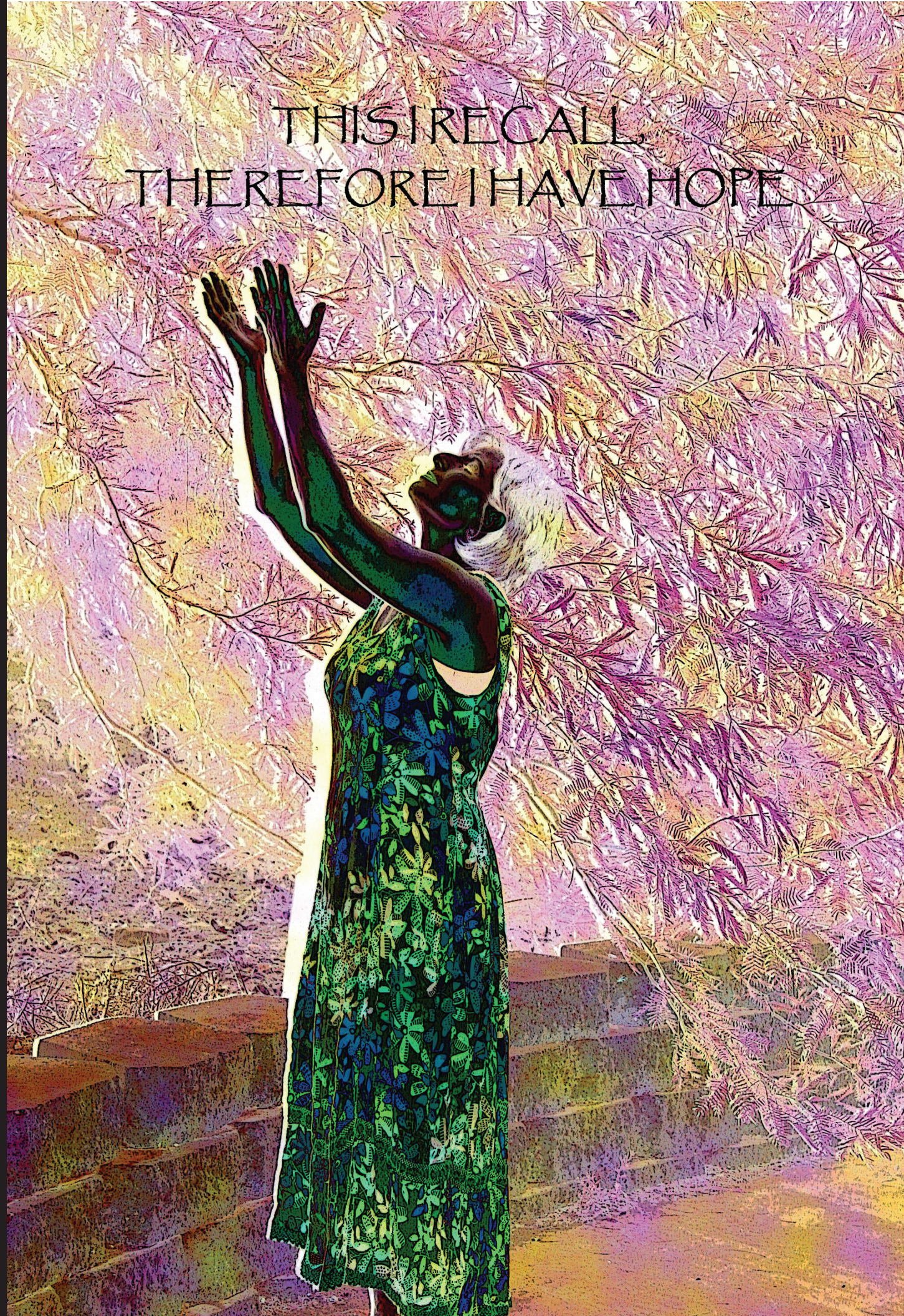


THIS I RECALL
THEREFORE I HAVE HOPE



This I Recall,
Therefore I Have
Hope

Overlook. Ruins overlooking Lake Cuomo, Italy, 2004. Sue Brooks



“External facts about a life can be researched generations later, but the inner life is irrevocably lost unless written during one’s lifetime.”

Nan Phifer, *Memoirs of the Soul: Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography*

We dedicate this book to our Lord, Jesus Christ, in whole-hearted praise and gratitude for who He is and for all He has done and continues to do in our lives.

“When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the night watches,
For You have been my help,
And in the shadow of Your wings
I sing for joy.”

(Psalm 63:6-7 NASB).

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About the Cover

The cover represents a posture of praise, thanksgiving, and worship of our loving, merciful God. It depicts our reaching out to Him in acknowledgment of who He is as our All in All. Because He has shown Himself faithful and true in the lives of His children through times of loss, pain, and extreme suffering, He has been glorified.

The photos were taken at night in a park with a digital camera. I then used Adobe Photoshop to add the colors and effects to enhance certain elements, such as the tree's leaves, the lighting, and the silhouette. It was important to me to have a tree be the backdrop of the image with the branches and leaves reaching down as the worshiper reaches up. The human image is a silhouette so that the focus is not on a person, but on the posture of a person on holy ground.

--Sue Brooks, Art Editor and Designer

Translations

AMP	<i>The Amplified Bible</i>
HCSB	<i>Holman Christian Standard Bible</i>
KJV	<i>King James Version</i>
NASB	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>
NLT	<i>New Living Translation</i>
Msg	<i>The Message</i>

Acknowledgments

My thanks go to many people, beginning with my husband, Suresh, who has given me extraordinary time and space to focus on *This I Recall*. I am grateful to my editorial staff for their faithful support: Georgia Herod for her editorial suggestions and daily give and take on every detail; Sue Brooks for her many creative contributions in photography and cover design; Brenda Reyes for the time she has given and her professional expertise; Sharmila Felix for her tireless proofreading and excellent suggestions for revision; Laura Stephens and Lisa Duce for their early draft proofreading; and for all of you who have encouraged and cheered me on. Bless you all!

--Diane Kulkarni, Managing Editor

Foreword



Over a coffee cup last week, I told my colleague that I had had a whimsical epiphany, more like a fantasy, that promised to transform Christian television into a compelling, world-changing medium. But after tossing the idea around for a while, we dismissed it as being silly, given the realities of broadcast television. Oh well.

Within a day, I had a preview copy of this volume in my hands and soon found an odd validation for my television whimsy.

The power of this book is not in its sole professional voice, that expert name who gains an easy book-jacket following, but in its chorus of ordinary voices. This is not to say that it is an amateurish attempt. On the contrary, it is compelling because the stories, while experienced by different people in differing places, are actually one story in many contexts. Authentically first-hand, bridging the ordinary with the extraordinary, these accounts piece together a quilt which, when viewed a few steps back, reveals the face of Christ. Maybe a 24-hour TV network of back-to-back personal testimonies was not as silly an idea as we had thought.

There is genius in Jesus' strategy to use many ordinary witnesses to reach a world. While we are conditioned to treat celebrity communicators with suspicion, it is hard to resist the authenticity of these many calm voices who have actually lived within the ark of God's lovingkindness as their unique storms raged about them. Now with their seas stilled, these dear ones have taken the opportunity to recount for our benefit how the gritty experience of life was itself overwhelmed by the sovereignty of God's grace.

Forget Christian television. Such are the stories that lay waiting here for you now.

Jim Catlin, Pastor,
Living Hope Christian Fellowship
November 2006

Fascinated with how things worked and aspiring to be an inventor, **Jim Catlin** earned two university degrees in Electrical Engineering and was employed by NASA and Hewlett-Packard Company as a principal researcher and as a research manager. But having become a follower of Jesus at age fifteen, his spiritual life eventually overtook his electrical fascinations, and after nearly twenty years engaged in technology, Jim followed Jesus' leading into fulltime pastoral ministry. He and his wife, Dorothy, and three of their four children live in Brigham City, Utah, where Jim pastors Living Hope Christian Fellowship.



Preface

“The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is His faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in Him! The Lord is good to those who depend on Him, to those who search for Him. So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord.’”

(Lamentations 3:19-26 Msg)

The idea for *This I Recall, Therefore I Have Hope* originally came to me after reading a presentation which my friend, Georgia Herod, planned to give to her church women’s group. She sent a draft to me for feedback. Her essay, “God’s Surprises,” which grew out of that talk, inspired me to sit down at the keyboard and begin remembering my own spiritual journey. Several writing sessions provided so much encouragement. Looking back, I recognized God’s guidance, His intervention, His provision, His unending love. I didn’t want to keep my story to myself—I wanted to share it and to read others’ stories. Eventually, the idea for a collection took shape. My hope is that our readers

will take the time to record their own memory of God’s loving intervention on the blank pages provided at the end of the book.

The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, provides the model for our holy remembering. He decided to pause in the midst of national and personal catastrophe to remind himself of God’s character and His faithfulness. Because of continuing sin, Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed, many of the people had died in the siege or others were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar as a fulfillment of the warnings God had given to the prophet (Jeremiah 19). Jeremiah was bereft and

hopeless, until he reminded himself of Who God is and what He promises those who seek Him and trust in Him. As he wrote, keeping his eyes on God, his hope returned, and his words continue to serve centuries later as a beacon for all of us who believe to recall our personal histories with our faithful God.

The contributors to this book have followed Jeremiah's example. We might have every reason to despair in a cruel world, but if we belong to God and He belongs to us, remembering gives us courage and inner joy to go forward. For each of the authors, writing has been therapeutic, inspiring a closer *and* a broader look at the miracle of salvation and the surprises of sanctification. Inner healing has taken place. Possibilities for deeper exploration through writing and new avenues of ministry have unfolded.

Likewise, the photographers who have contributed their work see God's hand in the beauty and majesty of Nature, His truth demonstrated in the combination of light, structures, settings, textures; the miracle of human life; and the unique animals He has created. Through their cameras' lenses, they view the world, selecting the right elements in a moment of time which connect them to God's Word for the day.

Together, we pray that our combined message will be a way of magnifying Jesus, just as He instructed: "*When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself*" (John 12:32 NLT).

Diane Kulkarni,
Managing Editor
November, 2006

Editorial Staff

- Diane Kulkarni, Managing Editor

Diane lives in Perry, Utah, with her husband, Suresh, a retired rocket scientist, originally from India. They have two daughters, Anjali, who lives in Las Vegas, NV, and Sharmila, who lives next door. She and Josh, her husband, have two children who keep Diane happily busy. She has been a Christian for 41 years and most of her writing reflects the journey of faith. Since coming to Utah in 1972, she has had a double passion: to spread the gospel message and to give all Christians a voice through writing. She began a writing/editing/workshop ministry at Living Hope Christian Fellowship and has also served the church as a women's Bible study leader. Diane has been a freelance writer for 24 years and has had her work published in newspapers, magazines, books, and academic publications. In 1987, she graduated from Weber State University in Ogden with a degree in English, and for the next seven years, she managed the campus Writing Center. In that capacity, she tutored hundreds of students of all abilities with writing assignments across the curriculum.

- Georgia Herod, Assistant Editor

Georgia resides with her husband, Jim, in Washington, Vermont, where he pastors the only church in the village. In 2004, they moved from Utah, where Jim had pastored Baptist churches for 24 years, with Georgia, his partner in ministry. In addition, she taught writing at Weber State and Utah State Universities, providing "forced opportunities for her students to write their stories and discover what they could do." For three years, she was the only English teacher at Christian Heritage School (CHS) in Ogden, teaching literature, language, and composition to students in grades 7-12. She ended her professional career in 2004 after serving as elementary principal for four years at CHS. Though she had written for herself for many years, Georgia had never written for public view until Diane Kulkarni challenged her to "practice what she preached" in her classes at Weber State. Thus began a journey into creative non-fiction, resulting in publication and prizes. Over the years, God has given Georgia a passion for His Word and its power to transform lives. She is a Bible teacher, conference speaker, women's ministry and missions leader, editor, writer, and mentor, as well as an avid reader. The Herods have two children and one granddaughter, who live in Kansas City, Missouri.

- Brenda Reyes, Layout and Design Editor

Brenda Reyes lives with her husband, Jeremy, in Brigham City, where they raise two small children, Nora May and Everett James. As a stay-at-home dad, Jeremy manages the household fulltime while Brenda works for Building God's Way. In her role as marketing director, she leads a marketing team who support both the 100+ staff members and a network of partners across the country. The team stays busy with the development/maintenance of direct mail, print material, training tools, website and multimedia. While project management and organizational systems take the most hours of her day, Brenda enjoys the quiet moments when she is able to pen some text, sharing the heart of the ministry with those who may be interested. Brenda earned her degree from Liberty University, concentrating on journalism, communications and business. Her work allows her to have an impact on growing churches and schools, but her passion is on the homefront where Brenda and Jeremy are training their children to love the Lord and know Him deeply. Jeremy has a business degree from Weber State University, leads worship at Living Hope Christian Fellowship and works on a volunteer basis with Living Hope Video Ministries. Together, they enjoy praise and worship, outdoor activities, and home improvement projects.

- Sharmila Felix, Copy Editor

Sharmila Felix and her husband, Josh, have been married for eleven years. After living in Northern California for five years, the Lord made it possible for them to move back to Utah. They are thrilled to be serving in their home church, Living Hope Christian Fellowship, spending time with old friends, and making new ones, and living next door to Sharmila's parents. Josh works for Building God's Way as an architectural designer, designing Christian churches and schools. Sharmila and Josh struggled through years of infertility; through this, they were able to experience God in a very real way. He has richly blessed them with two wonderful miracles: Madeleine, age 3 1/2, and Ian, nineteen months. Sharmila is thrilled to have the opportunity to be home with them fulltime, raising them to love Jesus, and to marvel in His ways. Daily, the children are a reminder of God's faithfulness, an evidence of His power to be the Ultimate Physician and Healer. Sharmila received her degree in psychology with an emphasis in child and family studies. She has a passion for the written word, especially when it glorifies God and reveals Him for Who He is. She enjoys taking pictures of her children, spending time with her family and friends, serving in various ministries in her church, and home decorating.

• Sue Brooks, Photography Editor and Photographer

As a photographer, Sue enjoys shooting landscape images when the lighting is dramatic; taking candid shots of people when what she sees is real and not masked; focusing on part of a whole thing as an image; and shooting and creating images that tell a story. She says that God's creation is beyond beautiful; it is "fearfully and wonderfully made." She feels compelled to capture some of it with the lens of her camera. Sue volunteers at The Mesquite Fine Arts Center in Mesquite, NV, as a past president and now board member, and for the last three years as chairwoman of The Mesquite Chili & Arts Festival. Sue, her husband, Bill, and their "youngest of ten" daughter, Charlotte, have lived in Mesquite since 2000. The 14th grandchild is due in December. Two married daughters, sons-in law, a granddaughter, and another on the way, have recently moved to Mesquite, which she counts as a blessing from the Lord. Sue came to Jesus in her late 30s, and nothing since then has been the same. God gave her a passion for His Word and a heart for women. She has been a Women's Bible study teacher for years and is the Women's Ministry director at First Baptist Church in Mesquite. Sue also enjoys co-teaching adult Sunday School. "There's nothing like seeing God's Word transform lives. I've witnessed many miracles," she says.

Photographers

• Phil Reyes

Phil has been married to Julie for 35 years. He is the father of four, grandfather of seven. The Reyes family moved to Brigham City from the country in New Hampshire in 2004 to be near their son and his family. Phil's background is in executive sales. Photography is his passion, which is part of a God-given ministry. He shares his faith whenever a door is opened through passing on his knowledge and skill with youth at the local youth center and with the elderly at the Senior Center. He teaches people how to use digital cameras and the computer software to enhance their photos.

• Lisa Wells

Lisa enjoys taking pictures of nature and children. Beautiful landscapes and wildlife shots remind her of God's creative hand. She loves getting shots of children with different expressions, which show the full spectrum of personality. Lisa formerly worked in the environmental consulting business, but is now a stay-at-home mom, raising her 20-month-old son, Tyler.

• Emma Woods

Emma (formerly Brooks) recently returned to live in Mesquite with her husband, Skyler. She is happy to be working as a secretary for a construction company and to be living near her mother and two of her sisters. Emma has also been a wonderfully expressive writer since childhood.



Raven at One Thousand Feet. Graphic from a photo. Bear River Bird Refuge, Brigham City, UT, 2006. Phil Reyes

Ballet Anyone? Bear River Bird Refuge, Brigham City, UT, 2006. Phil Reyes



“But ask the animals what they think—let them teach you; let the birds tell you what’s going on. Put your ear to the earth—learn the basics. Listen—the fish in the ocean will tell you their stories. Isn’t it clear that they all know and agree that God is sovereign, that He holds all things in His hand—Every living soul, yes, every breathing creature?”

(Job 12: 7-10 Msg)

“Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget none of His benefits;
Who pardons all your iniquities;
Who heals all your diseases;
Who redeems your life from the pit;
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;
Who satisfies your years with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.”

(Psalm. 103:1-5 NASB)

God's Surprises

Georgia Herod—Washington, VT



“Close your eyes and hold out your hands,” Daddy said when I ran to greet him as he returned from a trip to town. With eyes tightly closed, I eagerly thrust my small open hands before him. With heart pounding in anticipation, I could hardly keep my eyes closed. But I knew the “rules”—I had to try to identify the surprise before I opened my eyes.

Once Daddy had placed it in my hands, my fingers gently wrapped around it, turning it over and over, drawing on my limited experience to guess what the treasure was—perhaps a Butterfinger candy bar, a rubber ball, a jump rope, or a box of Cracker Jacks. Then, as if a spring had shot loose, I would blurt out my answer and pop open my eyes, squealing, jumping up and down with delight.

I loved surprises then—and I love surprises now:

- a friend asking me to lunch for no reason,
- a “thinking of you” card,
- a hug from a child,
- a call from a loved one who lives far off, or
- an unexpected bouquet of flowers on a doldrums day.

My heart races and my spirits soar when a surprise comes my way. God must love surprises, too, because He shows up at the least likely moments; He shows up and “shows off” in ways I would never imagine. Recall with me a few of God’s surprises which we encounter in the Bible—

- He speaks to Moses in a burning bush on the backside of the desert;
- He tells Noah to build an ark when Noah had never seen rain—and months later, He places a rainbow in the heavens as a sign of hope;
- He promises a son to Abraham and Sarah, in their 90s. Then perhaps a decade or so later, He asks Abraham to sacrifice that child of promise. But God showed up—and

provided a ram in place of Isaac.

- After 400 years of silence, the angel of the Lord appears to a virgin and tells her she’s chosen to have a baby who will be the Savior of the world—Emmanuel, God with us!
- Thirty years later, God shows up on the third day after crucifixion as Christ is resurrected.
- A few days later, Jesus Christ, very much alive, appears to His disciples on the road to Emmaus—and their attitudes, perspective, and lives were changed.

In Isaiah 55:8-9, God says, “My ways are not your ways, and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts.” I think God loves surprises!

Oh, how many, many times He’s surprised me in major and minor events in my life—by changing my thinking, by redirecting my path, by stretching my faith, or by confronting my sinfulness.

God used my first husband’s death in Vietnam to dramatically change me. It was then that I began to search hard after the Lord and His will. A few months after my husband was killed, I moved to begin graduate school and immediately immersed myself in my studies—a great escape from grief. But then depression came crashing in—and after a long weekend of darkness, anguish, weeping, and near despair, searching God’s Word, I cried out, “You have to *do* something—I don’t want to live like this; I’m yours.”

And suddenly the presence of God filled the room as He spoke to my heart: “Georgia, I love you and that’s all that matters.” The darkness disappeared, as God became “*my glory and the lifter of my head.*” I don’t remember walking to school that day—but I’m sure I did. For weeks, I walked in a deep sense of His presence.

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall remain stable and fixed under the shadow of the Almighty [Whose power no foe can withstand]. I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress, my God; on Him I lean and rely, and in Him I [confidently] trust!”

(Psalm 91:1-2 Amp)

After marrying James Herod five years later, we moved to Louisville, Kentucky. While he attended seminary, God had me in the school of prayer and faith—and I began to know God as Faithful Provider.

Instead of a full-time teaching position, I got a part-time gift-wrapping job, in addition to substitute teaching. James had only a part-time job. One day after we had deposited our checks and paid our bills, we had only \$3.15 in the bank—and there would not be a paycheck for two more weeks.

Although I fell apart in worry and anxiety, I also ran to the Lord. He directed my thoughts to Matthew 6:25-34, where Jesus says, *“Do not worry about what you’re going to eat, drink, or wear. I know everything you need. You’re valuable. I’m going to take care of you. But if you worry, then you’re no different than those pagans who don’t know me.”*

As I spent the day reading and meditating, those last words slapped me in the face: if I chose to worry rather than take God at His Word, I was no different than an unbeliever! In brokenness of heart, I asked God to forgive me. By the end of the day, I had moved toward new trust in Him, claiming His faithfulness to His Word and resting in the promise found in Philippians 4:19—*“My God shall supply all your needs, according to His riches in glory.”* The weeks passed, and we always had food—a sack of groceries at the doorstep, an unexpected invitation to dinner or lunch, Wednesday night supper at church, a potluck with friends, or a love gift of money.

One morning as I prepared to leave for a teaching assignment, my only pair of pantyhose developed another run. I’d already mended a run in each leg. On the way out the door, I said to James, “I have to buy stockings,” but we had no money. Once

again, I claimed God’s promise of provision. That afternoon when I arrived home, I found a letter from the mother of a young woman whom I had befriended as a student and then comforted when she became a widow.

The letter said, “A few years ago you gave some stockings to Betty, who gave them to me. Use the money from the enclosed check to buy some stockings.” In it was a check for \$10.

I wept—and praised God for His faithful provision. I had just experienced Isaiah 65:24—“It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer.” My answer had been on the way, even before I prayed for those stockings. God knows; He hears; He shows up—in the most surprising ways.

My family has a lifetime of stories of God’s perfect provision for every financial need. All our medical bills were covered when I had cancer and after I was struck by lightning. When the bills were paid, the provision stopped!

In December 1992, after I had been diagnosed with breast cancer nine months earlier, our daughter had to have a jaw realignment. When I checked her into the hospital for surgery, the nurse asked me if I was going to pay the \$1000 deductible that day. I said, “Yes,” but I had no idea how—I was trusting God.

As I waited during surgery, the pastor of the church we had started in Logan, Utah, dropped by. After he prayed with me, he said, “I have something for you.” I felt as if he had said, “Close your eyes and hold out your hands.” From his coat pocket he pulled a check for just over a \$1000! When I shared with him our need, we had another prayer and praise time.

Just as God remains faithful to His promise to provide for our needs, we can be sure He will provide opportunities to share Christ when we ask for them.

While teaching at Weber State University, I would park at the fieldhouse and ride the shuttle to my office. One morning, I parked and walked to the shelter, where a young man was staring off into the distance, oblivious to me. Suddenly, he turned to me and said, "Do you know what that fish symbol is on the back of that car? Is it some kind of secret society?" What a lead in for me to share Christ.

Another day, after the Gideons had done a Bible distribution on campus, I had gone to the bus stop and sat down on a bench. Soon a young man carrying an armload of books and a Gideon Bible sat down next to me. He opened the cover on the Bible, where the plan of salvation is, and began reading. In just a bit, I very casually asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?" Like Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, we had a conversation that continued after we were seated on the bus.

Oh, God does surprise us in both big and small ways. He always hears our prayers, and He always answers, "Yes, No, or Wait." The biggest "No" of our lives came in 1992 as we were being considered for the pastorate of a Christian fellowship in Saudi Arabia.

We had prayed in earnest; we had sensed God's clear direction; we had shared with our children, who were in agreement. We were ready to pack our bags, but then the letter arrived that said another man had been chosen.

We were in shock—we questioned ourselves, the process, and God, not really knowing how to pray except that we wanted to be obedient, no matter what. We had no understanding. We threw ourselves before the Father, knowing that God was sovereign and that we could trust Him—but we

Joni Eareckson
Tada calls God
the Glorious
Intruder. She says
"He encroaches,
presumes, invades,
and infringes.
He crashes the
party. Tears aside
curtains. Throws
open locked doors.
Hits the light switch
in a dark room."

He has been the
Glorious Intruder
in my life, my
thoughts, my
pain, sorrow, and
brokenness.



Restful Refuge, Lake Cuomo, Italy, 2004. Sue Brooks

“He is kept in
perfect peace
whose mind is
stayed on Thee.”

(Isaiah 26:3 KJV)

were being stretched in new ways. Six months later, as I lay in the hospital after a mastectomy, the still small voice of God whispered to my heart, “My ‘no’ was mercy.” God’s answer was consistent with His character, with His desire to protect and provide. How thankful I am that we had already learned to trust Him.

On my first night home after surgery, I awoke about 3 a.m. surrounded by the terror that lurks in darkness. I was scared of the unknowns—chemo, radiation, statistics. I had young children and a wonderful husband. I didn’t want to die.

As I cried out to God, tender words calmed my spirit: *“He is kept in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee.”* That was King James English, but I hadn’t used a King James Version of the Bible in twenty-five years.

Quickly and quietly, I slipped out of bed, hurried downstairs to find that Bible, and searched the concordance for those words. After several missed attempts, I found them as I turned to Isaiah 26:3. God showed up—He surprised me! He met my deepest need, took away my fear, and gave me peace that night—and throughout the ensuing months as I set my mind on Him.

Joni Eareckson Tada calls God the Glorious Intruder. She says “He encroaches, presumes,

invades, and infringes. He crashes the party. Tears aside curtains. Throws open locked doors. Hits the light switch in a dark room.” Certainly, He has been the Glorious Intruder in my life, my thoughts, my pain, sorrow, and brokenness.

Tada goes on to say, “God, an intruder? From His perspective, never. From our point of view? It happens all the time, whether He encroaches with a gentle, subtle reminder or in sudden, devastating judgment.”

During the past two years, as a result of an uprooting and replanting in location, vocation, and relationships, God has intruded in ways I had not thought necessary. In doing so, He’s revealed idolatry, unbelief, and self-centeredness, which have startled me. At each point, He’s carefully guarded my heart, allowing me to confess and repent, waiting patiently for me to yield to His hands so that the jolts would turn to joy.

Over the years, I’ve become more expectant of God’s glorious intrusions in my life. I continue to wonder at His surprises; in fact, I revel in them, realizing that I’m wondrously blessed because God the Father cares enough to step into my life. Sometimes when I least expect it, He says, “Close your eyes; hold out your hands. Let Me surprise you in ways you cannot even imagine.”

Falling Up

Daniel Cook -- Ogden, UT

I grew up in Butte, Montana, a small mining town near the center of the state. My father worked several jobs but predominantly worked at the open-pit mine during my formative years. As I graduated from high school, I had one great desire and it was burning inside of me. I wanted to have the good life, and I would do almost anything to achieve it. I set a goal to be a millionaire by the time I was thirty.

My first job as an intern architect paid \$800 per month--not much of a start towards my millionaire status. On my 30th birthday in 1979, I had exceeded my goal and was a multi-millionaire several times over. I had achieved the good life and never wanted to look back.

By 1981, I had increased those assets even more. My investments included a thriving architectural firm, construction company, hotel conference center in Butte Montana, five bars with full gambling casinos, four restaurants, a half dozen development projects going on in downtown Great Falls, and a hotel conference center in Great Falls.

Our casinos were large and catered heavily to the young crowd. I was very involved in passing legislation to allow gambling in Montana and to reduce the drinking age to 18. I had done everything legally possible to insure that I would succeed in business and have more toys than others my age. While my lifestyle was not lavish, I treasured my sports car and believed that my wealth and achievements would lead to fame.

Because of my involvement in the gaming business, I took in some partners from Las Vegas who had close ties to organized crime. I publicly personified the American dream of autonomy, which meant that there were no limits and no restraints in my life. Privately, I was the father of four wonderful

children, unhappily married, and also a full-time alcoholic. My personal life was in shambles. My god was fame and fortune.

By 1983, I had tremendous cash flow from my empire of architectural firm, construction company, hotels, gaming operations, bars, restaurants, and office building developments, but the business climate was changing in Montana. Interest rates were over 20 percent, tourism was slowing, and the state raised the drinking age back to 21.

I left Montana and found the economy was somewhat better in Utah. I soon opened a full office in Ogden and purchased the Ben Lomond Hotel in late 1983. This was the largest development job yet--8.5 million dollars. I thought I was invincible and had the golden touch. Everything I touched was coming up roses. At least, that's what I thought.

