I was feeling. I knew I had to find help. I described the vision to my husband and told my family that I was going to find a church. My daughter called about a week later and asked if I wanted to attend a nearby church with her that morning. She had a friend who attended there who had invited her.

The people were friendly and seemed normal. I loved the music. The songs they sang spoke of a kind and loving God. When they prayed they spoke to God with reverence and love, rather than fear. The sermons made me want to know more, but it was the worship music that captivated me.

One evening, during the worship time at church, I was thinking, praying and thanking God that I was there. God spoke to my heart that He had brought me there. It was unmistakable! I had heard others speak of hearing from the Lord but never expected that He would speak to me.

I was amazed but also completely content to keep this communication secret, just between me and God. I believe that God would not allow anyone to cast doubt on what I had experienced. I became a regular attendee, even going to “discipleship training” classes on Wednesday evenings. Those Wednesday meetings were like a mid-week boost and helped to keep my focus on learning more about the relationship God wants to have with us.

I always have music on in my car. If I am driving alone, commuting to school, work, or to visit family, I will have music on and will sing-along. If I can't find music which suits my mood, I'll turn the radio off and maybe sing or hum a bit to myself. One day as I was driving along singing bits of a worship song, the Lord spoke to me, saying that the voice I heard telling me not to commit suicide, was not my voice, but His.

I had not thought of that night for countless years. It was wonderful to hear from the Lord that He was protecting me when I was unaware. It also confused me to recall looking for help from the Bible and being unable to find it there because I didn't always understand what I was reading or where to find the answers. What I knew at that time was that God loved me and would help me make it through whatever the

future might bring.

Friendships I had made at church were so valuable to me. Even though it seemed we had very little in common, we could pray together for greater understanding of the Lord's work in our own lives and a closer relationship with Him. In this way, we're very much alike, regardless of our families, work lives, and personalities. Praying for each other and seeing the results of those prayers helped me to understand that the Lord's timing is always better than mine and that His plans for us are much, much better than the plans we have for ourselves.

I know the Lord strengthens me. He is my rock. It may feel like everything is crumbling around me but I know that His Word will always stand, that He who is in me is greater than he who is in the world.

I know the peace that surpasses understanding. I have immersed myself in it when chaos threatened to overwhelm me. We are not promised lives free of storms. We are promised a comforter to be with us through them all. All glory to God.

I know that He hears my prayers, that He knows the desires of my heart before I speak them. I know that my home is blessed with His Presence, that my husband and I love each other better because we both love Him.

I have been blessed over recent years to hear many personal stories of how God has touched individuals, each one miraculous. Each one different. But God is the same. He loves us. Each one.

Diane Thrawley

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You Are A New Person

The Bible says:

“When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun!”
2 Corinthians 5:17

Say this:

I am a new person. I have a new life, a future and a God centered life.

The Bible says:

“All these new things are from God, who brought us back to Himself through what Christ Jesus did. And God has given us the privilege of urging everyone to come into His favor and be reconciled to Him.”
2 Corinthians 5:18

God bridged the gap of sin between you and Him by Jesus dying on the cross. He now has given you the honor and privilege of telling people how to find that same favor with God through what Jesus has done for them.

The Bible says:

“He died for all so that all who live — having received eternal life from Him --- might live no longer for themselves, to please themselves, but to spend their lives pleasing Christ who died and rose again for them.”

2 Corinthians 5:15

Jesus died so you could have eternal life with Him and our Father in Heaven. Jesus is calling you to now live for Him; doing those things with your life that would please Him.

To learn more about what you should now do, go to page 104.

What Do I Do Now?

1. Get a Bible and read it every day (start in the New Testament).
2. Find a church where you can grow in your faith.
3. Attend Bible studies and other spiritual meetings.
4. Pray every day.
5. Tell people what Jesus has done for you.
6. Write out your real life story, your testimony, and give it to people.
7. Make a public profession of your faith by being baptized in water.
8. Shout. Yes, Shout! Friend, you have something to shout about.
9. You've been set free. Death cannot hold you, and Hell can't have you.
10. You belong to God and no matter what happens in this life, walk together with Him. Talk to Him and know He is always with you. Someday, you will be together with Him in Heaven!

Welcome to the Family of God!!!

Church Outreach

Every member in every local church has a real life story (a testimony).

One of the most effective ways to teach Christians how to share their faith is to get them to write out their testimony (real life story) and share it as part of their everyday lifestyle.

Step By Step Ministry worldwide award winning evangelism teachings are available on DVD and cover the topic of sharing your testimony plus many, many more effective ways to witness. For more information and resources about witnessing call, write, or email:

Step By Step Ministries
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Indiana Regional Unity Gatherings

In December, 2012 as Jim Barbarossa prepared to speak a message at a Saturday night meeting, he kept hearing the word “Unity” over and over again in his spirit. Then God directed Jim to go look in an old file cabinet in his garage. To Jim’s amazement in the back of this old file cabinet were 30 messages Jim wrote as a baby Christian, 18 years earlier. One of those messages was on the topic of “Unity” in the Body of Christ.

Jim preached that “Unity” Message on December 22, 2012.

You can watch the “Unity” message video at our website:

www.step-by-step.org.

