

# CRISIS *of* BELIEF

*Pathway to a Spirit-Filled Life*

REVISED, UPDATED, WITH COMMENTARY • 3RD EDITION

Revelation 12:11

JAMES TIMOTHY BUTT

## WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK WORTH READING

This book is a perfect example of how our God makes beauty from ashes. Thousands have downloaded earlier additions because James' candid testimonies of his ever-changing, wild, exciting, and sometimes painful journey of faith make his readers want to experience the same intense and rewarding relationship with God that he has.

This book is an open and honest chronicle displaying God's amazing grace, which empowers a person to forsake all and follow Christ. James' Revelation 12:11 rags to kingdom riches storytelling is one of those "could not put down" autobiographies because of the unique personal testimonies that document a twenty-year track record of answering the call and risking everything to become and remain a disciple of Jesus. Not only has James given away everything he owned multiple times, but he has sacrificed everything, including "the perfect new job," for the privilege of remaining a follower of Christ.

A wonderful read and a challenging book, *Crisis of Belief, Pathway to a Spirit-Filled Life* is a call to action for all Christians, especially American believers so blessed with so much, yet living in a time of hyper-grace and a watered-down gospel. Perfectly aligned with sound doctrine, it resets the shaken moral compass of today's church! ~ Reviews Montage

**CRISIS**  
*of*  
**BELIEF**  
*Pathway to a Spirit-Filled Life*

REVISED, UPDATED, WITH COMMENTARY • 3RD EDITION

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## REVIEWS

This autobiographical masterpiece by James Butt is essential reading for anyone interested in the practical application of the Holy Spirit to one's life. ~ David Vandenberg

An incredible journey of transformations, signs, wonders, and coincidences that fit the definition of miracles. Written in an authentic way that made me feel like I went on and enjoyed these adventures with him. ~ Nate Garrett

Amazing and inspirational! A true example of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. From the pit of hell to the throne room of God, James' stories are examples of what a loving God can do when we step out in faith and die to ourselves. ~ Pari Rossi

James' stories describe the narrow path that God has led James down. Few find that path. Fewer stay on it. Fewer yet find the courage to speak of those lessons or dare to put them into written words. His personal stories provide many signs, lessons, and bread crumbs you can pick up and apply to your life. ~ Clark Jacobson

An easy read that documents an extraordinary journey. I found it to be sincere, well-written, and thought-provoking. It made me look at my own life. ~ Wendy S. Copenhaver

I've known James for a long time as both a forerunner for Christ and a trailblazer for our generation. I helped edit the first edition and continue to use *Crisis of Belief* as a discipleship tool. I highly recommend sharing it with your family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors. When you do, they will discover the power needed to transform their lives. ~ Laura Berndt

I was James' boss. He was my top salesman. I used to quote verses to him like "You see, but you're blind." and "You hear, but you're deaf." Soon after I baptized James on 7/2/03, God filled him with the Holy Spirit. Afterward, he dedicated the rest of his life to becoming a follower of Jesus, living a missionary lifestyle. I highly recommend this book which documents his truly amazing journey.

~Nick Coppola

I read this book in two days and found it hard to put down. It shows us how to overcome the battle of the mind, will, and emotions (soul) so that we can walk in the Spirit by faith to do seemingly impossible exploits as led by the Holy Spirit.

~ Karen Lieberman

James' story and his collection of testimonies herein has had a profound effect on my own walk with God. God has helped my understanding that he has no favorites (all of his children are his favorites!) and that all of us can lay hold of his promises for our lives. James' experiences with doubt, crises of belief, and the resulting strengthening of his faith have reinforced my own faith to the point that my heart is sure of God's love for me and that the waves are my sidewalk! Thank you, James, for sharing your amazing journey with us!

~ Therese L. Spina

*Crisis of Belief* provides the reader with a sense of relief that his or her trials are not uncommon to man. James' transparency and raw storytelling will keep you engaged and provoke you to gaze back at the cross. It gave me fresh faith in what God can do in my own life!

~ Elizabeth Mello

What I like about this book is that it is action packed like the Book of Mark, not filled with theology or philosophy. This takes us into his story line in such a way that it leaves room for the Holy Spirit to speak to us in various ways about our own lives. I like that it encourages us that we too can lead this kind of life if we are willing to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit.

~ Elizabeth Johnson

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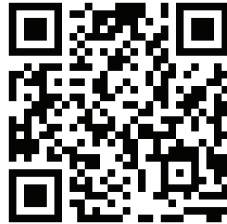
A window will open up and invite you to rate the book from 1 to 5 stars and then write a headline and a brief review—and it really can be brief! Most readers want to know whether you liked the book or not. And if so, why? No need to be fancy. If you want to elaborate, that’s great.

Thank you,  
James Timothy Butt



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## DEDICATION

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## *Acknowledgments*

I am so grateful for my wife, Theodora Wang, who partnered with me to completely revise and update this volume, write the teaching moments, reflection questions, and prayers found at the end of each chapter. Not only do I honor her, but I want to acknowledge how greatly she influenced what this third edition has become.



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## PREFACE

### *Do You Know Him?*

*We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*

*1 John 1:3*

*Crisis of Belief* is my testimony, aligned with Scripture verses. It documents what I've witnessed, experienced, and learned firsthand while living as a missionary in America for the past twenty-plus years.

Like many, I grew up hearing about Jesus from various preachers, televangelists, prophets, and best-selling authors who exposed me to the American version of Christianity, but it wasn't until I accepted the absolute lordship of Christ Jesus that my life was transformed.

After becoming born-again, I became aware of the dangers of a watered-down gospel, and I realized that crisis of belief moments are open doors that invite us into a deeper experience of Jesus we cannot find in any other way.

Jesus inspired me to share these stories to provoke others, including the lukewarm church. When our relationship with God is restored, we are called to step outside the four walls of the local church to become ambassadors of reconciliation to a fallen world that desperately needs a Savior.

The Bible is often referred to as the greatest story ever told, but it does not end there. God is still writing his story in the hearts of his disciples like us. As we walk the spirit-filled path, our testimonies light the way for others to follow.

—James Timothy Butt



## FOREWORD

*We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. Colossians 1:9–10*

I have the utmost respect for my husband, James, who has chosen to walk a life of wholehearted love and devotion to Jesus Christ, his Lord and Savior. He has dedicated his life to discipling others. Nothing brings more joy to James than seeing a life changed by the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit!

*Crisis of Belief* is a timely book to read to root our faith in God's unshakable kingdom. We are here on earth but for a twinkling of an eye, but our eternal rewards will last forever. In Revelations 22:12, Jesus said, "Look! I am coming soon, and my reward is with me to pay each one according to what they do!" (NIV) For believers, the judgment seat of Christ isn't a place of punishment. It is a place where rewards will be given or lost depending on what believers do to fulfill the calling God has placed upon their lives.

This book is intended to be used as a workbook—a resource for you to ponder on the things James has shared with you and to apply them to your own life. To fully benefit from this book, take your time, read it a second or third time, and meditate on the Scriptures and reflective questions at the end of each chapter. Consider taking a forty-day journey using this book as a devotional to assimilate the scriptural truth more fully as it relates to your walk with the Lord.

It's time to get out of the boat and walk on the water. Signs, wonders, and miracles are God's blessings which we experience while walking the pathway of a spirit-filled life!

—Theodora Wang

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# *The Key to Understanding A Crisis of Belief*

*May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. By his divine power, God has given us everything we need to live a godly life. We have received all this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself. 2 Peter 1:2-4*

Let me begin by explaining what I mean by a crisis of belief. The one force that constantly pulls on the soul (mind, will, and emotions) of everyone actively seeking God's will is the spirit of the antichrist. It disguises itself as common sense and is the power behind modern-day false teachers and prophets. This spirit drives the media, politicians, TV personalities, and fallen religious institutions to deceive the masses through secular humanistic teachings, self-centered thoughts, and human reasoning. Its followers rely on human intellect, strength, abilities, and other self-generated efforts.

In contrast, the newly awakened, born-again soul learns to recognize God's grace at work, which enables it to partner with the Holy Spirit who empowers us to overcome in the battle between the two worlds. The crisis of belief moment is when we come to the crossroads of decision. Will we choose to follow the Lord of heaven and earth or will we choose to follow the antichrist spirit of this world, affecting our destinies?

*"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." John 10:27*

We need to learn how to hear and follow God's voice and understand the various ways he speaks to us. When we face a belief crisis that tests our faith, we must choose between listening to the voice of God or the voice of the enemy. Logic and common sense don't always help us distinguish between the two. The enemy's voice tries to get us to make quick decisions. He sounds very reasonable and entices us by telling us what our emotions want to hear. I've found that God's voice is a "knowing" that stamps an indelible thought impression upon my soul. It's as if it rises from the inside of me, from my heart or spirit. What he says always resonates with peace, truth, and love, and never contradicts Scripture. I recognize it and somehow "know" it is God speaking to me.

The “knowing” includes the grace of confidence to step forward. If I have doubts, I ask the Lord to confirm if I heard him correctly, and he always does. Too many doubts? Drop it and ask the Lord to speak again in another way. The many supernatural events written in this book are about hearing from the Lord and following his voice. To clarify, when I say, “God told me,” in my stories, a thought impression is likely what I mean.

All faith is a gift of grace from God. However, we still need to do our part by stepping forward in faith toward the direction we believe God is leading us. Through submission, we align our will underneath God’s grace which empowers us with supernaturally creative thoughts, divine appointments, and resources. It is as if we are fed through God’s umbilical cord. Self-willpower wears itself out because it is dependent upon human self-sufficiency. God’s gift of grace enables all things, making what is humanly impossible possible. But first, we must step into grace through faith, which allows us to overcome our initial crisis of belief.

Since God desires us to enter into a deep and personal relationship with him through Jesus, don’t be afraid to ask questions. Talk to Jesus just like you would to your best friend. While praying, practice listening and expect him to respond to your prayers. A knowing or thought impression could be a word of wisdom that solves a complicated situation, a preview of a future event, a peace that transcends understanding, or other components of God’s grace as captured in the stories throughout this book.

*“They said to each other, ‘Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?’” Luke 24:32*

During this journey of faith, there are many forks on the road including one misleading sign pointing toward secular humanism. The correct sign, which points to God’s gift of grace, leads to the right pathway. As we embrace the truth, we become more sure-footed and find ourselves being guided by a fresh inner consciousness. Like the biblical story the road to Emmaus, this journey also comes with a surprise guest.

When you become fully awakened to the truth, you’ll recognize Jesus has been with you during this new journey and that finding this book wasn’t an accident.

# *A Teaching Moment*

## **Secular Humanism versus God's Gift of Grace**

*Secular humanism is an ideology that believes humanity understands truth and morality; therefore, it thinks it can self-govern without any relationship with God. The gift of God's grace reveals the truth that God is absolutely sovereign, and that we are hopelessly bankrupt without a relationship with him.*

## **The Mind of Christ ~ 1 Corinthians 2:14, 16**

People who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them, and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means . . . But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

## **The Wisdom of God ~ 1 Corinthians 1:19-20**

As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent." So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.

## **Self-Reflection**

- What do you hope to get from reading this book?

## **Prayer**

*Jesus, I pray that you will open my mind each time I read this book and enable me to understand the practical application of what's written. In Jesus' name, I pray!*

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# *Becoming Born Again*



## CHAPTER 1

### *A Wake-Up Call*

*The gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. Matthew 7:14*

The American dream for many is owning a home, having two cars, kids, and a house with a white picket fence. As we reach each milestone, the focus shifts: raising the kids, helping them go to college, and saving money for retirement. But what happens when we reach our goals and still feel incomplete?

My mid-life crisis occurred right before I turned forty. My second wife and I had \$300,000 in the bank, stock funds, and an excellent retirement plan. I had a successful career, lived the country-club lifestyle, we could travel to many great places all over the world, and could buy most anything we wanted. Although it sounds great, I began searching for reasons to keep living. I had it all, but still felt an emptiness inside, and I was still suffering from childhood wounds. We had reached what many would describe as the pinnacle of our careers; however, I never thoroughly enjoyed it because I lived in fear. I worried about our mortgage payments, how to keep up our lifestyle, and other worldly concerns. This created anxiety and tremendous stress. The truth is, I was miserable, but didn't understand why.

My first wife was a smart, beautiful, ambitious, hard-working woman. After our careers took off and we were making six figures, we built a two-story stucco dream home down the street from Great Hills Country Club in Austin, Texas. I wish I could tell you that the story ended here and that we lived happily ever after. Unfortunately, our marriage didn't stand a chance. I met my second wife at a bar. She wasn't drinking at the time and said she was trying to quit. Since my life was spiraling out of control, I missed the red flags, but so did she. I had hoped we would be a good influence on each other. We dated for a short time, got married too quickly, and bought a home near Berry Creek Country Club in Georgetown, Texas. I was back to playing golf, still making six figures, but it didn't take long until our lifestyle choices became unmanageable. As silly as this broken record sounds, insanity is doing something repeatedly and expecting different results.



When my first marriage failed, I was convinced that it was my ex-wife's fault. When my second marriage failed, I realized something might be wrong with me. When I became single again, I dove even deeper into my addictions and self-indulgences to numb the emotional pain of being a two-time divorcé. When the booze stopped working, I discovered drugs, which pulled me down quickly. Until I hit rock bottom I didn't realize how lost and messed up I was, because the voice in my head convinced me I could fix my problems without any help.

If I had any morals before I started free-falling into the demonic realm, the devil shredded what was left of them through a series of compromises. That is, until the day I woke up and discovered I was morally bankrupt. When I started down this path, I had some semblance of self-respect, but it was gone and I didn't know how to get it back. One thing led to another, and then, during a brief moment of clarity, I realized that I had signed over the rights to my free will. Only then I realized that Satan had deleted the word "free" and completely possessed it. The devil had stealthily chained to my ankles a heavy iron ball of childhood wounds, alcoholism, the pride of life, lust of the flesh, failed marriages, and drug addiction. It became harder to live with myself because my guilt had become unbearable after crossing the threshold of sanity into a permanent state of hopelessness.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Anxiety and Depression**

*Growing up, I had parents who drank a lot. Like my parents, I used alcohol to calm my anxiety and numb painful thoughts. I didn't turn to Jesus until after I hit rock bottom. Amazingly, when I turned to him, he turned to me and spoke peace into my heart and mind.*

### **Peace ~ John 14:27 (NIV)**

[Jesus said,] "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

### **Rescue ~ Psalm 34:18**

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

**Self-Reflection**

- Am I asking myself, “Is there more to life?”
- Am I in denial?
- In emotional pain?
- Self-medicating?
- Feeling empty or incomplete? If so, please continue reading this book.

**Prayer**

*Jesus, I can relate to this story. Will you reveal yourself to me and show me that you are real? I would like to experience peace and be filled with hope.*

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## CHAPTER 2

# *Becoming God-Conscious— A Forty-Foot Cross*

*“I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along. He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see what he has done and be amazed. They will put their trust in the Lord.” Psalm 40:1–3*

By the time I turned forty, the devil had a firm grip on my soul. I sank deeper into darkness until Jesus rescued me from Satan’s grasp through the most unlikely of people. A partying buddy of mine invited me to a red-themed social party in an exclusive part of West Austin. At that time, I didn’t recognize the prophetic significance of the color red or the number forty. Later, I could connect the spiritual dots to events unfolding in my life that aligned perfectly with the biblical narrative of repentance, forgiveness, grace, mercy, and love, as referred to in Psalm 40 above.

That Saturday night at the red party, I came across Carol, whom I had dated a few times before. She introduced me to her friend Todd M., who became instrumental in helping me turn my life around. After we exchanged phone numbers, I picked up my pace chugging beers. Finally, I left to do drugs with the friend who had originally invited me to the party and shown up two hours late.

The following week, my new friend Todd invited me to go with him to one of my favorite night clubs. I still remember standing at the bar ordering a drink with my credit card in hand while looking back at Todd, asking him what he wanted to drink. Todd ordered a Coke. That was when I learned that he didn’t drink, nor had he been drinking at the red party. Then he informed me that both he and Carol were in recovery. Half-jokingly I asked, “What? Do you go to AA?” When he said yes, I told him I had been exposed to recovery meetings after my arrest for DUI years earlier.

After admitting my parents had been alcoholics and that I probably needed help, Todd said, “If you’re serious, I can help you.” After I asked him a few questions, I decided to give recovery another shot even though

I could not imagine not drinking for any length of time. I grew up with alcoholic parents and unconsciously I had become like them. The drinking lifestyle was all I had ever known.

Todd took me to meetings at the Northland group Alcoholics Anonymous meeting every day that first week. During one of those meetings, I heard an old man named Charles say, "If your life is perfect, don't change a thing. Just keep doing what you are already doing. If your life isn't perfect, do what someone suggested to me over twenty-seven years ago in a room like this. Get down on your knees for thirty days in a row. Ask God to come into your life, help you with whatever you're struggling with, and ask him to keep you sober one day at a time. If you do that, your life will change dramatically." That struck a chord with me, but not enough to get me to give it a try. I was already motivated to turn my life around, using my own willpower.

The following Saturday, April 2nd, 2003, I participated in a scramble format golf tournament. Afterward, I was proud of myself for avoiding the temptation to drink when my team hit the 19th green to get drunk. Later, while driving home, my cell phone rang. It was my friend Meredith who convinced me to meet her and another friend at a bar on 8th Street. I went, figuring that I could still have fun and drink Coke.

Like a slow-motion déjà vu video clip from that first evening with Todd, Meredith was standing at the bar with her credit card in hand when I walked through the front door. I remember her asking me what I wanted to drink. Unlike with Todd a week earlier, my willpower collapsed. In that weak moment, I blurted out, "I'll have a Corona with lime," which turned out to be the first of many that night.

Much later when the dope urge came over me, I left the bar and drove from downtown Austin up I-35 and turned onto Highway 183 North, on my way to meet my dealer to score. Suddenly, a sobering thought came over me. It was not the thought of a lost, sinful man who is convinced that God didn't want anything to do with him. Instead, I thought, "God, what do you think about what I plan to do?" At that very moment, a forty-foot-tall cross suddenly lit up on my immediate right, which startled me, to say the least! It wasn't the burning bush that Moses experienced, but that forty-foot-tall cross represented a turning moment in the spirit realm. Later, God used that cross to lead me back to my place of encounter with Him.

Though I had driven down Highway 183 thousands of times, I had never noticed Gethsemane Lutheran Church, where the forty-foot cross had suddenly appeared. Gethsemane was the name of the garden of decision where Jesus chose to embrace his cross. Ironically, this was the place of my monumental decision at this 'cross' road of my life.

Many identify Gethsemane Lutheran as the beautiful stained glass church because of its stained glass wall with a forty-foot cross at its center. For me, as I had recently turned forty years old, the stained glass cross represented my sinful condition. This church, located on Highway 183 between Lamar and Interstate 35, is meaningful because of the Highway of Holiness which traverses the parched desert land in Isaiah 35:8. I also found it very interesting that construction began on the church in 1962, the year I was born; and on top of everything else that lined up perfectly, the name of the church I attended as a youth in Pitman, New Jersey, is Saint James Lutheran Church.

The occurrences of that April 2nd, 2003, and thereafter were much like a private premiere of the movie Bruce Almighty which was released to the public the following May 23rd. In the film, Bruce attempts a conscious connection with God. During a scene where Bruce is driving, he fervently prays, "God, just give me a sign." Immediately, his prayer is answered when a highway construction vehicle loaded with road signs pulls out in front of him with stop, wrong way, caution, and other warnings confronting him.

## *A Teaching Moment*

*If you've read this far, it isn't by accident. God is calling you into a deep, personal relationship with Him. God has good plans for your life!*

### **Hope for the Future ~ Jeremiah 29:11–13**

"I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me."

### **Scripture Number Poetry**

God often uses numbers to get our attention. An example is the number forty, which often represents a test or trial. Moses became God-conscious or aware of God calling him to his people when he was forty (Acts 7:30). The Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years (Deuteronomy 8:2). In the New Testament, Jesus was tempted for forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4:2). The significance of the number forty for me is the Lord encountered me with a forty-foot cross when I was forty. Psalm 40 also perfectly describes my testimony!

**Self-Reflection**

- Am I noticing some unexplainable “coincidences” occurring in my life?
- Is the living God of the universe trying to get my attention?

**Prayer**

*True and living God, are you trying to speak to me? Who are you? I don't know you, but I want to know you. I want to believe; help my unbelief. Open my heart; help me see and hear you.*

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## CHAPTER 3

### *A Heart Condition*

*Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." John 3:3*

*Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 2 Corinthians 5:17*

"Aha" moments are often misdiagnosed. Initially, they may appear like a mid-life crisis, but they are accelerated spiritual growth opportunities in disguise. They grab our attention as if someone physically slapped us in the face. When I awoke from my spiritual slumber, I suddenly found myself wrestling with new thoughts foreign to me up until that point. It was as if God had reached into the darkness to awaken me with his marvelous light right before I slipped into a permanent state of unconsciousness.