The move to Ogden brought with it many challenges --the least of which was to determine how to live and work in a different culture. The casino and bar scene did not fit with Mormon values. During 1984, I met some incredible obstacles head on. First, the architectural and construction business went into a slump in Montana with the advent of higher interest rates and a major downturn in the economy.

Then the lawsuits started. I was named in a lawsuit where two drunks got into a fight at Crazy Clancy's Claim Bar and Casino in Great Falls. One chased the other to the top floor of the building through our stairwell atrium. At the top he pushed the other man through the glass elevator and down five stories. I was named in the lawsuit from a number of directions. I was the contractor and architect on the building, the owner of the bar that sold them the alcohol, and the owner of the building. The



“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.”

(Proverbs 24:3-4 NASB)

“Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.”

(Isaiah 40:30-31 NLT)

attorneys had never seen one person in so many lawsuits with that many different companies.

Before this suit could be settled, my company was named in a DUI incident where a pedestrian was killed. Our bar was named in the lawsuit, and I became a marked man because of my large financial wealth. The case was eventually settled out of court for several million dollars of which our insurance paid only the legal fees.

Then IFG Leasing, the largest tenant in the office building market in Great Falls, went bankrupt and closed its offices throughout the city. Since I owned the majority of their space, their crisis created havoc for me with major vacancies and significant loss of cash flow.

In Ogden, things were even worse. The Ben Lomond Hotel was complete, but the city would not allow occupancy. In 1984, we lost over \$2 million in tax credits because the building did not open by December 31st. Between interest expense, lawsuits, poor occupancy, and the loss of tax credits, I lost nearly 15 million dollars between 1983 and 1985.

Since money was my god, I had lost everything that mattered. My alcoholism had reached the point that I was drinking nearly a case of beer by early evening, switching to Jack Daniels until it put me to sleep. The good life was not good!

In the spring of 1986, I reluctantly attended a Christian Business Men's Committee luncheon at the Ben Lomond Hotel. Adolph Coors IV was the speaker. He shared about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and how Christ had changed his life. He closed with an invitation to us to ask Christ to be Savior

and Lord of our lives. As Coors spoke, I knew I wanted what he had. Before I left the luncheon, I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into my life.

I had lost over \$15 million dollars and everything that I thought mattered to me. But at the very bottom of my misery, I found the Lord and everything that really mattered for eternity. I thank the Lord daily for taking all of those “things” away from me so that I could have this personal relationship with Him.

Adolph came over to my office after the luncheon and asked if I understood what I had done and if I had any questions. We talked into the night with me asking hundreds of questions that he patiently answered. Almost immediately, dramatic changes began to take place in my life. I started attending church. Then, I gave the church the little money I had left. I was starting fresh with a much different attitude of what was important in life.

Americans put a lot of credibility in what we do for a living. In the last few years, I have found that our purpose on earth is not what we do at all. We cannot determine our purpose. God made that decision before we were born. When I have traveled on mission trips to Guatemala, Mexico, New Zealand, Chile, and Peru in past years, it has become abundantly clear that I did not have the slightest idea of what God had in store for my life.

As I look at my professional career, I am struck with a nagging question: What does all of this mean? The answer was clearly given to me a number of years ago in Ecclesiastes 2:23-24: *“All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless. A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God.”*

A Firm Foundation. Ft. Jefferson, Dry Tortuga Island, 2006. Sue Brooks



True enjoyment in life comes only as we follow God's guidelines for living, which enable us to accomplish the purpose He has for us. Without Him, satisfaction is a lost search. Those who really know how to enjoy life are the people who receive each day as a gift from God, thanking Him for it and serving Him. Those without God will have no relief from toil and no direction to guide them through life's complications. As I have learned to trust in the Lord and look to Him for directions, my life has changed a great deal.

Abraham Lincoln gave a speech before he left his hometown to serve his first term as President of the United States. In his speech, he stated that there were difficult times ahead and with God we would overcome the difficulties. Without God, it was impossible. This is true about life—with God we can overcome anything—without God, even the simplest things are impossible.

In 1986, I began attending a conservative Baptist church in Ogden. Soon after, I met Claudia who later became my soul mate and my wife. We

were married in 1989. Claudia had one daughter, Amanda, and I had four children from my previous marriage: Kevin, Brian, Carrie, and Bethany. We could not decide if we should have any more children. God ended up making that decision for us, and Catherine was born on March 12, 1990.

One of our frustrations with living in Utah was the quality of the school systems. We quickly determined that we needed an alternative in our community for education—we wanted alternatives for Amanda and Catherine.

In 1995, I made a decision to take almost a year away from my architectural and construction practice and spend my time working on the development of Christian Heritage School in Riverdale, Utah. God has blessed this decision in all ways. In 1997, I shifted my business plan to do more of "God's work" and less "secular work."

At the time, it never occurred to me that Utah was not necessarily the best place to start a Christian design and construction business, but that is

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

(1 Cor. 3:11 NIV)

where God had placed me. My initial business plan was not successful and resulted in very little, if any, increase in God's work.

In November of 1998, I committed all of my resources to the Lord and dedicated myself to doing the Lord's work the rest of my life. I notified my clients that I could no longer be their corporate architect or contractor though that decision cost me over \$600,000 a year in fees and nearly 10 million dollars worth of construction volume per year. In addition, I was forced to shut down my construction company, which had been operating since 1972.

When I committed myself to pursue God's work, the company, originally called Dan Cook and Associates, had one church design project, which we were finishing and several Christian schools that were in the formative stages of contract negotiations. Making that change in direction allowed me to grow as a Christian in a very special way. The first years of this new business were very difficult, and we incurred a serious amount of debt.

However, God has blessed the business today beyond my understanding. Building God's Way (the new company name) now has offices in six locations, a payroll of over six million dollars, and Christian church building projects exceeding one billion dollars worth of construction.

While I cannot out-give God, He does require faith on my part. Today, the "Building God's Way" program has spread out to nearly every state in the United States. Church and school groups are organized as never before, many people are coming to know the Lord through the ministry of

construction, and many more are increasing their walk as they step out in faith. Today, I am seeing God work in a wonderful way throughout many parts of the world.

I cherish the new life the Lord gave me when I was born again, and I do not often look back at the awful times before that wonderful event. I continually thank God for what He has done for me, such as granting me sobriety for nearly 20 years.

I have learned so much, and yet have so much to learn. My greatest lesson to date is that happiness is never going to be achieved by getting more "things" for myself, but by giving of myself to others. God has given me the strength to do far more than I ever thought possible. He has brought people into my life who are true brothers in the Lord, and He has brought happiness that is difficult to explain.

My prayer is to be able to work hard, soar like the eagles, and be able to finish this race very strong, while continually maturing spiritually. May God teach me how to draw on His energy and spiritual refreshment as I follow His plan the rest of my life.

Dan Cook resides in Ogden, Utah, with his wife, Claudia, and youngest daughter, Catherine. They have five other children: Kevin, Brian, Carrie, Bethany, and Amanda. Dan continues to lead Building God's Way, a national firm dedicated to the biblical approach to building churches and Christian schools throughout the United States. He also is very involved with Third World mission projects with a goal to construct 1,000 churches in third world countries by the time he is 70. Dan also serves on the advisory board of Youth Reach in Houston, Texas.

To Forgive Is to Set a Prisoner Free and Discover the Prisoner Was You



"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14,15 KJV).

On February 9, 1960, Adolph Coors III was kidnapped and held for ransom. His body was found seven months later on a remote hillside. He had been shot to death.

Adolph Coors IV, who was fifteen years old at the time, lost not only his father but also his best friend. For years, young Coors hated Joseph Corbett, the man who was sentenced to life for the slaying.

Then in 1975, Adolph Coors became a Christian. He knew this hatred for Corbett blighted his growth in faith and also alienated him from other people. Still, resentment seethed within him. He prayed, asking God to help him stop hating Corbett.

Coors eventually felt led to visit Corbett in the maximum-security unit of Colorado's Canon City penitentiary. Corbett refused to see him, but Coors left a Bible with this inscription: "I'm here to see you today and I'm sorry that we could not meet. As a Christian, I am summoned by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ to forgive. I do forgive you, and I ask you to forgive me for the hatred I've held in my heart for you."

Coors later confessed, "I have a love for that man that only Jesus Christ could have put in my heart." Coors' heart, imprisoned by hatred, was at last set free.

"As a Christian, I am summoned by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ to forgive. I do forgive you, and I ask you to forgive me for the hatred I've held in my heart for you."

Adolph Coors IV

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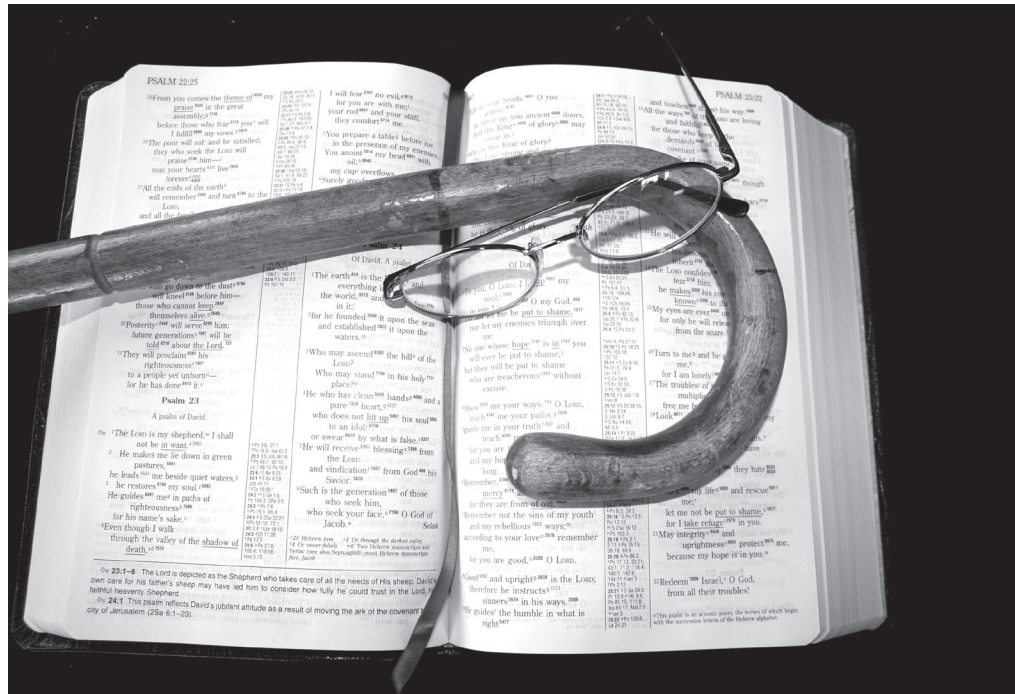
Though I Walk

Barbara Ali--Winterville, GA

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4 KJV).

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

(Psalm 30:5 KJV)



I Shall Not Want, 2006, Sue Brooks

The curtain over my mind opened just a little, letting in the searing light of reality. The light painfully pierced the darkest corners that were not yet ready to accept it. I was grateful when the curtain closed again. Every once in awhile, over several months, this would happen, each time remaining open a little bit longer.

I remembered when I was pregnant that I had false labor weeks before the actual onset. The contractions gradually increased in length and duration, developing a higher and higher tolerance level of pain. I knew that my mind was trying to help me reach acceptance of every parent's worst fear: the loss of a child.

I was allowed 21 years with my first son,

Kevin. Many times as I remembered his life, I blamed myself for things I should have said or done differently. No other event pulled me harder or humbled me more than his death. Those first few weeks after he was gone, I was so numb that I felt nothing--no emotion at all, neither high nor low, neither happy nor sad. I just watched things happening around me.

I still had a younger daughter and a younger son at home. My oldest daughter was away at college. I knew I had to focus on helping these three to cope with the loss of their brother. I encouraged us to talk about Kevin--anything that they wanted to talk about, whether memories, or feelings that had to have a name and be looked at directly. I quit my job

that summer in order to be at home with them.

Looking into the face of each angel who came into my life, I sang softly, "Sleep my child and peace attend thee, all through the night." The words of this old lullaby soothed my own being as I repeated, "Guardian angels God will send thee, all through the night." Watching each new baby sleep, I wondered what life would hold, what roads would have to be walked. Would I be able to give the guidance needed?

I prayed often, "God, watch over and keep this little one in Your hands. Guide his footsteps. Give me the wisdom and strength to know what to say and do. And, please, Lord, undo the mistakes that I make. Make right what goes wrong." I felt such inadequacy for such an awesome responsibility.

The Bible says to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6 KJV). I prayed every day for each one in my family: "Lord, place a hedge of protection around them. Keep them safe from harm and evil. Guide their teachers in giving the children's lessons today, and help my children to learn and understand the things they need to know."

Sometimes, there were nights when bad dreams would come. One would wake up crying, and I would bring a drink of water and talk awhile and say a prayer. "Do you know what to do when you are afraid, when you wake up from a scary dream?" I asked the wide, dark eyes beginning to glisten with tears. The perplexed shaking of a small head would be followed by a look of incredulity as I answered, "You sing." "Sing?"

"Yes. Sing songs of praise to the Lord for His goodness. Sing the Lord's Prayer. A song is like

a prayer. God hears you and the devil runs away. No more bad dreams." So we sang together, and soon went peacefully back to sleep.

Of the four children, Kevin came with special needs and special gifts. His above average intelligence was accompanied by dyslexia and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Experts considered everything "borderline," and his problems weren't recognized and tested for until he reached the third grade. By then, they were interfering with his school work and personal relationships. He obtained the services of Special Ed and the Gifted Program at the same time. He had inherited his dad's photographic memory, which helped him through a lot of exams when he hadn't turned in his homework.

When school started in the fall of the year that Kevin passed away, I started a new job. I became a teacher's aide in a Special Education classroom at the middle school. Helping those children was very therapeutic for me. It gave me the outlet I needed as I worked through my grief. I also learned quite a lot about my son.

The teacher I helped bubbled with the energy and vitality of the young. I didn't have to talk much--she did most of it. She was not married yet and had no children, so she did not mind when I shared "Kevin stories" of his escapades growing up. I had discovered that talking to other parents about my grief generally made them uncomfortable. They did not know what to say, and of course, no parent wants to think about ever having to go through such a thing. I loved working with these children so much that I continued for many more years.

We went through some extremely tense years in our family. My husband is Muslim, from

“And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife.”

(I Cor. 7:13-14a KJV)

Bangladesh. Getting married was a very risky thing to do and guaranteed more problems than not. The clash between two cultures created rocky ground. Our expectations and methods of working through issues differed greatly, although the goals we wanted for our family were similar. Crossing cultures is difficult enough, but differing religious beliefs make the going a whole lot tougher.

When we married, my husband was not following any religion, and I thought that our love and respect for each other would help us over the rough places to find common ground. It does not work that way when the basic concepts of marriage and family have completely different expectations for the roles of each member.

More than any other factor in my life, my husband has kept me on my knees in prayer. The reality of my faith has been pushed to the test such that even Muslim friends testified that only God could have done the things that were done.

A time came when we separated for about a year. How do you explain to a young child when he looks into your eyes and tells you, “Mommy, I need two parents, not just one”? It breaks your heart. That separation shook the foundations of our children’s security for a long time afterward.

I tried to reassure them many times that I would not abandon them, that Dad and Mom needed to work through some problems. It was not any fault of theirs. Both of us still loved them. Their dad would always be their dad, and their mom would always be their mom.

It was difficult for my husband to talk about his son’s passing. When he did, he was sometimes lashing out, blaming others, including me. There were

a lot of questions about the events surrounding the accident. It took a while to make sense of everything. Many stories were going around that exaggerated the incident. Young people all over town were upset. Kevin had many friends.

I call part of the grieving process “the broken record.” Everything leading up to the accident, and a little while afterwards played over and over and over again in my mind. It became impossible to focus on the mundane things of daily existence; it was a struggle to process, resolve, and finally accept the reality.

Kevin left the house about 4:00 a.m. with his girlfriend and met up with three other friends. They drove about an hour and a half out of town, pulling off the road at a large bend. Kevin then walked into the road in the pre-dawn light as a semi-tractor trailer rig came barreling around the curve. The skid marks were close to a hundred feet long. To try to go around him would have put the truck into the path of oncoming traffic. Four hours later, someone from the sheriff’s department knocked on my door as I was getting ready to go to work.

One year before, I worked part-time for an agency doing housework and giving personal care to the elderly. As I was driving to an assigned client’s house, my mind wandered in and out of many things. This day one thought kept interrupting and pressing in. “What if one of your children was taken Home? What would you do? Would you be angry with Me?”

Finally, I could take it no more. I broke into deep sobs, hardly able to see the road. I answered, “Lord, it would devastate me more than anything I know; but if You had to take one of them, there would be a good reason why. It would hurt

like crazy, but no, I wouldn't be mad at You." I remembered this sometime later and thought about it a lot. God found it necessary for me to address the possibility early on, partly in preparation, but I think also because my relationship with Him is very important to Him. "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9 KJV). He did not want me to turn my back on Him in anger and resentment. I realized that life on this earth is temporal for all of us. Eventually, I wanted to make it to Heaven, too.

It's a myth that most couples will pull together when a child dies and have a much stronger relationship. That can and should happen, but in a large majority of cases, divorce will follow. There has to be a solid foundation to begin with. Sensitivity and support must be shared. Each spouse must be allowed to grieve in his or her own way.

Being with others who have shared a similar crisis or loss is a great support. In the months that followed, I met several people who, in sharing their experience, encouraged me. In turn, I was also able to comfort others.

One evening, I talked at length with a friend who had lost her daughter. As we compared experiences and feelings, I suddenly realized that my husband was sitting close by listening to every word. Not only was I giving expression to her feelings, but also to his.

It can be very hard to say how you feel, or know what to call these feelings. I discovered that even though the circumstances differ, the emotional process is basically the same. The tears welled up in his eyes, and I saw a release in him.

We had reached an agreement in our family. I told

the kids that Dad and Mom both believed in God, but in different ways. "Your relationship with Him is between you and God alone, not between you and us and God. You will need to do your own searching and questioning--He doesn't mind being questioned--and find your own relationship with Him."

So, they went to church with me one weekend and to the mosque with their dad the next. I wanted them to see an alive God, real and loving and caring. That requires coming to Him the way HE provided. Being good, being religious, or being charitable isn't the way, even though these things are commendable.

One evening at church, we had a visiting preacher. He delivered a good message about needing Jesus in our lives. Every so often, as the minister spoke, he would seem overcome with emotion and his voice would quiver. After the service, everyone got up and left, except Kevin. He remained there, pale and somewhat shaken. "Did you see it?" he asked.

"See what?"

"The Light."

"What Light?"

"It was moving around the minister. Sometimes it would be on his shoulder. Then his voice would change."

"What happened to it?" I asked.

"I don't know. It just left."

"Left how? Through a door or window?"

"No. It was just gone."

I attempted to explain to him about God's Spirit, the anointing power on a minister, and that not everyone can see Him when He is present. Then I brought in the pastor and the visiting preacher who also tried to explain to a ten-year-old boy what

"For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known."

(I Cor. 13:12 KJV)

the Bible says. Kevin told me later that for some time after that, whenever he even saw car lights approaching in the dark, it would shake him up.

He had been baptized at age seven. It's a bit young, but young hearts are tender. He expressed a desire, and I was hesitant to stand in the way. Now, however, Kevin was seeking God earnestly and asked to be baptized again. This time he understood that it was a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ, a symbol of repentance, of inward cleansing, of dying to oneself and living to God.

The first year is always the hardest to get through when a family member passes on. Holidays and birthdays are difficult. Life goes on, but it starts over as well. New memories are made. Siblings have a rough time. Our second daughter had been an A and B student. She failed every subject in school that year. However, she found a friend who had also lost a brother, and they became inseparable. Our younger son did not talk much, but he wrote a tribute to his brother and dedicated it to me when his class was learning how to make books,

I drove 75 miles every month to the cemetery. I cleaned, planted flowers, and walked among the tombstones, appreciating the stillness. I spoke often with the Lord. The hope that took away

the cutting edge of my pain was in knowing that separation is only temporary. I will see Kevin again.

I came to know the Lord first as a teenager. My immediate family never went to church at that time, although my grandparents did. My mother was especially antagonistic, insisting that I was being gullible and brainwashed. However, I wanted to know whether God was real. If He was, then I didn't just want to know about Him, I wanted to know Him personally--as friend to Friend. When He came to me, it was a Light coming on in a dark place. Everything around me seemed to glow. The glass box that I lived in within my mind shattered into a thousand pieces. People around me saw the difference and asked questions.

The journey has not been an easy one. I have fallen down many, many times and gotten bruised, but He promised to be with me always, *"even unto the end of the world"* (Matthew 28:20 KJV).

Barbara Ali lives with her husband in north Georgia, where she teaches Special Ed. They have three grown children and three grandchildren, who occupy much of her spare time. She writes children's stories and poetry, and is involved in a local church. She has frequently ministered to bereaved parents and children.

My Father's Lovely Surprise

Margaret Keyes Tate -- Nashville, TN

"Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only" (James 1:22) is carved over the doors of the lovely Gothic building known as Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, where I worshiped from the 1930s to the 1950s. Those words continue to have great meaning for me.

As the child of divorce, I grew up without a father's presence and love. Mother and Grandmother modeled their strong Christian faith and loved me unconditionally. Mother married a widower with six young children when I was eleven. My stepfather came from a dysfunctional family and never had a pair of shoes until he was twelve, but he was self-taught and built a successful business career as a pharmacist and apothecary owner. He supported us financially, but showed little interest in or affection for any of us children though we did become friends later on.

From childhood, I knew and loved Jesus, but I did not understand God as Father, the One who was with me when I thought I didn't have a human father. My best friend was Margaret Pleune, whom we called Pleunie. Her father, Dr. Peter Pleune, was a tall, handsome Presbyterian minister with a Scottish accent and a powerful voice. He read Scripture at the dinner table, which was a new experience for me. I heard those Bible verses with the heart of a child, but without great understanding. Dr. Pleune was a surrogate father to me.

After Mother had remarried, one day she came to pick me up at their home. Dr. Pleune escorted Pleunie and me down their steep driveway. At the car I looked up into his face and asked wistfully, "Dr. Pleune, would you pray for me to have a baby brother or sister?" Mother's face turned pink,

and that wise man said, "I'll just do that, Margaret Keyes, and we'll see how much drag I have with the Lord."

Some years later after my dear half-brother, Joe Brooks Jones, was born and mother was raising eight children, she ran into Dr. Pleune on Louisville's Fourth Street. When he stopped to chat, she said, "You can stop praying now. We know how much drag you have with the Lord."

My teen years were filled with moderate scholarship in high school and the companionship of a circle of friends who formed a sort of club. Mother told me that my friends would have to include my older stepsister, Sara, in the club or I would have to get out. They chose to include her and became her friends as well. During high school, I was honored to be elected to the staff of the school paper, editorship of the yearbook, and a good role in the senior play.

When we studied Shakespeare's *As You Like it*, I wrote in the flyleaf of my five-year diary: *"Down on your knees and thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love"* (Act 3 scene 1). I had no idea what that meant, but it sounded romantic to my young heart. I did volunteer work in church and community and spent many social evenings with Baptist Seminary students, some of whom were convinced I should be a minister's or missionary's wife. I prayed for God to help me find the right man with whom to spend my life.

Ward-Belmont Junior College, Nashville, Tennessee, a finishing school for young ladies (which Mother had previously attended), provided two years of positive experiences. The chosen



"This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike 'What's next, Papa?' God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance!"

(Romans 8:15-16 Msg)

“I know what I’m doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.”

(Jeremiah 29:11 Msg)

college Scripture was printed in their brochure: “Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8 RSV).

Being elected to edit the weekly newspaper, *The Hyphen*, was exhilarating. I loved being the editor. When I matriculated to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, I discovered the same Bible verse was theirs as well. “*Hearing, Thinking and Doing*” according to those Biblical imperatives were guidelines for me. God was leading me in new paths. I wondered what His plans were for my life and when I would understand them.

After graduating from Northwestern Medill School of Journalism in 1940, I didn’t find a job until spring of 1941 when I went to work for American Airlines as a reservations agent. I resigned my Highland Baptist Church job as Baptist Training Union Director and said farewell to Louisville, my home town. The airlines trained me in New York City, but instead of sending me elsewhere, I was assigned to work in Louisville’s Bowman Field, serving only two airlines at that time.

I had a little Ford car, was making \$80 a month and living at home where Mother made me pay \$18.75 monthly rent, with which she bought a war savings bond in my name. My social life was pleasant, but war in Europe was raging. My intentions were to postpone any serious entanglements until life was more certain. God had other lovely plans.

Pleunie’s family owned a cottage in Holland, Michigan, where she enjoyed happy summer months. Her mother spent the entire summer there while Dr. Pleune continued to serve his

Louisville congregation, with only a short vacation. He was often a dinner guest in my grandmother, (Grandmuzzy’s) house on Windsor Place.

During the summer of 1940, Pleunie met a young man named Len Foley, who was visiting friends in Holland. When she learned he was a University of Chicago student, she told him to look me up at Northwestern, where I was a senior. He cut in on me at a sorority dance after a fall football game and amazed me by spouting intimate details of my life: I was allergic to tomatoes, I liked blue shirts and lime mints, and I had seven brothers and sisters. We dated for awhile, but it was never a serious romance.

My future husband, Jim Tate, graduated from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, Virginia, in 1938 as a second lieutenant in the Army Reserve. He worked for a transportation company until 1941, when he was called to active duty in the U.S. Army.

Foley had finished his dental course and was also called on active duty. While stationed at Camp Polk, Louisiana, Jim and Foley became friends. (In retrospect, we understand well how God was working.) Conditions at Camp Polk were miserable, so Jim chose to attend a tank maintenance course at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, thirty miles from Louisville. When Foley heard Jim was going to Ft. Knox, he told him about me. “She had a fraternity pin the last I heard, and might be married, but she will introduce you to some nice girls.” We’ve never forgotten Foley’s role in our lives.

Jim Tate telephoned my home several times before we made contact. It was August 31, 1941, when I opened the door to greet Jim and two fellow lieutenants. We fell in love quickly. When we realized he would be leaving Ft. Knox in



December, our marriage plans accelerated. I insisted he request my hand properly. Mother had scarcely had a conversation with Jim in the short weeks of our romance. She wanted more than anything in the world for me to have a good marriage. Her "job interview" would have overwhelmed a lesser man. At the close, she asked, "Does your mother know about this?" "No ma'am, but I'm going to write her tonight." "I am, too," my mother said, "and I'm going to ask her to come right up here and help me break this thing up."

After that, I wondered if I would ever see him again, but Jim has an unflappable personality. With my determination to marry the love of my life, Mother cooperated bravely, and Jim and I were married December 6, 1941--the day before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. It wasn't long before she discovered what a fine man I had married.

We still marvel at the chain of events that God used to bring us together. After that, He

“Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the
everlasting God,
the Creator of the
ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired
or weary, and His
understanding no
one can fathom.
He gives strength
to the weary and
increases the power
of the weak. Even
youths grow tired
and weary, and
young men stumble
and fall; but those
who hope in the
LORD will renew
their strength. They
will soar on wings like
eagles; they will run
and not grow weary,
they will walk and not
be faint.”

(Isaiah 40:28-31 NIV)

protected us through wartime travels, the birth of our first child in California one month before her daddy went overseas, and the 21 months he spent fighting in the Pacific. Jim seldom spoke of wartime experiences until many years later when our grown children pressed him for details.

We praise God for giving us four splendid children, seven grandchildren (the oldest is already in Heaven), and one great granddaughter. Our son and his sisters are all professionals and strong Christians, helping to make the world a better place. I reminded my three daughters many times I would never have met their daddy if I had not been a “nice girl.”

During my childhood and teen years, I felt very much like a fatherless child. I saw my birth father (a doctor who graduated from the University of Louisville Medical School as top man in his class) only two or three times on visits to his parents in Dana, Indiana, after my parents divorced when I was about six. He ignored the invitation to my high school graduation, such an important rite of passage, and it hurt me terribly. Troubled by alcohol addiction, he changed jobs often and was working at a hospital in Detroit not far away when I was at Northwestern. I wondered how he could be indifferent to his college-age daughter. Mother seldom said unkind things about him, but she told me one time, “Don’t ever give him the first meal in your house.” Later on, he moved to California, married a widow with one daughter, and died there.