Shortly after preaching the “Unity” message, the Father told Jim to call a meeting of leaders, elders and 5-fold ministers for the purpose of joining hands and working together to equip the saints to go beyond the walls of our buildings to reach and disciple the lost.



On January 20, 2013 the Father brought together forty 5-fold ministers representing a diversity of 12 churches scattered throughout three Northwest Indiana counties, including the cities of Valparaiso, Porter, Chesterton, Portage, Gary, Michigan City, St. John, plus Hazelcrest, IL and Chicago, IL.

Four things all of the ministers present have in common is their love for Jesus, their desire for more of Jesus, a passion to reach lost souls and a hunger to see revival in our land!

One additional thing most of us, if not all, held in common, in the natural, we were all too busy to even consider attending this gathering in light of everything else we had to do.

But, we did attend and after introducing ourselves, we discussed the purpose of the gathering and then we began to pray as the Holy Spirit led.

Inter-mixed between the prayers, God spoke prophetically using various gifts

to confirm His call and purpose for the “Unity” Gatherings and what to expect in the future.

As we prayed we could sense a shift taking place in the atmosphere.

At one point a symbolic prophetic act took place as every person stood on their feet, symbolizing the army of God rising up. This was followed by the sounding of the Shofar accompanied by a declaration of war, as the army of God called upon our Leader with a “Unified” shout, “Jesus”!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

There was such freedom in the atmosphere. It was such a joy to see the 5-fold ministry gifts working in unity complimenting each other in the body of Christ!

I wish I could find words to express the fullness of this experience, but this is one of those times where words fail to fully describe what happened.

The meeting I just described has “birthed” in the following locations what we now call “Indiana Regional Unity Gatherings!”

For dates, times and exact locations, visit us on our website: www.step-by-step.org

Northwest Indiana/Chicagoland Regional Unity Gathering, Chesterton, Indiana

Central Indiana Regional Unity Gathering, Indianapolis, Indiana

LaPorte/St Joseph County Regional Unity Gathering, LaPorte, Indiana

Northeast Indiana Regional Unity Gathering, Angola, Indiana

South Central Indiana Regional Unity Gathering, Corydon, Indiana

Southwest Indiana Regional Unity Gathering, Paragon, Indiana

We believe these 6 Regional Unity Gatherings are the “firstfruits” of 20 or more that will be started in the State of Indiana.

Regional Unity Gatherings are not the planting of a new church.

Regional Unity Gatherings are not the starting of a new denomination.

Regional Unity Gatherings are calling God’s Leaders, across all denominational lines to join hands in unity and take the Gospel message Beyond the walls of our buildings, out into our cities to reach and disciple the lost. If you are God’s leader, no matter what your title is (bishop, elder, pastor, priest, apostle, teacher, missionary, sent one, evangelist, prophet, youth pastor, or some other), no matter

what part of the body you represent, no matter what denomination, no matter what stream, no matter what flow, God is calling us to join hands and carry His gospel into our cities and regions to reach and disciple the lost.

It is Time The lost people in our cities come to know God, through the love that we demonstrate for one another!! If we will come together and work in unity, God will Command His Blessing towards us! It is Time For the City Wide Church and Regional Church To Arise!

Regional Unity Gatherings Function As A 5-Fold Ministry Where Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors And Teachers Work Together To Equip The Saints To Do The Work Of The Ministry. Regional Unity Gatherings Are Part Of “The Church” With A Call To Come Along Side Other Parts Of “The Church” And Work In Unity With The Whole Body Of Christ To Move The Saints Beyond The Walls Of Our Buildings, Out Into The Community With The Training And Tools They Need To Reach And Disciple The Lost.

To help us fulfill our mission to reach the lost, disciple them and equip the saints we have 2 Free Resource tables in every Regional Unity Gathering.

Evangelism Resource Table : This table is filled with tracts, outreach gospel CDs, and Real Life Stories Christian Testimony Books . The people attending these Regional Unity Gatherings are encouraged to take these Free evangelism tools and use them over the next 30 days to reach the lost and come back with a report or testimony of what God is doing!

Discipleship or Equipping Table: This table is filled with books as well as messages on cds, and dvds. These messages are the best of the best and designed to equip or disciple the saints . Saints need a steady diet of faith building messages to be equipped and we encourage the saints to take these Free Resources for their personal growth and to then pass them on to help disciple or equip others . Regional Unity Gatherings provide the saints with the tools they need to reach and disciple the lost!

United Community Outreach :

In addition to equipping the saints to be effective witnesses and disciples in everyday life, we also want to bring the saints together from all the different parts of the Body of Christ in a City or Region to join hands and do, simple, yet effective outreach projects in the Community to touch lives and reach lost people!

You can see a sampling of these types of outreach projects on our DVD titled "Going Beyond The Walls - City Wide Church - How To Go Beyond The Walls Of Our Buildings As One Voice To Reach And Disciple The Lost In Our Cities".

Would you like to start a Regional Unity Gathering in Your region?

Do you want to know more about Regional Unity Gatherings?

You can watch the Regional Unity Gathering Vision casting message on our website at www.step-by-step.org.

Any Questions about starting a Regional Unity Gathering in Your City or Region give us a call 219-762-7589 or email jim@step-by-step.org.

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Notes:

To contact us, cut out and mail pages 111 and 112.
You may also call or email your comments or questions to us.

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