What had happened on that fateful Saturday in April 2003, when the forty-foot-tall cross lit up on my immediate right, startled me. Although I wasn't positive, I believe God spoke to me through a thought impression. Then my self-centered thoughts shifted back to my quest to score dope. In spite of that "Aha" moment, I still remember thinking, "Forget God," as I called my dope connection to let them know I was on my way. I was up for three straight days partying before I finally fell asleep for a few hours. When I woke up, I saw that Todd had called a few times. He knew I had fallen off the wagon. His last message was, "Call me when you wake up."

Pulling myself together, I called him back. Todd asked, "Are you ready to go to a recovery meeting today?" I reluctantly admitted that I felt horrible, but he said, "That's the best time to go. I'll come by to pick you up." When he hung up, I thought to call him back to cancel, but didn't. I couldn't stop thinking about my Bruce Almighty moment and the brightly lit forty-foot tall cross. I wondered if God had indeed spoken to me, and if he had, I wondered if he would give me another chance.

The recovery meeting began in the usual way, then they opened it up for discussion on that day's topic. Suddenly, Charles repeated what I had heard him say the previous week, catching my attention. "If your life is perfect, don't change a thing. Just keep doing what you are already doing. But, if your life isn't perfect, try what was suggested to me over twenty-seven years ago. Get down on your hands and knees for thirty days in a

row and ask God to come into your life. Ask God to show you that he's real and ask him to keep you sober one day at a time." Again he said, "If you do that, your life will change dramatically." Before Charles even finished speaking, my heart leapt in my chest because I realized that God had not abandoned me for turning my back on him three nights earlier. When Todd dropped me off at my apartment that evening on April 5th, 2003, it was a "kairos" moment. (Kairos in Greek, the language the New Testament was originally written in, means "right or opportune time.") I was lost and confused and my shame was unbearable, so I got down on my knees and cried out to God in complete humility and total brokenness. I laid down my old life, surrendered my free will, which Satan was up until then in control of, and offered my soul to the Lord's keeping. To the best of my recollection, I prayed this exact heartfelt prayer:

*God, I don't know for sure that you are real, but if you are real, I will give you a chance to prove it. For the next thirty days, I will get down on my hands and knees and give you a chance to prove to me that you are real. I will cry out to you. I am offering you my free will to do with it as you please. If you don't answer me or show me that you are real, I will never come to you again. I need help. I am an alcoholic. I am hooked on drugs. I can't beat this on my own. Satan owns my free will. I need you to deliver me from alcoholism and drug addiction. And Jesus, if you are real, I need you to forgive all my sins. If you help me, I'll do whatever you ask.*

The tears came; I cried harder than I had ever cried in my entire life, soaking through the front of my shirt, and as I got up off my knees, a noticeable change had occurred. Heavy burdens had been lifted from my shoulders. New thoughts suddenly became crystal clear. I began to believe there was a way out of my hopeless situation. I thought that if God were real and he had truly spoken to me through that bright cross, maybe he could do what I couldn't do for myself. Perhaps God did have the power to keep me sober. Perhaps God could help me find a life worth living.

In my own unique way, I had asked Jesus to live in my heart on April 5th, 2003. That decision severed the devil's claim on my life. God gave me his Holy Spirit and my own spirit was born anew, pushing out the darkness and flooding my soul with light. Suddenly, all things became possible. I could look at myself in the mirror again because the guilt and shame were removed when I became a new creation in Christ Jesus.

God had delivered me from drug addiction and the desire to get drunk.



For thirty days straight, I got down on my hands and knees and cried out for God, who freed me from destructive thoughts, emotional pain, and the struggle to maintain sobriety that had plagued my life. I celebrated twenty years of sobriety on April 5th, 2023. Praise the Lord!

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **What Is the Good News?**

*When we repent of our sins and receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we become children of God. His supernatural power delivers us from the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. It is this free will decision that activates his divine intervention. In Christ, we become justified through the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Through the blood of Christ which was shed on the cross for the forgiveness of our sin, we are made right with our heavenly Father, and not by our own self-righteousness. A person is saved by faith, not by trying to be good. It's a gift, and that is the Good News!*

### **The Gift ~ Romans 6:23**

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

### **Salvation ~ Joel 2:32, Romans 10:13, and Acts 2:21**

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

### **Ask! ~ Matthew 7:8**

[Jesus said,] "For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

### **Self-Reflection**

- When reading this chapter, did you feel God tugging on your heart?
- Have you asked Jesus to make his home in your heart?
- If not now, when?

*If you've read this far, it's not by accident. It's a divine appointment! If you're ready to invite Jesus into your heart, please pray the eternal salvation prayer that follows. Your words don't have to be perfect. God just wants you to speak from your heart.*

## ETERNAL SALVATION PRAYER



*“Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for my sins and for raising him from the dead so that I could have eternal life. I ask that you forgive me for all my sins. [If you feel led to confess your sins out loud, do it.] I invite your Son, Jesus, to make a home in my heart, and I pray that you will fill me with your Holy Spirit so that I can understand spiritual truths and be born again. Thank you for forgiving me for all my sins. I am now a new creation in Christ Jesus. It is in Jesus’ name that I pray. Amen.”*



**Post these verses in plain sight and read them out loud daily:**

*But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12*

*I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. 1 Corinthians 15:3–4*

*For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. Colossians 1:13–14*

*And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. Since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. Romans 5:9–11*

*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. Romans 10:9–10*

**Congratulations!**

If you have decided to ask Christ Jesus into your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and Savior, you've just taken a significant step to enter the Kingdom of heaven. I encourage you to read your Bible, pray, and find a Bible-believing church to fellowship with that also offers a discipleship program.

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## CHAPTER 4

# *Learning to Hear God's Voice*

*When I consider these things, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources, he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to fully comprehend. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.*  
*Ephesians 3:14-19*

On January 3rd, 2003, my co-worker Laura Berndt Gunther gave me two gifts: a leather-bound Bible with James Timothy Butt engraved on the cover and a copy of Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God* workbook. Initially I thought, "Why would you give these to a sinner like me?" It wasn't until after April 5th, 2003, that I began to recognize the spiritual significance of those tools that helped me get started as a new believer, teaching me how to recognize God's voice, and making sure that it was him that I was following.

When I first began reading the Bible, it was like learning a foreign language, but rather than tossing it, I prayed. Afterward, God's Spirit led me to a Christian bookstore to buy a Bible study guide. While checking out, the cashier placed a free copy of a Christian worship compilation CD into my bag called *Go Out with Joy*.

At first, I wouldn't say I liked listening to that CD because it differed so from secular music. But, after playing it a few more times, I stopped listening to earthly sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll music since Christian music modeled the new life God's Spirit was leading me to embrace.

Christian praise and worship music is powerful as it embodies Scripture. As I listened to it, I learned how to pray prayers that align with God's heart. I also discovered that God's Spirit inhabits our thoughts when we praise him. Tormenting thoughts, fear, anxiety, and depression disappeared when I listened to worship music. Suddenly, listening to Christian music

became a necessity rather than a whim.

The following is another example of how God began teaching me to recognize and follow his voice. One day, a friend emailed me the daily devotion of *Today God Is First (TGIF)* by Os Hillman. While I read it, God spoke directly to my heart, imparting understanding to me that could only have come from him. At that moment, a specific truth that applied to my life became real to me in a way that I could never have thought up. That same friend emailed me another daily devotion in the discipleship series a week later. As I read it, God spoke directly to me for the second time, so I signed up to receive it. During the next couple of years, God used *TGIF* to teach me many more profound lessons about himself.

It's of utmost importance that we understand that God *wants* to speak to us, especially first thing in the morning; so we need to learn how to hear him. Daily devotion is essential. God also speaks to us through Scripture meditation, praise music, situations, circumstances, dreams, visions, Christian books, and inner promptings, as described earlier.

Signs, wonders, and miracles suddenly became frequent occurrences. Healing the wounded child within, however, became a process. I learned to connect the spiritual dots of events in my life, like bread crumbs along my path, reassuring me that God was actively involved in every area—past, present, and future!

I have learned over the years that two positions constantly pull at the soul. One position is self-will, which latches onto common sense and does what it believes is right. It relies on human strength, abilities, resources, timing, and other self-efforts. The other position, God's will, aligns itself under the covering of humility, brokenness, obedience, and submission. It relies on supernatural thoughts, divine appointments, Kingdom resources, and a childlike faith that feeds the spirit intravenously through God's divine umbilical cord. Self-willpower eventually wears itself out because it is dependent upon self-sufficiency. However, God's will enables all things to become possible because it is backed by the same amazing power source that created the heavens and the earth.

Learning to become a Christ-follower is different from simply going to church or blindly following theologians' teachings. It takes time to extract truth from the various nuances of Christianity. The challenge is sifting through doctrine and tradition and learning to apply Scripture rightly. Without the Holy Spirit's help, which we are given when we become born again, it would be impossible to understand God's will. Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth," (John 16:13). God's voice, frequently understood through thought impressions, is often confirmed through people, circumstances, situations, and Scripture.

On the morning of April 12th, 2003, I was driving my SUV down Parmer Lane and realized I had been sober for an entire week! While praising God for keeping me sober, I found myself at a red light in front of the same Austin nightclub where I had scored dope just the week before. From the elevated vantage point of my SUV, I glanced down to my left and noticed a young man snorting cocaine in the next car. Then God spoke to me. It wasn't an audible voice. It was a conscious impression in my thoughts that God had begun teaching me to recognize while reading devotionals. The Lord seemed to say, "This was you a week earlier. You can go back to this lifestyle or follow me and do what I say. The choice is yours."

The following day, I got down on my hands and knees and asked God to be Lord over every area of my life, not just a someday savior insurance policy. I also asked God to allow me to live by faith, and thanked him for giving me the miracle gift of sobriety. Little did I know back then that my desperate prayers for help would lead me to become a completely sold-out, all-in, radical follower of Jesus Christ. I call it crazy faith. If you choose to travel the narrow path that few find and fewer follow, most people will think you are crazy since following Jesus is radically different from how most people live.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***Pursue Jesus***

*Anyone can attend church or learn stories about the Bible, but only God's Spirit, combined with our free will, can place a craving deep within our souls, which causes us to pursue Christ Jesus passionately.*

### ***Drink Your Milk! ~ 1 Peter 2:2-3***

Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.

### ***Self-Reflection***

- God desires to speak to me!
- Do I hear his voice?
- Do I *want* to hear his voice?



*A Seed Sown in Good Soil*





## CHAPTER 5

# *The Highway of Holiness*

*And a great road will go through that once deserted land. It will be named the Highway of Holiness. Evil-minded people will never travel on it. It will be only for those who walk in God's ways. Isaiah 35:8*

There is an invisible path interwoven throughout the Bible. The Old Testament refers to it as the way of holiness. The New Testament calls it the narrow path that very few find. Although there are clues to its existence, the cares of this world prevent many from seeing the on-ramp to the Highway of Holiness, which enables us to experience the supernatural and enter into God's promised rest.

At the beginning of this journey of faith, secular programming and cultural conditioning block us from comprehending God's ways. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the humble, the peacemakers, and those who mourn, who have positioned themselves to tap into the supernatural grace that breaks through religious spirits, dogmatic perspectives, and secular humanistic conditioning. Human common sense can be counterproductive to understanding God's ways which challenge us to redefine our concept of reality. God's Spirit guides those who submit themselves to his wisdom in humility, brokenness, and a yearning for more, opening the way to this spiritual journey. We must completely surrender our lives to Christ's lordship and allow him to lead us. There is no other way. Period!

Without faith, it is impossible to please God. He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6). Taking a risk involves faith. A crisis of belief situation challenges us to move forward in faith. Cowabunga! Leaps of faith contain elements of unpredictability because God doesn't always tell us where He is leading us, how or when we'll get there, how long each new season will last, where our finances will come from, or who we will meet or work with along the way. At some point, we begin to understand that we aren't in control of anything. Instead of driving, we become passengers. Instead of giving directions, we learn how to listen. Instead of telling others what to do, we become servants who are instructed what to do. Christ Jesus' soft, tender, nudging love says, "Follow me." God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

God is always at work building his kingdom all around us. When we

do what pleases him, we are rewarded with opportunities to represent Christ's hands, feet, and voice. The most incredible adventure of our lives begins when we recognize our need for Jesus to become Lord over every area of our lives, granting us access to the Highway of Holiness. As we travel on it, Christ's voice becomes more apparent, giving us the confidence to take risks and do things we may not feel qualified to do.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **A Truly Amazing Adventure**

*Following Christ's Spirit for twenty-plus years has been the most incredible adventure of my life. It's never been dull. I've moved fifteen times in those years (2003–2023). Three times God relocated me to other states where I didn't know anyone. It should be impossible to live a missionary lifestyle with very little support and no job. But having done so, I greatly appreciate the magnitude of God's faithfulness.*

### **Good News ~ Romans 1:17**

This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. The Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."

### **Self-Reflection**

- Where am I in my faith journey?
- Am I walking in God's ways?
- Wherever we are, we can always ask God for help.

### **Prayer**

*Jesus, I want to follow you. Please teach me how. Help me recognize areas of false beliefs, wrong attitudes, and sinful behaviors. I repent of these areas of unholiness. Help me follow you and embrace righteousness. [Repent out loud any specific areas that the Spirit brings to mind.]*

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## CHAPTER 6

# *The Spirit Realm*

*This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:2-4*

Initially it was very awkward learning to follow a subtle new voice speaking thought impressions into my mind, like trying to rub my belly in a circular motion while patting myself on the head. What made things more difficult is that until this point, I had never heard anyone talk about having a relationship with Jesus the way I was suddenly experiencing him.

In the natural realm, the mind processes information gleaned from past experiences. But when the supernatural blinds open, the senses are exposed to the heavenly realm and its unlimited possibilities. Initially, my brain kept telling me things like, “I’ve never seen that before. That can’t be real. There is probably a good explanation for that. That is your imagination. God doesn’t speak to people like that. That must have been a coincidence.” Later, I learned that doubt and negative thoughts come from the antichrist spirit whispering lies into our minds.

It was Mother’s Day, May 11th, 2003, a day indelibly stamped in my mind. It was just a few weeks after inviting Jesus to become Lord over every area of my life. Todd and I were attending Riverbend Church in Austin, Texas. Pastor Gerald Mann’s sermon was on how difficult it is to be a mother raising children. Suddenly, God’s presence came over me and overwhelmed me. As I wept, I didn’t hear anything the pastor said because Jesus started speaking directly to me through thought impressions, telling me all of my sins had been cleansed, wiped away, and forgiven.

The Lord was teaching me how to recognize and follow his voice. My hesitant baby steps were confusing, partly because I didn’t know anyone with similar experiences. Since God had placed the desire in my heart to learn more, I started attending Bible study at Riverbend Church. To ensure I wasn’t crazy, I set up an appointment with Pastor Rick who taught the

Bible study, to get some good counsel.

When I met with Rick, he asked, “What’s going on? How can I help you?” Suddenly, a torrent of words came spewing out of my mouth. I told Rick, “God did this! I heard God tell me that. Then God did this!” After realizing he wouldn’t call the police or have me committed to a mental ward, I told him what happened on Mother’s Day. He just smiled reassuringly and said, “James, you aren’t losing your mind. God is just speaking to you a lot. God speaks to some people more than others, especially those with a unique calling. Just relax and keep praying and trusting God.”

As I left Rick’s office, I thought, “Ok, I’m not crazy. What a relief! Whatever is happening to me is real. I don’t know where this rabbit hole is leading, but I’m not turning back even if others think I’m nuts.” Some people *will* think you’re nuts if you dare to travel the narrow path that few follow, since following Jesus differs from how most live. You might even question your own sanity, which took me back to Rick’s office a few weeks later.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **God Speaks to Us**

*The Holy Spirit, which resides in our inner being, is given to us after we repent from sin and become born again. It’s common and natural for God to speak to his children through an inner voice like thought impressions or a knowing. Often, God communicates to us through the Holy Spirit while we are reading God’s Word, the Bible. The Bible also records God speaking audibly to people throughout the Old and New Testaments.*

### **God’s Divine Power ~ 2 Peter 1:3**

By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence.

### **Knowing God**

Getting to know someone, including the true God, takes time and effort. To grow closer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we must become students of the Bible and be willing to be led by God’s Spirit. And we must learn to recognize when and how God speaks to us, which is a by-product of our relationship with him.

**Self-Reflection**

- Do I desire to grow closer to Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior?
- What am I doing now to help me grow closer?
- Do I recognize God’s voice?
- Am I following God’s voice?
- Do I need to ask God to increase the hunger in my soul for him?

**Prayer**

*Dear Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I want to get to know each of you well. I want to understand your character, your values, what you think, how you work, and what you want to say to me. Show me how to have a relationship with you. Thank you for your promises in Jeremiah 29:11–13, which reassure me that you have a good plan with a future and hope for me and that if I look for you wholeheartedly, I will find you.*

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## CHAPTER 7

# *Obedience—The Red Tank Top*

*Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant. Galatians 1:10*

Two months after the forty-foot cross experience, I was bedridden for three straight days. While I slept, God gave me a clear and vivid dream/vision. Though he had spoken to me numerous times through inner knowings, this was different. In the image, I was wearing my red tank top, shorts, and sandals to Riverbend Church, located in a well-to-do part of the city. I then understood that God was directing me to wear the red tank top to church for four Sundays in a row. I also knew that the unwritten dress code was semi-formal, if I wanted to fit in with everyone else.

In my dream/vision, I saw the red tank top hanging on a coat hanger on my bedroom doorknob making it impossible to leave my room without remembering to put it on before going to church. I had no idea why God would want me to wear that outfit at all, much less for four consecutive services. It made no sense at all. What also concerned me was that I couldn't stop thinking about it.

At this point, I was a baby Christian, just two months into learning how to live a sober and Christ-centered lifestyle. Because I could tell that Jesus was active in my new life, I placed my faith in the belief that he had the answers to every problem, situation, or circumstance I faced while trying to recapture a life worth living. If God wanted me to wear a red tank top to church, I was afraid not to do it, but I needed to be sure it was the Lord leading me rather than the antichrist spirit tricking me into doing something I would regret later.

Since I found myself stuck between a rock and a hard place, I set up another meeting with Pastor Rick. I figured that he would tell me that God wouldn't want me to wear a red tank top, shorts, and sandals to Riverbend Church, especially since I have several tattoos on my upper arms. After listening to my description of the dream/vision, Rick said he didn't know why God would have me do that. Then he surprised me when he said he couldn't give me any advice about what to do other than to encourage me to keep praying about it. Unfortunately, that was not the answer I was looking for; I was hoping he would tell me that God would never ask me to

do that. Instead, I was left facing a crisis of belief.

Heading toward the exit after meeting with Rick, I noticed that the office door of Pastor Gordon Smith was open. After tapping on the door, I asked him if he had a few minutes to spare. Gordon cordially invited me in to have a seat. I shared the dream/vision with him, hoping for a different answer, but to my surprise, he gave me the same advice Rick had given. When I left their offices, I was proud of myself for seeking the wise counsel of others; but still, I was left facing a crisis of belief.

As I prayed about it, I discovered that it is relatively common to experience God's omnipresence as a believer, but directional commands from God are not very common. When God does speak directional commands, our submission puts us in a spiritual position that taps into supernatural grace. Common sense told me not to wear the red tank top because it would attract unnecessary attention. However, it was Jesus' voice, attached to an inward sense of knowing, that beckoned me to step out in faith.

Since obedience-based decision-making is the safest way to follow Jesus, I decided to wear the outfit to church once before committing to all four weeks. I was worried about what others thought, instead of focusing on pleasing an audience of One (the Lord), so I convinced Todd and his girlfriend Katie to meet me in the parking lot to escort me into Riverbend Church. That strategy shielded people from seeing the tattoos on my upper arms. That way, I could be obedient to what I thought God might have asked me to do and minimize the number of stares I faced while testing out if the dream/vision did indeed come from God.

It worked perfectly, until Pastor Mann encouraged us to get up from our pews to meet and greet our neighbors seated around us before beginning his sermon. When I turned around, an elderly couple seated behind me looked at my appearance with a disgusted look in their eyes. When they did, I felt a strange new connection to Jesus, which enabled me to see His earthly ministry from a different perspective. I began to understand the connection between persecution, faith, and obedience-based decision-making. Right then and there, I decided I wanted to experience *more*.

I didn't need escorts for week number two as my courage had increased as a result of my resolve to follow Christ. In fact, when I attended Pastor Gordon's Bible study class before church, as was my usual routine, I wore the red tank top. When I did, to my surprise, no one said a thing about my appearance. Then something very unusual happened while walking from Bible study toward the main entrance. The person in charge of the greeters stopped me. He told me they were short-handed and asked me to volunteer as a greeter. Suddenly I found myself standing in my red tank top, shorts, sandals, and tattoos holding the door open while greeting the

hundreds of people coming to worship.