During my childhood and adolescent years when

I thought I was a fatherless child, my Heavenly Father was looking after me. I had to become a mature Christian and earnest Bible student before experiencing the marvelous surprise that God, Father of Jesus, is also my Father. He is always with me and I can and do speak with Him all the time.

My RSV translation of the Bible is marked on many pages with sermon comments and Greek and Hebrew translations explained in study courses. I have many favorite verses, but I believe Psalm 139 and Isaiah 40:28-31 are the dearest. I’m very poor at memorizing, but I keep struggling to seal those precious words in heart and mind as I gain understanding of the magnificent plans God had made, continues to make, and will continue to create in His universe. He orchestrates what we could never work out ourselves. How blessed we are to be His children.

Octogenarian **Keyes Tate** lives with her handsome husband of 65 years in Richland Place, a stylish retirement center in Nashville, Tennessee, where they host a classic movie every Saturday afternoon with popcorn and sodas. They are active members of the Sojourners Sunday School class in First Baptist Church. The Tates have attended 45 Elderhostel programs, some of them overseas. With Jim’s planned retirement, they built a house in Costa Rica, Central America, and commuted there for five years while he completed his business career. They moved to a Cocoa Beach condo on the Florida Space Coast for seven years before settling permanently in Nashville. Keyes authored *From God’s Footstool: History of the Space Shuttle*, and is currently writing her memoir.

Nothing Is Too Hard for God

Ivy Lippard--Olathe, KS



For me, growing up was hard. By the time I was in junior high, I had lived through more than what most people experience in a lifetime. In seventh grade, I experimented with drugs and alcohol, desperately trying to take control of my life, which was spinning completely out of control. For as long as I could remember, my world had been dark and bleak, with a total lack of joy or happiness. My childhood was riddled with abuse and instability. I learned to control parts of my world by manipulating others while at the same time, seeking unconditional love from *someone*.

During that year, I decided that if I were just prettier someone would love me. My weight plummeted to 80 pounds. I was hospitalized for two months for anorexia, drug and alcohol problems, and depression. While in the hospital, I attended many groups and counseling sessions designed to “equip” me with the “tools” I needed to live a healthy, happy life. A “greater power” was always emphasized, but it did not matter what the power was. After my release, the death of a friend caused even more chaos in my life.

I loved to party and had never felt as happy as when I was drunk or high. After two more times in treatment centers, many loving, well-meaning people offered to take me in to their homes and families, but none of their good intentions helped. By the time I was sixteen, I had attempted suicide numerous times, had dropped out of school, and was living with my much-older boyfriend, struggling to provide for myself on \$4.50 an hour.

Something about the occult dazzled me, especially that I could have control of my life through “magic.” I began studying Wicca. I thought that I was unlocking the wisdom and power of

the universe. Although many believed that I worshiped Satan, I disagreed because I worshiped the Greek god, Pan, and the goddess, Diana.

I did not understand that whatever was not of God, the Creator of the universe, was from Satan. I did not relate to the first commandment: “I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before or beside Me” (Exodus 20:2-3 Amp).

The Wiccan way is highly dependent upon altered states of consciousness, induced by drugs and alcohol. I believed that I was in tune with the earth, and that the gods I had chosen to worship were not really that different from the God of the Bible. Long and wide was my path of destruction. I am so thankful that God was faithful to me. Even then, when I was spitting in His lovely face, He sent people my way to share the Good News of Christ. Oh, how ignorant I was!

At the age of eighteen, I unexpectedly became pregnant. I moved in with my grandparents so that I could go back to school. One requirement that never wavered in their home was attending church. Thank God for God-loving grandparents. For months I attended Living Hope, the little church on Main Street that I had attended when I was a child. Slowly, Jesus began to clear the mud from my eyes and soften my heart.

One Sunday in church, a man offered to pray with me for salvation. I didn’t know what he meant, but I agreed. As I spoke the words of the sinner’s prayer, I did not understand the full impact of what I was praying. I only knew that I was desperate for a Savior and change in my life. I was six months

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

(Galatians 5:1 NIV)

pregnant when I invited Christ into my heart.

Immediately, the Great Physician was busy working miracles. He instantly freed me from the hold of tobacco, and took away all desire for drugs and alcohol. He began refining me, and although it was unpleasant, in the midst of every trial, He was pulling me closer, holding me tighter, and allowing me to catch glimpses of His Holiness.

He planted in me a deep hunger to know Him and His word. As I studied, I began growing closer to Him. What He spoke 2,000 years ago, He whispered softly to my heart--and it made perfect sense. My hurts began to heal, and I realized that nothing I had been through could compare to the price Jesus paid for me that day on the cross. The most amazing thing is that even though I am ugly and nasty, I am being transformed through Him.

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying” (Titus 3:4-8 NIV).

Even though I am nowhere close to His Holiness, He loves me and blesses me continually. He has brought me out of the pit of despair and blessed me beyond my wildest imagination. But as I struggle daily with many issues from my past, I realize that the battle for me will never be over. I know that Christ died to take all my sins and my mistakes, but daily I must fight against my flesh, and my uncanny ability to slip back into deep sorrow, despite all the blessings He has showered on me.

Through the Word of God and people around me, He is training me in the use of His spiritual armor and weapons. As I look around, my heart cries out to Jesus for those still stuck in my old lifestyle of absolute hopelessness, drugs, and alcohol--those who are trying to do it on their own with only their will power.



For God's Glory: The Italian Alps, 2004. Sue Brooks

Why did He choose to deliver ME? I will never know, but I am so thankful, and I want others to know that their only hope lies in Him.

Ivy Lippard recently moved to Olathe, Kansas, with her husband and four children. After months of being unsettled, they have finally found a new church called Grace Church. The recent move has given Ivy a great deal of time to reflect on her walk with the Lord and to trust Him in very tangible ways. She is newly involved in MOPS International and enjoys working with children and teaching them in ways easy for them to understand.

Resting Before Nightfall. Antelope Island, the Great Salt Lake, UT, 2006. Phil Reyes





My Makeover

Denise Thirkill-Green—Rogersville, AL

“The gospel is called a burden and a yoke, lest we presume; yet light and easy, lest we despair. . . .What can be lighter than a burden which takes our burdens away, and a yoke which bears up the bearer himself?”

Bernard of Clairvaux

May 14th, 2005, started out like any other Saturday; except that I was admitted to Huntsville Hospital in Huntsville, Alabama, with a heart rate of 288 beats per minute and a blood pressure rate of 70 over 40. I was *very* afraid.

A couple of days and several tests later, the electro-cardiologist said the results showed I was suffering from Supraventricular Tachycardia (SVT); a procedure should be performed to recreate the SVT and try to ablate or destroy the pathway or group of cells that were causing the abnormal heart rhythm. At this point, I came unglued. I just knew that my days on earth were nearly done.

My mother and husband, who are very strong believers in God, began sharing religious stories and reading Bible verses to me. I was not a faithful person but had started attending a small church in our new community. The minister of that church stopped in to check on me. Many people were praying for me, and I was comforted.

The ablation procedure was unsuccessful, but I survived! This was one of several blessings I would be receiving from our Lord during “my makeover.”

Upon recovery, I was sent home and placed on a medication that would regulate my heart rate. Several months passed. I continued going to church, but life didn't change too much for me, except for the addition of a daily pill.

I died on August 25, 2005. I was preparing to play tennis and collapsed. I have no recollection of this and am told that is for the best. When I was found, I was blue, not breathing, and had no pulse. Someone ran to the courts, shouting, “We need medical personnel!” At this time, I received another blessing: an

anesthetist, an R.N., and a doctor were all close at hand and began CPR. Moments passed, and I still had no pulse. Still, God made a way for me to survive: the Women's Tennis Association had recently purchased an Automated Electronic Defibrillator (AED) and arranged for training. This AED was used to re-establish my heart rhythm, and I was transported to the hospital.

Again, I was afraid, VERY afraid. I finally listened to what God was saying to me: “Child of mine, it is time for you to turn your life over to Me. It is time for you to pay heed. It is time for you to believe and to share My Word.”

On August 29, 2005, I underwent surgery and received an internal defibrillator, sort of my very own personal paramedic. Going into the procedure, I was not afraid, nor was I panicked. I knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that if it were my time to die, I'd be going home to be with the Lord.

Shortly thereafter, I was baptized and am continuing to learn all the glorious ways of Christ Jesus. I share my blessings and God's Word every opportunity I get, and my opportunities continue to expand. I have since become a board member of the Madison County Medical Alliance that, among several projects, is raising funds (and awareness) to make AEDs available throughout the local community. With this responsibility, I participate in outreach programs where I share my experience.

No words adequately express my gratitude, for God has truly blessed me. I am a new person both inside and out. I hope that I am kinder, more understanding, and more enjoyable to be around. Of course, I'm not quite the finished project. My makeover is my newfound belief and faith and God's grace that shines within me.



“Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.”

(Psalm 27:14 KJV)

September 2006 - - Addendum

March, April, May, and June of 2006 have been difficult. I experienced numerous “appropriate” firings from my defibrillator, which can be an electrical shock to the heart muscle of approximately 750 volts at one time. After several visits, my cardiologist in Huntsville could not determine the problem and suggested I go to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, Maryland.

I made the necessary arrangements with the recommended doctors and also established travel plans for a quick trip: travel on a Saturday, tests to occur on Monday and Tuesday, and then return home on Wednesday.

However, the short visit turned into two weeks, most of it spent in the hospital. After my last scheduled test on Tuesday, while resting in the hotel, my defibrillator went off again and the doctors who had been conducting the tests said I needed to return to the hospital as quickly as possible. I was admitted and had more tests done.

They determined that my medications should be changed and that I should be monitored for a couple of days. I was sad, but quite honestly, the only place I was at ease was at the hospital hooked up to monitors and a lidocaine drip, which prevented arrhythmias and therefore stopped any more shocks from the defibrillator.

I was released and told I could go home. HOME! I've never liked that word more. We spent that Friday seeing what we could of Baltimore and readied for our flight the next morning.

On Saturday, June 10, my husband, Paul, and I were on our flight relaxed and kidding around with one another. The door to the plane had been secured and the plane began backing away from the terminal. "Oh no, oh no, oh no!" I cried. Paul grabbed my hand and *BAM!* My defibrillator went off. Paul asked me what I wanted to do, and all I could say was, "I want to go home." In the past, one shock had been painful, but I had been able to return to relatively normal activity within an hour or two.

Bam, bam, BAM! Three more times my defibrillator shocked me. This had never happened before, and the pain was excruciating. Paul told airline personnel, who stopped the plane, and we returned to Johns Hopkins. Once there, after more evaluations, every test came back inconclusive. I had to spend another week in the hospital, placed on additional medications that, thanks to God, are currently keeping my heart regulated.

My experience on the airplane that day was horrible, but God was ensuring I didn't get too far because He knew there was more to be done; I needed to remain in Baltimore until I was stable. During the weeks and months that followed, I received comfort from God through my Bible readings, family and friends, periodicals, various religious books that I'd been given, and prayer. My life would have been unbearable without God.

It's been over three months now since my last shock. I have returned to driving and a relatively normal lifestyle. I recently got on an airplane to surprise my mother and brother for their birthdays

(70 and 50, respectively). It was my first flight since receiving the four shocks in a row, and I was terrified, but God was with me. He was my rock. My family and I had a tremendous celebration of life.

My story is traumatic, but I simply wouldn't have the amazing relationship I have with God if it hadn't been for my makeover. You know, it sounds crazy, but I'd do it all again. Thank you, LORD, for waiting on me, getting my attention, for nurturing my heart.

Denise Thirkill-Green enjoys life with her husband on the Elk River in Rogersville, Alabama. Denise works in Huntsville, Alabama, for ATK Thiokol as a Contract Administrator. In her spare time, she assists the American Red Cross and the Madison County Medical Alliance with their Automated External Defibrillator (AED) fundraising efforts. Denise is involved in a local church and continues learning more about Jesus.

Editor's Note: "*Wait on the LORD*" (Psalm 27:14, Lamentations 3:25, Isaiah 40:31) is a command, and it doesn't mean to wait idly, twiddling your thumbs. The word *wait* comes from the Hebrew verb, *qawah*, which means "to twist or stretch," and the noun that indicates "line, cord, or thread." If you wait on the LORD, you are active.

The picture that comes to my mind is God, like a mighty rope anchoring the largest ship in the world to the dock, and me, a single, flimsy strand of embroidery floss, actively wrapping myself around and around that rope so that I become one with Him, exchanging my weaknesses for His unsurpassed power and strength.

Passion Over Logic

Jay Sambamurthi--Willard, UT



There is nothing more important to God than pre-planning encounters with His children. This is an overwhelming passion of our Creator.

In sharing my salvation story, I'd like to start with what happened with Zaccheus when he met Jesus (Luke 19:3-4, NASB). Like him, we both had a choice to make.

"Zaccheus was a chief tax collector and he was rich. Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way" (vs. 3-4).

Zaccheus probably started that day like any other day before it. He had no idea what was going on when the crowds started to pack the dirty streets of Jericho. He was simply a businessman caught in a traffic jam, trying to see what was going on. Zaccheus heard the commotion and followed the crowd until he had a glimpse of Someone who took his breath away. Zaccheus was too short to see much, but even a glimpse of this person's face made him desperately hungry for more.

Could this be the One they say He is? Zaccheus' thoughts raced as he fought for some kind of vantage point. Then he remembered the tree, a sycamore he had passed hundreds of times before. Its broad limbs overshadowed the street where Jesus would pass by.

Quickly, he abandoned the swirling mob and ran ahead until he reached the tree of his memory. As he leaned against it to climb, an odd idea formed in his mind: *Someone of my stature in the community doesn't climb trees. However, the truth is, someone of my stature will never*

see Him unless he climbs the tree! But how do I preserve my dignity? His prideful logic attempted to overwhelm his passion. Which would win?

While Zaccheus was debating over his dignity in the shadow of the sycamore tree, I believe the angels were cheering him on. "Climb the tree, man! Get up there. We didn't guard this tree for over fifty years for nothing. Deity over dignity. Passion over logic!"

God had prepared this blind date with destiny. It was no time for Zaccheus to wrestle with his pride over what a disapproving public would think of him. He climbed the tree.

"When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, 'Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.' And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly" (vs. 5-6).

Jesus invited himself into Zaccheus' life, and Zaccheus was saved that day because he received him gladly. He was authentically transformed by the encounter. It's evident in what he said and did. *"Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much'" (v. 7).*

We know from what Jesus said in response that the crowd surrounding them had witnessed His power to save. *"And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost'" (vs. 8-10).*

Fifty-two years ago, I was born to devout Hindu parents in Tirunelveli, a small town about 40 miles north of the southern tip of India. I was one of six children. We were all raised in a very traditional

The Mighty Tree Path. Redwood Forest, CA, 2004. Sue Brooks



“Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him; were He to move past me, I would not perceive Him. . . If I called and He answered me, I could not believe that He was listening to my voice. . . If the scourge kills suddenly, He mocks the despair of the innocent.”

(Job 9:11, 16, 23 NASB)

way: learning all the religious customs, edicts and scriptures. I was extremely independent from the beginning, and my parents, realizing that I was intellectually blessed, encouraged my independence. My family lived in predominantly poor neighborhoods where I witnessed extreme poverty. I could not conceive of a compassionate, loving God in the midst of so much deprivation.

My understanding of God was strictly limited to creation, punishment and suffering, and death. God was remote. He created, but He did not care about the outcome. The remoteness of God under such circumstances was justifiable for me. It satisfied my rational mind, but there was no satisfaction in my inner being from this rationalization.

I attended Catholic schools from an early age because my parents knew that these schools offered the best education in India. Part of the curriculum included lessons from the Bible. Every school day started with a prayer meeting and the reciting of the Lord's Prayer. However, these were perfunctory acts as part of the school routine with no real spiritual benefits. Neither my parents' faith nor the religious

teachings at school answered the mystery of the suffering and the hopelessness I witnessed around me.

When I left home at the age of 17 to attend an exclusive engineering college, the Indian Institute of Technology in Madras, I completely shut God out. The intellectual, rational dialogues with my

elite collegemates from many southeast Asian nations only added to my agnosticism. When I was 21, after having completed my undergraduate degree, I left India and immigrated to the United States to pursue my graduate studies at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, Georgia. Surrounded by students from different parts of the world added more firepower to my agnosticism. I agreed with a wide-ranging rationalization justifying a godless, self-sufficient universe.

Marrying a girl raised in a Christian home did not in any way change my beliefs and value system. I believed strongly that survival and security in this world were strictly a function of one's material acquisition and the protection of one's interests. “Be selfish and enjoy all the comforts that the world has to offer” became my mantra.

My dream of one day working for the space program came true when I joined the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1989. Living in Georgia and Alabama, part of the “Bible Belt,” I had many friends whose sole goal was to convert

me, the “heathen” man, and make me see the Light. Instead of drawing me nearer to God, this actually pushed me more toward atheism.

In December of 1996, NASA sent me to Wallops Island in Virginia to oversee a two-week project. I was staying in a motel on Chincoteague Island. One cold morning about 6 a.m., I decided to visit the beach, for I had been raised in a coastal city in India and was fond of the sea. Of course, at that hour, no one was around. It was high tide with six to eight-foot waves crashing onto the 20-foot wide shore. Hermit crab tracks and shells were strewn all around. At the time, no overwhelming issues of any nature were on my mind.

After walking a quarter of a mile, a Bible story came flooding into my memory, something I had learned 30 years before in my Christian Education classes in the Catholic School. So goes the story: *“That day when evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Let us go over to the other side.’ Leaving the crowd behind, they took Him along, just as He was, in the boat. There were also other boats with Him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, ‘Teacher, don’t You care if we drown?’ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’ They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!’”* (Mark 4:35-41 NIV)

Suddenly, just like in the biblical account, a scene unfolded in front of my eyes as I stood

alone on the beach. The roaring sea abruptly calmed down. The wind ceased. I saw a small boat floating ashore, and a white-robed man stepping off the boat. He walked toward me and took hold of my hands. I distinctly remember Him calling me by my first name, “Jay,” a nickname my father gave me when I was a child. The man told me, “Jay, I love you. Trust Me and all your doubts will be cleared.”

He took me by the hand and we walked together along the beach. I can’t fully recall all that He told me, for I was too overwhelmed. But I didn’t have to be a NASA rocket scientist to realize Who walked beside me. Then and there I knew I belonged to Him. I let go of all that had been precious to me--my life--and surrendered it to Him. Indescribably, peace filled me.

I knew my intellect would stand in the way of sharing this vision and my surrender of the world. The whole encounter refuted my logical training and rational mind. However, this was my sycamore tree, my passion. I knew I had to climb the tree, for the One I had encountered had transformed me into a new person. My old self and its loves were dead. Passion had conquered logic.

From then on, I found security, not by owning things, but by being owned by Him. I found peace, not by controlling with my mind, but by being controlled by His love and grace. I began a new journey, a life of eternity in Christ. My selfish egotistical past was crucified, and I was reborn. An insatiable desire drives me to hear His words constantly, and I have an all-consuming passion to see Him again.

The truth is that we all have “come short of the glory of God,” and we cannot see Him face to face without divine assistance. The sycamore tree of Zaccheus was the proverbial tree of divine purpose.

“One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to meditate in His Temple.”

(Psalm 27:4 NASB)

“We may be certain that whatever God has made prominent in His Word, He intended to be conspicuous in our lives.”

Charles Spurgeon

When humanity fell short of the glory of God, He planted another tree of inestimable worth. The tree of destiny, the cross, was planted on Calvary for all of us. God himself climbed it first so it would still be standing on our day of destiny. We can't see Him from any other vantage point, but if we will just climb that tree, we'll transcend time and access His abiding presence for eternity.

I wonder how many times the sycamore seedling growing beside the road would have been trampled, but for the grace of God? How many times could our destinies have been short-circuited, but for the providence of the Father? I read with joy the good news that He has made plans for us, *“plans to prosper us and not harm us, plans to give us all a hope and a future”* (Jeremiah 29:11).

Jay Sambamurthi is currently living in Willard, Utah. He is an aerospace engineer working for NASA on the Shuttle Solid Rocket Motors. He has been happily married to Jennie for the last 24 years and has a 17-year-old son, Nathan. He worships at Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Brigham City, where his services to the Kingdom of God include worship singing, small group leadership, ALPHA facilitator for beginning Christians, and chair of the board for the local Pregnancy Care Center. His hope is that he is obedient to the invitations that God sends his way in the community where the harvest is plentiful and the servants are few.

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name.”

(Psalm 100:4 NIV)



Enter His Gates. Lake Cuomo, Italy, 2004. Sue Brooks

What Can Separate Us?

Erika Pimper--Brigham City, UT

When I married Travis, I was deeply in love and thankful he was a Christian--or so I thought. I joined his church so that we could attend together. However, it soon became evident that his church was totally different from what I had known and experienced in my earlier years as a Christian.

I became increasingly frustrated, even angry, and most of all, spiritually empty. When I shared my concerns with Travis, he said, "There must be something wrong with you, because I am happy with the church."

Several years passed, and I did not have a better attitude participating in the various services. But when I was appointed to teach Sunday school, I was eager to teach the young students about the sacrifice Jesus made so we could have forgiveness, and through our faith, eternal life—beliefs not taught in the church.

Taking part in higher ceremonies is the lofty goal set before each member. This is accomplished by going through an interview and affirming, among other things, belief in the doctrine; recognizing the leader as the only one on earth to hold the keys to the priesthood; living a chaste life; abstaining from drinking coffee, tea, and alcohol, as well as refraining from use of tobacco products; not associating with those who oppose the church; attending services regularly; and tithing ten percent of one's gross income. If members fulfill these requirements, then they are deemed worthy to take part in the ceremonies.

I had been told on numerous occasions what a wonderful spiritual experience it was to do this, so I anticipated finding the missing link that had kept me wandering in a spiritual desert. When I received the permission to attend, I was truly

flattered to have "made it" with the select few, because not every member achieves that privilege.

After participating in a rather strange ceremony, my heart was pounding. I had no words to adequately express my feelings, but somehow I knew I had become involved in teachings and practices completely opposed to Biblical truth. I muttered to the woman next to me: "What are we going to do *now*?" She replied, "You have made it!" Later, when I shared my concern about the ceremony with Travis, he assured me that it was good insurance. In other words, if Plan A does not succeed, then Plan B is surely a guarantee.

I had accepted Christ as Savior at age eight in my hometown of Munich, Germany. I loved Jesus, Who gave His life to save me. I knew I was going to heaven after I die. Because I did not want to be a part of the rituals of my present church, I began to research the doctrines, history, and theology, something I had not done prior to my marriage. What I discovered disturbed me. My attempt to share what I was learning with Travis was totally rejected. In fact, he became hostile by my mentioning the name of Jesus Christ. He referred to Him as "your Jesus." Needless to say, our loving relationship took a nosedive. I became even more frustrated and helpless.

As my frustration and disillusionment grew, I began to seriously consider having my name withdrawn from church membership. But it is not so simple. At that particular time, 1981, it could only be granted by excommunication, which leaves a stigma on one's reputation. I did not want to embarrass my husband, who was a well-known businessman, by being excommunicated. So I silently went through the motions of attending church with him, while inside I was full of turmoil.





Break Through. Alaskan waters, 2003. Sue Brooks

“The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

(John 1:5 NASB)

During that period, I was also going through a very difficult time physically. Something strange happened during my sleep, a kind of sleepwalk. I would jump out of bed, driven by utter horror and fear, my heart racing out of control, and I would shake like a leaf. I could never remember the reason or the nightmare that brought me to this horrible experience. The episodes became more and more frequent; in fact, in one night, I had as many as three of those frightful sleep walks.

But that was not all that plagued my spirit. When I awoke to make a routine trip to the bathroom, I suddenly and violently became ill to the point of passing out. I could barely manage to sit on the bathroom floor with my head over the toilet, feeling like I had a severe case of stomach flu. Perspiration soaked my nightgown. After about eight to ten minutes, I felt the nausea pass as if nothing had happened.

I was unnerved about these tormenting experiences. I prayed to my Lord, knowing I had peace with my Savior. Scripture was my comfort and strength. Romans 8, especially verses 38 and 39, spoke to me in my desperate situation:

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I determined that I could not compromise my faith in my Lord to accommodate my husband’s beliefs and subsequently appease him. Even though my devoted love towards Travis was genuine, no one could take away my faith in the true God of the Bible.

During the day, I functioned normally, fulfilling my duties as a homemaker and helping in our business. No one other than my husband knew about my nightly episodes, and he did not pay any attention. Frankly, I was embarrassed to seek medical assistance, and Travis did not encourage me to do so. As time went on, the attacks became more frequent; in fact, almost every night I had either one or the other experience.

My relationship with Travis became painfully estranged, but through all of this I still loved him. One day he told me, "If you're so unhappy in the church, you should leave it." Ultimately, that is what I did. I wrote a letter, requesting to have my name removed from church membership. I was excommunicated shortly thereafter. As a result, my husband divorced me. Almost immediately, he started dating, and four months later, he married a member in good standing.

After I moved out of our house, I went to live with my widowed mother. Two weeks went by, and strangely, I did not have one single nightmare; even months later, not another frightful episode. I'm writing this 25 years later, and not once has this happened again.

Only in the light of Scripture can I come to the conclusion that I was indeed involved in a spiritual war. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12 KJV)

I've been married now for 24 years to a wonderful Christian man. We share our faith in Jesus

and love for each other. God truly removed me from an unhappy situation, taking a huge load off of my shoulders and setting me free.

Erika Pimper has lived in Brigham City since 1971. She and her husband, Dennis, are retired. They attend Community Presbyterian Church where Erika is involved in missions and evangelism. She also sings in the choir as a soloist, and volunteers at the local Soup Kitchen and Senior Center.

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(Romans 8:38-39 KJV)

“Let us draw from that ‘great cloud of witnesses’ and learn from their journeys, so that our memory may span the story of God’s relationship with His people. Remembering is not mere nostalgia; it is an act of survival, our way of ‘watching over our hearts with all diligence.’”

Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance*



Power for Liftoff, Promontory, UT, 2006, Phil Reyes
Night static test of a space shuttle solid rocket booster at ATK.

“I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. With Your counsel You will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

(Psalm 73:23-26 NASB)

Seeing Stars

Dorothy Catlin--Brigham City, UT



What I saw took my breath away. Gazing through the telescope eyepiece, I felt a deep and direct connection between my soul and “the One Who has created these stars,” even as I stood in my own backyard.

It was late August, and our friend Dave had a new telescope; the sky was clear, and the planet Mars was passing closer to earth than it would again for hundreds of years.

Dave was like a kid with a fantastic new toy, eager to show us all it could do. He fussed over the focus and position, anxiously searching out the stars he wanted us to see: the Andromeda Galaxy, the Ring Nebula, a “loose cluster.” With each new wonder, I was amazed and humbled afresh, as the words I had read that very morning echoed in my mind:

“To whom then will you liken Me that I would be his equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one of them is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD, and the justice due me escapes the notice of my God?’” (Isaiah 40:25-27 NASB)

I’ve heard it said that the stars are cold and distant--that viewing them brings a sense of one’s insignificance. But for me, the effect was just the opposite. My husband, Jim, and I were in the midst of painful circumstances, utterly beyond our control, and here was God, calling my attention to the heavens, affirming His loving care over my life in a most visual and memorable way.

Those glittering points seemed strikingly near,

each one held in its assigned place by an unseen, powerful hand. God’s universe was all in order, inviting me to trust Him to bring order to mine.

The things we saw that night remained in my mind’s eye, forming a firm foothold in the deep places of my heart for the events that would soon unfold in our lives.

A few days later Jim lost his job--a common enough experience in today’s economy. But when that job happens to be in ministry, there is trauma to a whole body of intimately connected people: the body of Christ.

“Removed as pastor” the letter had said--no explanation or elaboration. We had expected it for months, but the actual blow was sudden and rude, the culmination of almost two years of painful struggle and anguished prayer. Overnight, our comfortable, complacent church became an armed camp. As shock gave way to anger, the fellowship began to splinter and divide, accusing and wounding one another.

Our faith-family seemed to implode: confusion, misunderstanding, and gossip abounded. Many whom we’d regarded as friends were suddenly suspicious, and kept their distance; others pressed in close, bringing to us their confusion and anger, but also their love and support. The phone rang continually.

Daily, I grappled with bouts of anger and exhaustion, repeatedly facing the choice between forgiveness and bitterness. Those days were heavy with sorrow, but also often brought surprising joy. Even as I struggled, I was absolutely confident that God had brought us to this, and I found that He continued to meet me in a most personal

“It seemed to me then (and still does) that God was saying to me: ‘Don’t you realize Who I am? If I am calling the very stars by their names, and they must respond, how could you think I would overlook you? You are much more precious to Me than these stars... I don’t get tired, and neither will you, if you will entwine your heart with Mine, and exchange your strength for Mine.’”

and gracious way. I found that surrender to His grace brought a confidence in God Himself, and a deep peace which transcended our circumstance.

Countless times in the following months, I was encouraged and strengthened by the memory of those stars. When I was tempted (which was often) to believe that there would be no justice, no truth, no end to the painful confrontations and accusations, Isaiah’s words would ring in my ears, always accompanied by those stars.

Even as God stripped away all the resources and props to which I had clung, He continued to reveal the unshakable depth and permanence, the glorious beauty and wonder, the amazing grace of finding Him afresh. Isaiah 40 continues: *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might, He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary”* (Isaiah 40:28-31 NASB).

We rarely read these verses in their full context. It seemed to me then (and still does) that God was saying to me: “Don’t you realize Who I am? If I am calling the very stars by their names, and they must respond, how could you think I would overlook you? You are much more precious to Me than these stars. I don’t get tired, and neither will you, if you will entwine your heart with Mine, and exchange your strength for Mine.”

I’d been living in Isaiah 40 for almost seven months,

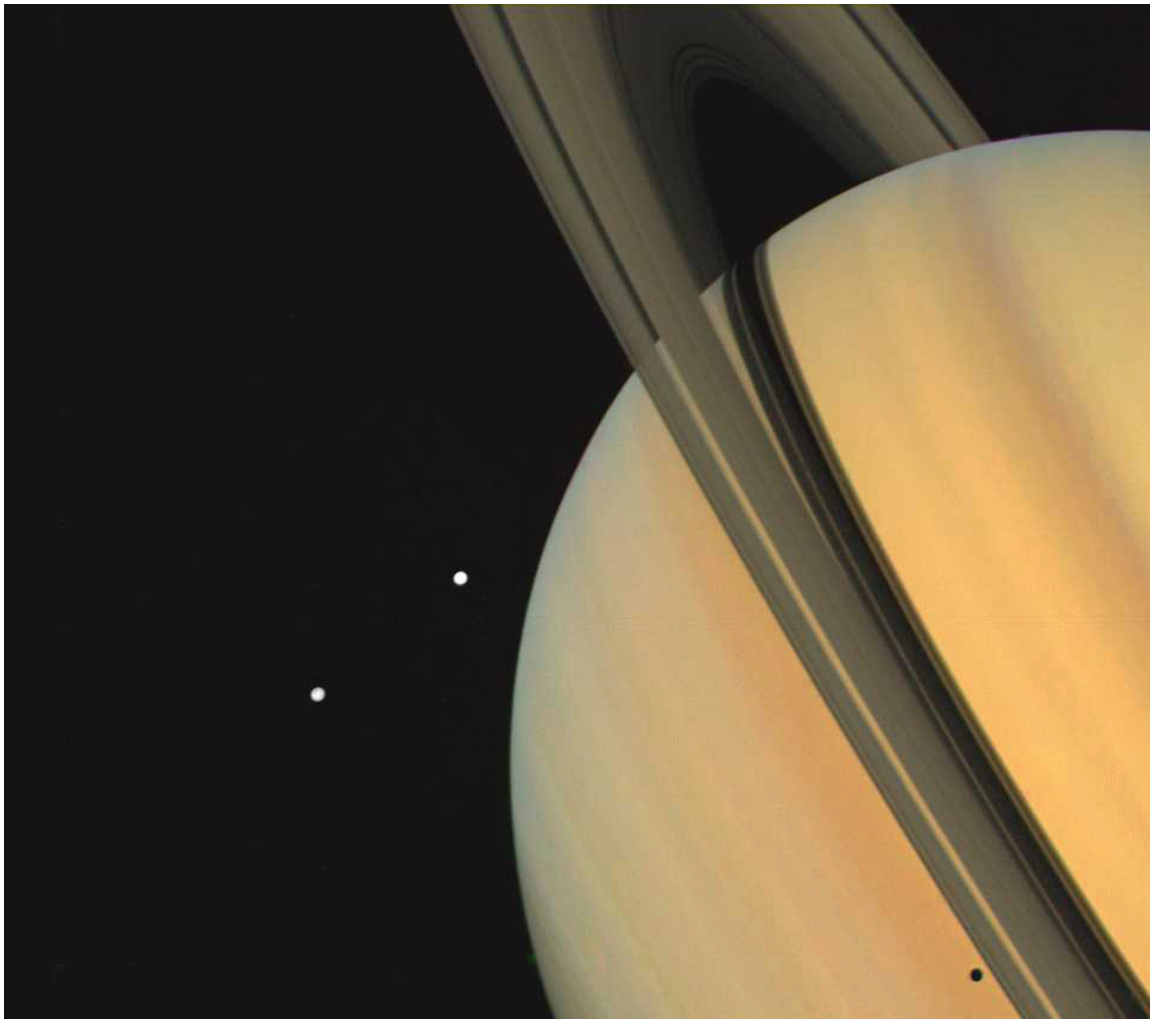
re-reading and savoring the words, finding comfort and healing in the might and the tenderness of my God. I was so touched by Isaiah’s message that throughout that winter, I met weekly with a small group of women to explore the book together. We were all deeply encouraged by its repeated refrain, *“I am God, and there is no other; There is none like Me.”*

This would have been enough. I had been transformed throughout that year in ways I have yet to fully understand. But God had more in store for me; He’d planned a second encounter with the stars.

We hadn’t seen much of Dave over the winter. For weeks, he’d been consumed by an impossibly large design project in his business and had found very little time for anything else. But on the very day when Jim had decided to accept God’s call to a new ministry in Utah, God had provided Dave a breakthrough in his work. The planets were already arranged, so He brought about a beautiful, clear night, and then He prompted our friend to call.

Jim and I were at the kitchen table, talking. He’d just told me of his decision. I knew I was required to accept God’s call to my husband and to trust Him for all that it implied. I was very willing to do so and regarded it as delightful timing--the very next day in my morning Bible study, I’d be teaching from Isaiah 40.

But the prospect of moving away from our friends, leaving Jim’s parents, selling the home I loved, and the gardens I’d nurtured, uprooting our teenagers’ lives--the price seemed high. Tears flowed; I deeply needed to know that God was also calling me.



I was still wiping my eyes when I answered the phone. Dave's voice was cheerful: "It's a clear night, and Mars is in view. May I bring the telescope over?" My heart leapt as I recognized the affirming hand of God.

Dave had no idea that his suggestion of an impromptu star-gaze was a God-directed gift to me! Only later, as we stood outside in the darkness, did I realize how profoundly the Lord had met my need. He had granted me a fresh view of Himself in August, sustained me through the winter by His word to Isaiah, and now, in March, He was personally reviewing it for me as I stood in the dark in my own backyard: the Orion Nebula, Jupiter with all four moons clearly arrayed, Saturn, steeply tilted, casting its

own shadow on those amazing rings, the Pleiades each in their assigned places.

"The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one of them is missing" (Isaiah 40:26 NASB).

Dave and his telescope had formed a bracket for me around the experiences of that year: an undeniable mark of the intimate involvement of my Father in all that had happened. I was humbled and filled with wonder at this intimate love-gift I had received. God does see. Nothing escapes His notice. I would have been fine without it; I suppose I would have thrown myself diligently into the packing and painting required over the next

few weeks, dutifully accepting the momentous change that had been thrust into our lives. But now everything was different—those tasks would become filled with joyful anticipation, because God had called me. He had lifted my eyes to the stars, and He had given me Himself.

P.S. to Dave: The sky is dark and the stars are brilliant here in Brigham City. Come visit us, and bring the telescope!

Dorothy Catlin now lives in Brigham City, Utah, with her husband, Jim. They have four children, two of whom are still in the home as teenagers. She is delighted by the rugged beauty of the state, and is utterly in love with the people of the small church where she and Jim serve. This is an interesting season of life for Dorothy. In addition to shuttling between her kids' activities, it seems that most of her energy is directed toward Bible study and gardening; lots of time on the knees in the garden has proven to be a powerful means of processing biblical truth in preparation for teaching women's Bible studies twice weekly.



Armored Vehicle: Tortoise found wandering in a Mesquite, NV neighborhood, 2006. Sue Brooks

“The Lord knows how He can use for good all the negative paragraphs and chapters of your life. As you yield to Him, He transforms them (often in unexpected ways) into something beautiful and useful. He uses them, along with your present trials, as a platform—a stage—on which He reveals Himself through you.”

Warren and Ruth Myers
Discovering God's Will

Mastering the Darkness

*"... sin crouches at your door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."
(Genesis 4:7 Amp)*

Thurl Van Kirk--Running Springs, CA

I stood shoulder-to-shoulder with ninety naked men in a large room. A dentist looked inside our mouths. An optometrist checked our eyes. An M.D. listened to heartbeats with a stethoscope. We turned our heads and coughed while doctors searched for hernias. It was my first Marine physical. Only six of us passed. "You'll get your orders in three months," they said.

At the time of my Marine physical, I was in a Naval Reserve unit. In the summer between my high school junior and senior years, I had taken a train to Chicago for boot camp at Great Lakes, Illinois. Came home. Went to school. During Christmas break, I caught a two-week cruise on a Destroyer out of Providence, Rhode Island.

So with previous training, issued uniforms and graduation from high school, I could be gone in two weeks. Instead of waiting three months for the Marine Corps, I opted to stay in the Navy. On my flight to San Francisco, a man sitting next to me said, "I bet you are going to Vietnam." I didn't have a clue where Vietnam was. Nor did I care. I was hung over from my going-away party.

He was right. Six months later, about 1400 other men and I boarded a ship on a cold, foggy, black morning. Head lamps on the pier followed more head lamps. We were in the Naval yard preparing to receive our first Army unit. Then a smaller truck bearing a big Red Cross pulled off to the side. The staff set up coffee units and spread boxes of cake donuts on a table.

Filing past, each of us got a hot cup of coffee and two donuts. We stood quietly eating. Then the

order came, "Grab your gear!" Up the gangplank we went with duffel bag, M-16, and anxious anticipation. Light gray appeared on the eastern horizon. Then we saw a school bus arrive at the pier carrying a band. The mood was quiet, subdued. Troops milled about topside as the gangplank was taken away and the band snapped to attention. Then the brass section played a familiar melody,

*"O beautiful for spacious skies,
for amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties above
the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
from sea to shining sea!"*

We all stared down at the band. Tugs moved us away from the pier. The Red Cross packed up. "O beautiful for spacious skies" lilted in the morning mist. Blasts from the ship's horn jarred our thoughts. Would we return? *America! America!*

For us who did return, America greeted us with spit. "Baby killers!" they jeered. They placed signs around their homes: "Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Keep off the Grass!" No, America was not kind to us. Cold gray has always been the greeting for Vietnam Veterans.

How could we know that when we sailed past Alcatraz and under the Golden Gate? Men squeezed into every square inch of deck, stood at the rail, gazing at Oakland, then San Francisco. Men huddled around bundles of bright orange life



rafts and stood around ventilation shafts, smoking, talking in little groups. Conversations centered upon home, sweethearts, cars. They milled about as the ship rumbled far from empty shores.

Two or three days later, the shock wore off. Cold currents, bitter winds, and bright sunshine made us forget. The ocean's dark blue spread out in all directions as far as the eye could see--nothing but water, waves, and the gray hull of a monster ship taking us further and further from home. Men dressed in olive-drab green talked with men dressed in bell-bottom dungarees and light blue work shirts. For the next thirty days, we would be brothers in tight quarters adjusting to seasickness. Some never did.

Then we hit Okinawa, five days away from Vietnam. *Awoo! Awoo! Awoooooooooooooooooooooo!* The sound made me think of the prairie in West Texas, but it wasn't a coyote howling. It was Sergeant Bovich wailing a prophetic, low, mournful howl. Looking back, it seems Sarge knew he wasn't going to make it. Some of the guys laughed when they heard the sound. "Sarge is blitzed!"

They were right. But it struck me differently. Why, I don't know. Maybe it was a premonition, but I wasn't much of a spiritual man at that point of my life. Now, so many years later, when I hear coyotes, I think of Sarge.

Two weeks later, he was dead. We received a letter describing a routine night patrol. They were checking how the Viet Cong were moving supplies on mountain trails. Seems the supply lines were always changing. So Sarge's first assignment was to spot the enemy, watch their movement. Someone messed up. They were inexperienced. A firefight followed. Sarge was hit. They got good

cover. Leaned him against a wall. Medic was checking him out. It looked bad. Sarge had taken several rounds from an AK47 in his right leg. He was bleeding. They couldn't stop it. Obvious to everyone, the leg was history. Sarge knew it.

No one could explain what happened next. He lit up a cigarette. *That's nuts! It's night!* The North Viet Cong could easily see the glow. Sure enough, five shots from a sniper pierced his chest.

One month before, all we had talked about was getting home and how we were going to ride in his '62 Corvette down Main Street with the top down. Now, he wouldn't be driving anything.

After I read the letter, I walked over to the porthole and tossed my fresh carton of Pall Malls into the ocean. It took years for me to accept the fact that he had wanted to die. He was a good soldier. Not dumb. Not blitzed. He didn't light up out of habit. No, it was intentional. He didn't want to live with his leg blown off. So he lit up and the Viet Cong finished him. That was my introduction to Vietnam, one week after our arrival. Sergeant was twenty-three. I was nineteen.

We arrived in Da Nang near dusk. As we rounded one island, we heard automatic weapons fire. It was slow, methodical. Someone was shooting, but who? It was close. Could be a sniper. "Which side?" we asked. Finally, we spotted him. He was one of ours, catching up on his target practice. The men were ready to break out weapons when the order came to stand down.

The next morning, I took my first photo of Da Nang. We were anchored off shore in a wide bay. Sun was just coming over the eastern hills. A Swift-boat was tied off next to one of the launches that

would be transporting troops. It all seemed so peaceful. What a lie.

Troops assembled mid-ship. They opened the side hatch and troops climbed down a Jacob's ladder. Since World War II, U.S. troops have deployed out side hatches because the Germans used to fly overhead and strafe assembled troops on the deck. Large safety nets hung beneath the hatch. Like spiders, troops had to maneuver gear, weapons and themselves over the side. Booms hauled seabags and ammunition to waiting LSTs, our flat bottom landing craft.

Overhead, one boom had gathered a pile of sea bags and was heading towards an LST to drop the load. Then for some reason, a slice in the netting allowed a soldier's seabag to tumble into the water. A groan went up from the crowd. A man had just lost his most valuable possessions, along with his photos from home.

I remembered our chilly exit from San Francisco a month earlier. That day in Da Nang, it must have been 100 degrees as the troops deployed. In the evening, however, we had a treat coming. We had made a deal with one of the Swift-boats to swap movies with another ship. We had watched all our movies. They had watched theirs. Our lieutenant gave us the go-ahead.

The real thrill would be to take a short trip on one of the black Swift-boats. They had a sixty-caliber machine gun on the bow and a sixty on the fantail. Mid-ship they had 50-caliber machine guns on port and starboard. When we came on board, each guy had an M-16, a forty-five, and the boat carried three M-79 grenade launchers. That's firepower. But we were just going for movies, right?

The night was hot and sticky. The coxswain fired up our diesel engine. Wave after wave slammed against the hull. *Wham, Wham, Wham, Wham!* We were doing well past 40 knots. Feeling ill, I moved back towards the fantail. Then we saw action, a firefight. A Destroyer joined the party. They had their automatic guns responding to positions on the shore. Tracer after tracer darted across the sky. This wasn't some safe, 4th of July celebration. It was real. Men were dying while we were going to trade movies.

Our best defense was speed and darkness. The coxswain turned the boat to get out of the way. The Viet Cong were shooting, but their fire was over our heads. He zigzagged while the waves slapped the hull, *Wham! Wham! Wham!* We pounded along. Our orders were not to return fire-- just get out of there and let the big guys handle it. We circled around and connected with the destroyer. We got our movies while hell was breaking loose, and then returned to the ship.

As we approached the dock, we witnessed a drama unfold. A Merchant Marine who had a little too much to drink was climbing up the inside of the Jacob's ladder. That meant he was going to be trapped once he got to the top. When gunfire started, he became disoriented. Instead of climbing up, he turned around and climbed down towards the South China Sea.

Our boat was about ready to dock, so we attempted a rescue. We couldn't turn on a searchlight since it would have invited fire from shore. So with small flashlights, we kept an eye on the man climbing back towards an all-too-eager ocean. Wave after wave rolled closer and closer. Then he fell.

“Bless you, prison,
for having been in
my life.”

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

With strong currents and five-foot swells, he would be swept out to sea. We had one pass to grab the man or he would die. Four of us moved to the starboard side, shining our flashlights into brown water. He surfaced. We shot out arms and grabbed death-warmed-over. He sobered, coughing, cursing, puking. We dragged him in. He fought. Got a line about him. Hauled him in again. On the next approach, we put the movies off and got a harness on the drunk.

The next night, it was our turn to visit Da Nang. We finished work and headed for an LST for a ride to shore. We met five Australian soldiers in a bar. We heard nearby small arms fire while talking, but we didn't care. We were working on our fifth or sixth beer. By this time we had swapped stories and traded hats. I got one of those fancy Australian bush hats.

Then we heard a mortar explode. We knew we would have to vacate soon, so we said goodbye and staggered out into darkness. Darrell and I decided we had had enough and headed toward the ship, which meant we had to hike about a mile down a dark road in order to catch a launch. Da Nang was supposed to be secure, so we didn't anticipate a problem. But the Viet Cong were always testing. They tried to find the weakness in American defense. Darrell and I headed on until we heard an eerie sound off in the distance, "Thud, Thud, Thud!"

After we dove into a gully for cover, I had to take a leak. So did Darrell--the war would have to wait. We began to relieve ourselves when what we feared happened. The sky above us burst into light. Three observation flares shot skyward to provide light for combat. We were stuck in the gully directly underneath. The Viet Cong were on

one side of the mountain. Our troops were on the other. Each opened fire. We were caught in the middle, peeing. Thank God there was plenty of bush. No one saw us.

The shooting lasted only as long as the flares burned. Then we climbed out of the gully and ran all the way to the launch. I had never seen Darrell move so quickly as when we sprinted down that totally black road. I don't know how we made it. All someone had to have done back there was look down into the gully to where we were standing for easy shots. I thought of Sarge in Okinawa, howling like a coyote. Instead of a moon, we saw night flares. Instead of howling, we peed.

Don, a handsome Marine, six-three with dark, greenish-blue eyes didn't say much, but he had a ready smile. On our trip over, a group of us sat out at night after dinner and talked about home and our girlfriends, and Bob played guitar. Don lasted a week in Da Nang. Spence wrote me. "A smoking boot is all we found. Don had stepped on an anti-tank mine. It blew him up and several other guys were wounded." I felt so bad. What a gentle, kind man; yet duty called. As a United States Marine, he found himself on patrol that afternoon.

I read the letter in an empty troop compartment. Just a month before, we had put together a talent show. Some guys danced like a guy and a girl while a trooper played a honky-tonk piano. We had different guys entertain with songs, music, and some even read poetry. I remembered Don so shy, happy, smiling. He would be forever twenty-one.

So we came back to America the beautiful. Got more troops. Heard more stories. Visited hostile lands and returned. But those young men left

an impression on me. So brave, so courageous, unsuspecting that life could end so quickly.

Got another letter from Spence: "Perez and our squad were on patrol. We swept through a village. Checked out the bar. An eight-year-old boy followed us in. Cute kid, we thought. Then he pulled out a gun and shot Perez. He was from a large Mexican family. He loved children. No matter what they told us about the Viet Cong, Perez could never shoot a kid. So the kid shot him. He used a U.S. issue 45 automatic."

Spence was standing next to Perez. As the eight-year-old turned towards Spence, he fired his M-16. They found out later that the Viet Cong had threatened to kill the boy's family if he didn't shoot U.S. servicemen. What the eight-year-old didn't realize was that the Viet Cong shot his family and raped his sister shortly after he had left them. It was their brand of terrorism. It worked. They got children to kill soldiers.

Spence did okay. He loved kids. It didn't really bother him until he returned home. Shortly after, he and Christine married. He thought he had put the war behind him. He had, for a long time. Then they had a son, Justin. When Justin turned eight, Spence fell apart. He couldn't get over what had happened on that patrol. He had dreamt about Perez, lying there staring at the sun, dead. Then he would dream about Justin lying in the same way.

What do you say to soldiers struggling with the darkness that follows them home? It came to me seven years after my return from Vietnam. I thought I had handled the war pretty well. Reevaluated life. Purposed new goals. Read the Bible cover to cover. Rediscovered faith. But emptiness remained. What was I seeking?

I needed a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. It wasn't enough to attend church, hear great sermons or sing in the choir. I needed to recommit my past, present and future to Christ. His presence soothed painful memories. His continued touch made me more positive. Other changes took place. I quit drinking, found a great job, married, and was nearing the end of my studies. We talked about starting our family.

Then my wife, Diane, came home late from a Women's Bible study. I was asleep. I had been studying hard for finals, trying to wrap everything up so we could accept a job in California. When Diane came into the bedroom, she took off her coat. In the process, she knocked over a little perfume bottle. *Chink* was all the sound it made. I started rolling on the bed, moaning and groaning.

The next morning, she described what happened. "I thought it was funny. I stood there chuckling. Then you saw me. You stood up slowly, started coming towards me. I had turned on the dresser lamp to get undressed. I saw your face. It was vacant, distant. You drew back your arm and made a fist. I could tell you were getting ready to hit me! I yelled, 'Chuck! It's me, Diane!' You walked back to bed, laid down right where you had been sleeping. Funny thing is, you were not awake for any of it."

When she told me this, I was frightened. I had a loaded 45 automatic in the nightstand and could have easily rolled over, grabbed the weapon, and emptied the clip into my wife, killing her. I went to a trusted professor that morning and said, "I need to talk." As I described what happened, she told me about Delayed Stress Syndrome (DSS).

"Yeah, what you have sounds like that Delayed Stress thing," she said. But I hadn't seen that

much combat, I told her. "You didn't have to. It's being in an overwhelming situation that causes the soul to imprint. Coming under fire. Hearing bullets zing over your head. Seeing people die. Feeling concussion from explosions. All of these things are capable of causing Delayed Stress Syndrome."

The solution, she said, was to "watch stressful situations. When stress can't be avoided, be careful of your reactions to surprises. In a crowd, if someone bumps you, a child screams behind you, a quick gesture is perceived threatening, or you hear popping noises, your tendency will be to overreact." I went home and got rid of the 45 automatic. Haven't had too many incidents since. But it's scary, sometimes. I can't leave the darkness of Vietnam behind me. It followed me home.

However, the Word speaks to me:

*"What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light;
and what you hear whispered in your ear,
proclaim upon the housetops. . . Do not fear those
who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul;
but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both
soul and body in hell
(Matthew 10:27-28 NASB).*

Jesus speaks to darkness. The Greek word suggests even the result or residue of darkness. The Greek present tense means a continual action--Jesus speaks not only once but continues speaking to all the dark circumstances in our lives. What does He say? What He always says, "*Peace, I am with you always.*"

So why write this story? The war happened 40 years ago. *Who cares?* People who ask that question have never been to the Vietnam Memorial

in Washington D.C. There is a list of 58,000 names in the order of the day they died. But you will see something else as well. Trinkets come and go from that place. Little notes from survivors, hubcaps from old cars, messages from the living to the dead. It seems some people still remember.

But most don't know the battles the soldiers faced. We don't have their last words, their last testimony spoken to a buddy as they lay dying far from home. Nor do we have the hosts of other stories of those who returned, who because of their war experience continue to struggle to overcome their present darkness.

Not a holiday, not a Fourth of July, not a Memorial Day, not a May 12th--the day I safely returned--goes by without emotional pain. I have learned to live with sorrow, but I try to ignore it, grow past it; however, every now and then, a coyote howls. I hear a car backfire, *POP!* Some stressful situation comes my way, and I overreact.

Healing is not easy. Writing this story has dredged up the past. It is painful. I look at old wounds, stare at old photographs. Guess I've been telling myself, *Move on. Forget it.* But to do so would be disrespectful of the men who died. It would discount their sacrifice.

There is a famous picture of a businessman visiting the Vietnam memorial. Obviously, he is alive. But when he visits the black granite wall, the artist portrays his fallen buddies standing, even reaching out a hand to touch their friend on the other side. That is what it is like to be a Vietnam Veteran. As Alexander MacLeish says, "We have given you our deaths; now give them their meaning." We live with a sense of responsibility. We want their lives and their sacrifices to stand for something.



Perhaps the greatest healing I have ever known came on Thanksgiving, 2005, when I addressed 700 Marines headed for Iraq from Camp Pendleton: "I have been where you are going," I told them. "It's a place where you discover darkness within yourself. A place where death is the surround sound. A place where darkness follows you home. Yet home is supposed to be where you are safe. How can peace become disturbing? When we bring our enemy with us, when we ourselves become the enemy! But we *can* master the enemy when we let Jesus speak to the darkness within and without.

"At home, busyness keeps harassing our peace. Pressures of peace trigger wartime defenses. We need inner healing. So we try to stuff the pain with drugs, booze, excitement, success. But stress squeezes darkness out. We overreact. People we love get hurt in the process. We scare them by our ferocious anger. Murder is in our eyes. It frightens them.

"We act like this because we have grown

comfortable with rage. People have no idea the drama we have seen. Yet, there is hope! The world is safer today because of the sacrifices we made in Vietnam. We are here to tell you today that America believes in what you are doing in Iraq. Never forget, when you face darkness within, let Jesus speak to it. What will He say? "*Lo, I am with you always*" (Matt. 28.20).

"When you face darkness around you, when a mine explodes, when a buddy dies, when you suffer wounds, let Jesus speak to the darkness around you. What will He say? "*Peace, be still. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world*" (John 16.33).

"When darkness follows you home, when it begins to destroy your peace, when bitterness rears its head and anger rages within, let Jesus calm the storm. What will he say? "*Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid*" (Matt. 14.27).

"It's been nearly 40 years since I sat where you sit tonight. Yet I have learned, Jesus Christ is faithful.

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. . . Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

(Psalm 119:9-11, 105 NIV)

Nothing in this world is as sure as salvation. It is offered to you right now. It is found only in Jesus Christ. Accept Him tonight. He's waiting. He enters only when you repent of your sin and ask His forgiveness. Then He comes in. When He does, He not only transforms you at once, He keeps on transforming.

"When darkness comes knocking, when it pounds on the memories of your heart, 'Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!' Jesus answers, 'Go to hell!'" Darkness must obey the Prince of Light.

"That is what we shout from the housetops: only Christ has the power to deal with the darkness within. Only Christ can address the dark circumstances around you. Only Christ can answer the door when darkness follows you home. When it wants to consume your dreams, shrivel your efforts, shrink and turn you into bitter old men, don't let that happen.

"One day we will be joining the men on the other side of a black granite wall. Do so with honor. 'We have given you our deaths, now give them their meaning.' Do so by living for Jesus Christ!"

As I finished, 700 Marines rose to their feet. The chapel thundered with applause. I thanked them and sat down. They kept applauding. The band

played a closing song. I moved to the rear of the chapel. They kept applauding. They not only honored me but all the other Vietnam Veterans forgotten and ignored by America. It was the best honor because it was bestowed by warriors!

As they filed out, I stood at the door. Many grabbed my hand in a firm grip and said while looking me square in the eye, "Thank you! Thank you, for your service!" It was as if I were standing before the Vietnam Memorial, representing one generation greeting another. From that vantage point, the future for America looked pretty good.

Jesus is the only one I know who takes the worst the enemy can do and uses it for glory. Let Him speak to your darkness.