As people approached the sanctuary, I looked at their facial expressions. The vast majority didn't even notice or care about my appearance. They were simply happy that I was holding the door for them. A few looked at me with condemnation, enabling me to experience Jesus' persecution for his obedience, which was very different from reading about it in the Bible. After the second week's experience, I felt I had mastered the lesson that Jesus was trying to teach me. I had faced my crisis of belief—fear of persecution—and was sure I had passed the obedience test. The following Saturday, as I read the book of Acts in my living room, God's presence fell upon me. I would describe the experience as a cloud of glory covering me and saturating me in joy. The hair stood up on the back of my neck and arms while I wept like a baby in God's presence. I was overwhelmed by a new infilling of God's Spirit which seemed to last a very long time. As the glory cloud lifted and I regained my composure, God spoke a thought impression into my mind enabling me to connect what just happened with the Scripture verse I had been reading:

*The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.  
(Acts 5:41)*

God then spoke plainly to me through the verses I was reading. He had filled the disciples with joy and a fresh indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a reward for the persecution they had endured from the religious authorities of the day. Though I did not understand it at the time, God was preparing me for the persecution I would face after he gave me a vision to produce the Power of the Cross Festivals at Auditorium Shores in Austin, Texas.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***Pleasing God or Pleasing People?***

*At the root of people pleasing could be the fear of rejection, avoiding conflict, wanting to fit in, lack of self-love, and other reasons. It's impossible to please everyone, and people pleasers risk not being who God created them to be. The cycle of pleasing people is broken by focusing on pleasing God and relying on him to meet our emotional needs, including the need to be liked. The Bible contains many stories of disciples facing opposition yet faithfully persevering. If Daniel, Moses, Nehemiah, and countless others can rise*



*above mortal critics and stay on the divine path, we can too.*

**We Are Messengers! ~ 1 Thessalonians 2:4**

We speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts.

**Self-Reflection**

- Am I too concerned about pleasing people?
  
- Why?
  
- Is winning approval from others more important to me than pleasing God?
  
- Why would the two pastors suggest that James keep praying about whether or not to wear the red tank top rather than tell him what they thought he should do?

**Prayer**

*Father God, deliver me from the fear of people or worrying about how others view me. Please give me the grace and boldness to obey your commands, especially when it doesn't align perfectly with common sense.*

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## CHAPTER 8

# *Baptism—The Devil Gets Desperate*

*The temptations of this life are no different from what others experience, but God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so you can endure. 1 Corinthians 10:13*

It was Saturday, June 28th, 2003, I was sitting in my living room praying. At around 10 a.m., God spoke a thought impression into my mind and said, “Get in your car now and drive to Great Hills Baptist Church.” I was a member of Riverbend, not Great Hills, but God’s Spirit directed me to find a pastor at Great Hills on this day.

As I pulled into the vast complex, I saw scaffolding surrounding the church. It looked like they were stuccoing the entire exterior. Then the anti-christ spirit spoke suggestive lies into my thoughts, saying, “It’s Saturday. They aren’t here. You’re wasting your time.” Though tempted, I resisted the urge to turn around and go home and continued my search for signs of activity. Then I noticed a mobile construction office at the edge of the parking lot. As soon as I pulled up to it, the front door opened, and a man walked out. I stepped out of my car and greeted him, “Excuse me, sir. I am looking for a pastor.”

Glenn Rogers, whom I had not met until that moment, replied, “I’m a pastor, the only one here.”

“Then you’re the one I am supposed to meet with,” I said with a smile.

Glenn paused, looked into my eyes, and said, “OK, follow me inside to my office.” As we sat down, he asked, “OK. How can I help you?” I started opening my heart and confessing my sins as I thought that was why God brought me there. Glenn stopped me, “You know you can go directly to Christ to repent.” Then he changed the subject and started talking about my need to get baptized.

As he spoke, I just shut up and listened. He told me everything anyone would ever need to know about getting baptized, including why it is essential to do it with a committed heart. He also said that anyone could baptize me and that I should do it right away.

When he finished talking, I said, “That’s interesting that you brought up baptism, because God has been speaking to me about that. How did you know I’ve never been baptized?” Puzzled, Glenn looked at me and said, “I

thought you asked me about baptism.” I just smiled and thanked him for meeting with me.

I attended Gordon Smith’s Bible study at Riverbend Church that Sunday. He spent the entire hour discussing agape love, which I’d never heard about until then, though it accurately described God’s love that was manifesting throughout every area of my life.

The following Monday morning we had our weekly sales conference call. Before the call ended, I surprised my boss Nick Coppolo, by asking him if he would baptize me, and to do so in two days’ time. After Nick agreed, we met at Riverbend Church to make arrangements. While at the church, we bumped into Patrick Abbott, the church’s executive pastor. He suggested that instead of using the regular baptism facility, I should consider getting baptized in the stream that runs through Remembrance Gardens, a burial ground for church members. It wasn’t until later that I began to understand the significance of Pat’s recommendation—God was orchestrating my baptism to take place in a garden. Remember the Garden of Gethsemane (Garden of Decision) and its tie to the Lutheran church on Highway 183, where I saw that forty-foot-tall illuminated cross?

The following Tuesday, just a few days before I was to be baptized, I had stopped at a 7-Eleven on Highway 183 to get a coke. As I was getting back into my car, I heard Frank, someone I knew from recovery, calling my name from an adjacent parking lot. He was standing in front of the liquor store smoking a small cigar, so I walked over to say hello. While Frank and I were talking, unbeknownst to him, a temptation came at me hard, catching me totally off guard.

One of the most beautiful women I had ever seen, wearing a very low-cut, sexy dress got out of a car parked next to where we were talking and stared me down. Like something out of a Victoria’s Secret fashion show, she strutted past, paused, lifted her sunglasses to her forehead, and scanned my body. Her alluring invitation beckoned to engage me. She walked past us into the store, and I tried vainly to flee the temptress by returning to my car. As I backed out of the parking space, she appeared at the passenger side window to introduce herself.

“Write down my number and call me tonight.”

I fumbled an apology, “I’m sorry. I don’t have a pen.”

“Program my number into your cell,” she purred, “Are you ready?” At this point, I couldn’t stand it anymore. I was ready to marry her and spend the weekend shacked up in a cheap honeymoon suite.

I abandoned what little restraint I had, “What are you doing now?” I gulped, sweat forming on my brow.

She pursed her lips and pouted. “I can’t now, but call me tonight after

seven,” she cooed, eyelids lowered. Lustful thoughts are pretty standard for new people in recovery trying to learn how to tame their emotions.

At the time, I was wearing the same red tank top God had challenged me to wear to church months earlier. I was quite fit back then, so I had thought perhaps she was attracted to my muscles and tattoos. What I didn’t recognize then, as I do now, was that this was a demonic attack sent to cause me to stumble before getting baptized.

Instead of calling her, I drove myself to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting at Northland. While walking into the meeting, I bumped into a Christian woman I knew named Judy. When I told her what had just happened, she suggested that I read Ephesians 6, which covered spiritual warfare and putting on the whole armor of God. After the meeting, I told another friend, Mike, what had happened. To my surprise, he also suggested that I read Ephesians 6.

After sharing the story yet again with an older man, he said “Quit pouring kerosene on the fire and inflaming it! Instead of giving lustful thoughts power by talking about what happened, pray for that woman since she serves a demonic master. Delete her number from your cell phone, get down on your knees, and ask God to remove lust from your thoughts. Pray for her salvation.” Thankfully, I had godly accountability partners, and their wisdom delivered me from temptation. Praise God!

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Temptations Are Your Training**

*The enemy’s voice tries to get us to make quick decisions. It entices us by telling us what our emotions want to hear. It attacks our weaknesses. Temptations from the adversary are tests and growth opportunities God allows in our lives. They are blessings in disguise because they put us in unique positions for God to teach us how to break free from evil and all types of bondage, including lustful thoughts.*

### **Stand Firm! ~ 1 Peter 5:9**

Stand firm against him [the enemy], and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.

### **Resist the Devil ~ James 4:7**

So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee.

**Be Strong ~ Ephesians 6:10–11**

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.

**Self-Reflection**

- Reflect on your moments of weakness and temptations.
- Is there anything I would have done differently?
- Who can I turn to as my accountability partner when tempted or need wise counsel?

**Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, you are faithful and will not let temptation overpower me but will show me a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). I put on the armor of God according to Ephesians 6:12–17. With your help, I can overcome all temptations. Lord, direct me to wise believers who can give me counsel when I need help.*

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## CHAPTER 9

# *The Best Day of My Life*

*After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. Matthew 3:16*

The best day of my life was the day I got baptized—with a committed heart—on July 2nd, 2003. At 5 p.m. I drove down Highway 183, past the 7-Eleven where the beautiful woman had tempted me days before, and turned right onto Highway 360 South. As soon as I did, a dark Suburban pulled out in front of me and personally escorted me, or so it seemed, through heavy five-o'clock traffic to exactly where I needed to exit—the entrance to Riverbend Church Remembrance Gardens.

During the twenty-minute drive, God's presence filled my car, causing me to weep like a baby. Struggling to figure out what was happening to me, I took a closer look at the SUV and noticed a yellow sticker on the back bumper that read, "Agape Love—A Christian Love Thing." On the rear window was another decal of a shield and sword, with the words "Ephesians 6," symbolizing spiritual warfare and the armor of God.

When I saw those decals, I recognized that God was doing something above and beyond all I could think of or even imagine, and when I finally met Bishop Lawrence Wilkerson from Agape Christian Ministries three years later, he was driving the same dark Suburban with the two familiar decals. However, the Agape Love decal was white, instead of yellow. When I mentioned it, he said, "It *was* yellow. I recently changed that decal to white." He also confirmed, unbeknownst to him at the time, that it was his SUV that God had used to give me a personal escort to my baptism. He then invited me to share this story with his congregation one Sunday. (Afterward, Bishop Wilkerson agreed to become a member of the advisory board I put together for the Power of the Cross Festival in 2006.)

The second sign and wonder occurred within an hour after the first. Nick was waiting for me in the parking lot of Remembrance Gardens so we could put on our white robes before making our way down to the stream where my friends were waiting to witness my baptism. Two days before, Nick had told me that I might come out of the water weeping while God filled me with the Holy Spirit. He said, "Hold on to me if you need to."

I told Nick, "I want God to kill the old me, so please hold me under the

water for a long time.” I don’t remember being submerged, but coming out of the water, I do remember gasping for air. I looked up at Nick and to my surprise, I didn’t feel filled with the Spirit. Then we got up and walked out of the stream. After standing around for a few minutes, everyone started walking back toward the parking lot. Two different people asked if I was coming, and twice to my own surprise, I said, “No, God wants me to stay.”

After everyone left, I sat down in dismay and cried out to God, saying, “Ok Lord, why am I supposed to stay? Is this all that there is to water baptism? Granted, the escort experience coming here was pretty amazing, but why wasn’t I filled with the Holy Spirit when I came out of the water?”

I’m not sure if what happened next came from within, from without, or both; but what I am certain of is that God’s Spirit overwhelmed me again, this time much more intensely. I became submerged in his presence, like being in a glory cloud filled with love. I heard God saying, “You are my dearly loved son in whom I am well pleased.”

Suddenly, I found myself back in the stream, on my knees, shaking, crying out to God. Words of gratitude came out of my mouth faster than I could think; a rapid fire of “thank you for this” and “thank you for that.” I was overflowing with God’s Spirit, causing me to praise him lovingly and appreciatively.

God only knows how long I was in the stream, but I managed to crawl out of it onto the shoreline and collect myself. When I had regained my composure, I walked out of Remembrance Gardens to find Mike waiting for me in the parking lot after everyone else had left. He told me he wanted to ensure that I was filled with God’s Holy Spirit. To this day, I can’t help but wonder if Mike was an angel. I never saw him again after he gave me the only photographs I had of my baptism. On the back of one photo, he wrote:

*James, peace be with you. As the Father sent me, I also send you (John 20:21). You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses even to the remotest parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). Mike*

Afterward, I drove to Nick’s house to meet with everyone who attended my baptism. His wife cook a wonderful meal in celebration of the occasion. As dinner ended, Nick and his wife gave me a lovely plaque which read:

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11*

After everyone left, my friend Jennifer agreed to go with me to Mount Bonnell, overlooking Austin. We arrived about fifteen minutes before sunset. As soon as we sat down, God's presence came upon me for a third time that day, and once again, it was different. I wept as I noticed a solid beam of sunlight hitting me directly in the chest. I tried touching it, but couldn't feel it. In wonderment, I asked her, "Can you see that?"

"See what?" she asked.

I attempted to touch the sunbeam again, but still couldn't. Then the antichrist spirit spoke a suggestive thought into my mind: "That isn't God. That is a reflection of your sunglasses. It isn't real. Lift your sunglasses to your forehead. See if you see it then."

As I lifted my sunglasses, I realized that I was mimicking what the beautiful temptress had done the day before. I lowered my sunglasses and exercised faith by telling myself I believed what I was seeing. Suddenly, a thought impression penetrated my mind, will, and emotions. The Lord inspired me to think, "I am a man of faith. God intended for me to see this sunbeam with my sunglasses on. I believe what I am seeing." I continued looking at the beam, still hitting me directly in the chest, until a cloud covered the sun right before sunset. I watched as the solid beam faded into an array of light particles and sat weeping until God's presence lifted.

While writing this book, I felt the Lord say, "Count the number of days between your birthday and the day you got baptized at the Remembrance Gardens driving down Highway 183." That is when I realized I was baptized precisely 183 days after my fortieth birthday. Again, I am amazed at God speaking through number poetry.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Multiple Infillings**

*Scripture indicates that there are multiple infillings of the Holy Spirit. With each new infilling, I experienced the fruit of the Holy Spirit intensely. When I gave my life to Jesus on April 5th, 2003, he filled me with hope and gratitude. God filled me with joy during the red tank top experience, and filled me with agape love when I was baptized as an adult with a committed heart on July 2nd, 2003. We know through Scripture that spiritual fruits come forth throughout the life of a believer.*

### **The Fruit of the Spirit ~ Galatians 5:22–23**

The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace,



patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

### **Signs and Wonders ~ Hebrews 2:4**

And God confirmed the message by giving signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit whenever he chose.

### **Love ~ 1 Corinthians 13:13**

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

### **Joy ~ Acts 13:52**

And the believers were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

### **Life ~ Psalm 16:11**

You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.

### **Water Baptism ~ Mark 1:8**

[John said,] “I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!”

Water baptism is a personal declaration of the redemptive work of the cross—the death of self as we are submerged in water, washed, and resurrected as a new person when we emerge.

### **Self-Reflection**

- What was the best day of my life?
- Do I need to get baptized with a fully committed heart?
- Meditate on the above Scripture verses. Focus on enjoying God’s omnipresence for a few minutes.
- Ask God to speak thought impressions into your mind. What thoughts come to you?

### **Prayer**

*Holy Spirit, I want to know and experience you more deeply. I desire the infillings of faith and hope, joy, and agape love. Baptize me with your Spirit. I renounce my old life. I am a new creation in Christ; fill me with your Holy Spirit.*

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Lined area for taking notes, consisting of 35 horizontal lines.

# *Responding to the Call*



## CHAPTER 10

# *Go Forth and Make Disciples*

*You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.*

*2 Timothy 2:2*

The Kingdom of heaven is continuously operating on the earth. Our job is to recognize what God is doing and step into opportunities where God invites us to represent his hands, feet, and voice.

One evening, I was standing outside a convenience store entrance talking to Pat Trocha when a car pulled up playing very loud Christian music. The driver got out and left his car running while he went into the store and brought out an eighteen pack of beer. Suddenly, the Lord spoke a thought impression into my mind, “I want you to go speak to him.”

I looked at Pat and said, “The Lord just told me to go speak to him.”

As the driver was pulling out, I walked over and tapped on his window. He rolled it down to see what I wanted, and I said “The Lord told me that He wanted me to speak to you, but He didn’t tell me why.”

The young man said softly, “I know why. I know what this is about.” He turned the engine off, stepped out of his car, got down on his hands and knees, and began to repent. Pat and I didn’t need to lead him in prayer or say anything. He did a fantastic job repenting all by himself while we stood over him praying silently. I asked the Lord to reveal to me what, if anything, to do next, but didn’t sense that I should do anything more than to give the fellow my phone number and encourage him to call me.

One month later, while in the middle of a citywide prayer meeting, I received a phone call from Jared, the man at the convenience store. I don’t remember what he said, but sensed an urgency in God’s Spirit telling me I needed to meet with him right away. Since I was concerned that he might be suicidal, which I later understood wasn’t the case, I asked him to meet me the next day to worship together at a local church. After the church service, I sensed God’s Spirit encouraging me to take Jared to a homeless ministry called Church Under the Bridge (CUTB).

On our way, we prayed until we pulled into the parking lot under I-35 and Seventh Street. I asked the Lord to allow us to be his hands, feet, and voice to others in need. As soon as we got out of the car, the Holy Spirit

drew my attention to a man leaning against one of the concrete supports under the highway. I told Jared that the Lord had directed me to talk to the young man, but didn't tell me why. Signalling to him, I said, "Follow me, listen, observe, and pray."

We approached the man, who shifted uneasily. "The Lord told me to talk to you, but He didn't tell me why," I said.

The young man, Tom, said he knew what this was about. "I hate God because he killed my wife," he growled.

With sensitivity and compassion, I walked Tom through some deliverance. Afterward, he got down on his hands and knees and repented. As I led him through a heartfelt prayer of salvation, I noticed a truck pulling a trailer on which was a large horse trough spilling water over the sides as it turned the corner. While Tom continued praying, I watched as the truck turned into the parking lot. We had no idea that they were doing baptisms that day.

While Tom was still on his knees, a word of knowledge inspired me to say, "See that? That's a baptism trough. God has prearranged for you to get baptized today."

Shocked, Tom said, "I just gave my life to the Lord. I'm not ready for that!"

I smiled and said, "Yes, you are. There are plenty of examples in the Bible of people getting baptized right after asking Jesus to come into their lives. Jesus arranged this divine appointment for you in this kairos moment. Now is the perfect time for you to get baptized."

After Tom agreed, I introduced him to the pastor, Duane Severance. When I asked Pastor Duane if I could help with the baptisms that day, he gave his consent and called everyone forward who wanted to get baptized. About twelve people, including Tom, stepped up. After Duane explained the Scriptures on baptism, each person stepped up onto the trailer and climbed into the water trough. I asked them to make a public confession of faith before baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and into the likeness of the death, burial, and resurrection life of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose body is the church. When they came out of the water, I prayed for them to receive the gift and power of the Holy Spirit.

After I baptized six people, the Lord spoke very clearly directing me to step aside so Jared could take my place. I told Jared, "The Lord just told me to let you do this."

Startled, Jared looked at me, "I can't do that."

I replied adamantly, "It's not up to me, nor is it my decision. The Lord told me to tell you to take my place." Jared took his position at the trough, and after baptizing the first person, his eyes lit up as he understood what it means to be discipled by a more mature believer and be part of God's Kingdom of heaven that operates on the earth. Praise the Lord!

# *A Teaching Moment*

## **The Great Commission;**

*Jesus commands everyone who receives God’s Spirit to share the Good News. When we do, we become Christ’s hands, feet, and voice—perhaps it’s sharing the gospel with neighbors, planting a seed while we are standing in line at the grocery store, raising godly children, or helping to meet the needs of a local church.*

## **Go ~ Matthew 28:19–20**

[Jesus said,] “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

## **Self-Reflection**

- God is at work all the time. When was the last time I prayed for my eyes to see and ears to hear in the spirit realm?
- What do I sense happening in others’ lives that God is showing me?
- Do I recognize invitations to partner with God in situations and circumstances?

## **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, I want to be your hands, feet, and voice to share the Good News and serve those around me. I am asking you to put individuals in my path and teach me how to encourage them and pray for them.*

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## CHAPTER 11

### *My Walk to Emmaus*

*Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Jesus  
And at that moment he disappeared! They said to each other,  
“Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the  
road and explained the Scriptures to us?” Luke 24:31–32*

There are many resources that give us information about Jesus. Through my relationship with him, I discovered he desires to walk side by side with us to be our personal teacher through the Holy Spirit. Jesus wants to fill us with wisdom and revelation, not intellectual head knowledge.

After Jesus called me into a personal relationship with him, he began healing the emotional trauma from my past so I could become whole.

One day, my mother called to tell me that my first wife, Melissa, had called and said she needed to speak to me. Since I was working on making amends and cleaning up the wreckage from my past, her call was perfectly timed. Although Melissa was at the top of my list, I never thought we would ever make amends since we had not spoken in many years. She had remarried, moved to a different state, and had an unlisted number. We had lost all contact as my number had changed as well. So, when Melissa called my mother and left her number to call back, I knew God’s supernatural grace had dropped it into my lap. Praise the Lord!

I called her back and we talked for what seemed like hours, though it might have been a thirty-minute conversation. She told me three different times that she wasn’t sure why she needed to call me. It was a beautiful conversation that paved the way for me to ask her for forgiveness. When our conversation ended, I realized that Jesus had set up our call both to reward me for seeking Him and to bring the closure we both needed.

Encouraged, I contacted my second ex-wife the following day to make amends with her as well. Afterward, I called her brother Charlie, who does remodeling work, to get an estimate for repairs on a condo I had just bought from Jeanne Butterfield at Re/Max Realtors. It turned out that God had quite a different purpose for Charlie and me to get together.

When Charlie and I sat down to discuss his estimate, I shared how God had been reconciling my life. Suddenly, tears welled up in his eyes, and he said, “You need to go on the Walk to Emmaus.” Charlie tried to explain the event, but he was not making it clear. I silently prayed, “God, if you want

me to go on this Walk to Emmaus, you will have to get somebody else to explain it better.”

Two days after my meeting with Charlie, I drove out to to play golf with my buddy Todd and his girlfriend, Katie. As I got out of my car, Katie handed me a booklet called *Walk to Emmaus*. I asked her why she was giving me that booklet since neither she nor Todd knew about my conversation with Charlie. Katie said, “A man came to church last month, sat down next to us, handed me that booklet, and left before services started. He never returned.” Katie went on to tell me that she had been intending to give me that booklet for the last month but didn’t because she couldn’t find it until that morning. Talk about an answer to prayer! I now had all the information I needed about the Walk to Emmaus in my hand.

On Sunday, the first song that Riverbend choir director Carlton Dillard conducted was called *The Walk to Emmaus*. I kid you not. I nearly fell out of my chair. Within three days, I had three separate confirmations that God wanted me to go on the Walk to Emmaus (a retreat patterned after the disciples’ encounter with the risen Lord in Luke 24:13–35). In my life story, I have experienced those Luke 24 verses coming alive as Jesus walked side by side with me, restoring purpose and meaning in my life, teaching me what I am now passing on to you through my testimony.

The next day I called Riverbend’s main office. When no one answered the phone, I left the following message, “My name is James Timothy Butt. I am supposed to go on the Walk to Emmaus. Does anyone in the office know anything about it? Can someone tell me how to sign up to go on the Walk? I know that I am supposed to go.”

A lady named Kay Dodds called me back the next day to set up an appointment. Other denominations call An Encounter, The Road to Damascus, or Tres Dias. The common thread is that they are all four-day spiritual retreats for believers to encounter Christ to help them become strong servant leaders.

God’s perfect timing for me occurred at Camp Young Judaea in Wimberley, Texas. John Hilgers was the lay director for Walk #1092 in September 2003. We spent most of our time in a spacious room seated around twelve large tables, each named after an apostle.

For four days, we sat at Jesus’ feet. We worshiped in Spirit and truth, oblivious to all else. I witnessed God’s Spirit dropping on everyone (Acts 11:15), enabling us to experience a taste of heaven on earth collectively. Moreover, I noticed that everyone’s eyes had changed color that second day. One by one, as each person became filled with the Holy Spirit, their eyes turned a heavenly blue, filled with compassion. I couldn’t stop staring into everyone’s eyes! It seemed I was looking into Christ’s eyes when I did.



At the same time, I became keenly aware that Christ was looking directly back at me, I couldn't hide anything because he knew everything about me. Seriously, I felt naked!

At first, I struggled to comprehend what was happening though it aligned perfectly with Luke 24:13–35. I wondered if God was doing something only I could see. Then I locked eyes with someone who looked like a deer caught in the headlights. I asked him what he saw, and he seemed to see the same thing. God was blessing us with something extra special!

When our Walk to Emmaus experience was over, I wondered if there were more to it. I sensed that the Lord had brought me on the Walk for another reason. Later, I realized that I was right. The Lord used the Walk to Emmaus to lead me into many other God-ordained experiences, such as the Kairos Prison Ministry, the Crow Nation, and putting together the Power of the Cross Festivals at Auditorium Shores in Austin, Texas.

Since I don't reference Kairos Prison Ministry in future chapters, let me simply share that Kairos is just like The Walk to Emmaus but on steroids as we bring the Emmaus experience into maximum security prisons. One time, while serving as clergy, the Lord allowed me to be his hands, feet, and voice to a Muslim gang leader who oversaw 500 other prison inmates. Forever etched in my mind was getting down on our hands and knees while he invited Christ to dwell in his heart.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***The Path of Healing ~ Forgiveness***

*In our faith journeys, God places red and blue pill-type choices in our path to train us to make decisions that rely on His grace. Forgiveness is a choice. It is also the best emotional weight loss program because it cancels the enemy's power to torment our souls with angry, vengeful, and anxious thoughts. When we forgive, the memories remain, but the associated pain dissipates.*

### ***Walking with Jesus ~ Luke 24:14–15***

As they walked along, they talked about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them.

### ***Holy Spirit Falls ~ Acts 11:15***

“The Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning.”

**Reconciliation ~ 2 Corinthians 5:19**

For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.

**Forgiveness ~ Ephesians 4:31–32**

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, slander, and all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

**Self-Reflection**

- Where am I on my healing journey?
- Are there people I need to forgive?
- Have I harmed people I need to seek forgiveness from?
- Pray and make two separate lists, one for those you need to forgive, and one for those you need forgiveness from. Then pray for the Lord to set up divine appointments to forgive and seek reconciliation.

**Prayer to Forgive**

*I choose to forgive (who) for (what). I release (who) and cancel this debt. I declare (who) doesn't owe me anything. Jesus, I choose to forgive. I lay this sin and the pain it has caused me at the foot of the cross. I declare that the debt is canceled, paid in full, and satisfied by Jesus Christ on the cross. I trust you to bring justice in your time and way. I choose to release any anger, bitterness, or resentment in my heart toward (who).*

**Prayer for Forgiveness**

*Lord Jesus, I regret doing/saying (what) to (who) that caused (what pain) to this person. Jesus, forgive me. Please heal and release me from any torment I may have experienced due to unforgiveness.*

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## CHAPTER 12

# *Jumping Off the Income Cliff*

*As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died. Galatians 6:14*

In the beginning, adjusting to living the sober lifestyle wasn't easy. Substance abuse had been my crutch to deal with unpleasant feelings and emotional pain along with denial, masking issues, and self-medicating. Still, with Christ's help, I began learning to confront problems head-on, which helped me grow and become more spiritually mature.

One day, an accountability partner suggested that I meet with Mary Jo, a mental health counselor who worked with people in recovery. During our second session, Mary Jo shocked me when she said, "It's obvious that you hate your job. What would the perfect job be if you quit your current job which you've excelled at for the past twelve years?"

I laughed, "You are wrong! My current job *is* the perfect job!"

Then she asked, "What do you love about your job?"

"I love making six figures annually, working out of a home office, taking fabulous vacations, and working for Nick Coppolo, who's a great boss!"

"Ok," Mary Jo said, "Here is what I want you to do. Don't do it, but allow yourself to feel what it would feel like if you called your boss today and gave him two weeks' notice. Just grant yourself permission mentally to feel what that would be like, and then let's meet again in two weeks."

I listened to her suggestion. I took the time to pray about quitting, and allowed myself permission mentally to let go and feel what it would be like if I left my job of twelve years. What I sensed God saying was, "Don't worry about money. Just spend time with me." Three days later, God gave me the grace to call Nick to give him my two weeks' notice.

The more time I spent being healed by God, the more I realized how much more inner healing was needed. As in the first *Matrix* movie, I became conscious of a sophisticated matrix system which controlled my thoughts and defined what I thought made me happy. I realized that my entire life needed to change and that nothing was more important than spending time with God, who reprogrammed my mind to have an eternal perspective of a life worth living.

When I had left Southwestern Publishing Company in 1999, it had taken a headhunter a mere two weeks to help me land my “perfect job” with legal publishing company Matthew Bender, which Lexis-Nexis later acquired. When I left them, my initial plan was to spend one month focused entirely on getting to know Jesus, and then I would give my resumé to a headhunter who would quickly line me up with my next career move. Well, one month with God turned into two, then three, then four. In my prayer time, my spiritual ears could hear Jesus singing verses to me from the Song of Solomon, whispering, “Relax. Don’t worry about the cares of this world or getting back to work right now. Just spend time alone with me, in my presence, and allow me to heal all your emotional wounds.”

In the beginning, my full-time job consisted of sitting at the Lord’s feet, worshiping him, praying, soaking in God’s presence, and allowing Jesus to renew my mind through his Word while I listened to Christian music. Nine months in, I became very concerned about my finances. I was praying for God to give me the strength and inspiration to get back to work since my savings account by now was depleted. Instead, the Lord kept saying, “I don’t want you to give your resumé to a headhunter. You can only give your resumé to the pastors at Riverbend Church.”

I assumed God was calling me to become a pastor, so I gave my resumé to pastors Gordon Smith, Bob Lively, and Pat Abbott. I figured that God either already had or would instruct them to help me become a pastor. But as time passed, they never said or proposed anything, which only added to my confusion. It wasn’t until later that I understood that God’s calling for my life was broader than serving in a denomination or religious institution.

In the interim, I found my thoughts trapped in the Valley of Crucified Thoughts, where God rearranges our thinking and thought processes so that we can understand the spiritual realm with Kingdom-minded clarity. God also used this time to tear down mental strongholds that stood in the way of me becoming God’s bondservant.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***The Matrix Perspective***

In the movie *The Matrix*, the character Morpheus said this:

*“Do you want to know what the truth is? The truth is that the matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. You can see it when you look out your window or turn on your television. You can*

*feel it when you go to work, pay your taxes, and when you go to church. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth. We are enslaved people who, like everyone else, were born into bondage and a prison that we can't smell, taste, or touch—a prison for our minds. Unfortunately, no one can be told what the matrix is. You have to see it for yourself. You have to choose between the red pill and the blue pill.”*

The Matrix, written by the Wachowski Brothers, produced by Village Roadshow Pictures, 1999. Watch the clip here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE7PKRjrid4>.

### **Transformation ~ Romans 12:2**

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

### **Be Set Free**

When we become conscious of God working in our lives, we become less focused on chasing after the things of this world and more focused on discovering God's Kingdom. Jesus puts a deep longing in our souls to pursue him, which is the passion described in the book of Song of Songs. And as we spend more time in His presence, the Lord brings healing to the wounded places in our hearts, restoring our souls.

### **Gain or Loss ~ Matthew 16:26**

[Jesus said,] “And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?”

### **Self-Reflection**

- How would I describe my perfect job?
- Will I permit myself to feel what a change in careers might look like?
- Do I need to keep acquiring more things?
- What would it look like to simplify my life so I could spend more time pursuing Christ?



## CHAPTER 13

# *A Mission Trip and Bible School – The Crow Nation*

*Trust the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5–6*

While I was a member of Riverbend Church, I attended their Walk to Emmaus accountability group. We supported each other and sponsored new pilgrims to go on future walks. One morning, I received the first of many emails from Trish Burkett encouraging us to go on a short-term mission trip to the Crow Reservation in Montana. Each time I received her emails, I quickly hit delete because I didn't believe God would send a white man, instead of a local Native American, to a reservation to evangelize.

I had never been on a mission trip, so in my ignorance, I thought the goal was to change others rather than learn how to selflessly serve them. Later, I recognized how God had used these mission trips to launch me into new ministries. I had no intention to go until two weeks before when Trish sent out another email saying someone had backed out, and that they had an opening to fill. This time, God spoke a thought impression into my mind saying, "I want you to go on this trip." Talk about a crisis of belief! Since I didn't believe God would send me on a trip like this, I said a quick half-hearted prayer, "God, if you want me to go on this trip, you will have to give me a bunch of confirmations. Otherwise, I am not going." By the end of the day, I knew God wanted me to go, so I called Trish to set up a meeting with her the following day.

When we met, I gave her my check. In turn, she handed me a one-inch thick mission trip workbook which we reviewed over coffee. Flipping through it, I came across the history of the Crow Nation. That is when I realized that the James Avery necklace I wore was a replica of the Crow national emblem. The only difference was that mine was a slightly different Christian version. I showed it to Trish and said, "The Lord just gave me another major confirmation that I am supposed to go." Trish just smiled.

During the week-long mission trip, we worked hard on construction projects during the day, and in the evening, Trish did an excellent job leading discussions about what it means to become servants of Christ.

I also became friends with a young Crow Nation man. Toward the end of the week, he and I hitchhiked around the reservation and passed out stuffed animals to hospitals and daycare facilities.

As we traveled, I noticed the Christians who picked us up complained about other churches in the community. After this happened multiple times, the Lord said, “I am calling you to build community among different churches.” Initially, I had no idea what that meant, but looking back, that is when the Lord began birthing a vision in me that ended up consuming the next three years of my life.

In the town of Crow Agency, Montana, there is a church called Spirit of Life Lighthouse for the Nations Foursquare Church. The senior pastor, Kenneth Pretty-On-Top, started a two-year Bible School to groom pastors for the Crow Reservation. After Doug, the associate teaching pastor, told me about the Bible school, I couldn’t stop thinking about it. Since I lacked the passion or energy to get back into sales, much less any other kind of career, I figured I should get ordained to become a pastor to pursue the new passion in my life. (Little did I know how many years I would spend working to get ordained, and once that goal had been accomplished, how I would rip up my ordination paper over biblical principles I could not ignore.) While considering relocating to attend Bible school, I kept my thoughts to myself.

After we flew home from our trip, I emailed our team, asking them to join me in prayer. Instantly, one of the guys asked if he could come to my home to pray with me. It turned out to be more of a lecture than prayer. He believed that I was making an emotional decision which he felt would be a huge mistake and tried to talk me out of it. Others had mixed advice.

I was out driving and still praying about what to do when the Holy Spirit directed me to stop at a Christian bookstore, pick a random book off the shelf, open it, place my finger on a paragraph, and allow Him to speak to me. The book I chose, which I had never heard of before, is *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The quote read:

*The Cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. The dying of the Old Man is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, He bids him to come and die.*



Later, as I continued to seek God about attending the Crow Bible College in less than three weeks, he directed me to write down why I couldn't simply move from Austin to Crow Agency. My reasons were as follows: 1) I owned a very nice condo. 2) My monthly mortgage was \$1200 per month. 3) I owned a Lexus Sports Coupe 400, which wouldn't survive Montana's winters and was too small to move my belongings. 4) I owned expensive furniture which would be hard to move into storage since it was heavy. 5) I was unemployed. And 6) my savings were depleted. I figured I could cash in some of my stocks to finance two years of living in Crow Agency, but I still couldn't figure out how to make the mortgage payments of \$28,800 over two years.

I called my family to discuss the decision and they recommended selling my condo. When I talked to my next-door neighbor and realtor, Jeanne Butterfield, she suggested I pay her a small management fee to rent out my condo. She said, "Since we share a common wall, you know I'll be very picky and make sure I rent it out to a great tenant that is responsible. They will sign a yearly lease, so you will only have two rental contract periods." Confused, I found myself in the Valley of Decision, where I learned to stretch my faith muscles. It is one of the places where God crucifies our soulish thoughts to perfect our faith, often by turning our world upside down to teach us what is right-side up. The Valley of Indecision—and Crucified Thoughts—is where we face our Garden of Decision moments. It is where God's living Word becomes flesh in our lives—the glory of God radiating through the life of a Christ follower.

While praying over my list of reasons, God answered my prayers. With great clarity, God said, "Here is what I want you to do. You are too attached to your car. Would you be willing to get rid of it? As far as your condo is concerned, you don't need to sell it. Let Rob and Lisa Jackson, who are in ministry, live here rent-free and you pay the mortgage out of your 401(k). If you do that, I'll let you keep the rest of your 401(k) for now. As for your furniture, let them enjoy it while you are gone."

Suddenly all the obstacles were gone. The same God who spoke the universe into existence answered my prayers. The administration of his grace filled me with the faith I needed to move forward with confidence.

I called Rob and Lisa and told them what the Lord had said. As they were already getting ready to move, the timing was perfect. They praised God for their good fortune since my condo was nicer than the place they had planned to move to. When they asked me how long I'd be gone, I told them, "I can't give you any guarantees, but you can stay here as long as I am gone or until God tells me differently." They were delighted to move into their new home a week later, rent-free.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Administration of God's Grace**

*Following Christ is a great adventure. My interpretation of Bonhoeffer's quote aligns closely with The Proud Way by Hunter S. Thompson. It reads:*

*Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming, "Wow, what a ride!"*

*Sometimes our spiritual growth is stunted by things we're attached to, such as material things, emotional habits, or thought processes. When we follow Christ, supernatural grace becomes available, enabling us to push the boundaries of what is humanly possible. But first, Jesus often challenges us to get out of our comfort zone so that we learn to rely on grace rather than our strength.*

*It might sound ludicrous to some to cash in my life savings to advance the Kingdom of God. Still, it is a very small price to pay in comparison to everything Jesus has done for me, including his sacrificial offering on the cross so that my debts would be paid in full.*

### **Follow Me ~ Luke 9:23–24**

[Jesus said,] "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."

### **Our Gain ~ Philippians 3:8–9**

Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him.

### **Self-Reflection**

- Is God challenging me to step out of my comfort zone?
- What is He challenging me to give up to follow Him?

- Have I considered going on a short-term mission trip to experience God’s Spirit and gain a different perspective?
- Am I willing to give up the thought patterns, habits, comforts, or other attachments that stand in the way of becoming more Christ-like?

**Prayer**

*Dear Jesus, I want to follow you. Will you give me your supernatural grace and strength to overcome the things of this world that hold me back? I want to turn from my selfish ways, take up my cross daily and follow you, being fully committed, according to Luke 9:23–24. Lord, teach me to follow you.*

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CHAPTER 14  
*God Equips the Called*  
*-The Crow Nation*

*May he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen. Hebrews 13:21*

I traded my Lexus for a Subaru hatchback, loaded my car, and drove from Austin to Montana. I arrived a few days before Bible school started. I moved into an inexpensive furnished apartment in Hardin, Montana, on the outskirts of the reservation.

Since school didn't start for a few more days, I decided to attend the annual Crow Fair Pow Wow dance competition. Walking back to my car, I came across a revival tent where I learned the worship team hailed from Nashville, Tennessee. The third-generation preacher said God had given him a healing anointing and when he prayed for people, nearly all of them fell down. Later, I learned that "being slain in the spirit" is a belief held by many Christians. Until then, I had never experienced charismatic, Pentecostal, or five-fold ministry teachings, so my brain struggled to comprehend what was happening. Since I didn't know if it was real or false teaching, I did the only thing which made any sense. I started praying. My prayer was, "Lord, what is this? Is this real? You know I have a degenerated disc in my lower back that needs healing, but I'm not sure about this preacher. I'm going to stand right here and if you want him to lay hands on me, I'll let him if he walks back to where I am standing."

The preacher never did walk back to where I stood. God didn't speak to me, either. I now know that sometimes the most impactful lessons come after God remains silent. I went home that night, my back still hurting, wondering if I had missed a genuine move of God's Spirit.

The next day while reflecting on what had or hadn't happened the night before, I realized I might have missed my healing because I didn't step forward in faith. I also realized that I needed to become more open-minded to different teachings and interpretations of Scripture and to learn as much as possible about the Holy Spirit since he seems to be the least understood by those of us who call ourselves Christians.

A few days later, Bible college began at Pastor Kenneth Pretty-On-Top's Spirit of Life Foursquare Church. These classes were held in partnership with three other local church denominations. There were twenty in our cohort, but only five of us were considered full-time students.

One day Doug, one of the teachers, stopped by my apartment. He asked me if I had received the gift of speaking in tongues. When I said no, he asked if I would be interested in learning more about it. I said, "I am open-minded to anything you can show me in the Bible, and I am especially so to learning more about God's Holy Spirit."

Doug had me open my Bible and showed me New Testament Scriptures about speaking in tongues and the spiritual gifts Christ gave to his church. Then Doug handed me a book written by a pastor who was kicked out of a mainstream church after he started tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit. After I read the first book, Doug gave me a second book, which built my faith in the spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and other places throughout the New Testament.

When Doug sensed that I was ready, he had me open my Bible to 1 Corinthians 14:1 which says, "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit." (NIV) Then he asked me, "Do you eagerly desire all the spiritual gifts God wants to give you?"

"Yes."

Then he asked me if I would like to speak in tongues. I responded, "Yes."

Doug took my hands in his and began praying in tongues, saying to me (in English), "Allow your tongue to be loose while following my lead." I tried but nothing happened. Then he said, "When you pray in the morning, exercise faith. Tell God that you desire the gift of speaking in tongues."

Every morning for the next six days I prayed and tried to speak in tongues, but nothing happened. Then, on the seventh day that I exercised faith, God gave me the gift of tongues.

As stated earlier, we started with twenty people attending classes. After three months, everyone had stopped attending except for one other person and myself. When I asked them how much longer they would put forth the effort for just us two, they said, "You made a big commitment to come here, so we will continue this for as long as you are here."

After prayerful consideration, I met with Pastor Kenneth and Doug and told them I felt I had accomplished what God had sent me to do. I told them it would be better for them if I left so that they could retool their teaching program to make it easier for them to fill pastor vacancies on the reservation. They said they understood. A few days later, Doug and I went to lunch; I thanked him for everything they did to help me mature, and we said our goodbyes.

Thankfully, I hadn't rented or sold my condo as suggested. If I had rented it, I would have been locked out of my condo for an entire year. Instead, I got right back into my condo after Rob and Lisa Jackson moved out. Once they knew I was coming home, the transition was easy because we were all submitted to God's Spirit.