Thurl Van Kirk has been the pastor of Rim of the World Community Church in Running Springs, California for the last 21 years. He is the father of three married daughters. Each, with their spouses, serves respective ministries. This December, he and Diane celebrate their 37th year of marriage. Family, friends, church, and mountain living are their passions. When Thurl isn't studying, counseling, or at the computer, he can be found in his shop enjoying the scent and pleasure of woodworking.

"Give me the love that leads the way, The faith that nothing can dismay,
The hope no disappointments tire,
The passion that will burn like fire, Let me not sink to be
a clod: Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God."

Amy Carmichael

The Sentinel. Hogle Zoo, Salt Lake City, UT, 2005. Phil Reyes



“O Lord, by all Your dealings with us, whether of joy or pain, of light or darkness, let us be brought to You. May all that You send us bring us to You. Then, knowing Your perfectness, we may be sure in every disappointment that You are still loving us. And we may know in every darkness that you are still enlightening us, and in every enforced idleness that You are still using us.”

Phillips Brooks (Modernized)
Discovering God's Will



Soul Restoration

"He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

(Psalm 23:3 NASB)

Jean Buist--Brigham City, UT

"Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He sent forth his word and healed them; He rescued them from the grave."

(Psalm 107:19-20 NIV)

Whenever I look at the third verse of Psalm 23, I am reminded of a time in my life when God was leading me, but I wasn't sure that I wanted to follow. I didn't know if I wanted to be newly married with a ready-made family in place. My husband Jerry, had two sons, Christopher, age seven, and Jacob, age six, from a previous marriage.

A lot of selfishness on my part, also doubts that it would even work out or that we would be financially able to manage created anxiety. In discussing if we would take custody of my husband's children, we came to the conclusion that it was the right thing to do. In spite of that, I was hesitant and had many fears. I was not thinking clearly, and was more frustrated than anything else, because I couldn't understand why certain things were happening. I felt alone. I was trying to run my life by myself.

As time went on, it seemed that our whole world was falling apart. Not only were the children having a hard time adjusting, my husband and I were, too. The boys had behavior and learning problems at school, so a counselor suggested that we go to family therapy, then each see the therapist individually. This didn't help.

I simply couldn't see beyond myself, that it wasn't about me but about two hurting children. I had no patience and didn't even look forward to waking up to a new day, because I knew that it would be the same as the day before. Life continued this way.

Then two years later, in 1981, I was at my lowest point. I couldn't continue with my life as it was; I knew that dramatic changes had to happen. Although I hadn't been attending church regularly

and didn't have a personal relationship with Christ, I cried out to God for help. And He answered! Thus began my soul restoration.

God led me to Scripture, in particular, Colossians 1:11, where the Apostle Paul prays that *"you may be made strong with all the strength that comes from His glorious power and. . .be prepared to endure everything with patience."* God knew exactly what I needed to hear. From that point on, everything in our lives changed.

I realized that I that I had never been in control but that God was. He had assured me of a newfound strength, which was in Him. Each day, I trusted God more because I was learning that I could *"do all things through Him Who strengthens me"* (Philippians 4:13). With Jesus Christ in my life, the situation may have been the same, but I wasn't. He was changing me.

Each morning, I offered the day up to the Lord and prayed for His guidance. As a family, we began to go to church. We weren't attending regularly, but at least we were going. It was a wonderful start. We all came to know God as our Father and the wonderful love that He has for us.

God gave me a deep love for Him and the boys. I had joy even in the midst of our everyday trials. I also experienced more patience. I was actually able to sit down with the children and talk, whether it would be to praise them for good choices or to discipline them for poor decisions.

We even came to the point that we could talk about their mother, Paula, who had died six months

Soft and Still. Lake Cuomo, Italy. 2004. Sue Brooks



after Jerry and I were married. I showed the boys pictures of her. The last photos taken were of them with their mother, just prior to her death, at a retreat with the church that Paula had attended. Going to the retreat was the last thing they had done together with her. The boys still prize those pictures.

I knew that we were all on our way to being healed. Nothing is impossible with Christ. I realized where my strength came from because everyday God filled me with His Spirit. I was not, and would never be, in control of anything, but God was. I learned to trust in Him by letting go and allowing Him to be the center of my life.

As a family, we still experienced problems, but I was comforted to know that we have an awesome

God in Whom we can trust and turn to at all times. He never asks us to face our trials and temptations alone. He has provided the way of endurance.

I am learning the importance of obedience in following Jesus. He knows what He is doing with me, and I can trust Him to provide all I need as I obey what He shows me to do. All my praises go to Him. My family and my soul have been restored.

Jean Buist and her husband, Jerry, currently live in Brigham City. They have three children and 14 grandchildren. When not at home, Jean and Jerry are somewhere in God's country. At this time, God has called Jean to minister to the elderly.

“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us--they help us learn to endure.”

(Romans 5:3-5 NLT)



The Right Prayer

Stan Lang--Manitou Springs, CO

“A new heart will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

(Ezekiel 36:26 Amp)

I never thought much about prayer. Deep down, I believed there was a God--but a God who answers prayer? That never entered my mind. I always felt that God was out there in control of our lives--but a God with whom I could talk?

I was born in East Orange, New Jersey, in 1937. One day in 1941, my mother found me on the front porch, blue and unconscious. I had a ruptured appendix. The doctors used the first antibiotic, the sulfa drug, to save my life.

I was raised in a passive Christian home where Christian values were upheld, but church attendance was rare. At the age of twelve, I listened to “The Greatest Story Ever Told” on the radio, a recounting of parables and stories of the life of Jesus. Those stories planted a seed of such strength that their memory would come back throughout my life. I made a decision to believe in Jesus at that time.

My mother died of cancer at age forty-three, when I was nineteen. I don't remember blaming God, but I couldn't understand why He allowed this nearly perfect person to die so young and in such pain. I cried the day my father told me my mother was dying; six weeks later, she passed on, but I didn't cry--not for another fifteen years. I always wondered if prayer could have helped save her.

From then on, work and study became my focus. I challenged everything, taking university courses in Old Testament and cultural anthropology, in addition to engineering courses. I completed two degrees in electrical engineering, with strengths in mathematics, science, and problem-solving. I became a follower of Ayn Rand's Objectivism. Her reasoning-based philosophy, with logic as its cornerstone, was clear and pure--she contended that our minds are the source of our strength. I studied contrasting economic and religious points of view to understand the relationship between freedom, capitalism, and morality. I studied political history and the principles used



Walls of Stone. The Duomo in Milan, Italy, 2004. Sue Brooks

by the “founding fathers,” deciding that everything must be logical, rational, and understandable.

My conclusions regarding religion were that man created God as an answer for what he didn't understand, and that belief systems are a sign of weakness, detracting from our search for truth. Yet, this period of intellectual and personal growth—including job changes, marriage, three wonderful children—also brought self-alienation, tremendous stress, and divorce.

In 1973, I saw the movie, *Brian's Song*, about two friends, one of whom lost his battle with cancer. Watching Brian's story showed me that the wall I had built around my heart had a flaw; I cried uncontrollably for over an hour. Nothing had touched me in the years since my mother's death. I had been out of touch with myself and estranged from God. I thought I was “safe” within a cocoon of my own making, insulated from any pain that could result from the loss of someone I loved. The film had momentarily broken through my protective wall.

A few months after my divorce in 1974, I accepted a short-term work assignment in California, where I met and later married Deanna Miller. My marriage to her was complete—in mind, heart, and soul, based on accepting and loving each other as we grow together. The early development of our relationship led to a critically important insight for me—loving leaves a person vulnerable to being hurt. At 19, I had loved my mother more than any other person at that time, and she died suddenly. I never wanted to experience that kind of pain again, but thanks largely to Deanna, I was free to love deeply.

Soon after our marriage, we began to attend church regularly. I knew inside that my separation

from God had lasted long enough. I wanted to learn who He was. I knew that I needed to restart my relationship with Jesus Christ. Deanna and I had been “good” Christians, living life ethically, according to God's principles. Although Dee had already given her life to Jesus, I remained reluctant. Still depending on my logical approach, I was a “good person,” living life according to God's tenets.

Our first son David was born in 1977, a wonderful child who has grown into a fine young man. Five years later, our second son, Jonathan, was stillborn. No cause was ever found, no reason given that would have prevented me from cradling our new baby in my arms. He came into the world without a chance to live. He was absolutely beautiful, and my grief was unbearable.

This experience intensified my focus on Jesus. I gave my life to Him. I cried out to Him for help, for the strength and peace that only He could give. Up until this point, I thought I had been in control, and it took this moment of loss to realize how ridiculous that was. I ended my separation from God and truly became a seeker. Previously, church and Bible study classes had been a mind exercise for me, and my heart had been hard, but when I believed, I began to see that I could become the man God wanted me to be.

Before, I had been aloof, objective, critical—telling, not asking. Now, I had become more sensitive, caring, and listening. And I began praying to God, applying Christian principles. I treated others with the unconditional love that Jesus teaches, resulting in many wonderful friendships. Remembering back to when my mother found me unconscious and later, when I was twelve years old listening to the radio stories about Jesus, I knew that God had been with me my whole life, even when I wasn't

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. . . . The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the danger of love. . . is hell.”

C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

“And when [he] cried out to you again, You heard from heaven, and in Your compassion You delivered [him] time after time.”

(Nehemiah 9:28b NIV)

with Him. I knew Jesus was perfect, and there was no man or group of men who could have invented or created this story. It was and is true. I made my choice.

In coming to the Lord, I saw the movement of my heart and mind from the position, “When I understand, then I will believe,” to “Now that I believe, I am beginning to understand.”

I first confessed my belief in Jesus Christ as a child, and then again after our baby, Jonathan, died. I went to my knees. It is a relationship that Jesus is still nurturing, and now He has my willing, loving cooperation. Do I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord and God, and that my life and salvation depend on my believing in Him? Absolutely! My path was shaped by Him, through His efforts, not mine. I still sin, but I know God loves me and protects me, giving me a way out of the temptations I encounter.

I need help from God, and ask for it in prayer daily. Even when His help is not obvious to me, I know He loves me, and His help is there. I know clearly that my purpose in this life is to glorify God, and to do that, I must keep coming to Him and keep building my relationship with Him.

C.S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*: “Until I have given up myself to Him, I will not have a real self.” So, each day I pray, “Dear Lord, my God, I love You with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my strength. Dear Lord, my God, how can I serve You today?”

As I daily submitted, I grew spiritually, and my family life, career with Hewlett Packard, management experiences, and effectiveness became enriched. My greatest joy at work was in coaching, teaching, and supporting young

engineers and managers as they faced business or technical problems beyond their reach.

After more than 25 years of experience managing product development and marketing teams for HP, I began the 90's by narrowing my efforts, to concentrate exclusively on Japan, providing the needed product development and business leadership for our operation there. I focused on management of marketing programs and business development. This included extensive work with Japanese customers in many business situations, and developed into a network of Japanese associates.

Following a successful ten-year period in Japan, I retired from the company the summer of 2000. The most critical component of my success in Japan was my ability to build relationships, care for, and trust the Japanese people with whom I worked. After retirement, I reflected on the turns my career had taken: engineering and circuit design, then management in product development, and ultimately in marketing and sales. These turns took me from an office cubicle to business development worldwide. The trail led to Japan. Reflecting on the changes over those 35 years, I saw God's role in each change and recognized that He was not finished with me yet. God had given me gifts and used my career path to develop those gifts, adding skills in engineering, business, and communication.

In the late 90s, near the end of my career, circumstances drew me to a church in Yao, Japan, near Osaka, where God planted the seed that in two short years would grow into the calling He had given me years before. In 2002, after settling into retirement, I felt the call to go on a mission to Japan. I knew about Japan, but not missions. A simple telephone call led me first

to a mission to Tanzania, providing the needed experience and training for work in Japan.

A question remained: how could I bring the message of Jesus Christ to the Japanese? I believed that by studying and observing the Japanese people, their history, culture, conduct, relationships, and religious practices, and then contrasting them with my own, a new understanding would develop so that I could share the Gospel message.

In 1 Corinthians 9:20, Paul said, "To the Jews I became a Jew, to win the Jews." I followed his example: "To the Japanese I became a Japanese, to win the Japanese." I participate in two mission periods of 30 days each, in April and October of each year. In general, while in Japan I share my wide range of experiences, including those in the workplace, and in my personal and family life. This ability leads me in a practical and strategic way to relate those experiences to Scripture for teaching and leading within the Japanese culture.

I contribute to and participate in the vision and activity development designed to expand the spread of the Gospel by increased numbers of local ministry workers. My specific activities and responsibilities include:

- a) Bible discussion and teaching leadership. The emphasis is on seekers and new believers who need to know how the Word can be applied to their everyday lives.
- b) Relational healing
- c) Local ministry fundraising
- d) One-on-one fellowship, ongoing encouragement to The Navigators' staff
- e) Contributions to changes in The Navigators' Japan strategic direction
- f) One-on-one evangelism with past co-workers

I will return for my fifth mission to Japan in the fall of 2006, supporting The Navigators' Japan staff, joining them in fellowship as they face many concerns. I will follow up with: university graduates who came to the Lord during college, yet struggle with their faith; Japanese believers who have returned to Japan, yet lack the biblical foundation to grow in their faith; young businessmen seeking the Lord who need someone to talk with about their questions or concerns; and new believers thirsty for insights about how Scripture can apply to their everyday lives. I thank God for preparing me through my professional career for this mission work in Japan.

About two weeks after returning from a mission in mid-November, 2005, I woke with a terrible pain originating in my right hip and extending down my right leg. At 68 years of age, I am an avid hiker, also engaging in a daily workout at home. With any joint or muscle pain, my first response is to "work it out" with exercise. This time, however, the pain continued to worsen, so that by early December, I could stand for only three to four minutes, or walk only 20-30 yards before the pain became excruciating, and I had to sit for relief.

After a few days, to take the pressure off my hip, I began using a cane. Within another week, I had seen two doctors, and was diagnosed as having a sciatica, an inflammation of the muscle in my right hip, at the point where the sciatic nerve passes, carrying the pain through the thigh muscle and shin, to my foot. There was a narrow range of body position where restful sleep could occur; I was thankful for that. For a couple of weeks, doctors prescribed pain killers and muscle relaxants, which gave little relief and added extreme skin dryness and some depression. I attempted the preparation for my next mission to Japan and discovered that

"Answer me when I call to You, O my God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer."

(Psalm 4:1 NIV)

“And the prayer
offered in faith
will make the sick
person well; the
Lord will raise him
up.”

(James 5:15 NIV)

focused reading and study were impossible—it was so difficult to concentrate.

I began physical therapy and muscle stretching in the area of the inflammation, so I discontinued taking the two medications and continued the stretching therapy through the Christmas holidays. I did this on my own, following the picture instructions given to me. In early January, movement without severe pain was still limited. I was concerned that my April mission to Japan was in jeopardy. I had not yet sent out my summary report from the previous trip, much less worked out a plan for April with the Japanese leadership.

I continued the stretching exercises with little lasting improvement. From mid-November, I prayed for relief from the pain and for return of normal hip muscle function. Family and friends, especially our Sunday School class members, were praying for me. I had thought, with time, the problem would work itself out, but there had been no change. By early January. I was greatly concerned that I would be prevented from going. Still, I was confident that God had called me to mission work, and each experience had reinforced that Japan was where He wanted me to be.

My prayers became more intense, more direct, “Lord, You called me to Japan—take this pain from me so I can serve You there.” Still, no change! I continued intense prayer, and then woke one morning abruptly, realizing my prayers had been wrong; they were self-centered, lacking in true faithfulness, not reflecting the deep

trust that God would use me to serve Him. So that day, I went to my knees in tears and prayed for forgiveness, realizing my pain was so small, my suffering so slight, in comparison to my Lord’s suffering for me on the cross. I wept and prayed in repentance, accepting that this pain could continue, that it would not prevent me from serving Him in Japan where He had called me to go. I thought to myself, *I will go to Japan and serve Him, even with the pain. I will walk with a cane, rest when I need to, and continue to serve Him, as He has gifted me to do.*

By day’s end, I was exhausted. I slept well that night, and when I woke up, the pain was gone—it had left me! I cannot describe my feelings as I quietly, softly praised God. He had heard my cry; He had answered. As He has many times in my life, God guided me to greater maturity in Him through a painful experience. There remains some muscle soreness; I walk slower, and I still do the stretching. But this has been a reminder of yet another gift He has given so I can experience the joy of serving Him.

Stan Lang lives in Manitou Springs, Colorado, with Deanna, his wife of 31 years. He is the father of two married daughters, one married and one single son, and eight grandchildren. He retired the summer of 2000 after a 35-year career with Hewlett-Packard. He enjoys reading historical fiction, writing, playing bridge with friends, plus traveling and hiking the many local Colorado Springs trails with his wife. He especially enjoys corresponding with the many Japanese who are part of his ministry as they seek to know Jesus better.



“Beware in your prayers, above everything else, of limiting God, not only by unbelief, but by fancying that you know what He can do. Expect unexpected things, ‘above all that we ask or think’. Each time, before you Intercede, be quiet first, and worship God in His glory. Think of what He can do, and how He delights to hear the prayers of His redeemed people. Think of your place and privilege in Christ, and expect great things!”

Andrew Murray



From Obligation to Joy

Trudee Klein--Brigham City, UT

Before I came to Christ, my life was filled with things I felt obligated to do. I filled up my time with works because I thought my works were going to bring me favor with God. I was always in a frenzy to get them all accomplished and would feel depressed or inadequate when I didn't succeed.

My former husband was called by our church leadership to be a leader. When he was ordained to the position, in front of other church members and our families, the leaders promised us that we would have great prosperity and enlarge our family if we would just be faithful, righteous, and live as we should.

When our financial problems worsened and we were never able to have children, I became upset with God because we had been given those promises, which remained unfulfilled.

For two years, I struggled with this disappointment because I thought we were being as good as we possibly could. A Christian friend and I talked a lot about religion. He knew about the financial and marital problems I was going through and how confused I was about the promises the leaders had given in God's name. I started having doubts about the foundation of my church and its founder. I was praying to God to give me an answer and to give me some peace. The beliefs and way of life that I had been taught over the previous 28 years were crumbling around me, and I was scared.

One day in October, 2002, I was intently watching a televised church conference, hoping that I would receive a confirmation to my prayers that I should leave the organization. The main speaker of the conference said if people didn't believe that the founder was a true prophet, then they couldn't have a testimony that the church is true.

I shot out of my chair. "Wow! I don't believe he is a true prophet--that is my release from this church!"

I came to believe that all I needed in my life was Christ, but I had a lot of questions. So I made an appointment with a local pastor and asked him. He answered my questions from the Bible. My eyes were opening.

Then I asked him how I could be saved. He told me how to pray the sinner's prayer, something like this: "Thank you, God, that You love me. I believe Jesus died for me and is alive today. I know Jesus is the only way for me to get to heaven. I know that I sin, and that my sin is against You. Please forgive me of all my sins and help me to obey You the rest of my life. Jesus, I invite You to be my Lord and Savior. Thank You for hearing me and answering this prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen."

It seemed way too easy to me, but on the way home, I prayed, wondering if I had remembered the correct words. The joy came a little later when I realized that I had been truly saved. It was that simple.

Even though I was still nervous about the effect my decision for Christ would have on everyone else, I was at great peace inside and truly free and happy for the first time in my life. It was such a weight lifting off of me when I discovered that all I needed to do was repent and call on Jesus to lay his saving grace on me and save me. He had already done everything else for my salvation.

I realize now that I had needed Jesus all along, and I had missed that relationship with Him. I always knew God existed and that He was my way to salvation, but for so long I had been caught up in doing my own works.

Now I do good things to reflect His light, not because I feel pushed by guilt to do them. I could never be faithful enough or worthy enough for Jesus to save me. It is impossible, because I am a sinner and in need of a Savior.

What a relief it is that God's free gift of grace was there for me and all I needed to do was reach out and accept it. On that day, I was spiritually reborn, and I now am at peace. I praise Him for drawing me to Himself and setting me free. God is good!

Trudee Klein is the mother of three and helps with bookkeeping at her husband's chiropractic office. She enjoys participating in many sports and staying active with her family. She attends Living Hope Christian Fellowship and helps with the children's and women's ministries.

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

(II Cor. 3:18 NIV)



Reflections. Clouds reflecting on my kitchen table, 2006. Sue Brooks



Is God Even Real?

Mitali Perkins--Newton, MA

I'd heard enough from Christians, atheists, and even Hindus like my parents. Now I had to decide for myself what I believed.

Farmhouses nestled in the snow-covered Austrian countryside. Smoke rose from chimneys, making me think of hot cups of tea, apple strudel fresh out of the oven, and families gathering around warm fires.

As the train sped toward Vienna, I stared out the window, trying to fight that familiar, lonely feeling of being a minority. Along with two dozen other college students, I was about to spend winter quarter in Vienna, Austria. The others in the program were chatting about their Christmas holidays and discussing concerts, balls, and operas they were hoping to attend.

I sighed. They have so much in common, I thought. I was an immigrant from India; they'd all been born in America. I was paying for college with scholarships, loans, part-time work, and my parents' sacrifices; their wallets were probably full of platinum credit cards and inherited money. The biggest difference between us, however, was that they were white, and I had dark skin.

"Didn't I see you at the Christmas service on campus?" I turned around. A blond girl with friendly blue eyes was smiling at me.

"Uh-huh," I said. It had been my one and only experience attending a Christian church.

"I'm Elizabeth," the girl said. "My family drags me to a Christmas Eve service in our home church, but I like the one on campus better, don't you?" I mumbled something and went back to watching the scenery. The last thing I needed was

another Christian friend. In fact, that was one reason I'd applied for the program in Vienna. I wanted to continue my search for truth far away from the influence of friends and family. I was tired of listening to the opinions of devout Christians, passionate atheists, and even spiritual Hindus like my parents. It was time to decide for myself whether or not I believed in God.

A friend back at school had asked me to take a closer look at Jesus. And I'd agreed to read C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* as well as the Bible while I was in Vienna. But it seemed to me that Christianity was for white-skinned Europeans and Americans.

I was from the world of dark-skinned people, those who worshiped Hindu idols, believed in Allah and Muhammad, and followed Buddha and the eight-fold path. If Christianity were the only way to salvation, as my friend claimed, then the Christian heaven would be full of white people, just like the train I was riding. My beloved Hindu family would be nowhere in sight. How could I turn my back on my own people and heritage by accepting this white religion?

And I had other unanswered questions. A guy I'd liked in high school had died in a car accident involving a drunk driver. How could an almighty God allow this type of chaos and pain? I'd lived in India, Ghana, Cameroon, and Mexico; I'd seen people struggling to survive, children on the verge of starvation. How could a merciful God allow such suffering?

I couldn't get away from Jesus--I decided I needed solitude and privacy to search for answers. Once we arrived in Vienna, I planned on keeping to myself, reading books about different religions, and writing in my journal.

But in spite of my best attempts to stay aloof, the city's warm friendliness drew me in. The woman at the post office came from behind the counter to tie my scarf more securely against the cold. The vendor at the chocolate stand stuffed extra caramels in my bag. Austrian food seemed bland to my Asian buds, and the cheerful roast-potato seller generously sprinkled paprika on my steaming potatoes.

Elizabeth, one of several Christian students in the program, also refused to let me go my own way. She pulled me into the circle of her friends, inviting me to the opera, balls, and concerts in the evenings.

Mornings were full of classes in art history, German, and music, but I managed to squeeze in a few lonely rambles in the afternoons. When the snowfall grew heavy, I ducked into a cathedral to warm my hands. Stained glass windows gathered light in the sanctuary, despite the snow. They glowed in soft patterns of mustard, saffron, indigo and coral. Arches and vaults curved above me, soaring so high I could hardly see where they intersected. And always, the twisted, half-naked figure hanging on the cross in front shone as if it were sweating.

Why so much suffering? I asked silently, gazing up at Him. Do you hear? Do you care? Or are you only a false god for white people, an idol they worship in blind ignorance?

Despite my best efforts to stay away from the influence of Christians, every piece of art that caught my eye, whether in cathedrals or museums, seemed to be about Jesus. Every concert I attended mentioned his name, and all the books I read either disputed or supported his teachings. It even seemed like every conversation I had, whether with other students, the cleaning lady, or

the newspaper boy, ended up being about Christianity.

So when the university offered a winter-break trip to Russia, I decided to go. I thought a visit to an atheist country was just what I needed. Maybe once I'd left the domain of Christendom far behind, I'd be able to regain some intellectual perspective.

But the Russian tour led us through prisons and cemeteries. We listened to story after story of suffering and evil. We visited old churches with histories of massacres and torture, where ancient icons vividly displayed the crucifixion. Again, I felt completely overwhelmed by the evil in the world. How could God leave us alone to endure so much suffering? And if Jesus was the Son of God, why did He have to die so brutally?

One afternoon, we were scheduled for a tour of the Hermitage, a beautiful museum in St. Petersburg. The regular English-speaking guide was sick, but a higher-up museum official was assigned to take us from room to room. Once again, most of the paintings were of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. I didn't really listen to the tour, but stood at the edge of the group, questions racing through my mind.

Just before we were about to leave, the Russian official pulled me aside. "You are struggling with something, aren't you?" he asked in a low voice. "What are you thinking about?"

I was surprised into telling the truth. "About God," I told him. "And about suffering."

"You are at an intersection of choice," he said. "There is no turning back. Either you decide Jesus is the Son of God, or you turn your back on Him forever. You must choose for yourself." I felt a shiver that had nothing to do with the icy

"And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.'"

(Revelation 5:9-10 NIV)

“Peter replied,
‘Repent and be
baptized, every one
of you, in the name
of Jesus Christ for
the forgiveness
of your sins. And
you will receive the
gift of the Holy
Spirit. The promise
is for you and
your children and
for all who are far
off—for all whom
the Lord our God
will call.’”

(Acts 2:38-39 NIV)

Russian winter. Somebody was pursuing me. Somebody was reaching out to love me, Someone who was more than a system of beliefs, a credo, or a philosophy. Slowly, it was dawning on me that I was being courted by a person, not a religion. I was seeking truth, and Truth Himself was seeking me.

Back in Vienna, alone in my room, I pulled the Bible off my shelf. While I had promised my friend I'd read it, it had remained untouched until now. Flipping the pages, I found the Gospel of Mark and began to read. Strangely, it seemed like I was listening to the story for the first time. Somehow I wasn't considering a "Western religion" anymore; I was encountering an amazing person with olive-colored skin, black hair and dark eyes. Why had I waited so long to read this Middle Eastern book?

When I read about Jesus' crucifixion, tears filled my eyes. Finally, I understood why He had to die. Through Jesus' life, God Himself had entered into the heart of pain, grief and evil. And through the resurrection, God had opened the door to freedom from all of it. Suddenly, I knew I wanted Him more than anything.

I closed my eyes and prayed out loud: "Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God. I believe You died for our sins and rose again from the dead. I want to follow You. I trust You with the lives of my loved ones. I know You have answers to all of my questions."

I've traveled to many places since then, and realized that Christianity is not a white man's religion at all.

Christianity is and always has been about a person—Jesus of Nazareth. People of many cultures worship Him, and we'll all be in heaven together. I admit I still have questions. I wonder why the world is unfair and full of suffering. I question how racism continues to abound, even in the church. And how can Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists who have never heard of Jesus be destined for hell?

But in the midst of doubt and struggle, I remember a conversation Jesus had with his disciples. "Do you, too, want to leave?" He asked them. They answered with a question, followed by a declaration of faith. "Lord, where else would we go? You alone have the words of life."

I can still feel lonely in an all-white setting, just like I did on that train to Vienna. But now that I have a relationship with Jesus, it's easier to forget about race. Everybody's blood is the same color, anyway—red, like His, spilling down from the cross. And that's what counts.

(Mitali's story is reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 2002, *Christianity Today International/Campus Life* magazine. June/July 2002, Vol. 61, No. 3, Page 50.)

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“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians 4:4-7 NIV)

“And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands. As you have heard from the beginning, His command is that you walk in love.”

|| John 1:6 NIV



By Grace We Are Saved

Marie Hartin--Brigham City, UT

So many events can take us to a deeper place of need. My deeper place was cancer. This disease did not invade my body but that of my dear husband, Bob. We decided from the first time we heard the word that we would not let anything interfere with this opportunity to walk solely in God's grace. We thanked the Lord for this time of dependence upon Him for what we were about to endure together, individually, and for what our children would have to suffer.