My drive back to Texas was depressing. I felt like I had failed since I hadn't gotten ordained. When I got home, I decided that enough was enough. I pulled the blinds shut, cuddled up in a little ball on my couch, and told myself I was done chasing after God. I also told myself I was sick and tired of trying to follow God's voice. From then on, I would focus on embracing my sobriety and living a "normal" Christian life, or so I thought.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Obedience in Decision Making**

*Initially, I believed I needed to earn the credentials that would enable me to make a living while sharing the gospel. Only years later, when I had gained greater spiritual maturity, did I realize that the Lord had not sent me to Bible college to get ordained by a religious institution. His purpose was to introduce me to spiritual gifts, which included the ministry of healing through laying on of hands and speaking in tongues, all of which are biblical. And more than anything else, God had arranged my move to Crow Nation to teach me the importance of obeying him in my decision-making. Jesus wanted to teach me personally, just as he did with his two disciples on the walk to Emmaus. Without question, Jesus is the best seminary teacher!*

### **Hearts That Burn ~ Luke 24:32**

They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

### **Understanding ~ Luke 24:45**

Then he [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

### **Spiritual Gifts ~ 1 Corinthians 12:7-11**

A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another, the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the

ability to prophesy. He gives another the ability to discern what is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while yet another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

**Self-Reflection**

- How open-minded am I toward the different spiritual gifts listed in the Bible?
  
- Meditate on 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.

**Prayer**

*Dear Holy Spirit, thank you for giving us spiritual gifts so we can help one another (1 Corinthians 12:7) and strengthen the different parts of Christ's body, which is the Church. Please help me understand what the gifts are that you have given me to strengthen and serve others.*

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## CHAPTER 15

### *Brotherly Love and Accountability Partners*

*Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. Hebrews 10:24–25*

When I returned from Crow Agency, I felt lonely, confused, disoriented, and pretty much an all-around wreck. And I felt uncomfortable going back to church because I felt like a failure for coming home without being ordained. I decided to attend a recovery meeting instead of joining a new church immediately. As soon as I walked through the Northland doors, the Lord connected me to Dicky, a Christian with long-term sobriety, who helped me regain my composure.

After mentoring me for a few weeks, Dicky took me to an old graveyard not far from Northland. As we drove through the gates, he said, “Look for God and tell me when you see him in the things that you notice.” He took me to one particular grave with a bench in front of it, and as we sat down, he said, “Take your time, look around, pray, and tell me what you see.”

After ten minutes, I told him everything I could see, hear, or sense in the spirit realm, including life and death issues. When he was satisfied that I was where I needed to be in the Spirit, Dicky had me get down on my knees to confess my commitment to Jesus as being Lord over every area of my life. With his help, I was back on track to hearing God’s voice with renewed confidence. I realized that I had indeed survived the Montana test.

I met Curtis at a recovery meeting a few days later. After discipling him for two months, it became clear that Curtis was ready to give his life to the Lord, so I brought him to that same graveyard. Driving through the gates, I said, “Look for God and tell me when you see Him in the things you notice.” I parked the car and took Curtis over to the grave with the bench. Repeating my friend Dicky, I said, “Take your time, look around, pray, and tell me what you see in the spirit realm.”

Curtis told me everything he saw, and I asked him if he was ready to ask Jesus to become his Lord and Savior in every area of his life. Since he looked confused and indecisive, I encouraged him to walk around and pray about the most important eternal decision of his life.



Curtis walked off as my friend Lucinda called. We had talked for about ten minutes when I noticed a car pull up nearby. A lady got out of the car and retrieved flowers from the back seat. God spoke to my heart: “This person is here for Curtis. You need to get off the phone.” I told Lucinda, “God just showed up. I need to go. I’ll talk to you later.”

After I hung up, the woman walked in my direction instead of toward the hundreds of other graves in the immediate vicinity. I closed my eyes and my prayer went up: “God, help me help Curtis. I don’t know how to lead him to you or what to say.”

When I opened my eyes, she was standing right next to me. When she asked if I was a relative of the person whose grave I was sitting in front of, I told her I was sitting there to pray and asked her why she was there. She said, “To visit a family member’s grave.”

Curtis suddenly appeared, standing next to me. She glanced at him and asked who he was. After we told her that we were both in recovery, she said her husband had over twenty-five years of sobriety.

She carefully placed the flowers on her relative’s grave, and turned to address Curtis; “It’s really simple. If you learn how to turn your will and cares over to God who loves us, he will watch over you.” Curtis’s jaw dropped. He recognized that God had just intervened in what we were there to do. Then she turned, walked back to her car and left.

I smiled at Curtis, “Now, are you ready to invite Christ Jesus to dwell in your heart as Lord and Savior?”

Smiling back, he said, “Yes!” Then we got down on our knees while he made a confession of faith.

I needed Dicky’s help, and Curtis needed mine. Rather than recreating the wheel, I simply passed what Dicky taught me to Curtis. The Holy Spirit set up these divine appointments, which restored stability to my faith journey down the narrow path that few find and even fewer follow.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***A Helping Hand***

*God watches over the needs and well-being of those of us who are his Kingdom citizens. We should also be mindful to look out for each other. The Church is Christ’s body which can be a Celebrate Recovery program, a Twelve Step program, home gatherings, or wherever two or more believers gather together. A great way to maintain or regain our spiritual equilibrium is to help others or reach out to others for help.*

**Strength ~ 2 Chronicles 16:9**

The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

**Share ~ Galatians 6:4-3**

Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.

**Gather ~ Matthew 18:20**

[Jesus said], “For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.”

**Confess ~ Romans 10:9**

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

**Joy ~ Psalm 68:6**

God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free, and gives them joy.

**Self-Reflection**

- There are seasons of our lives when we need others and times when others need us, especially during times of hardship.
- Am I looking for opportunities to share the Good News with others?
- Do I have accountability partners to help me make good choices and protect me from making bad ones?

**Prayer**

*Father God, the Bible teaches us that your desire is for us to become part of your family of believers (Psalm 68:6) so we can help, encourage, and strengthen one another. Help me find, understand, and embrace your concept of a healthy family.*

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## CHAPTER 16

# *My Perfect Job Sacrificed*

*[Jesus said,] “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.” Matthew 6:31–33*

After I returned from Montana, I found myself at another significant fork in the road. The sign on my right read, “Trust God Completely.” The sign on the left read, “Trust Common Sense.” I became immobilized, like a seized engine, a deer caught in the headlights, unable to move either way. Suddenly, a new sign flashed before my eyes. It was Matthew 6:31–33.

It is easy to say we trust God when we have a solid backup plan or know that our parents will bail us out if necessary. Since I had neither, I suddenly found myself challenging the authenticity of these Scripture verses and everything else written in the Bible. Did Jesus want me to interpret Matthew 6:31–33 figuratively, literally, or in some other way?

One of the least understood aspects of Christianity is the battle between a person’s soul and the purification process done through the indwelling work of God’s Holy Spirit. Sometimes in a believer’s life God orchestrates shipwreck moments when “all or nothing” decisions are made. Usually, we come upon these monumental moments, which pull down strongholds, when we find ourselves in the Valley of Blood, Sweat, and Tears.

For Jesus, this moment was when he was deeply grieved in the Garden of Gethsemane. Upon falling to the ground, he cried out to God the Father, saying, “This path to the cross is crushing my mind, will, and emotions to the point of my fleshly death. If it isn’t possible to accomplish your will through me unless I go through with this, then let ‘Thy will be done’” (my paraphrase of Matthew 26:37–39).

My mind, will, and emotions kept wondering, would God the Father really provide for my needs? The other question troubling my soul had to do with the term “resurrection life.” What is that anyway? Is that life available now, or do I literally have to die first? Should I trust God or trust my common sense thoughts? I became fixated on the authenticity of a related Scripture. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus said, “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and

live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”

I was broke and needed money, so I prayed earnestly about returning to the marketplace. After many sleepless nights and restless days camped out in the Valley of Double Mindedness and Crucified Thoughts, the Lord opened up a supernatural door to test me so that I could learn an important lesson about myself. Now that I had gained sobriety, God gave me an option to exchange my new life for my old life as a very successful salesperson, making great money again and living a very comfortable lifestyle—or so I thought.

While I was praying about giving my resumé to a headhunter, Kirk Massey, the owner of the Medical Equipment Group, called me out of the blue. It was the first time I had spoken to him in about ten years. He offered me a job selling Matrix Medical Equipment to doctors’ offices. The Matrix Unit was a \$40,000 electrostimulation soft tissue mobilization unit that provided doctors’ offices with a physical therapy revenue stream. (Yes, it really was called the Matrix unit!)

Here I was given an opportunity in the marketplace that checked every box of my perfect job description, which I had given Mary Jo years before. Kirk told me I could be my own boss, work out of a virtual office, determine my own schedule, and take off whenever I wanted. Clint Fowler, another friend I had known from our Southwestern days, worked for him and was making six figures annually. It really was the “perfect” job.

After I accepted the job, I spent a few weeks studying the sales literature and recordings that Kirk had mailed to me. During that time, Dicky moved in with me for a few months because he needed a place to stay. He had a hip injury which made it hard for him to work, so I treated Dicky’s injury using the Matrix demo unit, which helped immensely.

Kirk volunteered to come to Austin to teach me how to sell the units if I would set up two clinical demonstrations at doctors’ offices the following week. We sold one of the \$40,000 units, enabling me to pocket about \$5,000. A week later, I sold two units for \$10,000. I was back in the game, making great money just like in the old days, only now I had gained sobriety which meant that I could be even more successful.

That Friday morning, while Dicky was still asleep on the couch, I went into my office to worship and praise God. As I thanked Him for the perfect job, God whispered a clear thought impression into my mind that shattered my heart into a million pieces. My Lord said, “You can go back to being a salesman again if you really want to, or pack up your Matrix demo unit and ship it back to Kirk today and continue to follow me.”

Simultaneously, my heart filled with both joy and sorrow. My thoughts returned to the fork in the road, that deer standing frozen in the headlights,

and the Scripture verses that had pierced my heart. The question came before me in this Garden of Decision moment: did Jesus want me to interpret Matthew 6:31–33 figuratively, literally, or in another way?

Dicky had been excited for me when I shared with him on Thursday that I had made two sales that week worth \$10,000 in commission. When I told him what God shared with me during my morning worship, Dicky said, “It sounds like an easy decision to me. If God told you to do something and you believe in your heart that it is what you should do, pack up your demo unit and send it back today.”

I found myself facing a huge financial crisis of belief! Shipping back the demo unit didn’t make much sense, but I did it anyway because God gave me the grace I needed. Still, I had no idea how God would provide for all my needs. To be honest, I couldn’t have done it without Dicky’s reinforcement. Thank God he “just happened” to be staying with me as I faced this crucial decision enabling me to stay on the narrow path that few find and fewer follow.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***Abandoning the Attachments to This World***

*Sending back the Matrix demo unit was a difficult decision, as I had no idea how God would provide for my needs. Regardless, I sent it back because I was more concerned about losing the intimacy with Jesus that I’d become accustomed to than pursuing the trappings of this world. Later, when I looked back at that fork in the road, I learned God’s wisdom is beyond human comprehension. I don’t know what is best for me because I can’t see into the future, but God can. Today, I recognize the wisdom in the Scripture verses below.*

### ***The Narrow Way ~ Matthew 7:14***

[Jesus said,] “The gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.”

### ***A Feast for All ~ 1 Kings 19:21***

So Elisha returned to his oxen and slaughtered them. He used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant.

**The Faithful Plowman ~ Luke 9:62**

Jesus told him, “Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”

**Self-Reflection**

- Is Jesus truly worth pursuing?
  
- Will I trust God to provide for all my needs if I pursue Him?
  
- Dare I take the narrow path that few find and fewer follow? (Matthew 7:14)

**Prayer**

*Jesus, according to Matthew 6:33, you promise you will take care of my needs. I believe you meant it. Forgive me for worrying so much about finances, food, clothing, and how to provide for myself and my family. Help me trust you to provide what I need to live so I can pursue your Kingdom wholeheartedly.*

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# *Crucified and Equipped*



## CHAPTER 17

# *The Birthing of a Vision*

*This vision is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. Habakkuk 2:3*

During my first few months back from Crow Agency, I had stopped going to a regular church. Instead, I attended recovery meetings and helped new people in recovery. At several of those meetings, I saw Greg, who kept inviting me to check out Austin Gateway Church which he said played rock and roll worship music.

So, I visited Gateway Church out of curiosity. I returned a few more times, which surprised me since I saw myself as a mature Christian and Gateway was a “seeker-friendly” church. Back then their services were designed for people who were learning to become new believers.

After attending four Sundays in a row, I decided I needed to find a different church, so I began praying for God to give me direction. God’s response was, “I want you to plant the Walk to Emmaus movement at Gateway Church.”

I thought to myself, “How can I do that? I’m brand new here. Nobody knows me. How could a newcomer like me plant that here?” You see, I was still trying to make things happen by my own power and control the outcomes, leaning on my own understanding rather than seeking God’s perspective.

Before the service, it was announced that the church was providing a complimentary dinner for anyone interested in meeting Gateway’s leadership team and to learn more about their vision for the community, which included a new church building.

When I arrived for dinner, I was seated with six other people at a large round table. To my immediate left was Nate Echelberger. While conversing with Nate, I learned that he and his wife were founding members of Gateway Church and that his wife was on staff while Nate organized the men’s ministry activities. When I asked him if he’d ever heard of the Walk to Emmaus, his eyes lit up and he asked me to tell him everything I knew about it. When I finished sharing, he explained that he had a great friend who had been trying to sponsor him to go on the Walk for some time. “And now that we’ve had this conversation,” he said, “I’m in!”



With Nate on board, I figured my purpose there was complete, so I prayed for God to release me from attending Gateway. But the Lord spoke another thought impression into my mind. This time he said, "I want you to stay at Gateway and get Senior Pastor John Burke to go on the Walk." The following week, while continuing to pray for confirmation, the Lord said, "I want you to get two senior pastors from two different churches to have lunch with Pastor Burke to explain how the Walk develops church leadership. I want you to set up a meeting between Pastor Burke, Pastor Bill Henderson, and Pastor Rick." I knew Rick from Riverbend Church but had only met Bill once, briefly, at Northwest Hills United Methodist Church, where he served as senior pastor.

While I was in Montana, Rick had formed a new church, but I couldn't place it. I called Kate Dodds and others I thought who might know, but no one knew the church's name or how I could get in touch with Rick, so I finally gave up looking. Bill's church was right down the street from where I lived, but I waited for God's reassurance before reaching out to Bill.

A few weeks later, as I was waking up, God said, "Today is the day. I want you to go see Bill Henderson." At that, I had the faith needed to take action. I drove over to the church, certain that our meeting would take place, which would confirm that I was hearing God's voice. When I arrived at his office, his assistant informed me he was in a meeting. Surprised, I left my number and asked her to have him call me because I needed to meet with him right away. After leaving, I kept my phone next to me to ensure I didn't miss his call. At 5 p.m. sharp, I got a voicemail from Bill saying he was sorry he missed me. I couldn't believe I had missed his call and found myself doubting if it was truly God's voice I was hearing.

That evening, I met my Gateway home group at Rudy's BBQ restaurant on Highway 183. While waiting in line for a brisket plate, I noticed that the person behind me looked like Bill Henderson. I wasn't exactly sure what Bill looked like since we'd only met briefly, so I said, "Excuse me, but you wouldn't happen to be Bill Henderson, would you?" Bill laughed out loud and I told him the purpose for my visit that day. He confirmed that a senior pastor would need to talk directly to another senior pastor on the importance of the Walk to Emmaus, and agreed to have lunch with John Burke.

When I got home that night, I received a forwarded email that was a poem from Rick which incorporated the rainbow, the symbol for the Walk to Emmaus. It contained his contact information and the name of his new church. I called Rick the next day, explained my objective, and invited him to have lunch with John Burke.

I know now that God was laying the groundwork to connect 360 churches in the Austin area, but had no clue what was going on at the time. It

appeared that God was orchestrating the meeting of these three pastors related to the Walk to Emmaus.

Though I had the confirmations needed to move forward, further prayer revealed that God wanted me to be sensitive to His perfect timing. So, instead of trying to meet with John Burke right away, I emailed Bill and Rick and asked them to join me in praying for God to let me know when I should share this information with John. Rick replied that he was proud of me for waiting. Initially, I figured it might take a few weeks, max, but after two months, I sent another email to Rick and Bill to inform them I was still waiting on God to tell me when to meet with John Burke.

Meanwhile, I participated in a local mission trip to Mission Impossible in East Austin arranged by Gateway. They called the three-day weekend “The Urban Submersion.” We checked in Friday afternoon and prayed for people at the Austin Recovery Community and the Salvation Army. All day Saturday, we worked restoring broken-down homes in east Austin. On Sunday morning, we attended the worship service at Greater Mount Zion Church, after which we served at CUTB until late Sunday afternoon.

Though I was unaware of it at the time, God worked powerfully through this local mission trip to line up critical divine appointments, paving the way for me to set up a non-profit called “United in His Love.” As we listened to Pastor Gaylon Clark’s sermon at Greater Mount Zion Church, the Lord said, “Gaylon is one of twelve leaders who will greatly impact what happens in the Greater Austin church community,” leading me to wonder who the other eleven were. After serving alongside well-known homeless Pastor Duane Severance at CUTB that afternoon, he and I became friends and accountability partners. Later on, I was honored to have him sit on an advisory board that I chaired.

Waiting for God to arrange the meeting with Pastor John Burke, I attended two Sunday services at Greater Mount Zion Church. Much to my surprise, Pastor Gaylon’s assistant contacted me saying he wanted to arrange a meeting with me. Intrigued, I said yes. When I walked into his office, Gaylon asked if we could hold hands and pray together. As we finished praying, he opened his eyes and inquired about the vision God had given me. At his prompting, the words tumbled out of my mouth, “Three pastors are going to get together for lunch to talk about the Walk to Emmaus and building unity in the body of Christ.”

Excited, Gaylon said, “I’m going!”

I began praying silently, “God, he just invited himself to the meeting you are setting up that was to involve only three pastors.”

Gaylon went on to say, “I’ve heard about the Walk to Emmaus, so I want to attend that meeting.”

I didn't know what to say. "Let me set up the meeting and I'll be in touch."

Some weeks after meeting with Gaylon, I participated in the National Day of Prayer at Gateway Church with John Burke leading the session. While we were in prayer, God said, "Today is the day. I want you to talk to John Burke about the luncheon meeting." As the meeting came to a close, John stood up and thanked everyone for coming. Then I asked him if we could speak privately.

After finding a quiet area to talk, I shared with John that God wanted him to meet with other senior pastors to discuss the importance of planting the Walk to Emmaus experience at Gateway. I shared with him how three pastors had already agreed to meet and that we were waiting for his response before we coordinated the date. He asked when this had happened, I told him three months ago and a puzzled look came across his face before he asked me why I had waited so long to tell him. I smiled and said, "We have been waiting for God's perfect timing." God had sovereignly expanded the size of the luncheon and my perception of the vision. Instead of three senior pastors meeting for lunch, the Spirit led me to coordinate a luncheon for twelve.

At the luncheon Bill Henderson shared how the Walk helps develop lay church leaders. I shared a vision that had been birthed at Crow Agency connecting the Walk to putting together a festival that would build unity among 360 Greater Austin churches. Thus, the Austin United Music Festival project was born, later becoming the Power of the Cross Festival.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **How to Walk Out a Vision**

*I had no idea how to be a visionary. Initially, I thought God would hand me a comprehensive blueprint explaining the plan to bring 360 churches together in the Greater Austin community. Later, I realized God had given me just enough to get me started, requiring me to stay close enough to hear him in order to make course corrections along the way.*

### **Thoughts ~ Isaiah 55:8**

"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine."

### **Truth ~ John 16:13**

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not

He will tell you about the future.

**Trust ~ Proverbs 3:5-6**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

**Grace ~ 2 Corinthians 12:9-11**

Each time he [Jesus] said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

**Self-Reflection**

- What does pleasing an audience of One mean to me?
- What did Paul mean when he said, “When I am weak, I am really strong.”
- Why was it wise to wait upon God’s perfect timing before sharing the vision with John Burke in this chapter?

**Prayer**

*Father God, you created me to do the things you planned for me long ago (Ephesians 2:10). Thank you for your ideas and the thoughts you place in my mind and spirit. I trust you to bring the resources I need to carry out your will. Help me to be patient and follow your perfect timing.*

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## CHAPTER 18

# *God Rewards Obedience*

*It is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. Hebrews 11:6*

After going on the Urban Submersion mission trip, I rotated where I worshiped. I split my time between Gateway, Greater Mount Zion, and serving at CUTB, which interested me the most since it was where I witnessed the Holy Spirit doing extraordinary things.

Pastor Duane announced something quite unusual when I showed up at CUTB on May 15, 2005. After rolling out a red carpet and placing a microphone in the middle, he said, "In recognition of it being Pentecost Sunday, I am opening up this microphone so that whoever feels led can come up and pray for our country, city, or anything you feel led to pray about." Then God spoke a thought impression into my mind saying, "I want you to go up there and pray in tongues."

First off, talk about a major crisis of belief. To my knowledge, no one had ever spoken in tongues into a microphone at CUTB. Pastor Duane came from a Baptist background, not Pentecostal. Second, church doctrine states that no one should speak in tongues in public (especially over a microphone!) unless someone with the gift of interpreting tongues is present. At that time, I didn't know anyone who had such a gift.

One by one, people came forward to pray in the traditional manner. While they were praying, my flesh battled the leading of God's Spirit. My carnal thoughts whispered doubt into one ear while the Lord encouraged me in the other by repeating, "I want you to go up there and pray in tongues." My fleshly thoughts were triggered again, only this time saying, "There isn't an interpreter here, and no one has ever spoken in tongues here before. Just admit it. You want to get up there to show everyone you can speak in tongues."

The battle between my two ears lasted for twenty minutes while others took turns praying. Finally, after Pastor Duane said, "We have time for one to two more prayers," I jumped up, walked forward in obedience, and faced another Garden of Gethsemane moment.

I stood at the mic, looked at the people seated directly in front, and all the people standing behind them, closed my eyes and let God's Spirit

speak through me to communicate to those in attendance. I am not sure how long I spoke in tongues. It felt like forever. When I opened my eyes, I saw the stunned look on Pastor Duane's face. Then I bowed my head and walked back to my seat. I wanted to hide, especially after he walked up to the mic and began following the biblical protocol to correct me since no interpreter was there. He started by saying, "I need to bring correction to what just happened."

Suddenly, someone I had never seen before interrupted him. He tapped the pastor on the shoulder and told him God had given him the interpretation of the message. After Pastor Duane stepped aside, the man gave the interpretation which aligned with the vision God began birthing in me in Montana to bring pastors together in unity.

Afterward, the man walked over to where I was seated and introduced himself as Brian Lohse. Brian commented that he thought it was cool that God had spoken through me and given him the interpretation. After we visited for a little while, he said, "The Lord has a prophetic word that he wants to give you tonight at Glory House Prophetic Ministries." Suddenly, a new spiritual door opened up for me. The Lord rewarded my obedience by leading me into an even deeper understanding of spiritual gifts and what some call the five-fold ministry.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***An Introduction to Deeper Spiritual Gifts***

*The experience of stepping out in faith to speak in tongues is an example of overcoming a crisis of belief, an open door from God inviting us into richer experiences with Jesus. When Brian asked if I had ever attended a prophetic ministry, my response was, "What's that?" You see, up until this leap of faith in 2005, I knew very little about the five-fold ministry, which is an expression of God's glorious church (Ephesians 4:11-16).*

### ***Spiritual Gifts ~ 1 Corinthians 12:4-5***

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but the same God does the work in all of us.

### ***Prophecy ~ 1 Corinthians 14:5***

I wish you could all speak in tongues, but even more I wish you could

all prophesy. For prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues unless someone interprets what you are saying so that the whole church will be strengthened.

***Obedience Is Better Than Offerings ~ 1 Samuel 15:22***

But Samuel replied, “What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.”

God isn’t a harsh, demanding overlord. Instead, he is a loving Father who leads us in what is in our best interest as we submit to his Lordship, which was what I did while praying in tongues into a microphone and wearing a red tank top to a semi-formal church. Both stories remind us that obedience to God’s voice is the safest way to follow Christ, rather than simply following common sense thoughts.

***Self-Reflection***

- What does “Obedience is better than sacrifice” in 1 Samuel 15:22 mean to me?
  
- Can I think of a time when I chose obedience that cost me something?

***Prayer***

*Dear Jesus, I want to obey you, even if it costs me. Teach me to do what pleases you. Please provide for me the faith I need to follow you.*

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## CHAPTER 19

# *Discipleship and the Five-Fold Ministry*

*Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received through the prophecy spoken over you when the church elders laid their hands on you. 1 Timothy 4:14*

Brian Lohse invited me to a men's Bible study at Glory House, during which they laid hands on me and prophesied over me. While Apostle Jim Muhlhauser prayed over me, my spirit leapt within me, and I knew God wanted me to be in relationship with Jim. You see, during that season of my life, I had been praying for the Lord to connect me to a spiritual father figure who could help me mature.

Jim Muhlhauser taught the weekly Bible studies using teachings by Derek Prince, who was a friend of his and had written fifty-plus books on spiritual gifts, deliverance, and other five-fold ministry subjects. After the first meeting, I approached Jim, and after prayerful consideration, he agreed to take me under his wing to mentor me. One of the things Jim taught me was how to avoid the pitfalls of religious traps designed to prevent me from carrying out God's will.

I sat next to Jim the first time I met the itinerant prophet Jess Bielby who prophesied over me: "The Lord is showing me a picture of you doing a music festival and being all over TV—not for your benefit, but glorifying God." Jess went on to speak other very accurate things that only God knew about me, confirming that I was indeed hearing God's voice.

During 2006, I dug deeper into learning about the five-fold ministry, and began practicing the use of spiritual gifts at para-church organizations like Bridge of Angels, Church Under The Bridge, Ministry of Challenge, and Austin Soup Kitchen, and through workshop-type ministries like Glory House. Various itinerant prophets traveling through Glory House confirmed God's unique calling upon my life, as did prophet Michial Ratliff, whom I met once during a divine appointment at a home church.

God equipped me with spiritual gifts to strengthen me so I would have the courage to grab hold of the vision God had birthed in my heart. My only question now was how to implement a vision since the only thing I knew for sure was that I didn't have a clue.

Turns out, not having a clue was my best qualification.



## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Spiritual Gifts—God Equips Those He Calls**

*God will connect us to mentors to disciple us if we ask. It's human nature to try to accomplish spiritual endeavors using common sense or proven skill sets, but ensuring that we are partnering with God's plan and perfect timing is essential. It wasn't until I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit moving through spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy, that I gained insight into the supernatural realm. My understanding dropped from my head to my heart after I witnessed God heal the sick and do other amazing things.*

### **Equipping the Saints ~ Hebrews 13:21**

May he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.

### **Test Everything ~ 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21**

Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.

### **Giftings ~ Ephesians 4:11–16**

These are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

### **Self-Reflection Questions:**

- Do I have a spiritual father or mother who holds me accountable and mentors me?
- If not, do I need to pray for God to connect me to someone?
- What is my understanding of spiritual gifts?
- Am I willing to study the spiritual gifts in Roman 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 and prayerfully consider attending a spiritual gifts workshop?



## CHAPTER 20

# *God's Gift of Grace*

*Jesus responded, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believe?" John 11:40*

Thus far, I had made difficult choices as I approached various forks in the road, but with God's guidance, I had been able to overcome multiple crises of belief. Moving forward, I took steps in the direction that I believed God's voice was leading me, seeking confirmations and making the necessary adjustments to align my will with God's vision.

To recap prior events, going on the Walk to Emmaus had led me to go on a mission trip to the Crow Nation. While hitchhiking around the reservation, God began birthing a vision. After returning to Austin, obedience at CUTB led to divine appointments connected to Glory House Prophetic Ministry. The prophet Jess Bielby prophesied, "The Lord is showing me a picture of you putting together a Christian music festival and being all over TV—not for your benefit, but glorifying God."

The Holy Spirit led me to organize a luncheon for twelve senior pastors from different churches, during which we discussed going on the Walk to Emmaus as a way to build unity throughout the Greater Austin church community. Out of that luncheon, the Austin United Music Festival vision was birthed. After Mayor Pro Tem Danny Thomas agreed to serve on the advisory board, he offered to host our meetings at Austin City Hall, which may have been the only time a Christian organization had ever held meetings there.

Soon thereafter, a very influential religious leader wanted to meet with me. Though I hoped that he would throw the full weight of his political support behind us, he told me that he didn't think I was qualified to lead something so important. He also told me that Church Under the Bridge wasn't a church and that I should go back to being a member of Gateway. He also called the advisory board members to persuade them to resign, and some did. Despite this discouragement and the ensuing obstacles he placed in my path, Apostle Jim Muhlhauser encouraged me to stay focused on doing what God had called me to do.

On the way to our first advisory board meeting, Satan jumped all over my thoughts and filled my mind with fear. It was intense. I was even tempted to turn around and go home. Satan spoke suggestive thoughts into my

mind disguised as common sense, saying, “What do you think you are doing? You can’t chair a meeting with these spiritual giants who preach on Austin Public TV every Sunday. They will chew you up and spit you out.” I quieted the storm by declaring loudly, “I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength,” (Philippians 4:13).

In our first meeting, I shared the pieces of the vision God had given to me. The tension in the room was palpable until Danny Thomas stepped forward and broke the atmosphere by saying, “I’ve prayed about this. God is with this young man, so I am totally in.” After that, one by one, everyone else agreed, but due to political pressure, some later changed their minds. Since Danny was on board and never wavered, we were able to secure the privileged rights to host the festival at one of the most sought-after locations in the heart of downtown Austin: Auditorium Shores at Town Lake Metropolitan Park.

God’s favor opened many doors, but some doors were kept closed by the same religious spirit that had crucified the Old Testament prophets and kept the Pharisees and Sadducees from recognizing the New Testament church. Thus, I found myself experiencing the teachings of the sixth chapter of Nehemiah, with spiritual attacks coming from within our camp and from powerful people outside of it.

One of the lies spread about me was that I wasn’t a man under authority, which was ridiculous considering that there were twelve senior pastors on our advisory board. Jim Mihlhauser stood by me twice when my two biggest adversaries, who carried immense political power, made false accusations. When one of them asked Jim what it would take to get him to step out of the way, Jim said, “I don’t want anything from you other than for you to let him do what God has called him to do.”

While trying to be faithful and barely holding on, word reached my ears that a certain large church’s senior pastor was attempting to raise three million dollars to bring Franklin Graham’s organization to Austin for a huge evangelistic crusade. After hearing that news, I pulled the blinds shut in my condo, curled up in a fetal position (again), and asked God to remove the burden he had placed on me to organize the unity festival. I was ready to give up, but after additional prayer, God told me not to worry about what they were doing and to focus on what He had asked me to do. I found out later that Franklin Graham canceled the event in Austin because of lack of support from Austin’s minority community. Interestingly, most of my advisory board was from the minority community, including Danny Thomas, who is black.

Since God had moved me away from Gateway Church to serve with Pastor Duane’s homeless ministry, I didn’t have access to any of the re-

sources of a large church. Instead, I waited for the advisory board members to offer volunteers and funding resources. During one of our meetings, Bishop Wilkerson said, “It looks like we’re done meeting unless God confirms us moving forward by providing resources.” So, the Austin United Music Festival was dead in the water for the second time.

One afternoon while I was in prayer, God told me to call every board member to tell them I had lost the vision for the festival and couldn’t move forward. Those I spoke with understood; I left voicemail for the rest.

Three days later, God’s glory cloud fell on me, filling me with joy and renewed strength. As I sat quietly weeping in his presence, he spoke to me, “Get up. Go upstairs to your computer and type the festival’s new name. Rename it the Power of the Cross Festival.” Excited, I called each board member to tell them that God had renamed the festival and to keep moving forward!

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***How to Walk Out a Vision***

*At the festival’s initial planning meeting, Lee, an experienced event organizer, offered to connect us to Greg Carnes Productions, HM Magazine, and the local K-LOVE radio station to get the festival off the ground. If we had gone Lee’s way, everything would have fallen in place easily, including sponsorship and radio promotion. We also had a church venue lined up halfway between Austin and San Antonio that had agreed to host the festival for free.*

*The plan seemed perfect, but I felt in my spirit that this commercialized plan wasn’t what God was calling me to do, which was to bring the larger church body of Greater Austin together as one. So I gave the vision back to the Lord and walked away. Afterward, God had me pick it up again, only this time it was totally dependent on him and not on other people’s resources or expertise.*

### ***Let Jesus Take the Wheel***

God taught me to be willing to let go and never hold the vision too tightly. If we do, we become dependent on human strength rather than being empowered by God’s administration of supernatural grace.

### ***He Directs Our Path ~ Psalm 37:23***

The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.

**Fear the Lord ~ Psalm 25:12**

Who are those who fear the Lord? He will show them the path they should choose.

**He is Able ~ Ephesians 3:20**

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

**By His Spirit ~ Zechariah 4:6**

It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

**Self-Reflection**

- How are the stories in this book speaking to me so far?
- In my faith journey, am I depending on God to help me make the right choices each time I come to a fork in the road of decisions?
- What does the phrase “the power of the cross” mean to me?
- How can I apply the power of the cross to my daily life?

**Prayer**

*Jesus, I want your glory to work through me. I lay down my own understanding. Help me stay close to you. Thank you for directing my steps. I believe you can do exceedingly abundantly above and beyond what I can ask, imagine, or think.*

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## CHAPTER 21

### *The 2006 Power of the Cross Festival*

*AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN, October 16, 2006; Praying for a Musical Miracle—Christian Festival Organizer Seeks to Unite Churches, Inspire City by Eileen E. Flynn. “James Butt believes that 40,000 people will attend Saturday’s Power of the Cross Festival at Auditorium Shores. He spent over \$100,000 of his own money to create the free Christian music festival, featuring 27 local Christian bands on three stages. ‘God wants to bring the full body together,’ he said. As Butt understands it, that means bridging denominational and racial divides.”*

About this time, I received a phone call from reporter Eileen Flynn, who breathed new life into the festival. She said that the *Austin American-Statesman*, the major local newspaper, would like to interview me now that they had discovered I was producing the first-ever Christian music festival at Auditorium Shores. After she wrote two very nice articles, I received countless phone calls from interested people. The challenge became learning to discern motives and figure out who to trust.

After the first article was published, it seemed like every musician came crawling out of the woodwork to tell me that God had told them they were supposed to perform at the festival. I also received calls from people willing to volunteer, including those with unique skill sets. Since the festival needed an executive leadership team, I now had the human resources to resurrect the vision and move it forward from the birthing stage.

The Greater Austin church community began to take notice as well. Suddenly, I found myself sitting at a conference table with Life Austin Church’s Senior Pastor Randy Phillips of Phillips, Craig, and Dean and Riverbend Church’s highly respected worship composer, Carlton Dillard. The managing director from the most prominent local Christian music station, Spirit 105.9, was also in attendance.

Pastor Randy offered his help under certain conditions: to give the radio station exclusive rights to promoting the festival, selecting the headline bands, and certain other parameters which would have alleviated my financial concerns. After prayerful consideration, I turned down their generous offer because God seemed to be leading me to build a festival

in a way that would promote greater participation from the 360 churches in the Greater Austin community.

During our executive leadership team meetings, the servant leaders and I faced many unknowns, including wondering if churches would support our efforts. The other big question everyone kept asking was how many people God told me would come now that I had turned down free radio promotion from the largest local radio station that included Christian headliner bands. Initially, I kept saying, “God hasn’t told me a number.” Later, immaturity led me to tell the reporter that I wouldn’t be surprised if 40,000 people came.

Since our goal was to bring together churches, para-churches, and governmental agencies to serve our city, we created a database which at the time did not exist. Later, various organizations would use said database to connect Austin’s churches. We also created a targeted list of every para-church ministry we could find. To encourage greater participation, we even offered free booth space. When the church at large failed to fund the festival, I felt led to cash in my 401(k), IRAs, and other retirement accounts to pay for it.

Austin has many great Christian musicians who lead worship every Sunday, so we decided to make the first festival a local event that we hoped would draw citywide participation. We figured we could squeeze in three stages and twenty-seven different bands at Auditorium Shores. After prayerful consideration, we also felt we needed to offer a grand finale. Thankfully, worship conductor Cody Holley, who had just moved to Austin, stepped forward after five others declined to help us showcase Austin’s amazing Christian talent. Even the Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau assisted our efforts as part of their charter to help promote major events at Auditorium Shores.

One day I received a call from a staff member wondering if we had any support from the many University of Texas (UT) Christian organizations. Although UT’s 50,000-student population was certainly a key target, a politically powerful religious leader blocked us from gaining their participation. Our volunteer coordinator ended up driving forty-five minutes south to San Marcos to recruit help from Texas State University’s Christian campus ministries, who filled many of the open volunteer positions. Praise God!

One morning Barry Brooks called to ask if I had thought about filming the festival. My initial response was “No, I haven’t. I’m overwhelmed working on everything else involved in putting it all together.” Barry related that Omega Broadcast might be willing to film the event for free since the owner David Fry was a very solid Christian. He gave me David’s number



and I felt led to call him a few days later. David agreed to provide the equipment we needed to film the main stage, provided that I supplied the volunteers needed to staff eight camera positions for ten hours of filming.

It wasn't until after the festival that I realized the spiritual significance of this last-minute addition. This helped fulfill the prophetic word spoken over me months earlier by Jess Bielby at Glory House, "The Lord is showing me a picture of you doing a music festival and being all over TV—not for your benefit, but glorifying God."

The first *Austin American-Statesman* article created great word-of-mouth buzz, which was critically important since we had a tiny advertising budget and no headliner bands. Lots of people were talking about our event. Momentum was building, then bam! One month before our festival, the Rolling Stones announced they would be coming to Austin for the first time ever, building the biggest stage ever seen in Austin. They also announced that they were limiting ticket sales to seventy thousand people. From then on, all anyone talked about was the Rolling Stones' performance the day after our event. Talk about discouragement!

The second *Austin American-Statesman* article, printed at the beginning of this chapter, was appropriately named "Praying for a Musical Miracle." From a worldly perspective, we knew we lacked the advertising budget, headliner bands, and many other components normally needed to attract record-size crowds, but we had lots of faith.

Executive team leader Daniel R. Garza selected the twenty-seven local Christian bands to perform at the festival. When the bands showed up, he gave each member a sticker for their shirt which read, "Performing for an Audience of One." Afterwards, I thought a lot about the wisdom that led him to create that. Twenty years later, I am still learning its significance.

The team did a fantastic job. A total of twenty-seven bands performed on October 21, 2006. We also produced a second festival in 2007. During each festival, the musicians played their hearts out in the heart of downtown Austin. Unfortunately, the large audience and united church support I had expected did not materialize. Later, I realized we were the forerunners.

After the second festival, Randy Phillips put together an advisory board that included people who had served on our board. They built on the foundation we laid and were subsequently able to produce events that brought together the 360 churches in Greater Austin. Praise God!

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Forgiveness and Respect**

*Putting the Power of the Cross Festival together taught me much about walking out a godly vision. I learned how important it is to treat other Christians with extra grace, forgiveness, and respect since the enemy is always at work, sowing discord. Sometimes the best defense is to keep quiet. The wise saying goes, "If we are right, we don't have to defend ourselves. If we're wrong, we don't have any defense."*

### **A Great Reward ~ Matthew 5:11-12**

[Jesus said,] "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way."

### **Love One Another ~ Philippians 2:1-2**

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

### **Grace and Peace ~ 2 Peter 1:2-3**

May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. By his divine power, God has given us everything we need to live a godly life.

### **Religious Spirit and Politics**

Churches aren't perfect, simply because they are communities of imperfect people. Whether we like it or not, religiosity and politics exist in churches, too. When they work against us, it can be painful. In those valleys where we battle negative thoughts or injustices, we can either embrace the victim mentality or choose to grow by becoming Christlike in our responses.

**Self-Reflection**

- How do I deal with discouragement when things don't work out?
- How do I react when treated unfairly?
- Will I put things in Jesus' hands and trust him to fight on my behalf?
- Will I embrace the opportunities to become Christ-like in my responses?

**Prayer**

*Jesus, I surrender my works to you. Whether I succeed or fail in the eyes of people is not as important as doing your will. Lord, please help me be more Christ-like in my responses to those who have offended or hurt me.*

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## CHAPTER 22

### *Austin Public Access Television*

*May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.*

*Ephesians 3:19–20*

David Fry from Omega Broadcasting called me while I was recuperating from the festival. “We shot ten hours of video footage. When do you want to pick up the tapes?” he asked. While preparing for the event, I never considered what would happen afterward. I asked David what needed to be done to ready the tapes for TV broadcast. He said, “First, you need to get an editor. Then you need to find and work with a local public television producer to get the footage on Austin Public Access TV.”

I googled video editors and called a few. Most wanted between \$150 and \$350 per hour. Someone informed me it could take up to five hours to edit each hour of footage. Since I didn’t have the funds to spend on video editing, I prayed about what to do. Then I remembered the prophetic word spoken through Prophet Jess Bielby before the festival: “You are going to be all over TV glorifying God.” I still didn’t know what that meant, but it encouraged me to take editing classes at Austin Public Access TV.

When I went to the station, I discovered that even if I did succeed in getting the tapes edited, I still had to learn production to get the edited tapes played, so I rolled up my sleeves and became a student. They offered classes on everything I needed to learn: filming, sound, lighting, editing, and certification training to use the mini- and main studios.

I met Jonathan Mayberry at a Christian event I produced. After helping him complete his studio courses, we became certified and started producing TV programs. One Friday, Jonathan said he had mistakenly reserved the mini-studio for three hours on Sunday. He asked me if I could use it; otherwise, he’d cancel it. “Yes, we can,” I told him, and explained that I felt led to launch a new series entitled *New Life, Powerful Testimonies*. When I asked him if he knew anyone with a great personal testimony, he said he could line up a few, so we agreed to keep the studio time.