We knew we were not exempt from troubles and suffering. We both understood there was only one way to live on: through Christ. You see, we both were faced with new lives to live. Bob would soon move on to eternity. I would continue here on this earth without him.

Bob had *Adenocarcinoma*, a very aggressive cancer, which begins in cells that line certain internal organs and have glandular or secretory properties. It can be extremely invasive, virulently spreading through the body. Thick tumors develop and can quickly spread to the liver, adrenal glands, bones, lungs, and brain. Often the symptoms appear too late for treatment to be effective. Bob was given three to six months to live.

Even if he opted to use both chemotherapy and radiation, the cancer would not be eliminated and would come back with a vengeance. The most aggressive treatment was estimated to add an additional month, at best. The radiation made him extremely sick. He was certainly not going to add chemotherapy for a measly few more weeks. We knew we would do better to concentrate on his time here with us and to lean on the Lord.

Yes, I cried out to God while alone in the shower. *"Why are you allowing this when we have so many*

plans? What do You want me to learn? I've already walked through adversity, hardship, and sorrow. We don't really need to go through this, do we? We are so young. How will I comfort our children? How will I support our household? You know we don't have life insurance or savings.

I am thankful for this new job, God, but there is no leave and very little health coverage. Oh God... only You can stop the whirlpool of uncertainty from spinning inside my head. Okay, God, whatever You have for me, I thank You... please help me!" Slowly, His peace poured over me, washing away my confusion and fear, just as the water drained at my feet.

I went back to 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, agreeing to give thanks in all circumstances. God was in control. I still cried alone in the shower, but God met me there with comfort, deliverance, and a strong hand on my shoulder.

I read the Bible and prayed continually. God saved me from fear, anger, and despair. I never questioned again, nor do I now, what God chooses to use in my life to build my faith. God is sovereign and controls my very breath.

Because I believe this truth, there is no room to doubt God's will and purpose. In all things, God's will shall be done. I couldn't begin to imagine what Bob must have been thinking and praying. It all seemed so unbelievable. He was exceptionally calm through each footstep of this journey.

From Bob's perspective, he knew it would be more effective medicine for him and those around him to see and hear him thanking the Lord. We were grateful to the Lord for everything. Actually, to paint a clearer picture of our thankfulness, we were so grateful to

God when we made it through another day. We could take a deep breath and move on to tomorrow.

Bob's disease worsened with each passing day. The initial discovery was a tumor in his left femur, so he had a steel rod inserted into the bone to keep it from breaking. The weight of sitting the first time after surgery in his recliner broke the bone anyway. Next, a small tumor was found in his lung, but doctors couldn't tell the point of origin. Tumors, found in the spine, quickly grew to the point of breaking his back. More testing found tumors in the brain, and finally, the tumor in his lung spread to both sides and consumed every clear space on the x-ray. Consequently, we were thankful when Bob could sit up, walk, eat part of a meal, and later on, swallow without choking, or even say a few words. Even when he couldn't talk, he raised his arms in praise. I planned his funeral at times when he was sleeping and I was alone.

One of many precious moments occurred when close friends from our church came to pray for Bob. We worshiped and prayed that Bob would be able to speak whatever God had for him. When Bob reached out to me, I leaned my ear close to his mouth, and he hugged me. He spoke for the first time in many days, clearly saying, "I love you." I

said, "I love you" back and we exchanged those words many times.

We knew peace and power in thanksgiving and praise to our Lord. This was not always easy, but it was always transforming. We had inner joy, peace, confidence, and strength because we knew where our help and hope came from. God's help was bigger than any circumstance. Philippians 4:4-9 was nourishment to us. We chose not to be anxious. When we prayed about everything and gave thanks, God's peace washed over us and gave us comfort.



Vessel of Clay: gift from Michael and Sue Chapman

As I looked back on previous weeks, I realized Bob had been fortunate to have out-of-town family come to visit him. A close military buddy flew in from California to see him and he stayed with our son during Bob's last hours. Other relatives spent whatever time they could.

Because Bob was a godly husband, his goal for his final days was to arrange as much as he could for the well-being of his family. He found someone to complete our taxes, to sort through finances, and to make sure I was informed. He also spoke with men at our church about being on call for needs we might have, such as repairs or questions. Knowing these things were

"See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."

(Isaiah 40:10-11 NIV)

“Search me, O God,
and know my heart!
Try me and know
my thoughts! And
see if there be any
wicked way in me,
and lead me in the
way everlasting!”

(Psalm 139: 23, 24)

going to be attended to gave Bob great comfort. On the more tender side things, we had pictures taken and made arrangements so Bob could be cared for at home, because that's where he wanted to be. He even found someone to take him to the local Christian bookstore to get a gift for me with flowers for our last anniversary. We discussed what special things Bob wanted his son from a previous marriage to have, and he wanted me to take care of the rest.

He gave me permission to re-marry, even though that was the furthest thing from my mind. He was specific in the instruction of our legal and financial affairs. I know that God was guiding him and giving him wisdom.

Bob and I had met on a blind date. When he proposed, he said he had never loved a woman more, next to his mom. We were married in 1985. Bob's son, Bobby, was ten years old. I had two girls, Tara, age 7, and Sarah, age 5. The children and adults in our household had been wounded from past experiences, but we worked through our problems. Bob and I were committed to God and to each other. We had gone through so much while combining two families into one, but we were seeing better times coming. At the time of Bob's illness. Bobby was 21 (married with two children), Tara was 19, and Sarah was 16, still living at home.

Bob and I were open with our children so they understood what was happening. Each reacted and mourned differently. It was so painful for me to watch, because I could not protect them. Each had a different relationship with their father and with God. I could not heal them; I could not answer all their questions. I could only allow them to experience this loss in their own way, and stand by them. Bob and I prayed that they would see our

faith and God's hand. It was my goal to stay close and keep our family bond strong.

Bob often encouraged me with the words of Philippians 4:13, “*I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.*” He believed that to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord. He wasn't just leaving us; he was moving to Glory Land and leaving his earthly tent behind. He had always said what an awesome experience it would be to sit and speak with Moses. He marveled at God's will working through men like him. He expressed excitement and nervousness anticipating his “moving day.” Dying is scary, because there is so much we do not know. It is like the anticipation and trust a child must have to jump off the edge of a pool into his father's arms for the first time. Bob knew all would be okay, but he still had to take that leap.

Our needs were met. My family generously donated money each month so that I could keep Cobra insurance going. Loans were miraculously forgiven. Just before we found out about Bob's cancer, we had splurged on new wedding rings. Bob had let me pick out a beautiful diamond ring. Without Bob knowing, I took the ring back to the jeweler and told him of my plight. He allowed me to return it in exchange for a band and canceled the debt. Bob felt sorry, but understood.

Friends and church family scheduled drivers for daily doctor visits and home care, so I could continue to work. They brought meals and stayed to pray and eat with us. Groups came to help clean and many came to visit, provide a listening ear, and sit awhile. All visitors had an opportunity to write their thoughts in a treasured journal.

We did have times of humor. I remember when

At the Cross. Created by Jacob Chapman, 1996. Photo: Phil Reyes



so he could be in the midst of visitors. His breathing slowed. We made some calls and soon fifteen church and family members joined us. We gathered around his bed, and as our church pianist played the piano quietly, we prayed. We cooled him with damp cloths and quietly waited.

As my right hand soothed his forehead, my left hand lay lightly upon his chest counting heart beats. The beats dwindled to 30 beats per minute, then slowly to 25, 23, 18, and then one beat every two or three seconds. Several times I thought he was gone, but then his heart would start beating again. The anticipation was agonizing. I leaned over and whispered in his ear, "It's okay to go home now--you have a better place to be. I love you." He took one last breath and was gone. We all cried.

"Ah, Sovereign Lord, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You."

(Jeremiah 32:17 NIV)

Steve, a friend from our church, came to sit with us for a night and help with Bob's medications. Bob could not swallow pills any longer so we had to give his pills like suppositories. Steve asked me how our bills were coming and I thought he said "pills." I said "Well, we do them rectally now." We were able to laugh the long night away.

About thirteen weeks after the diagnosis, Bob began to fade. He hadn't spoken until my daughter caught him calling my name just a few hours before he died. We had made him comfortable in his bed, which was positioned in our living room

We can trust in Christ daily, but I truly feel that in times of great trial, we go to a deeper place of reliance by focusing all our attention upon God, who is fully able to keep those who put their trust in Him.

Without trials, we would not even think of venturing to such a place. Trusting in Christ daily prepares us to stand against greater winds of adversity. This deeper trust allowed me to "let go and let God." I had no other choice. If I were to rely on my own strength, I knew I would fail fast. God's grace sustained me and His grace functioned through our families and

“Be joyful always;
pray continually;
give thanks in all
circumstances, for
this is God’s will
for you in Christ
Jesus.”

(1 Thess. 5:16-18 NIV)

church family creating a safety net in which we were cradled and allowed to experience God in a magnificent way.

I thank God every day for the wondrous way He provided for our needs. It is very easy to thank Him. I have His undivided attention. As I tilt my head and heart upward, close my eyes, and stretch my arms toward heaven, the tears that flow are tears of pure gratitude that God helped us, as we were more than aware of our unworthiness. No, we did not get the earthly healing for Bob that we wanted, but so many people were touched, so many received witness of God’s grace, and I have a richer, deeper image of my Shepherd. God’s will was different than mine. There is no way I can ever repay my debt to Christ for my salvation by grace, His deliverance, and provision. It is all a gift with fullness beyond measure.

Robert Kent Tomblom, diagnosed with cancer, January 8, 1996; left to be with Jesus, April 17, 1996.

Marie Hartin remarried and lives in Brigham City with her husband, Steve. She is the mother of four and grandmother of five. She has worked mostly as a technical writer and instructor and makes time to teach piano to a granddaughter, be with family, and be creative with crafts, painting, and music. She has been involved with many types of ministry, believing that God equipped her for serving others through her family’s various challenges and personal suffering. She attends Living Hope Christian Fellowship and ministers there through music, prayer, and writing.

“God never wastes pain. He always uses it to accomplish His purpose. And His purpose is for His glory and our good. Therefore, we can trust Him when our hearts are aching or our bodies are racked with pain. Trusting God in the midst of our pain and heartache means that we accept it from Him. . . .An attitude of acceptance says that we trust God, that He loves us, and knows what is best for us.”

Jerry Bridges
Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts

Saved

"No one is able to come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him." (John 6:44 Amp)

Megan Marie Jolley--Clearfield, UT



Aiming High. Duck Creek, outside Cedar Breaks, UT, 2006. Sue Brooks



Before I was saved, I lived day by day, not thinking about God or if I was going to heaven, because I was content knowing that I was good enough to get there. I didn't realize that I could be a better person with God in my life. Over the years, I became interested in the Bible and having a relationship with God, but in time, I ended up frustrated and disappointed because there was so much to learn, and I had no biblical background. Since I wasn't learning what I wanted to, I easily gave up.

My husband and his parents told me about the plan of salvation in 2000. I never felt comfortable talking about it since I didn't believe that I had to be saved to go to heaven. I thought that "all good people" would automatically go there.

Why wouldn't God let us in if we weren't saved? At that point, I didn't know that God loved me, that I was a sinner separated from God, or that the

wages of sin is death. I didn't know that God loved me so much that He sent Jesus Christ to die in my place. And because I didn't know what it meant to be saved, I became angry when anyone talked about it,

After my first child was born, I wanted her to know God and the Bible. She received a book with all of the Bible stories in it, so I decided to read it since I didn't know the stories. In reading, I felt a desire to know more.

After I finished the book, I began reading the Bible itself and started attending church. I also joined a Bible study. The first day of class was very frustrating and stressful. I cried, because I knew nothing compared to everyone else. Right away, the ladies comforted me, telling me that it was okay to start fresh without any preconceived ideas. I became excited to begin.

“Come to Me, all
you who labor and
are heavy-laden
and I will cause you
to rest--I will ease
and relieve and
refresh your souls.
Take My yoke upon
you, and learn of
Me; for I am gentle
and humble in heart,
and you will find
rest for your souls.
For My yoke is
wholesome and My
burden is light and
easy to be borne.”

(Matthew 11:28-30 Amp)

Over the next few weeks, I learned that the most important thing is to have a relationship with God, and I could do that without knowing everything about Him and His Book. The more I learned about God, the closer I grew to Him. Reading the Bible helped me to know what He did for me and what He promises to do for all of us. I was learning what it meant to be saved.

At church, the pastor also inspired me as he taught God's Word. He made it easy for me to understand. In Bible study, I learned from the women and our discussions. I was very interested, and I wanted to know more.

On October 17, 2003, because I was having a bad day, I decided to call my Bible study leader. I knew that I needed to call her but didn't know why. Just as I was about to pick up the phone to call her, it rang. She was on the other end calling me!

After talking with her for awhile, I broke down, saying I wanted God to take over my life, that I wanted to be saved. I finally believed. She prayed with me over the phone. I asked God for forgiveness and for Him to lead me. What a phone call!

Since that day, my life has changed. What relief to know that I am free to know God and His Word, and that I will be with Him forever. He is the Master

over my life. When I am stressed, I turn to Him and ask for His guidance because only God knows what is best for me.

Becoming a follower of Christ has been an amazing journey, but it hasn't benefited only me. My daughter is growing in her faith, and my parents, who hadn't been interested in the Bible and hadn't believed in salvation, saw positive changes in me. They joined a Bible study, began attending church, and were saved less than a year after I was.

Now we can joyfully sing: *“He saves me from ev'ry sin and harm, secures my soul each day; I'm leaning strong on His mighty arm; I know He'll guide me all the way. Saved by His pow'r divine, Saved to new life sublime! Life now is sweet and my joy is complete, for I'm saved, saved, saved!”*

(*Saved* [the hymn], verse 2, by Jack P Scholfield, 1882-1972)

Megan Marie Jolley lives in Clearfield, Utah. She and her husband of seven years have a four-year-old daughter, Taylor, and new son, Ethan. She works from home doing medical billing for her husband's chiropractic office. For the past year, her family has been attending New Harvest Community Church in Clearfield.

Be Still

Kim Mihelich--Pittsfield, NH



I sat crossed legged on the floor. A mountain of boxes surrounded me, but the one before me seemed most formidable. I stared at the smudged words from years before. "Christmas Ornaments," it said. A wave of grief came over me. I could not have imagined myself in this situation. Bowing my head in a desperate prayer for strength, I noticed the pleat on my maternity shirt was just beginning to reveal the new life stirring within me.

As I sat in the midst of my nearly empty home, sorting through all my husband and I had shared, the truth consumed me. He wasn't coming back. He left me alone to be a single mother. I knew I wouldn't be able to face this box after the baby arrived, so there I was, dividing eight years of memories. Overwhelmed, I slumped to the floor in heaving sobs of grief.

I was raised in a strict religion. I never knew Jesus was sent to earth to save sinners. I had learned He was God's son, a little higher than the angels, but not God in the flesh. Life was a struggle not to be a sinner—but if I were fortunate, "good" enough, and diligently worked in the ministry of placing our magazines with the lost world, I might live to see the New World. Otherwise, I would simply cease to exist. To my rebellious mind, non-existence was far better than one more day under the stringent rules imposed on me.

Sports and other school activities were forbidden, as were "worldly friends," meaning anyone who was not a part of our church. During school Christmas parties, I retreated to the library, in obedience to my mother. Like a killing frost, humiliation swept over me as I left the class to the snickering jeers of classmates. I was a good student, but the pressure among the church members not to pursue higher education was pervasive. The

faithful devoted their energies to "preaching the truth," working any job they could just to get by.

By my eighteenth birthday, humiliation became a consuming anger. My desire to fit in became outright rebellion toward my parents. The night of high school graduation, I moved into an apartment I had rented, using money saved from my part-time job. I kept contact with my parents and put in token attendance at the church, not wanting to alienate my family. But as I emerged from under the cloak of that religion, I questioned everything I had been taught. Was God really so cold and distant? Was serving Him really a long list of "do's and don'ts"? I never felt His presence. I never knew Him. If He was a God of love, why didn't I ever feel it? My parents told me I had been raised in the truth, but was it really the truth?

The Lord mercifully used my questioning to draw me to Himself. Because of my doubts, I gradually withdrew from my parents and had more contact with my Christian aunt and uncle. They became a powerful tool of the Lord's grace. Like healing salve to my doubting heart, they demonstrated Jesus' love instead of preaching it.

Within a year of moving out of my parents' home, I met Ken, the polar opposite of everything my parents stood for. He rode a motorcycle, smoked, and swore. But most importantly, he paid attention to me. He thought I was smart, funny, and cute—not weird. After a brief courtship and living together for a year, we were married, resulting in me being disfellowshipped from the church.

When I phoned my mom with the news, she responded with, "You are dead to us," and hung up. With this decree, I was completely alienated from my family for the next seven years. Although



Be Still and Know: Virgin River Gorge, Arizona Strip, 2005. Sue Brooks

devastated, I was also relieved to be liberated from the loveless and rigid doctrine under which I had been raised. I thought my relationship with Ken would be the start of the new life I longed for.

In the first several years of our marriage, I completed a degree in nursing while working part-time. Ken jumped from one job to another, leaving me desperately insecure. As I nagged him to become more responsible, we drifted apart. Seeking comfort, I began going to a Bible study at my aunt and uncle's church. My in-laws, who were also Christians, shared the truth of what God's Word, the Bible, teaches.

Eventually, the separation from my family, and disappointment that Ken could not fulfill all of my needs, left me empty and incomplete. Unable to bear the burden alone and knowing I didn't have all the answers, I was drawn to the Savior's arms. I heard in the Bible study, *"that if you confess*

with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9 NIV). A huge weight lifted from my searching heart when I learned about God's grace, that He desires all His children to accept the free gift of salvation.

One night at Bible study, surrounded by other believers, I asked Jesus to be my Savior. I prayed aloud for Him to be Lord of my life and to forgive me for my sins. Through tears I pleaded, asking Him to redeem the pain and disappointment in my life, to heal me. Immense love and support surrounded me as everyone praised God with joyful embraces. I had never known acceptance like that before. As the Lord's mercy washed over me, I was born again.

But just as Jesus warned His disciples in Matthew 13:22, I was like the seed planted among the thorns, when *"the worries of this life and the deceitfulness*

of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful." In unfaithfulness and immaturity, I took the lead in making our financial ends meet, devoting myself to my career. I attended church occasionally, prayed sporadically, and read the Bible when the whim hit me. Although Ken also made a profession of faith during this time, little changed in his life.

Five years passed as a series of crises pelted us like rain. In difficult seasons, I was faithful, praying and reading my Bible daily. However, when the conflict was resolved, I relapsed to my stagnant ways. Now, I can see how the Lord was using those hurdles to get my attention. He was progressively whispering in my ear, then tapping me on my shoulder, and finally, giving me a gentle shake, saying, "Kim, make Me the center of your life!" But I had a hard heart.

In our eighth year of marriage, life turned around. We joyfully anticipated the birth of our first child. Ken had a stable job and attended night school. As we became involved in a Bible study, we made new Christian friends. They encouraged us to attend a Family Life Marriage Conference, where we learned about God's design for marriage, gaining the necessary tools to transform our communication habits.

I learned the importance of being an encouraging wife, and I began taking my God-given role as a helper seriously. Instead of seeking recreation or relaxation, our week began with worship at our new church. As I grew spiritually, the Lord became the center of my life, fueled by daily prayer and Bible study. After a rocky start, it appeared my husband and I finally had it "all together." As I learned more about the Lord who saved me, I realized that only He could fill the width, breadth and depth of all my needs. No human

could, including my husband. The things into which I had invested time and energy since my salvation were not God's priorities. One day, I read this passage from a small devotional:

"And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:20-21 NASB).

I knew I had to change, allowing God to remove the idols I had constructed. I had to surrender my marriage, career, relationships, and future to the Lord, trusting Him for it all.

As we began home renovations to prepare for the baby's arrival, I was unaware of the lurking secret poised to destroy my family. My illusions shattered on July 9, 1998, when I was four months pregnant. As I arrived home from grocery shopping, Ken seemed very tense and angry. When I questioned him, he exploded, "I don't want to be married anymore! I don't love you anymore!" With his clenched fist banging the kitchen counter, he leaned over and started crying, "I need to leave! I need time away!"

Panic overtook me. This couldn't be true! Uncontrolled tears streamed down my face. He wanted this baby, too. It must be first-time-father jitters! However, in the months that followed, I learned he was serious. He was involved with another woman and she was also pregnant.

His betrayal overtook me in nauseating waves. My meager sleep was preoccupied by sorrow. While performing the most ordinary tasks, I would completely yield to my anguish. "Why, Lord, why?

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

(Psalm 46:1, 2, 4, 10 NIV)

How could You allow this?" Our marriage wasn't ideal, but we were learning and growing--and marriage was forever, I believed.

For a time, my shouts hit the ceiling. Peace eluded me. Then, exhausted and weary, I would collapse in a pile, sobbing. But as surely as a loving father comforts an anxious child by embracing her close to his breast, I felt the tender presence of the Lord hush my clamoring heart. In one of those moments, He led me to Psalm 46:10 (NIV): "Be still and know I am God." That truth sustained me like manna from heaven, as I learned to remain quiet in the Lord's presence.

The idols of my heart tumbled down one by one. The only rock that stood solid was the Lord, as I leaned on Him more than ever. Meanwhile, my health deteriorated, and I lost fifteen pounds over the next month. Anxiety made eating impossible, and I was hospitalized for dehydration. Doctors ordered bed rest several times to stop the early labor that frequently endangered my son's life. I was physically unable to work as a nurse.

When my vacation and disability time were exhausted, my employer was obligated to fill my position. Unable to afford our home, I put it up for sale. Friends we had as a couple retreated, not knowing how to react, not knowing what to say. My dreams of raising a family with Ken, in the home we had worked on together, died.

But in the Lord's undying faithfulness, He rebuilt the ruins of my life one prayer at a time. I found a small condominium near the hospital where I worked, and my employer promised me another job when I was well. When I needed maternity clothes, generous friends shared what they had. When I needed help packing, dozens of friends showed

up—new Christian friends, who surrounded me with love and prayers. Others hauled, lifted, and lugged on moving day and planned baby showers of such a massive scale, that I didn't need baby clothes or toys for years to come.

Through it all, the Lord made a bridge back to my parents who had not spoken to me for seven years. They reached out in my darkest hour. I was able to share with them the Jesus I had come to know, the One who was sustaining me. In my greatest pain, I shared my faith as never before.

My son was born in perfect health, five months after the collapse of my marriage. I named him Isaac, meaning "God laughs." Isaac's name embodied my hope for a joyful new future, which seemed so uncertain. And just as Abraham laid his own son Isaac on an altar, trusting the Lord, I also had to do that in the months that followed. As I navigated through the treacherous unknown, the Lord was truly my Shepherd. Though I feared peril before me, He saw all He had planned for me. As He firmly held my feet to that path, He taught me that He is all I would ever need, regardless of my circumstances.

A month after Isaac was born, I was served divorce papers. As I stood in the cold, stark courtroom and came face to face with betrayal, I couldn't imagine how the Lord would ever heal the hurt. The legal proceedings seemed so unfair and made the wounds inflicted even more gaping. Later, as I handed my infant son over to Ken and his girlfriend for court-ordered visitations, I questioned God's plan.

Then I remember that Jesus knows about betrayal. Hebrews 4:15 (NIV) says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our

weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”

When I meditated on this, I realized that Jesus had been betrayed although He was perfect. In the betrayal, He chose to bear my sin on that cross, to bleed and die a horrible death, so I could be forever forgiven and freed. Repenting of my own sin was the first step toward forgiveness. Eventually, I asked Ken to forgive me for my part in alienating him from our marriage.

As the Lord continued softening my heart and teaching me hard lessons, I never dreamed He was fulfilling His plans to give me a “...*hope and a future*” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV). I met Peter when Isaac was just a few months old. Through mutual acquaintances, we began email correspondence. After having prayed for a wife for 20 years, Peter was ready to give up. On our first date, I made it clear that Isaac and I were a package-deal, and Peter embraced us with tenderness and godly self-sacrifice.

On November 6, 1999, the Lord restored all the “*locusts had eaten*” (Joel 2:25 NIV). I married Peter, the answer to my prayer for a husband and a daddy for Isaac. Later, we had two other sons, Caleb and Logan. In the years since, Peter has adopted Isaac. Truly God does not lie when He promises to do “*immeasurably more than*

all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20 NIV).

Through the entire ordeal, the Lord lovingly directed me to “*be still and know*” that He is God. When my anxious heart rose up, or vain imaginations stole my peace, I dwelt on God’s promise that He is my “*refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*” Then, the Lord’s peace blanketed me. He was not caught unaware when any trial entered my life. I could trust Him with the small details of my earthly cares, because I had already trusted Him with eternity.

How could all this beauty emerge from the ashes of my life? I could not have believed, in the dark hours following the devastation of my first marriage that I would be the mother of three sons, and that God would give me a second chance to be a good wife. In His redeeming mercy, the Lord delights in second chances.

Kimberly Mihelich lives with her husband, Peter, and three boys, ages three through seven. They reside in Pittsfield, New Hampshire, where Kim spends most of her time shepherding her active bunch. However, in her spare time, she works part-time as an RN at a surgical center, and writes a regular humor column for a local paper, with a focus on parenting issues. She is actively involved in a local church with the childcare and meals ministry.

“To grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”

(Isaiah 61:3)



Time Alone With God. Duck Creek, UT, 2006. Sue Brooks

“The branch of the vine does not worry, and toil, and rush here to seek for sunshine, and there to find rain. No; it rests in union and communion with the vine; and at the right time, and in the right way, is the right fruit found on it. Let us so abide in the Lord Jesus.”

Hudson Taylor

That I May Know Him

Lawren Green--Brigham City, UT

I could not do all things well. My works were always imperfect. I believed the lie that other people could perform perfectly, but not me. I could perform *some* duties well, but not *all* duties well. This meant I must be a failure.

I was raised in a religious home and expected to do all things perfectly if I wanted to go to heaven. I tried my hardest to perform perfectly, but I could never do it. I was a fourteen-year-old failure, hopeless, and doomed to Hell. Something deep inside of me broke, and I am not sure what it was. I decided that I could not love a God Who demanded the impossible.

I chose to rebel. I thought, "If I am going to Hell anyway, I will enjoy the trip." I saw a group of hippies in Pioneer Park in Brigham City. They were traveling through and stopped to play some music and relax. They acted like a loving and accepting family I never had. My own family demanded perfection, or we children were denied love and respect and given punishment.

Although my parents sincerely believed in the axiom "Spare the rod and spoil the child," I needed love that was not based upon how perfect I was. So I joined the "Hippie movement." For the first time in my life, I was accepted unconditionally.

The only problem was that there were no standards of right or wrong. This led to a life of sex, drugs and alcohol. We were taught that "tuning in, turning on and dropping out" was all right because "we were not hurting anybody." I lived like this for many years. It got lonely sometimes, because nobody really loved anyone on a deep level. I decided that I needed a companion, a wife. So, I got married and had children.

Time demanded that I grow up. I put on a brave face, cut my hair, and went to work at Thiokol in electrical controls and instrumentation. I worked long hours and was able to provide for my family. Still I had no peace. I thought that if I had money and power, I could control my life to find happiness and peace. I worked extra hard and moved up the corporate ladder into "middle management," but this brought only dread that I could not perform at that level, or that I might lose the position. That old fear of failure dogged my every step.

In 2000, God stepped into my life in a dramatic way. He brought me to the end of all the things that I held on to for security and comfort. Suddenly, I could not please my boss. I did the same level of performance, but my performance reviews dropped from 99 to 70 percent. My failure complex started to work overtime.

After 21 years, my marriage also had grown cold. I had worked so many nights and weekends trying to move up the ladder that I had lost connection with my wife. She had just finished college and had her "dream job." She worked long hours serving others. This time, I was the one who felt abandoned. Meanwhile, my children went through rebellion. They were wild teenagers. I could not control them.

I had become a failure at work, in my marriage, and as a parent. I was extremely frightened because there was nothing that I could hang on to for security. God was patiently waiting for me at the bottom. He showed me that my life was nothing but sin and pain. I was reaping what I had sown. I had hurt myself and others deeply in so many ways. I had been doing that all of my life.