The following morning, I received a phone call from a publicist in Philadelphia. She asked if I was the producer of the Power of the Cross Festival. When I said yes, she asked if I would like to book Chris Plekenpol to speak at the next festival. Chris had graduated from West Point, served in Iraq, and had written a book titled *Faith in the Fog of War*. The publicist also shared that Chris was traveling around the country promoting his book at various TV and radio stations and was currently in Florida. When I asked where he was from, she told me Dallas. (Currently, he serves as senior pastor at Wells Branch Community Church in Austin, Texas.)

Obviously, God was at work setting up another divine appointment, this time through a publicist. So I inquired if Chris was available to come to Austin that Sunday. Not only did he feel led to join us, he also brought three people with him who shared amazing testimonies.

When I arrived at Austin Access TV that day, the lobby was packed with people who had come to share their testimonies. In the middle of explaining our procedures, the Holy Spirit made me keenly aware of the person standing to my immediate right. I looked directly at him and asked, “Who are you?”

He said, “My name is John Cochran, and I am here to do whatever you need me to do.”

I laughed, “I need another producer to get this new series launched.”

John asked me what it would take for him to become a producer. I suggested that he become a full-time student and take all certification classes, and quickly! To my surprise, he responded, “If my commercial real estate partner is willing to cover for me, I’ll do it.” Just like that, I had my third producer, who also became my strongest ministry partner during that season.

Fifty hours a week I worked: recording, editing, and producing Christian content on Austin Public Access TV without compensation. The first project I edited was the *Power of the Cross Festival* tapes. Afterward, I figured out how to repackage the footage in a million different ways to meet programming requirements and fill up the station’s available time slots with fresh new content.

We supported churches and para-church ministries that couldn’t afford in-house video production. *New Life, Powerful Testimonies* really took off after Pastor Paul Ojeda from Austin Powerhouse Church invited me to speak to his congregation. After I shared what we were doing, members of the congregation came down to the studio to record their testimonies which we later broadcast, filling the airwaves with the glory of the Lord!

Eventually I became the executive producer of five weekly Christian TV shows and God connected me to yet another person who would become

a producer. The Holy Spirit provided the necessary volunteers which enabled us to produce live Christian music events. The station loved the fresh new content which was desperately needed after changing management terms with Time-Warner Cable. The shows lifted our spirits and we were encouraged that a larger audience could watch the festival via television. Working on these shows also helped our volunteers to develop career skills to support themselves and other ministries.

Along the way, I set up a 501(c)(3) named United in His Love under which we created over 500 hours of Christian programming which was distributed multiple times over Time-Warner cable channels 10, 11, and 12. When other Christian organizations realized what we were doing, they followed suit to take advantage of the resources. Until we started doing what God called us to do, most of the programming on the channels was secular, including *The Atheist Experience* and *The Alex Jones Infowars Show*, which aired in the same time slots as two of our shows on other channels.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Who Can Dream This Stuff Up?**

*I didn't know how to do this—Christian festivals, TV shows, etc. Without Christ Jesus, we can't do anything that has eternal value. It still amazes me that through God's Spirit, these things happened. Pinch me!*

### **A New Thing ~ Isaiah 43:19**

For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?

### **Open Doors ~ Revelation 3:8**

[Jesus said,] "I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can close. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me."

### **God's Masterpiece ~ Ephesians 2:10**

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

### **Obey God ~ Philippians 2:12-13**

Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep

reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

**A Changed Life**

When I became a born-again follower of Jesus, my life changed suddenly and dramatically. God inspires us to do good works that glorify him.

**Self-Reflection**

- Do I believe I am God’s masterpiece?
  
- Do I believe Jesus can do amazing things through my life that I couldn’t accomplish on my own?
  
- Why or why not?

**Prayer**

*Lord, thank you for creating me just the way I am. In your eyes I am a beautiful masterpiece, and I am wonderfully and fearfully made (Psalm 139:14 NIV). I have a purpose and mission. You created me to do good works which you have prepared in advance for me. Let me bring glory to your name.*

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## CHAPTER 23

### *The 2007 Power of the Cross Festival*

*Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it." Luke 9:23–24*

I never intended to produce the second Power of the Cross Festival. The day after John Cochran and I taped footage of a particular show, it somehow ended up being broadcast live throughout Austin. Management couldn't explain why or how that had happened. Later I received a phone call from the Austin Parks and Recreation Department informing me that I still owned the first right of refusal to reserve the highly sought after Auditorium Shores. After John and I prayed about the sequence of events unfolding before us, we felt led to empty our bank accounts to produce the second festival.

The TV ministry was fun and exciting. God's favor was upon us, and so many great things were happening! One day while in the studio, I received a phone call from a talented web developer. He had created one of the most fantastic festival websites I'd ever seen featuring a cross that dramatically raised when people navigated to the home page. We were able to purchase the site for about \$10,000, which helped us attract great up-and-coming Christian bands representing most musical genres.

We auditioned bands on our TV shows and rented a video production truck to record the artists playing at the second Power of the Cross Festival. Not only did the Fred Thomas Band headline our event, Fred generously lined up sleeping accommodations for all the out-of-town bands at a brand-new condominium community.

The same politically powerful person who had been the biggest obstacle to the first festival tried to prevent the second festival from taking place. He called Paul Ojeda from Austin Powerhouse Church and attempted to persuade him to withdraw the volunteers we needed to staff the second festival. Thankfully, Paul ignored the opposition and kept his commitment. Today, Bishop Paul is a city leader in Austin.

The devil, full of deceit and the father of lies, also perverted the truth through a computer expert planted in our camp. Initially, he pretended to



be a helpful servant. It was not until after the second festival that I learned that he used our email database, which we had worked so hard to create, against us. He secretly made a way to capture the contact information from our entire database and sent emails to discourage people from participating in the second festival. On a positive note, Jess Bielby arranged for a semi-truck load of groceries worth over \$60,000 to be delivered to Austin which we distributed freely during the festival.

It's hard to get people to show up to a free Christian event when the weather is terrible. It rained off and on throughout the day and my heart broke into a million pieces. I felt horrible for the bands like Untitled, who traveled all the way from Chicago to perform. To make matters worse, one of their vans broke down on the way home.

If we defined the festival from an attendance perspective, it was a total flop. My soul searched for quick answers, but none came. Once again, I questioned everything I thought I knew about God and everything I thought I understood about my ministry in the Valley of Crucified Thoughts.

After the first festival, I thought I understood what it meant to be committed to pleasing an audience of One. The question that haunted me after the second festival was, "Did I mean it?" If so, "Would I be willing to do anything, including having my heart broken again, to follow Jesus?" Like the proverbial deer in the headlights, I stood staring at a new sign at yet another fork in the road reading "Total Reckless Abandon." Instantly, I felt this new proposition dividing me, soul and spirit. The thoughts and attitudes of my heart were being examined. Was I ready to become Christ's bondservant, or would I desert him like some of his other followers, who turned away, saying, "This teaching is too difficult" (John 6:66)?

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***The Purification Process***

*Forgiving the computer expert wasn't easy. In hindsight, I haven't always treated people perfectly. When we clothe ourselves with the victim mentality, we become enshrouded in dark clouds of anger and resentment. When we forgive, with God's help, we become partakers of God's divine character.*

### ***Forgiveness ~ Matthew 6:14-15***

[Jesus said,] "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."

**Due Rewards ~ Jeremiah 17:10**

“But I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve.”

**Harvesting ~ John 4:37-38**

[Jesus said,] “You know the saying, ‘One plants and another harvests.’ And it’s true. I sent you to harvest where you didn’t plant, others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest.”

**Unity of the Faith**

The vision was to bring 360 churches together in the Greater Austin area. I made too many assumptions about what we would accomplish through the two music festivals. I realize now that I was just an early plower. It was later that the 360 churches came together cohesively and accomplished many great things. All glory to God!

**Self-Reflection**

- How do these stories of being a bondservant to Christ apply to me?
- What does it mean to pick up my cross daily to follow Jesus?
- What did Jesus mean when he said, “Those that lose their lives will save it”?

**Prayer**

*Jesus, I surrender the fruit of my works to you, including results I might not even get to see. Lord, I surrender to your process of purification. Help me not to hold grudges against those who betrayed me, but instead forgive them generously.*

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## CHAPTER 24

### *Total Reckless Abandon*

*At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Matthew 27:46*

Traveling down the narrow road that few follow, I found myself at what appeared to be a dead end. My savings, stocks, retirement, and other funds were gone, entirely. I even had to sell my car to buy food and to pay my mortgage.

One afternoon, Jess Bielby called to check up on me. When I updated him on my situation, he asked if I had any equity in my condo, and suggested I sell it to get my equity back. Until he called, I believed that God would somehow rescue me since I had been faithful by sowing everything I owned since giving my life to Christ five years earlier. Though I didn't understand it then, I was still trying to hold on to my old life rather than allowing Jesus to give me a new life filled with meaning and purpose. When I asked Jess what I should do after selling my condo, he suggested I buy his 1978 Winnebago Chieftain, strap a motorcycle on the back, and go sightseeing until my equity money ran out. Then he said, "Go have fun. God will tell you what to do next when your money runs out."

So I bought the thirty-one-foot motor home for \$6,500. Realistically, I was facing another crisis of belief, only this time it was selling my condo, getting rid of all my possessions, and traveling out west until I spent every penny I had left. As crazy as it sounds, it made perfect sense since I was physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted after the second festival. Like the biblical story of Jonah and the whale (Jonah 1:12–15), I can relate to Jonah saying, "Just pick me up and throw me into the stormy sea. I am done trying to save my own life."

The next morning, I contacted Jeanne Butterfield, the agent I had bought the condo from, and told her I needed to sell my condo immediately. A father purchased it for his daughter because he wanted her to live in a safe community. Jeanne told me he prayed about it before saying "Yes, this is the one for sure. We will take it." We narrowly closed on it before the stock market crash of 2008. Today, that condo has quadrupled in value, a blessing to this father, his daughter, and family!

After signing the contract, I had thirty days to get my affairs in order

before I headed out west. I signed over our ministry, United in His Love, to one of our board members, including \$10,000 worth of video editing equipment. I then emailed the 360 pastors in our database to inform them that I was stepping down. Of the hundreds of emails I sent out, I only received one back; it was from Bishop Kenneth Phillips at PromiseLand Central Church, who said he was sorry to see me leave Austin.

When I left Austin, the orphan spirit of total rejection was heavy on me. It felt like the Greater Austin church community had made a crown of thorns, forced it down around my head, spit in my face, chained me to a political whipping post, and flogged me. I was angry at God because I felt like he had abandoned me. Later, I understood that everything God had allowed me to experience was a blessing in disguise since it was part of the maturing process that he had orchestrated to perfect me.

So, hearkening to the words of my friend Jess, I bought a used motorcycle, loaded it into the back of a U-Haul, drove it to Kansas, and picked up his RV. Then I drove out west and experienced what many Americans only dream about seeing in their lifetime. During the next three months, I put thousands of miles on the RV and 14,000 miles on the motorcycle, riding through the scenic byways in Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and California. The trip's highlights included several U.S. National Parks: Zion, Bryce Canyon, Arches, Lake Powell, Antelope Canyon, Monument Valley, and Yosemite. Another highlight was driving up the Pacific Coast Highway in California. These experiences also inspired the recent camping trips my wife "Dora the explorer" and I have taken.

While I was in California, Jess called me. He said he was bringing together a five-fold ministry team to start a church in Springfield, Missouri and invited me to be a part of it. I had just enough gas money to drive the RV from California to Missouri, but when I reached New Mexico, the RV broke down for the umpteenth time. The biggest problem this time was I didn't have the funds to fix it. When I called Jess for help, he suggested I pray about who to call since he couldn't help me. I then called my mother, but she didn't have any money either.

After praying about it, I called my second ex-wife, Terri, who told me to call her back the next day. The very next morning, she revealed that she had been receiving quarterly statements from a stock fund still in my name which had been part of our divorce settlement eight years previous. If I had known about this earlier, I probably would have spent it on the festivals, but God was gracious to hide it from me until I needed it. So just like that, I had the funds I needed to fix the RV and fund my new lifestyle for the next six months.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Total Reckless Abandon**

*As crazy as it might sound, going on a grand vacation, enjoying myself, spending my last penny, and having no backup plan made perfect sense in my spirit. I was tired of wondering if God really would take care of me, so this leap of faith beyond the point of no return fit perfectly. God's perfect timing and providence through the stock fund was above and beyond my intellectual understanding. Wow!*

### **True Value ~ Philippians 3:7-8**

I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ.

### **Be Satisfied ~ Hebrews 13:5**

Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you."

### **Why ~ Psalm 22:1**

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help?

### **Glory and Suffering ~ Romans 8:17**

Together with Christ, we are heirs of God's glory. But if we share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

### **All for Good ~ Romans 8:28**

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

### **The Teacher Is Usually Quiet During the Test**

The teacher is usually quiet during times of testing and perfecting. Worry, unbelief, complaining, and rebellion are soulish thoughts that trap us in the wilderness. The teacher allows trials to draw us closer to him for help. We may feel like he left us, but we know from Scripture that God will never abandon us (Hebrews 13:5).

**Self-Reflection**

- What does “forsaking all so that I might gain Christ” look like in my life?
- What is the practical application?

**Prayer**

*My Lord, thank you for the seasons of rest. Once again, I am leaning on you to take care of me. I let go of my worries, unresolved feelings toward people, and other cares of this world. I pray you will fill my heart with peace in Christ Jesus.*

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# *The Ministry of Reconciliation*



## CHAPTER 25

### *Franciscan Villa Apartments*

The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand. Psalm 37:23–24

After three months of travel, I felt refreshed when I arrived in Ozark, Missouri, a small town just south of Springfield. I remember enjoying the leaves changing color that fall of 2007. I was excited about participating in planting a new church and what I thought would be a career as an ordained minister. I looked forward to being a part of a five-fold ministry team flowing in the spiritual gifts to equip others, fulfilling the calling God had on my life which had been prophesied so many times.

But after six months, the church plant failed to take off. Instead of starting a church, it seemed God had brought the team together to further crucify our flesh in preparation for subsequent assignments: Kevin Goodwin moved to Honduras to head up an orphan adoption ministry, Will Deed relocated to Guatemala to serve as a missionary, others served in different churches in other capacities, and Jess ordained me during that time.

When the dust settled, I found myself stranded in Missouri, separated from everything and everyone I knew. With nowhere to go and very little money, I began praying. Then God directed my attention toward a picture of a low-income housing facility, the Franciscan Villa Apartments, in Springfield. The Lord said, “I want you to go there now. Don’t think about it. Get in your van and go. Now.”

I grabbed my keys, jumped in my van, and started the 20-minute drive to Springfield. I had given the RV back to Jess after Chris, another member of our team, had given me his van. On the way, I got ahead of myself, assuming I would rent a room at this low-income housing facility, which used to be a one-hundred-room hospital. I called ahead and the first person I talked to asked me if I was employed. When I told her no, but I believed God was putting me back to work, she didn’t seem to care and told me that I didn’t qualify to become a tenant. The only way I could qualify was through their transitional housing, but there was a long wait list for the two rooms allocated. I replied, “I am a man of faith. I believe I am supposed to be moving in there, so I am heading your way to learn more.”

Here, I faced yet another crisis of belief; I didn’t know what to believe!



Tempted to turn around and drive back to Ozark, I recalled God's words: "Don't think about it. Get in your van and go there, now!" and I realized God hadn't told me to phone ahead. By then, I had just enough faith to finish the drive to at least see if God was arranging for me to move there.

When I arrived, I discovered the person I had spoken to was an office assistant. She introduced me to Teresa, the manager in charge, who had me fill out a transitional housing application saying, "You never know."

Three days later, while I was praying, the Lord said, "You need to contact Teresa. She is supposed to do something." That is all I heard. I wasn't sure what that meant, so I sent Teresa an email that said, "Teresa, I am writing to you because you said you're a Christian. I need to ask you to pray about something. The Lord told me to tell you that you're supposed to do something, but I don't know what that is. God just told me to ask you to pray."

Teresa called three hours later to offer me a job as a night security guard in exchange for one of the transitional housing rooms that had suddenly become available. That's when it dawned on me that I had transitioned from a white-collar guy who made six figures into a night security guard working two nights a week in exchange for a room and three hot meals a day in the basement kitchen of a low-income housing facility. Needless to say, it wasn't what I expected of my plan to move to Missouri to help start a church.

After moving into the apartment, I had a come-to-Jesus meeting with myself. I cried out to God and complained like a little kid who didn't get his way. I reminded God that I had been faithful and that I had given Him everything that I owned. Then, on my knees, I asked, "God, is this where I am supposed to be? Have I lost my mind? I can't take this anymore. Please put me out of my misery." After I finished complaining, God answered my prayer by saying, "Get up and call Teresa. Tell her that I asked you to start teaching Bible studies."

So, I called Teresa. When she picked up the phone, I said, "Teresa, the Lord told me to start teaching Bible studies here. You lead, and I'll follow." I didn't know why I said it that way, nor did she.

Teresa said, "Ok, James, whatever you say." Click. She hung up on me.

The following day, a couple of widows walked into Teresa's office and told her they wanted to start a Bible study, but they didn't know anyone who could teach. They wondered if she could recommend someone, so Teresa called me and said, "James, I wasn't sure what to think about your phone call yesterday. Can you come down to the office? You're supposed to meet some people."

I needed reassurance that I was where God wanted me to be, and the

women's Bible study provided the confirmation I needed. Later that day, I received a second confirmation when I went to the bank; I learned I only had \$50 left to my name.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***Dark Night of the Soul***

*The dark night of the soul I experienced during that desperate come-to-Jesus meeting is synonymous with the narrow path Jesus spoke about in Matthew 7:13–14. More than once, mental anguish had left me curled up in a fetal position, asking God to end my misery. In these times of distress, I experienced fear, confusion, anxiety, uncertainty, and doubts about God. I felt taken into a valley, a Valley of Crucified Thoughts, where I had to stretch my faith muscles. In those places, God crucifies our soulish thoughts to perfect our faith, sometimes turning our world upside down to teach us what is right side up.*

### ***The Narrow Gate ~ Matthew 7:13–14***

[Jesus said,] “You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.”

### ***The Ways of the Lord ~ Isaiah 55:8***

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.”

### ***The Kernel ~ John 12:23–28***

Jesus replied, “Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me. Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But this is why I came! Father, bring glory to your name.”

**Self-Reflection**

- Is my identity tied to my ministry?
  
- Who am I without a ministry job or a title?
  
- Do I find my identity in Christ in seasons of testing?

**Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, I thank you for every season, including the seasons in the valley that perfect my faith. I surrender all my soulish thoughts, anxiety, doubts, and fears to you. I exchange them for faith and hope in you, my Lord and Savior. As I walk through the Valley of Doubt and Fear, thank you that you are with me, comforting and strengthening me. (Meditate on Psalm 23).*

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## CHAPTER 26

# *Blooming Where God Plants You*

*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. 1 Peter 4:10*

After moving into the Franciscan Villa Apartments, I started teaching Bible studies to a few widows who lived there. One woman, who was in poor health, died suddenly. When her relatives came into town, they asked Teresa if she knew a pastor who would be willing to conduct the funeral service. Teresa called me, asking with the exact same words as before: “James, can you come down to the office? You’re supposed to meet some people.”

I agreed to do the funeral service after the family permitted me to take advantage of the opportunity to lead others to Christ. Teresa placed invitations in all the residents’ mailboxes and about fifty attended to celebrate her life. I had a captive audience, which was a perfect opportunity to share the Good News. God led the granddaughter of the deceased and a few others to come forward to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Praise the Lord!

That Sunday, I invited a few people from my apartment to attend services with me at Dayspring Church. Each of us filled out a visitors’ card triggering their outreach team to visit the Franciscan Villa Apartment community. When Dayspring’s Pastor Paul Smith and Christa Stacy discovered that I was actively doing ministry there, they asked if they could come alongside me. Their visit led to me joining their church.

The Lord connected me to three people who greatly influenced my ministry while living in Springfield—Dayspring Pastor Farley Lewis, Brent Smallwood, and Christa Stacy. Pastor Farley invited me to be a part of his home visitation and community outreach team. I served on Brent Smallwood’s prophetic ministry team, and Christa Stacy became my most vital ministry partner. Together we pushed the boundaries of our faith through evangelism, prophecy, healing, and outreach. While serving in Dayspring’s food pantry ministry, I had the opportunities to create promotional videos for the ministry and to wash dishes after the Celebrate Recovery meetings.

The Franciscan Villa Apartment community was the perfect place to do ministry since many residents suffered from addictions and mental health

issues. Christa and I also did a lot of street evangelism. Sometimes others would join us, but mostly it was just Christa and me experiencing God's gift of grace working through spiritual gifts like words of knowledge, discernment of spirits, healing, and very accurate prophetic words.

One day as I was ministering to a young woman, the Lord told me to ask her if "firecracker" meant anything to her. Startled, she asked, "How did you know that my parents called me that while I was growing up?" After getting her attention, the Lord spoke other words of knowledge through us to minister powerfully to her, bringing tears to her eyes.