"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

(Romans 10:9-10 NASB)

As J. R. Tolkien said, "The path stretches out before me." I am walking home, but finally, I have a home to go to with a Father who genuinely loves me.



As the Deer, Redwood Forest, CA, 2003, Emma Woods

I repented of all the sinful things that I could remember doing. It was quite an ugly process of remembering all the cruel acts that I had done to others. God worked with me slowly and carefully. Weeks flew by into months, and the grip of His loving hand never let me go.

A friend gave me a Bible study on cassette tape of the book of Romans. I listened to each tape faithfully. Slowly, persistently, God worked with my heart. Good Friday, 2000, came around. I was all alone, listening to the Romans tapes in my backyard. The pastor was teaching on Romans 10:9-10, explaining the way of salvation through Christ alone.

It was as if I had never heard the message before, and suddenly, it made perfect sense to me. I stopped the tape and prayed to God, "If You exist and if Jesus is everything the Bible says He is, I want to accept Him as my Savior and Lord." The answer came instantly. Faith filled my heart, and I believed.

I felt like I had fallen backwards into the arms of Jesus. Though I cannot explain it all fully, my life changed instantly. The highs were higher and the lows were lower. The hatred that I had in my heart against my parents, authority figures, and myself disappeared. It was consumed by the love of Jesus.

My faith journey has never been boring, though oftentimes it has been difficult. Jesus is teaching me how to be a man, to face my fears, and grow. I still have so much to learn. As J. R. Tolkien said, "The path stretches out before me." I am walking home, but finally, I have a home to go to with a Father who genuinely loves me, who expects not perfection but obedience through the power of His indwelling Spirit. Thank You, Jesus.

Lawren Green lives in Brigham City with Nancy, his wife of 27 years. He has tried to leave Utah many times, but finds that God has glued his feet here. His passions are Bible study, theology, and kayaking.

From the United Nations to the Cross

Sammy Tippitt--San Antonio, TX

It was one of the most exciting moments of my young life. I was only 16 years old at the time. I had been selected as one of thirty students in my state to study at the United Nations in New York City. Students from throughout North America would gather there for conferences and consultations about world peace. It was a once-in-a-life opportunity to meet with other key young leaders from the U.S. and Canada and be immersed into international politics.

I knew that there would be an oratorical contest in which the students would speak on world peace during the study period. I had been trained in public speaking. I set my sights on winning the contest. I learned to speak a brief phrase about world peace in the official five languages of the United Nations. I opened my speech by speaking in five languages. My strategy worked. I was awarded "Most Outstanding Youth Speaker in North America."

Following that, I traveled around North America speaking about peace in the world. There was only one problem. I had no peace in my own heart.

After graduating from high school, I found myself wandering aimlessly through life. I was attending Louisiana State University on two scholarships. I was being rushed by a number of fraternities. I was going to parties every weekend. I had a great future, lots of friends, and everything a young person could want. But I didn't have peace in my heart or purpose in my life.

One night I went to church with my girlfriend. A

young man was speaking about Jesus. He talked about how Christ had changed his life. He was from a completely opposite background than me. His mother gave him away when he was six weeks old. He didn't have a supportive family like I had. He didn't have the educational opportunities that I had. But he had something that I didn't have. He had peace, purpose and joy in his life. He said that it came from a personal relationship with God through Jesus.

That night I prayed for the first time. I mean I really prayed - not just said prayers. I poured my heart out to God. I confessed to Him that I had failed Him miserably. I turned away from my self-centeredness. I placed my faith in Jesus as God's Son and the Savior from my sins. When I got up from my knees, I was completely changed. It was a miracle. Some of my friends couldn't believe the change in my life. One friend said, "Sammy, I'll give you three weeks and you'll be back to the same old way of life."

It's been 32 years since I prayed that prayer. I've never turned back. I've found that peace, joy, and purpose for which I was searching as a young person. Life has meaning. It's an adventure.

Since then, I have traveled to over 50 nations with the message of how to find real peace in life. My journey began at the United Nations in New York City studying about peace. It eventually led me to consider an old rugged cross outside of Jerusalem 2000 years ago. There hung the most unique human being to ever walk the face of this planet. He was all God and yet all man. The Bible calls



*"You will seek Me
and find Me when
you search for Me
with all your heart."*

(Jeremiah 29:13 NASB)

“Jesus said to them,
‘Come with me. I’ll
make a new kind of
fisherman out of
you. . . They didn’t
ask questions, but
simply dropped
their nets and
followed.”

(Matthew 4:19-20 Msg)

Him the Son of God and at the same time - the son of man. His name is Immanuel, which means, “God with us.”

After I placed my faith in Jesus, I found true peace –peace with God, peace with myself, and peace with others. I know that what Jesus did for me, He can do for you. If you don’t have peace in your heart, then place your faith in Jesus. If you will believe in Him, then His Spirit will come into your heart, and He will forgive your sins and change your life. Jesus loves you. He died for your sins. He arose from the grave three days later. If you’re willing to turn from your sinful ways and place your faith in Jesus, then you can experience His peace and purpose in life.

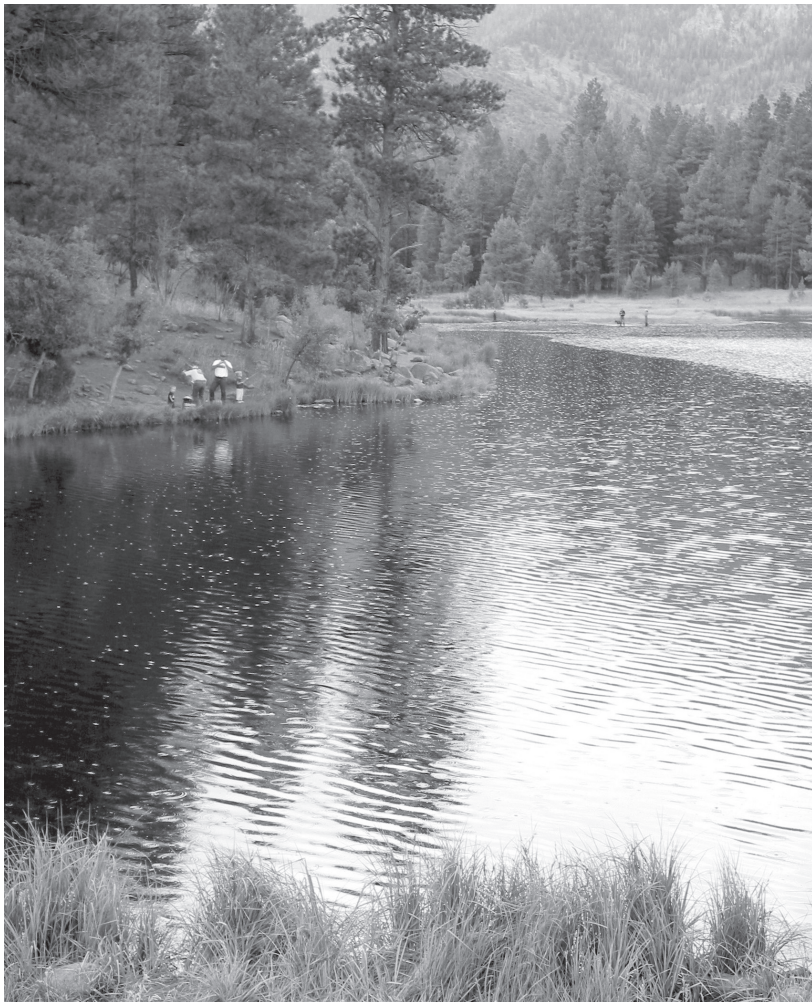
If you would like to know Christ and have this peace in your life, then pray this prayer or one similar to it using your own words. But pray sincerely. Pray in faith.

“Dear God, I know that I have sinned and failed you. I’m so sorry. I turn from my sins. Thank you for sending Jesus to die to take the punishment for my sins. I believe in Jesus. I believe that He is your Son. I believe He died and rose from the dead three days later. Come into my life and save me. Thank you. I love you. I give you my life. Make me the person you want me to be. Thank you for forgiving my sins. In Jesus name I pray.”

“If you confess with your mouth,
‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your
heart that God raised him from the
dead, you will be saved.”

(Romans 10:9 NIV)

For more than 35 years **Sammy Tippit**, founder and president of Sammy Tippit Ministries has traveled and preached the gospel in more than 70 countries around the world. He is the author of several books, including his autobiography, *God’s Secret Agent*, which he co-authored with Jerry B. Jenkins. He and his wife, Tex, have two children. You can find out more about his ministry by going to www.sammytippit.org.



Be Fishers of Men. Pine Valley, UT. Sue Brooks

A Person of Worth

Colleen Hamson--Brigham City, UT



The question lingered in my mind: If God made me in His image, why am I such a bad person? What hope do I have? I had been told so many times growing up that I wasn't pretty, had no talent, and would never amount to anything. I remember hearing so often, "How can you be so stupid? You're nothing but trouble; in fact, trouble is your middle name!" So when I got married at age sixteen and heard the same things from my husband, I really believed them.

I was busy the first ten years of our marriage having five children and working hard to cope without having enough money or time to do all that was expected of me. Anything that went wrong was my fault. I was always striving to be a better person, but was constantly told how worthless I was.

No words of praise or encouragement ever came my way, but still, I kept trying. Verbal abuse was a constant everyday occurrence for me and my children. I thought this was normal because my husband kept me from associating with family and friends who were happy. The few friends we had were chosen by my husband and were just like us: dominated and ruled over by the male of the house. Strict rules had to be obeyed or all hell broke loose.

I really enjoyed playing and having fun with my kids when their father was not around. He treated them just like me, except he spanked them quite often. They were his slaves, but he taught them a lot of good skills that they are grateful for now. Fortunately, most of our children did not carry on their father's domineering attitude. He never hit me, but I cried a good deal of the time from all the verbal abuse.

I had migraine headaches constantly. He said this

was just an excuse to get out of work. So I learned how to function with the severe headaches so no one knew how badly I hurt. My frame of mind became negative all the time. Whenever I found something to laugh and be happy about, he always put me down. His life, and therefore mine, was work all the time. My day started at 4:30 a.m. and it ended when I fell into bed exhausted at 9:00 p.m.

As my children were growing up and getting ready to go to school, I was the one who prepared them to join the school system. I realized during this time that I wasn't dumb, stupid, or worthless. I could do something right. I could balance a budget, sew clothes, grow a very good vegetable garden, raise five kids, and fix cars. I even helped my husband build five homes from the foundation up.

I enjoyed building because it was a challenge to make sure the footings were in line with the street and put on the lot exactly as the building code said. If the footings were done correctly, and the foundation for the house was right, we could plan on the rest of the house being square. I was happy when I used skills I didn't know I had.

The children escaped as soon as they could. The boys went into the military and the girls got married. They all have been very successful and raised wonderful children despite their abusive childhood. After our children left home, I became the target of all my husband's rage. Everything that went wrong was my fault.

He had not allowed me to finish high school for fear I would use my education to find a job and get out from under his control. The only way I could have any extra money to spend on myself was to sew for friends or to cut and perm hair. He controlled all the money. He told me how much money I could

“Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God’s Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don’t know how or what to pray, it doesn’t matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That’s why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.”

(Romans 8:26-28 Msg)

spend on groceries per week and not a penny more. We had money for his cigarettes. We had ice cream, if it was someone’s birthday.

Because he always put on a good show in front of family and friends, not many people were privy to the way we lived. My parents knew and were not happy with the situation but were careful to keep their opinions to themselves, or I would suffer. They helped only when he would not find out about it.

All my life, I had been raised in a male-dominated home. The male was the absolute head of the house, and his authority was not to be questioned. We were provided for adequately, having enough, but not any extra until after our children were grown. We never went hungry physically, but were emotionally starving for love. My husband did the best he knew how, given the way he had been raised. Growing up, he did not have a positive male role model. His father was always running away to find something better.

After 30 years of marriage, I began to question my belief system. I came from a religious family and never knew any other religion. We only had our church friends. However, my oldest daughter had married a Christian. When everyone in the family shunned her, I couldn’t figure out why. She had a wonderful husband and a good marriage.

I finally realized that there was a better life where I didn’t have to endure verbal abuse. I didn’t think divorce was an option for me because I was not educated and couldn’t support myself. I had been convinced by my husband that if I left without a good excuse (physical abuse), that I would lose my home and would have no support. For over 30 years, I had worked too hard to give all that up.

My self-esteem was so low at this time that I felt the

only way to get out of this trap was to kill myself, but I didn’t want to hurt my children or leave them. I decided to prove to myself that I was a good person and that I could take care of myself. Our home became a battleground, and finally, I told my husband to leave if he didn’t like the “new me.”

Without my husband knowing, I began adult education classes to get my high school G.E.D. I had finished all the requirements but didn’t get my diploma because it required my being present at the ceremony. At the same time, I was taking classes in drapery making and advanced clothing construction. I loved being around the different ladies in the classes. They were all trying to better themselves. They gave me encouragement, hope, and a desire to keep trying.

The tension in our house drove the children away, but they also knew the situation and took my side which didn’t help their father’s anger. In 1981, one year after my husband retired, he had a severe heart attack. At that point, his health started to decline rapidly. He never fully regained his strength and was limited to lower altitudes because of breathing problems. He quit smoking after 30 years, but his lungs were ruined by then. I decided I would stick with him and nurse him as long as I could; however, I prayed for him to die so I could have some peace and happiness in my life before my own death. I now know that God does not grant such selfish wishes.

In 1995, we both decided to cut our ties to our church after many discouraging conversations with the leader concerning our inactivity. He informed us that we would lose our communication line with God if we had our names taken off the church rolls. It was proof to me that he didn’t understand the Bible teachings at all. He never had the same

answer to our questions and never tried to back up his remarks with Scripture. We were supposed to take his word as the truth.

Leaving the church was a very hard decision for me because I love my family very much and was fearful that my children and grandchildren who

didn't realize until later that he was the pastor of the local Baptist church. Jim Herod always treated everyone with great compassion and kindness as though we were all his best friends. His actions confirmed my decision to search for the true path to God's kingdom.



White Rock Way. Gypsum mine, Arizona Strip, 2005. Sue Brooks

were still active would disown me. I was wrong! They have seen such a positive change in me that we are closer than we have ever been. Choosing to leave was one of the best decisions I ever made.

A few years earlier, while having coffee at the local McDonalds, we met a man who became a wonderful encouragement to us. Everyone in the place knew and loved him as "Pastor Jim." We

My husband liked Pastor Jim very much. Although he never spoke about religion to us, I think his actions spoke volumes about what he believed. I am not sure if my husband accepted Christ as his Savior. He would never talk about the subject, except to say that he knew God had created all the beautiful things in the world that he enjoyed so much. After a year of reading the Bible and listening to my oldest daughter and son-in-law

"The SPIRIT of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed and qualified Me to preach the Gospel of good tidings to the meek, the poor, and afflicted; He has sent Me to bind up and heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the [physical and spiritual] captives and the opening of the prison and of the eyes to those who are bound."

(Isaiah 61:1 Amp)

talk about the love the Lord had for me, I made a decision.

On Mother's day, May 10, 1999, with the help of my daughter, I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart. That was the beginning of the happiest and most joyful times of my life. I no longer felt stupid or inadequate, worthless or unlovable. After all, I was made in His image. Finally, I felt like I was a person of worth.

In October, 1999, my husband had a stent inserted into his main artery. His heart quit and had to be restarted. He needed three more stents, but the doctors decided it was too risky to try anything else. They sent him home to enjoy what little time he had left. On August 11, 2000, eight days before our 50th anniversary, he died suddenly of a heart attack.

At age 66, I was free to live the rest of my life as the person God had intended me to be. I would work in my new church and make my own decisions, right or wrong, and take care of myself with God's guidance. I have put all my rage and anger behind me and asked to be forgiven of my sins. I have forgiven my husband and am now free to go on with my life. I can't change the past, but I look forward to a wonderful future, one day at a time with the Lord leading the way.

Colleen Hamson lives in the same home she and her husband built in 1959. She has five children, 19 grandchildren, and 25 great ones. Five of her grandsons are on active duty in the military. She helps her 93-year-old mother, who lives alone. Colleen loves to volunteer and enjoys being a member of the Red Hat Society. Most of all, she loves working for the Lord in her church, Living Hope Christian Fellowship in Brigham City.



Silhouettes. Mesquite, NV, neighborhood at sunset. 2006. Sue Brooks

The God-Shaped Hole

Betsey McCarley--Brigham City, UT



Lord, You created us, gave us life.
Inside we have a God-shaped hole.
How do we fill it?
First, we try to fill the void with self.
We are not worthy of worship.
The hole remains.

You alone are worthy of worship.
You alone can fill the void forever.
You alone sent Your Son to die for our sins.

Lord, You created the sun for us.
We need the light, warmth, and love.
How do we worship You?
We buy things, we drug, and gamble, we do,
we do.
But none of those things satisfy.
The hole remains.

You alone are Holy, Holy, Holy.
You alone can fill the void forever.
You alone are enough to fill the God-shaped
hole.

Lord, You created the earth for us.
You created, mountains, valleys, lakes,
and deserts.
How do we nurture them?
From snowcapped mountains to desert floor,
we fill them with trash, cement, pollution--
Nothing worthy of worship.

You alone are power and glory.
You alone can fill the void forever.
Your power and glory are reflected by
earthquake, storm, volcano.

Lord, You created us for Godly relationship,
Love, caring for family, friends, and Jesus.
How do we love You?
With rejection, hatred, selfishness, hard hearts,
lies, deceit, disobedience.
Pain and destruction mark our relationships.
You seek our praise and worship.

You we need, seek, love, worship.
You alone can fill the void forever.
Your love can fill us, be reflected through our
lives.

Lord, You created us for love and life,
We love sin. We court soul death.
How do we escape it?
Seek God's approval only, fall on our faces,
confess sin.
Christ conquered death just for us.
Ask Christ to be personal savior.

You alone can forgive our sins.
Sing and dance: Death is conquered forever.
God's love triumphs. The God-shaped hole is
full.

BETSEY MCCARLEY's life journey has led her to service at the Pregnancy Care Center and to the people of the MVan Parish in Yaounde, Camaroon, Africa. She serves as liaison to the Presbyterian Mission Committee and helps raise funds and initiates projects to benefit the people of the African church, in particular the children. She retired in June, 2005, after 32 years in the Utah court system. She has three children, two stepchildren, 15 grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.



Joshua Tree, Mesquite, NV desert, 2006, Sue Brooks

“We first look backward to see how our lives’ seemingly unrelated events have brought us to where we are. Like the people of Israel who repeatedly reflected on their history and discovered God’s guiding hand in the many painful events that led them to Jerusalem, so we pause to discern God’s presence in the events that have made us or unmade us. For by not remembering, we allow forgotten memories to become independent forces that have a crippling effect on our function and relating and praying. George Santyana reminds us that ‘those who forget their past are doomed to repeat it.’”

Henri Nouwen

Turning my Mourning into Dancing: Finding Hope in Hard Times

God Answers Prayer with a Miracle

Shirley Reichard--Brigham City, UT

Around midnight on May 3, 1975, I called 911, seeking an ambulance for Hal, my husband of less than four months. He had been spitting up bloody phlegm all evening and had absolutely refused to go for emergency treatment at the hospital.

By the time he was profusely bleeding, I had to call for help. While the dispatcher asked questions, I responded as I watched Hal come out of the bathroom and walk toward me with an extraordinary look of fear and compassion. When he came near, he turned and fell face-forward onto the floor, choking as he fell.

Hal and I had been married that same year on Valentine's Day. Shortly after our wedding, he was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. The tumor was pressing against his esophagus. Doctors had given him approximately three months to live.

For several weeks, he drove to the military hospital, about 50 miles from our house for radiation. I drove us back home. We did this early in the mornings so we wouldn't miss work. After the treatments were over, we received a call from his doctor saying the treatments had considerably shrunk the tumor, and he was recommending chemotherapy.

Hal had witnessed the horror of others going through this treatment and refused, saying, "I am not going to be another guinea pig for medical science!" He was going to take his chances without it. This decision was final, so we faced whatever lay ahead. By the end of the second month, the doctors said he might live.

I was a praying, devout Christian and had been seeking God's guidance and grace through our stressful time. I felt with all my heart that God had

brought Hal and me together for a purpose. I loved Hal completely, and for the first time, I experienced unconditional love and real tenderness in a way I hadn't before.

Two years prior, I had divorced after 21 years in an abusive marriage. My four daughters from that marriage were 21, 20, 18, and 17 years of age. Looking back, I see that the real purpose of my relationship with Hal was his gift of unconditional love. Hal's love lifted me from a very deep pit of low self-esteem, and in return, I gave him the greatest gift I had. I introduced him to Jesus.

Hal had been married twice before, but had no children of his own. He had never known his biological father. When I first met Hal, he described himself with sadness as a person who had never been adopted or baptized. I introduced him to a loving Heavenly Father who, when Hal was saved, both adopted and baptized him.

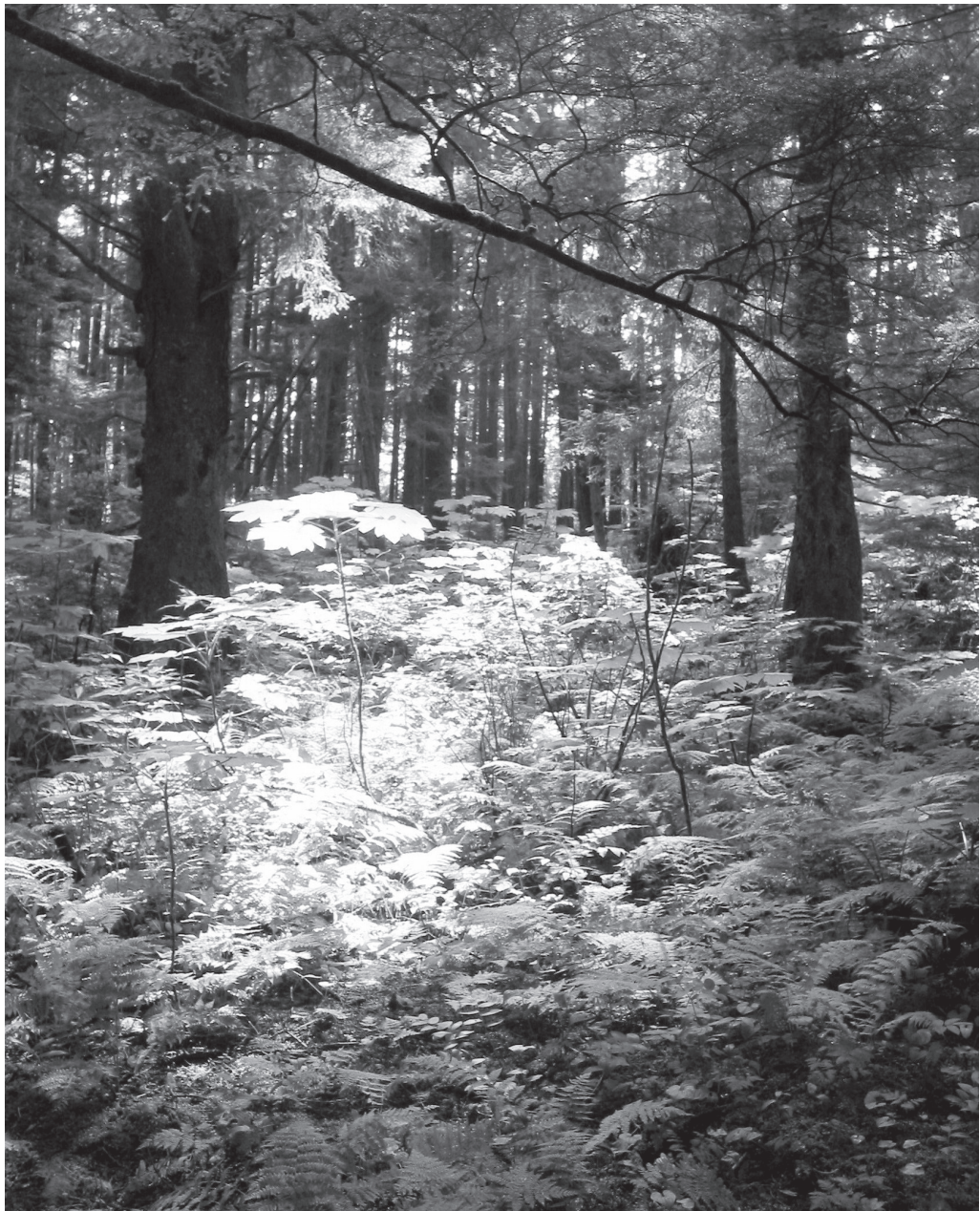
During Hal's illness, our lives were in turmoil, and I couldn't determine what God had planned for us or what His purpose was. All I felt was the pain of losing someone whom I had so recently found, someone who meant more to me than my own life.

After work each day, I felt the need to come home and be alone, to pray and seek God's strength. We lived in Island Lake, Washington. The lake was down a steep hill from our place, but as I walked down to the lake, in my mind, I approached the Sea of Galilee to seek Jesus for prayer. Later, the climb back up the hill was a real struggle, and with each laborious step, I told myself this was like my struggle with Hal's cancer. If I could climb this hill, I could also bear Hal's illness.



“O, LORD my God, I called to You for help and You healed me. O, LORD, You brought me up from the grave, You spared me from going down into the pit. Sing to the LORD, you saints of His; praise His holy name.”

(Psalm 30:2-4)



Sanctuary: Alaska Forest at Mendenhall Glacier, 2003. Sue Brooks

Once back at the house, I generally found Hal lying on the couch in pain. I would sit by him, rubbing his back and shoulders where he said it hurt the worst, all the while praying for God's comfort and asking for His healing. Hal felt comforted by this. I'd cover him with an afghan my mother had crocheted for me six years before, called "Joseph's Robe of Many Colors." I had chosen the colors myself. I told Hal about my color choice and the Bible story about Joseph's beautiful robe. He always wanted the afghan to cover him when he was lying down.

One evening after Hal had made the decision not to undergo chemotherapy, and knowing that the doctors said winning the battle with lung cancer was hopeless, I felt like I was dying also. I asked God, "Why did you bring Hal into my life only to bring us so much pain?" There was no comparison between my relationship with Hal and being married to an abusive man for so many years. I just couldn't comprehend what was happening to us.

At that moment, I sensed a gentle hand on my

shoulder and a quiet voice say, "It will only be for a short while, Child." God's comfort permeated my body, mind, and spirit. The peace of that moment lasted until I came home one evening and found that Hal hadn't arrived from work. In a short while, Hal's friend drove up to the house in Hal's car. Hal sat in the passenger seat, too weak to drive. His friend said that he'd been spitting up blood. Even after I pleaded with Hal, he still refused to go to the hospital.

He went to lie down while I fixed dinner. Joseph's robe was drying in the bathroom, because I had washed it and didn't want it to shrink in the dryer. Later, we had dinner and he ate very little, since eating was difficult due to the tumor pressing against his esophagus. Because the afghan was still drying, he decided to go to bed rather than lie on the couch.

I spent some time rubbing his back and then returned to the living room, feeling anguish pull me down. I literally got on my knees in front of the chair and talked to God. *"Lord, I can see what is going to happen and that it will be soon. I feel like dying, too. Please, please help me! I can't do this alone."*

After trying unsuccessfully to keep distracted by watching television, I went to bed. About midnight Hal woke me up when he got out of bed. Soon after that, he collapsed. The ambulance arrived with two attendants, and they immediately rushed to where Hal was lying, checking his vitals. They asked me details that led up to his collapse. I crouched against the wall in the hallway, asking, "Is he dead?"

One of the attendants looked up at me and spoke quietly. "Yes. Let me take you out to the ambulance while we take care of him." I was weak and very shaky. As we walked, the attendant asked whom he should call. He said that someone needed to be with me. I gave him my daughter, Debbie's telephone number.

Then I remembered that she and her husband were going to Wenatchee for the weekend, so instead, I asked him to call the Navy Chaplain at Keyport who had married us and had ministered to Hal and me on several occasions. The attendant returned to the house and left me, sitting alone in the ambulance.

After a few minutes, I heard a voice on the short wave radio reporting an abandoned car found on the pass to Wenatchee. "The vehicle is registered to Steven and Debbie Hinds," the voice said. Debbie was my daughter! I was jerked out of my state of shock. "Why God? This, too, just now?"

When the chaplain arrived, I went with him to Hal's mother's home so he could help me break the news. Once there, I called my ex-husband and talked to him about Debbie's car. Little did I know that while all this was happening, God was performing a miracle in order to care for me.

Shortly afterwards, I spoke with my ex-husband, he called back saying that Debbie's car had recently been sold and the old registration was still in the glove box. The car had been stolen and abandoned on the pass because it had run out of gas.

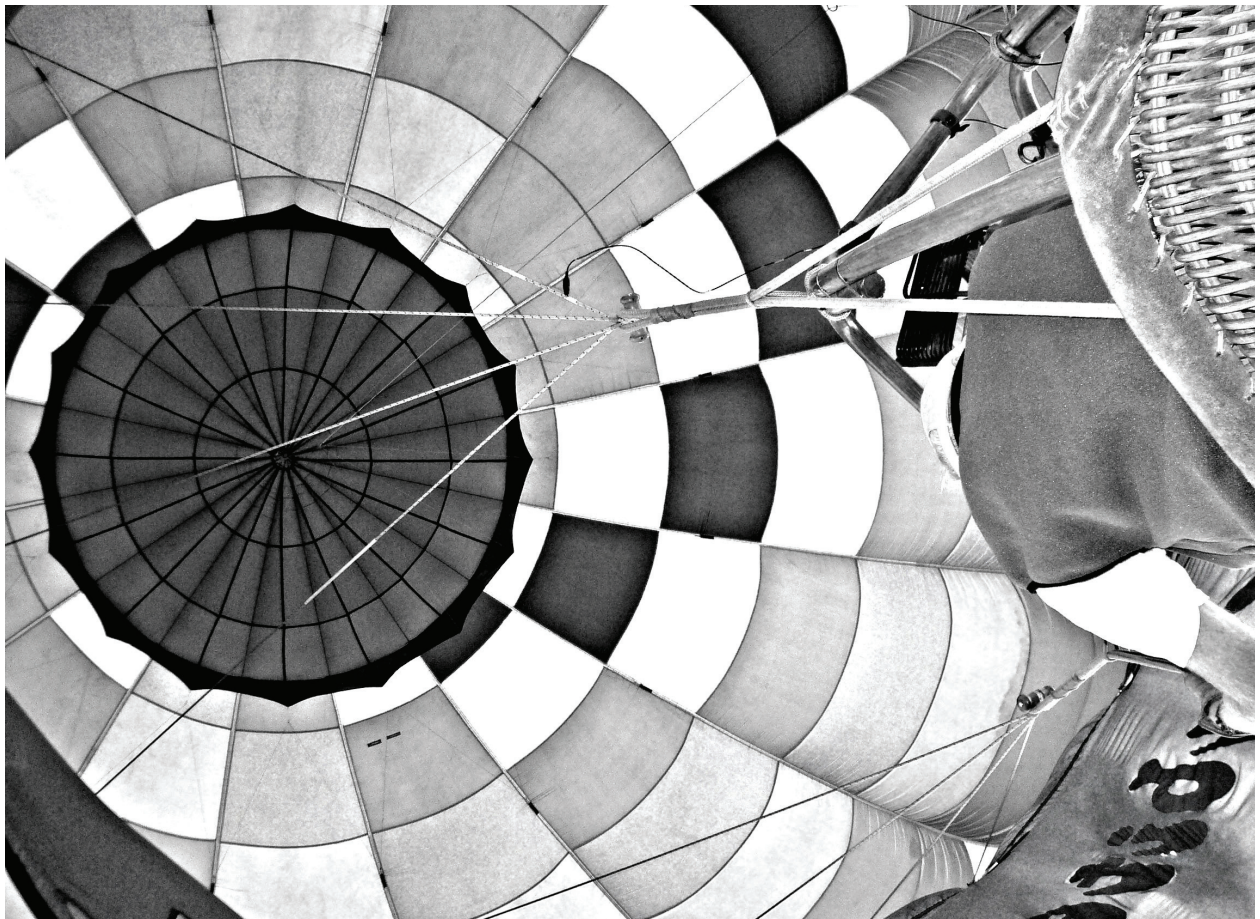
"...for He Himself has said, 'I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]'"

(Hebrews 13:5b Amp)

God knew the exact time I would be sitting in the ambulance in order to hear the short wave message about Debbie's old car. It was not a coincidence. My focus suddenly shifted from my devastating loss to my daughter's welfare. This event was just what I needed to find meaning again; I knew I had a reason to go on living.

What God said to me then and is saying to me now is that wherever I go, whatever I do, He is walking through it with me. Therefore, all I do in my faith walk is out of love and praise for Him.

Shirley Reichard and her husband, Floyd, are retired and live in Brigham City. She is 73 years old, active in her church women's ministry, facilitating Bible studies and helping with Vacation Bible School. Shirley is an artist, working with acrylics, oils, and watercolor on canvas and also on sweatshirts. She has four daughters and nine grandchildren by a previous marriage. She truly loves the Lord and finds her walk with Him more rewarding each year that passes.



Perspective: Eden, UT, 2006. Phil Reyes.



Knit Together: Tyler Wells, Perry, UT, 2005. Lisa Wells

“For it was You who created my inward parts;
You knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I will praise You,
because I have been remarkably and wonderfully made.
Your works are wonderful,
and I know [this] very well.
My bones were not hidden from You
when I was made in secret,
when I was formed in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw me when I was formless;
all [my] days were written in Your book and planned
before a single one of them began.”

(Psalm 139:13-16 HCSB)



The Plans He Has for Me

Sharmila Felix, Perry, UT

“He showed us over and over again that He is not going to fail us. In fact, His plans for us are only for good. And, in the end, His timing, not ours, is perfect.”

After graduating from college in June of 1998, my husband, Josh, and I moved to California. He went to work, and we decided to start a family. I put my career on hold and stayed at home, eagerly tending to our apartment and to my husband. It was fun to have him as the breadwinner and for me to be the housewife. We waited eagerly for a baby.

Three months passed, and I became pregnant. We were thrilled. Then, the day after Thanksgiving, I miscarried. My whole world fell apart, especially after my parents, who had been visiting us, returned to Utah. I was truly alone, and it was during this time that I recognized the distance I had placed between myself and God.

Over the years, I had prayed when I needed something, but had no relationship with Him. I truly saw my weakness and my frailty at that moment and cried out to Him for forgiveness and mercy. I knew I needed Him during times of trouble, and also in times of strength. Josh and I recommitted our lives to Christ. We grew closer together as a couple and put Jesus at the head of our relationship.

A few months later, I became pregnant again. I was excited, but skeptical. I wanted to trust God, but was worried He didn't want me to become a mother. When we went in for an ultrasound and no baby could be found, the doctor tried to reassure us that it was simply too early for anything to be seen. Some of my pregnancy symptoms started to disappear, but I clung to the hope that all would be fine. Then, about three months into the pregnancy, I went in for another ultrasound and the technician confirmed that the baby had died early on, and that I would miscarry again. I was totally devastated.

I prayed in earnest that God would reveal His plan for my life. He told me not to despair and gave me His Word: “‘For I know the thoughts and plans I have for you,’ says the Lord, ‘thoughts and plans for welfare and peace, and not for evil, to give you hope in your final outcome’” (Jeremiah 29:11 Amp).

Four years passed since my last miscarriage, and Josh and I were unable to become pregnant again, though no tests revealed why. In fact, every test we took came back normal. We were told to relax, and after two years of doing that, were sent to a fertility specialist and placed on fertility drugs. That didn't work.

Then, we tried a year's worth of natural family planning. That didn't work. Finally, I underwent a test to see if my fallopian tubes were blocked. They weren't, and the test, which was supposed to increase our chances of conceiving, failed.

I was often discouraged, but for the most part, I was strangely at peace with the whole situation. I just knew that God was in control. I put my trust in Him and prayed every day for God to bless us with a baby. I knew getting pregnant would be a miracle and the credit would go to God alone, not to a fertility drug or a schedule or a chart.

The Lord moved us back to our family and friends in Utah in February, 2002. We were thrilled to be home. The desire to become pregnant and have a baby was stronger than ever before. Impatience crept into my heart.

In June of that year, I went to our family doctor for some advice about getting pregnant. After hearing my history, he gave me a referral to a fertility specialist. He kept saying to me, “You really don't

want to go down this path.” I left his office in tears. I just wanted to conceive a baby without the use of doctors, drugs, charts, and schedules. I wanted to become pregnant because Josh and I loved each other and because God allowed it to happen.

I put the referral on my desk and left it there. It was my last resort, and I figured I would come back to it later.

Later that month, I noticed my period was quite late. After much urging from Josh, I hesitantly bought a pregnancy test. We had been through this countless times before--so many tests with negative results. That was devastating in itself. It had been the only month I hadn't charted my cycle on a calendar or thought about getting pregnant. I nearly passed out as I watched the test result turn positive. God had heard and answered our prayers!

We rejoiced when our baby girl, Madeleine Diane, was born on February 11, 2003; and again, two years later, when our second child, Ian Sawyer, was born on April 6, 2005. These gracious gifts from God continue to completely amaze and humble us.

In the five years of trying to become parents, Josh and I learned so much about the love God has for us. He is an awesome God. He makes promises



Evidence of God's Faithfulness: Madeleine and Ian, Perry, UT, 2006. Sharmila Felix

and keeps them. Our trials in becoming pregnant were for our own good, to encourage us to place our trust in Him, rather than in ourselves or in doctors or medication. He showed us over and over again that He is not going to fail us. In fact, His plans for us are only for good. And, in the end, His timing, not ours, is perfect.



All Things Become New: A Collage

Diane Kulkarni--Perry, UT

Through Death's Door (May 1953--age 7)

In May of 1953, my father was fighting for his life at St. Luke's Hospital in Denver. He had been suffering with *Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia* for ten years, and that day, pneumonia and congestive heart failure were winning.

Grandma Kimmett, Uncle Lefty and my mom came together because the doctors told them that Mac was having a hard time. As soon as they came into the room, the oxygen tent malfunctioned, and the nurses took it away.

Grandma told me later, "Your daddy was just plain worn out from the constant fight to stay alive. For some reason, he sat right up straight, and Winnie ran over to him," she said, emotion clutching her throat. "Your mom went over to get him to. . . to make him lie down again; she tried to cover him up. But he looked at her and said, 'Winnie, don't touch me! Where I am, it's so beautiful!' And then he closed his eyes and fell back against the pillows."

Turning Point (1963--age 17)

One afternoon after school, I walked out of my back door and across 26th, through the side gate of Crown Hill Cemetery and headed toward the office. Someone would know how to find Dad's grave. In the ten years since he died, the location was unknown to me, because we never visited it. Grandma Kimmett told me it was next to her husband's grave, "God-rest-his-soul."

The man behind the desk drew me a map, and after

finding the plot, I knelt down in front of the granite headstone and with my finger traced the engraving:

Henry Marshall McLaren
October 12, 1903--May 23, 1953

He hadn't even made it to age 50! No one looking at this marker would guess Mac's story: "Successful businessman with loving wife, two young children; owner of a large home on an acre of land with horses, several other properties and rentals; endured leukemia ten years with transfusions and positive thinking; died intestate because signing a will would be his 'death warrant'; survivors lose everything; widow plunges into depression."

The next day, when gravel underfoot interrupted my musing, I noticed Mom's car parked in our assigned place. *She's home early--for some reason.* Inside, just as I'd left them, breakfast dishes littered the sink and the laundry remained in a heap on the floor by the washer. The television in the living room chattered. Closed drapes made the room gloomy. *She's down again!* Ever since my stepfather, Stuart, left six months before with their seven-year-old son, she'd been drinking herself numb.

"Mom, are you all right?" I asked.

"My son, my son!" she whimpered, reaching out her neglected hand toward me. "Where has Stu taken him?"

I observed her stretched out under a sheet, like a corpse, and I sagged into the rocking chair. The half-empty Jim Beam bottle sat like a consuming idol on the coffee table in front of her. "*It's all your fault!*" I shouted, glaring at it. Around the bottle were overflowing ash trays, wadded up Kleenexes,

and a glass that measured each drink. *This poison is killing her! But if I get rid of the booze, she'll get back to normal. If she doesn't drink anymore, she won't turn up for the sock hop and do the Charleston for the ridicule of my friends--and she won't die.* I rushed into the kitchen and began throwing open cupboard doors.

Mom screamed, "No!" from the living room. "I am getting rid of this!" I hollered. I found three bottles huddled in the broom closet behind the vacuum cleaner. With them clutched in my arms, I dashed out the door. Charging through the gravel, I stopped at the edge of the busy road, looking at the cemetery gate on the other side. Rush hour traffic flowed by like timber on a fast-moving river.

I lifted a bottle high over my head and smashed it hard on the asphalt, splashing glass shards and the foul-smelling liquid against my legs. Cars slowed. A beat-up Ford pickup rolled off the road and stopped near me.

"Hey, girlie! Why don't you just give Papa those last two bottles--I'll get rid of them for you. Here!" He reached out both hands from the truck's

window. Looking into his scruffy face, I felt pent-up rage rising with the bottle aimed right for his fading grin. He peeled out, throwing rocks in his wake.

No! This belongs over there, in that dead place! Gawking drivers, in slow motion, cruised by pointing and laughing. Mother roared from behind me as I hurled another bottle high and wide over the road, smashing it against one of the gate pillars. The liquid trickled down like blood. She grabbed the remaining bottle from my hands and rushed back into the kitchen. I turned to follow her flapping pajamas and watched the bony arm carefully hide the survivor behind the vacuum.

"You don't *know* what you just did!" she stammered hysterically. "This is *expensive!* And I could go into withdrawal and die—all because you think you're. . ." She stumbled into the living room and landed hard on her couch. ". . .some kind of savior! You know what your problem is, Dinah?" she croaked breathlessly. "You're on a high horse, heading to hell in a handbasket--and one . . . more thing," her tired eyes seared my face, "You, you don't have the c-c-c-courage of your convictions."

"Where there is sorrow, misery, unhappiness, suffering, confusion, folly, oppression, there is the I AM, yearning to turn man's sorrow into bliss whenever man will let Him. It is not therefore the hungry seeking for bread, but the Bread seeking the hungry; not the sad seeking for joy, but rather Joy seeking the sad; not emptiness seeking fullness, but rather Fullness seeking emptiness. And it is not merely that He supplies our need, but He becomes Himself the fulfillment of our need. He is ever, 'I am that which My people need.'"

Roy and Revel Hession
We Would See Jesus

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”

(Rev. 3:20 NASB)



A New Creation. Sue Brooks

My Yoking (November 19, 1965--age 19)

I am standing on tiptoe to look at Daddy wearing his blue suit, asleep in a velvet box next to a flying-stained-glass angel reaching down for his hands.

From the kitchen, I see Mom in the living room, stretched out on her couch under a sheet. The shades are drawn, the night falls, and I am hiding out in my room. I hear her in the bathroom retching all night, but I don't get up. I dig into the inky blackness of my four walls, between cold sheets, under heavy blankets.

I cling to a boy in the dark, and we listen to the car radio play *What the World Needs Now is Love, Sweet Love*. But later, when his car leaves my driveway for the last time, I slide down the back door into a heap.

I am running away. But the storm traps me in a battered ship, swallowed by mountained Atlantic waves. Next to me, a Frenchman reading *The Stranger* asks, “Do you believe in God?” I'm scared.

I see distraught sailors throw Jonah overboard into gaping jaws.

I am in a blind alley.

Then I am watching a tailor-made movie and my heart splits open when the mother passes out on her couch and her slit-wrist daughter slides down into a heap when his car leaves the driveway for the last time.

And I grip the theater seat's arms and plant my feet, mumbling, “No! I won't go!” But when the man up on stage invites the heavy laden, I jump the legs of the man next to me and run down the aisle.

Dressed and in Her Right Mind (1967--age 20)

In 1966, during my first semester at Colorado State University in Ft. Collins, Colorado, Kathy Harsh taught me how to be a disciple of Jesus. We were in InterVarsity together. She modeled how to pray, memorize Scripture, study the Bible, and witness. Several times a week, we'd pray

together before going to the campus coffee shop. "Dear God," she'd say simply, "If you want us to share our faith today, please send us someone to talk to, and give us Your words. Amen."

I was amazed at how opportunities presented themselves without either one of us introducing the topic of faith. Students would sit down at our table and begin talking about things that mattered most to them, and soon we could share what mattered most to us. More than once, we made close friends, and one of them taught me a lot.

Jim was not a college student but a runaway from California who had secretly moved in with a student who was living in the men's dorm. One day at the coffee shop, Jim sat down with us and began describing his life. He said that he had been given everything because his father was wealthy, but he was empty and going nowhere. We'd often talked on the phone late into the night about his spiritual questions.

A few weeks later, he was arrested and called me instead of his lawyer. "Diane," he said from the city jail, "Tell Tom to come and bring me a Bible. I want to tell my cellmate about Jesus." Tom was the leader of our InterVarsity group, who had spent a lot of time with Jim. His startling conversion was like fuel in my tank—I knew that God could perform miracles, and all I had to do was be available to share my story.

Later, when Christmas break flyers were posted in the Union Building, one invited students to attend evangelistic training with Campus Crusade for Christ at Arrowhead Springs, California. Kathy and I eagerly signed up.

The staff trained us to introduce ourselves to strangers in malls, on the beach, at the bus station, and at the airport. If people were willing, we'd take a survey, and then share the Four Spiritual Laws. During our first practice excursion to the mall, a woman shoved me into a storefront window. "You're the fourth person to approach me. Get away!" she yelled.

On New Year's Eve, I called home. The telephone rang a long time before Mom reached the wallphone in the kitchen. "H-h-hello. . . .," she said. The television blared. "Hi Mom. Happy"

"Who the h-h-hell is THIS?" she snarled, and the receiver bounced hard against the wall. *She doesn't know me?* Stunned, I avoided the grand staircase with all the kids congregating for midnight's gaiety and headed for the back stairs. Each step up brought the realization: *God is not answering my prayers. She's going to die. The miracle I had prayed for wasn't happening.*

I dashed for the door to my room, hoping to disappear, but inside, my four roommates were together talking. When they saw my puffy eyes, they ran over. "My mom drinks a little," I said, ashamed. "She didn't know me when I called her."

They formed a circle by holding hands around me and began to pray. I had no faith at all as they spoke to God about a desperate woman they didn't know. I heard their words of hope, their rejoicing together that God was at work, their assurance that He would do a miracle in her life--while I envisioned returning home to despair.

Our bus drove into the Denver Greyhound terminal early on January 4, 1967. Kathy dropped me off at my apartment, and I reluctantly opened the door

“And the people went out to see what happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.”

(Luke 8:35 NASB)

to the usual television droning in the gloomy living room. The telephone receiver still hung against the kitchen wall, off the hook for the last five days. I saw Mom was stretched out on her couch.

“Dinah, I need help,” she croaked. “I’m so sick!” That was evident. Bottles and trash were everywhere, and the place stank of old vomit. I looked at her and wondered how long she could live in that condition--and why I had to be the one to watch her self-destruct. “I’m an alcoholic, Dinah. . . I’m a . . .”

I tried to soften that with my normal denial. I couldn’t even face the truth from the woman who was confessing it. “No, I *am*,” she said. “And I know that AA can help. Call the typewriter repairman who told you that he was a member. And then call Mrs. Newstrand.”

“Mom, what do you want with Mrs. Newstrand?” I asked. She was a Baptist friend who had tried to help us, another one Mother kept at a distance because she was “on her high horse.” I made the two telephone calls and then left to do errands.

Three hours later, walking into a clean kitchen, I saw that Mrs. Newstrand had done wonders. The clothes dryer tumbled one load dry while the washer agitated another. I saw the dishes in the drainer, a clean tablecloth on the table, everything in order. Putting the few groceries away quietly, I peeked into the sunny living room. The old sheet on the couch was gone, all the bottles, loaded ashtrays, and wads of Kleenex had disappeared. The coffee table emitted a lemony scent of furniture polish. But the biggest change was Mom sitting in her rocking chair by the window, showered clean, in new pajamas, her hair in rollers. She was calmly reading the morning paper. I approached her in

awe. The contrast was too great. “Mom, what *happened* to you?”

She looked up at me and said, “When Mrs. Newstrand came over and saw me sick like that, she said, ‘Before we do anything, Winnie, you need to get right with God. Let’s get down on our knees.’ And we did. I admitted to God that I was an alcoholic. I asked Him to save me. Then I took a shower. I don’t know what happened, really.”

Simple steps, I thought, remembering my Campus Crusade roommates’ earnest prayers for her, and vividly recalling my own transformation a year before when I had been saved at the Billy Graham movie, *The Restless Ones*.

“What did the typewriter man say?” I asked, still marveling at the peace I saw in her eyes. “He said they’re sending me an AA sponsor later today, a woman who’s been sober a long time. She’ll take me to my first meeting tonight and will be with me for the next 90 days. He said that I need to go every night.”

So a few hours later, my mother began her 90-day meeting routine, and I left for college. She told me later that her sobriety had come one day at a time, with much suffering, but with new inner strength and purpose.

“Dinah,” she said in 1969, “I want you to write my story so the drunks and other sinners out there will have hope. There is a sure way out, and it’s not hard at all if you ‘let go and let God!’”

Epilogue (1967-1974)

For the next seven years, until her death on July 7, 1974, my mother faithfully sponsored many women in Alcoholics Anonymous, helping them, just as she had been helped, to work through the Twelve Steps to sobriety and peace with God through Christ.

After she passed away, I found this quote taped on the flyleaf of Mother's AA devotional, *Twenty-four Hours a Day*:

“I have held many things in my hands and have lost them all, but whatever I placed in God's hands, that I still possess.”

Martin Luther



Heavy Laden. Santa Rosa, CA 2003--Sue Brooks

Gethsemane

Diane Kulkarni--Perry, UT

Only chosen olives get to Gethsemane.
Ripe and full, they are selected for their
quality by the grove master.

One day it starts. You come home tired, sit
down to a simple meal, and when you get
up from the table, you are on your way
to Gethsemane.

The press squeezes the olives dry to
extract the golden oil, but the only way
to get it is first to break and crush
the olive bodies, who
like you,

probably wouldn't have come in the first
place had they known the pain involved or the
shape their bodies would be in at the end.
It's only when you are oil that you look back

Dearly Beloved Reader,

As you have read your way through these unique stories of God's love, provision, and promises, perhaps you have recalled that specific time when you were born into the Kingdom or when He has walked with you through a crisis. Perhaps you have never yielded your heart and life to His Lordship, but you have learned how to do that through the messages on these pages. In either situation, now you're ready to respond.

We invite you to sit quietly for a few minutes before the Lord in reflection and thanksgiving. Then pick up a pen and begin describing the circumstances of His "glorious intrusion" in your life on the pages that follow. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. Simply present the writing as an offering of praise to Him. May recalling His involvement in your life renew your hope—and give hope to others as you share.

Georgia Herod and Diane Kulkarni

This I Recall, Therefore I Have Hope

"Beginnings are very hard to trace. A thought that seems to stray into our minds like a lost puppy may actually be a nudge from God's Spirit. A cry that rises from deep within and finds articulation in our minds can be the beginning of a path that will take a lifetime to follow."

Malcolm Smith
How I Learned to Meditate

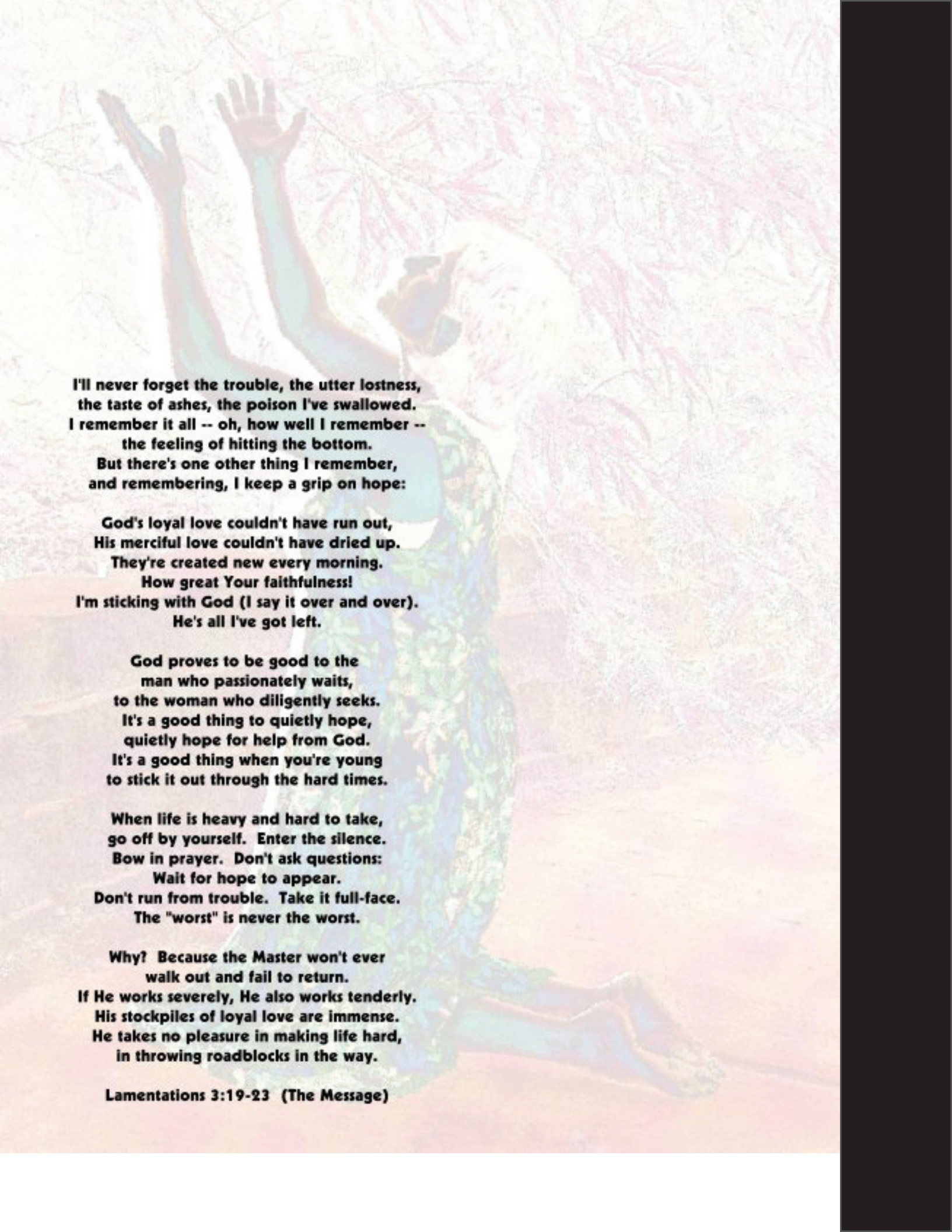




Too Heavy. Bear River Bird Refuge, Brigham City, UT, 2006. Phil Reyes.

“O Lord, by all Your dealings with us, whether of joy or pain, of light or darkness, let us be brought to You. May all that You send us bring us to You. Then, knowing Your perfectness, we may be sure in every disappointment that You are still loving us. And we may know in every darkness that You are still enlightening us, and in every enforced idleness that You are still using us.”

Phillips Brooks (modernized)



**I'll never forget the trouble, the utter lostness,
the taste of ashes, the poison I've swallowed.
I remember it all -- oh, how well I remember --
the feeling of hitting the bottom.**

**But there's one other thing I remember,
and remembering, I keep a grip on hope:**

**God's loyal love couldn't have run out,
His merciful love couldn't have dried up.**

They're created new every morning.

How great Your faithfulness!

I'm sticking with God (I say it over and over).

He's all I've got left.

**God proves to be good to the
man who passionately waits,
to the woman who diligently seeks.
It's a good thing to quietly hope,
quietly hope for help from God.
It's a good thing when you're young
to stick it out through the hard times.**

**When life is heavy and hard to take,
go off by yourself. Enter the silence.**

Bow in prayer. Don't ask questions:

Wait for hope to appear.

Don't run from trouble. Take it full-face.

The "worst" is never the worst.

**Why? Because the Master won't ever
walk out and fail to return.**

If He works severely, He also works tenderly.

His stockpiles of loyal love are immense.

**He takes no pleasure in making life hard,
in throwing roadblocks in the way.**

Lamentations 3:19-23 (The Message)