The Lord worked powerfully through Brent, who carries a special anointing to bring prophetic people together to minister to others. He once invited me to a large Baptist church gathering for singles at Wendell Lovewell's home. After nearly everyone had gone, Brent said that he believed the Lord wanted those of us who remained to pray for Wendell. As we prayed, the Lord blessed Wendell through accurate prophetic words that flowed through Brent, Christa, and another person, Becky. Then I shared, "The Lord is showing me a vision of a gift. I see your hands unwrapping the paper of a gift with strings around it and a bow. The Lord says, 'Tonight, I am giving you the gift of discernment.'"

After everyone had shared, Wendell confirmed that the words given were accurate. Then he mentioned that an intercessor came to his house two nights earlier to pray for him to receive the gift of discernment to help him manage the large number of people that often gathered in his home. So Becky, Brent, and I prayed over him and Wendell received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gift of speaking in tongues. Weeks later, he opened up his home to five-fold ministry gatherings. Praise the Lord!

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***A Crisis of Belief Explained***

*What appears as a crisis of belief is often an open door from God inviting us into a richer experience with Jesus. By persevering along the narrow path, we partner with God's grace, enabling us to participate in unique opportunities that produce spiritual fruit, which refines our character to reflect Jesus.*

### ***Fruit of the Spirit ~ Galatians 5: 22–23***

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

**A Still, Small Voice ~ Isaiah 30:21**

Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left.

**Instructions ~ Psalm 19:7**

The instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

**The Narrow Path That Few Follow, Explained**

The narrow path that few dare follow is unpredictable because God doesn't tell us where He is leading us, how we'll get there, or when we'll get there. Needing answers to questions such as how long each new season will last, where our finances will come from, or who we will meet or work with along the way are mental roadblocks we overcome. At some point, we begin to understand that we can't control anything. Instead of driving, we become passengers. Instead of giving directions, we learn how to listen. Instead of telling others what to do, we become servants who follow his soft, tender, voice, which beckons, "Follow me."

**Self-Reflection**

- Am I blooming where God has planted me?
  
- Or am I whining and complaining?
  
- Will I choose to serve where I am, using the gifts God gives me?

**Prayer**

*Father God, I want to bloom wherever you plant me, even in hard places. Help me stay faithful to you like Joseph in the Bible, when he was in the pit, the dungeon, and the prison. You are my deliverer. Regardless of the situations I find myself in, use them to produce abundant spiritual fruit in my life.*

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## CHAPTER 27

# *God Heals Two Women*

*[Jesus said,] "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works because I am going to be with the Father. You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father." ~ John 14:12-13*

One morning, as I was having a pity party about being a night watchman stuck in Springfield, the Lord told me to get dressed and go prayer walking. During the entire time I lived there, I never went prayer walking by myself, so this was something new and extraordinary. For anyone who has not experienced this, prayer walking is when we step forward in faith, making ourselves available so that God's will can be done on earth, through us, as we become Christ's hands, feet, and voice.

I grabbed my iPod, laced up my sneakers, cranked up the praise music, went out the door, and began walking. The fresh air filled my lungs as I praised and worshiped my Father, and prayed for divine appointments. During the first fifteen minutes of brisk walking, I didn't see anyone else. Suddenly, three little puppies were biting at my ankles. Then I noticed a woman on my right who appeared to be saying something, so I turned off my iPod.

"Don't move, or they will keep following you. I'll come to you."

As she walked toward me, I intensified my prayer. When the woman reached me, she thanked me for not moving.

The presence of the Holy Spirit was tangible. "I am prayer walking," I said, "How can I pray for you?"

Initially, she said she didn't need prayer because everyone in her family was a believer. I surprised both of us when I looked at her purposefully and said boldly, a second time, "I am prayer walking. How can I pray for you?"

Juggling her puppies, she turned to me and said, "Follow me." Then she walked inside her home, leaving the door wide open.

Continuing to pray, I stopped as I reached the threshold, concerned about being alone with a woman in her house. My concern faded when I saw the woman's husband sitting on the couch talking on the phone, so I walked through the living room and followed her into the formal dining

room. A young teenaged girl was sitting at the table.

“Get up,” the woman told her daughter, “God sent this man to come here and pray for you.”

The husband hung up the phone and said, “I want to be included.”

Something supernatural appeared to be happening. I asked, “What’s going on?”

I quickly learned that two different doctors had told them the day before that their daughter had cancer.

We formed a circle, held hands, and prayed. I sensed they were from the old-school, black Pentecostal church. While they were declaring, decreeing, and shouting, I silently prayed, asking God what He wanted me to pray. Then, I placed my hand on her and said a simple prayer. When I did, I experienced a unique thought impression telling me God had just healed her. It was so strong I felt led to write down their contact information so that I could come back to document the supernatural healing.

Christa called me one day to partner with her to do ministry. The initial game plan that day was to walk around praying for people at Walmart. After she picked me up, I asked her to make a quick stop at the home of the young woman I had prayed for six months earlier who had been diagnosed with cancer. On the way to our young friend’s home, we felt a prompting by the Holy Spirit to stop at a garage sale just a half-block from their home.

While Christa looked around, the Lord gave me a word of knowledge that this moment was a divine appointment. That is when I noticed that besides the couple holding the garage sale and their kids, no one else was around except Christa and me. I sensed that we were in a unique kairos moment with no distractions.

When I asked the man and his wife why they were having the garage sale, they told me he was a Baptist pastor in between jobs and that they were getting ready to move. Then the Lord encouraged me to share testimonies about supernatural healings to build their faith, even though I sensed they didn’t believe that spiritual gifts are still active in today’s church.

By now, Christa had noticed that we were deeply engaged in conversation, so she stopped browsing and joined us. I shared some amazing stories, including the one about the young woman we were going to see, whom we believed God had healed of cancer, and other divine healings we had witnessed. The pastor’s wife said, “We prayed for someone who got healed once. They stayed healed for a month, and then the illness returned. Subsequently, we did a Bible study about the Holy Spirit and became convinced that the spiritual gifts documented in the book of Acts are no longer active.”



As the woman spoke, the Lord gave Christa a word of knowledge. “You have a woman’s issue that has to do with your blood, don’t you?” Christa asked, “You need healing yourself, don’t you?”

Startled, the woman admitted, “Yes, I do. Because of the blood issue, we’ve had to adopt these children you see running around.”

Christa and I looked at each other. Then Christa asked her if she would allow us to lay hands on her to pray for God to heal her. The woman looked at her husband again, who nodded his approval. After we prayed, Christa said, “How would you know if the Lord healed you?”

The woman beamed, “I already know. God just healed me.”

Christa asked, “You do? How do you know?”

The woman said, “While you were praying for me, my sinuses cleared up, my headache went away, and all the other symptoms I’ve always had disappeared! I know God just healed me!”

Surprisingly, the Baptist pastor, who had been very reserved up until this point, asked us to pray for him too. When I asked why he needed prayer, he told us he had hepatitis. We placed hands on him and prayed, and though there were no physical signs of healing (hepatitis is asymptomatic), we believed God healed him.

After we left the pastor’s home, we visited our young friend and learned that the doctors had examined her and couldn’t find any cancer. Praise the Lord!

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***If We Ask According to His Will, It Will Happen***

*The Bible teaches us to pray for others, but we do not own the outcome. Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing. When divine appointments are lined up within God’s will in his perfect timing, supernatural events do occur. My part is walking in the Spirit, recognizing divine appointments, and accepting the invitations to join God the Father in what he is doing. His supernatural grace, accompanied by signs, wonders, and miracles, backs up our faith and always points others to Christ Jesus rather than to ourselves or our ministry.*

### ***Be Astonished ~ John 5:20***

[Jesus said,] “The Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished.”

**Miraculous Signs ~ Mark 16:17-18**

[Jesus said,] “These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak in new languages. . . . They will be able to place their hands on the sick, and they will be healed.”

**Grace and Power ~ Acts 14:3**

The apostles stayed there a long time, preaching boldly about the grace of the Lord. And the Lord proved their message was true by giving them the power to do miraculous signs and wonders.

**Self-Reflection**

- What is my understanding of spiritual gifts, such as the gift of prophecy and the gift of healing?
- Do I believe supernatural signs, wonders, and miracles still operate today through Christ’s church body?
- Why or why not?

**Prayer**

*Father in heaven, it is in your will to heal and restore. I ask for the gifts of healing and prophecy to operate through me. I want to partner with you in what you are doing when I pray for people. Let my life bring glory to the name of Jesus.*

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## CHAPTER 28

### *Four Divine Appointments –Easter 2009*

*My message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God. 1 Corinthians 2:4–5*

I will never forget what happened on my way to Dayspring Church on Easter Sunday. A cold front had blown in the night before, making the weather miserable, and as I approached Kearney Avenue, I saw a man walking in the cold rain. Driving past him, I noticed that he was carrying his belongings and wasn't wearing any rain gear, so I pulled my van ahead, positioning it directly in his path.

I figured I would invite him to attend church with me so he could at least get out of the rain for a little while. As he got closer, I rolled down my window and began to speak, "Would you . . ." then realized the man was possessed! His face was contorted in a most horrifying expression as he let out a screech followed by a satanic hissing sound that made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. Suddenly, I faced another crisis of belief, this time wondering what to believe about this demonic encounter. Though I was initially frightened, prayer gave me the courage to confront the demon, but God didn't give me the go-ahead to chase after him or do anything other than pray for his soul.

The whole experience was unnerving. I couldn't figure out why God would allow me to experience something like that without giving me the faith, inspiration, confirmation, and an opportunity to do something about it. Finally, I gave up trying to figure it out and prayed, "God, I am confused. If you want me to give someone a ride, cast out demons, or serve you another way, you need to make it easier for me to understand your will."

After church, I drove back to the Franciscan Villa Apartments using a different route. While getting ready to turn from Chestnut onto Main, four blocks from my apartment on Scott Street, I noticed another man walking in the rain wearing a nice leather jacket, again without any rain protection. I looked, but the man didn't signal that he needed a ride, so I kept going. For some reason, I felt guilty that I didn't stop, so I prayerfully reminded

the Lord again that I was willing to serve him, but only if he took out the guesswork and made his will clear.

I parked the van, walked through the basement passageway, and into the residents' kitchen. After serving myself a plate, I sat down to eat. When I happened to look up, the guy in the leather jacket suddenly appeared. To my surprise, he walked directly to the table where I sat with three other people instead of any of the other thirty-nine tables in the room. Then he asked the guy seated next to me if he could give him a ride home.

God was obviously at work right in front of me since the kitchen wasn't easy to get to, hardly anyone except residents ate their meals there, and I had never seen this guy before. God was calling my bluff about being willing to help only if he made his will known. Without hesitation, I spoke up, "I'll give you a ride. Let me finish eating, and I'll take you home."

We talked during the long drive across town to where he lived. He confessed to cheating on his wife the night before and admitted to having a drinking and drug problem. After the Lord ministered to him through my testimony, he repented from his sins, promised that he and his wife would get help, and invited Jesus to make a home in his heart. Praise God!

Driving back to my apartment to get ready for work, I patted myself on the back. I prayed gloatingly, "See, God, that wasn't so hard. If you make your will known, things will work much easier for both of us." Minutes later, a woman standing in the pouring rain jumped in front of my van as I slowed to make the turn into the Franciscan Villa parking lot, and before I knew what was happening, she was climbing into the passenger seat. Suddenly, God spoke to my heart, "I had this one wave at you, didn't I? She is a prostitute. I want you to minister to her and tell her I love her."

Realizing she wouldn't be successful in picking me up, the woman asked for a ride to her sister's place. On the way, we talked about her life, my testimony, her getting help, God's love, and the power of prayer. When we arrived, she cried as we prayed. Then with a big smile and a new infusion of hope, she got out of my car and walked up the sidewalk into the house.

This time, I didn't gloat. I drove home with my mouth shut. As my shift was about to start, Richard Schultz, a resident I had been trying to reach, appeared and informed me that he was ready to accept Christ into his life. Richard repented from the practice of witchcraft and sorcery and asked Jesus Christ to make his home in his heart. A few weeks later, he came with me to Dayspring Church to get baptized. We still keep in touch through Facebook. He loves the Lord and is now happily married. Praise the Lord!

Interestingly, a few months after Richard got baptized, he mentioned an extraordinary encounter with a demon-possessed man who hissed at him as he walked by.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Angelic and Demonic Encounters**

*The Bible says to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so, some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2). Angels are subject to the will of God. They are instrumental in setting up divine appointments like these. Angels, being God's messengers, bring answers to prayer (Acts 12:5–10). They aid us in winning people to Christ (Acts 8:26). Fallen angels are also real and so are demonic encounters. Because of sin's consequences, people can become possessed or come under the influence of demons. Bottom line, there are consequences to sinful behavior.*

### **Angels and Saints ~ Hebrews 1:14**

Therefore, angels are only servants—spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation.

### **The Gift ~ 2 Corinthians 5:18**

And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.

### **The Struggle ~ Ephesians 6:12**

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (NIV)

### **Faith ~ 1 Peter 1:5**

Through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation.

### **Self-Reflection**

- Open doors, through sin, make us susceptible to demonic activity.
- Do I feel conviction about these open doors in my life?
- Will I repent of the sin in these areas?
- If need be, am I willing to seek Christian counseling or deliverance?
- Do I struggle with finding and following the will of God?

- Am I renewing my mind continually by meditating on and applying the truth found in the Scriptures?

**Prayer**

*Father God, I want to keep following your perfect will in this journey of faith along the narrow path. Please help me and make it easy for me to understand your will.*

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# *The Father's Divine Provision*



## CHAPTER 29

# *A Supernatural Pathway*

*[Jesus said to Paul,] “Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. You are to tell the world what you have seen and what I will show you in the future.” Acts 26:16*

Living in Springfield, I held onto the hope wrapped around a word prophesied over me before I traveled out west in 2008. The prophet, who knew nothing about me, said, “God is showing me a vision of you doing a lot of traveling, ending up somewhere for a few years, and then another prophet, who loves God dearly, will bring you back to Austin. Like Barnabas to Saul, this man will reintroduce you to the Austin church.”

One day as I spent time in prayer, God told me he wanted me to give away my white van. My knee-jerk reaction was hesitation, as my first thought was that I needed the van to get back to Austin someday. After overcoming my initial crisis of belief (not trusting God to provide a way), I called Associate Pastor Farley Lewis at Dayspring Church. After sharing what God told me, I handed Farley the keys after church that Sunday. Two weeks later, Farley informed me that the church’s mechanic looked at the van and they decided they didn’t want it.

I was surprised when Dayspring didn’t accept my love offering. I then realized God didn’t tell me to whom I should give the van. The following day I remembered David, who pastored a homeless ministry. He had been looking for a van a year earlier, so I approached him. When I asked if he still needed a van, he said, “No, we need a truck.”

After trying twice to give away the van, I told God, “I must have misunderstood you. If you want me to give the van away, you will need to make it really obvious and provide me with multiple confirmations. Otherwise, I’m keeping it.”

During this season, I enjoyed serving at Dayspring’s amazing food pantry. One day as I was bagging groceries, the woman who led the prayer ministry said she believed I was supposed to join her team to pray for someone in the prayer room. (That was the only time she had ever asked me to join them.) When that person entered the room, he sat down next to me. The prayer leader asked me, “Has God given you something to pray for him?” I prayed silently for a moment, but God didn’t give me anything.



So she asked the man, “How can we pray for you?”

He said, “I need a van. Mine broke down and I need another one. It doesn’t need to be new. A used van is all I need.”

I nearly fell off my chair, but remained silent and prayed for more confirmation. A few days later, as I walked over to Dayspring, I found myself praying about the van. Suddenly, the same man I had met at the food pantry crossed the street in front of me and walked into a house, showing me where he lived. That night, God gave me peace about the man being the right person. The following day, I drove the van to his house and signed the title over to him. Though I didn’t realize it at the time, sowing the van as a love offering set into motion the fulfillment of the prophetic word that had been spoken over me two years earlier.

The following week, Charlie Lujan from PromiseLand Church in Austin contacted me to inform me that Bishop Phillips wanted to talk to me. Although I didn’t have a personal relationship with the bishop, he told me how God had illuminated me to him in his prayers, so he called to discuss bringing me back to Austin to be part of PromiseLand Church.

Just a few days later, I was summoned to the apartment office. The new manager, who had replaced Teresa, informed me that they were interviewing people for my night security job. He told me I would have to move out as soon as they had selected the next candidate.

The next day, Barclay Garman, a board member of United in His Love, contacted me, independent of the bishop’s call, and said that he felt led to send me \$2,000 so I could buy a car. Within days of Barclay’s call, John Cochran called to inform me that he and his family felt led to invite me to live with them at Point Venture, Texas, a vacation home community on a lake west of Austin. He said, “We have a spare bedroom and enough to take care of you until God reestablishes your finances.” Like a chess game, God was moving things around! I had no other options than to follow the path God was orchestrating. So I packed up the old tan VW sedan I had managed to buy with the money Barclay sent, drove to Texas, and moved in with the Cochran family.

Point Venture is about forty country miles from PromiseLand Central Church in downtown Austin. Initially, I lacked gas money for the hour-long commute, but Linda Chandler, pastor of the Austin Brethren Church, contacted me to let me know God had directed her to pay for a six month lease on an apartment, including utilities, to enable me to move closer to PromiseLand Church.

Now that I lived fairly close, God opened the door for me to be more involved. I led a strong Soul-Winning Action Team (SWAT) with Mary McLin, Francis Boaf, Iris Tsosie, Christella Calvo, and her sister Delia. Our team

went door-to-door at various apartment complexes leading people to Christ and recording their testimonies, which were then uploaded onto YouTube. Suddenly, all kinds of people joined in our weekly efforts, creating a training issue, so we organized a seminar to onboard newcomers.

Ministry work was thriving, but my six-month free apartment agreement with Pastor Linda was expiring, so I posted a prayer request on Facebook. Thankfully, Barclay Garman graciously invited me to live with him until I got back on my feet financially. Not long afterward, Brad Roberts and I became Facebook friends and shortly thereafter moved in with us. Like Barclay, Brad was going through a divorce, and since I'd been through the experience, I was able to minister to them while God reestablished me in Austin.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Sowing and Reaping**

*I've given away a van and an RV and received free cars. I've let people live rent-free in my condo, and I've lived rent-free in an apartment. I've given away everything I owned twice. I've also received an inheritance from my mother and my uncle Ruben when they passed. Truly, "Give, and you will receive" is an accurate biblical principle that I've experienced many times.*

### **Give ~ Luke 6:38**

[Jesus said,] "Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back."

### **Be Generous ~ 2 Corinthians 9:6 (NIV)**

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

### **Share ~ Galatians 6:2-3**

Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.

### **Self-Reflection**

- Are there scriptural or prophetic promises spoken to me that have yet to be fulfilled?

- Have I sought out the interpretation and application of these words?
- Have I sought God in prayer about these promises recently?

**Prayer**

*Father God, I trust you have a perfect plan for my life, and your promises are true, even when they seem slow to happen. Please close the doors that are not for me, open the doors you want me to walk through, and help me trust you each step I take on this journey toward you and with you.*

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## CHAPTER 30

### *A Head-on Collision with Destiny*

*Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you. Luke 1:1–3*

One day, Barclay entered my bedroom and sternly told me that it was time for me to get a real job or I needed to find another place to live. Then he said, “Humble yourself, if need be, and apply at the convenience store around the corner.” I was concerned about returning to the marketplace because the old me that excelled as a salesman no longer existed. And on top of that, I was having all kinds of problems with the old VW sedan I was driving. Around this time, Brad Roberts asked me to give him a ride to Marble Falls so he could pick his truck up at a friend’s mechanic shop.

On the drive back to Cedar Park, I felt a wobbling from the driver’s side rear wheel. I looked over my shoulder just in time to see the back tire fly off the car in a perfect spiral and head down the hill on the other side of the road. I hit the brakes and skidded across Ranch Road 1431 into what usually is oncoming traffic. Frantic, I brought the car to a stop and drove it back to the other side of the road, leaning on its back axle. My heart palpitating, I exited the vehicle and I stood looking at the car in shock.

Suddenly a big, angry man came running up the hill, waving his fist in the air, exclaiming “That tire just missed me! You could have killed me!” Fortunately, he left it at that and walked away muttering to himself.

I prayed about what to do with the car next since Fred Blackman and others had already helped me fix its multiple breakdowns. Besides the issue of the back wheel, the AC also had stopped working, and anyone who has spent a summer in Texas without air conditioning in their car will understand my dilemma. So, Brad picked me up on his way back from Marble Falls and took me home while we had the car towed to a local auto repair shop to get the wheel fixed. When I called the shop, I discovered that the VW dealership mechanics were the only ones who could reprogram the AC computer chip.

On my way to the VW dealership, the Lord reminded me of a prophetic word that Sarah Cheikho had given to me a few months earlier: “God

showed me a vision of you standing next to a used red Mustang convertible. In the vision, you were driving a different car than what you are driving now. I sensed the Lord saying, 'I will not allow you to drive your current car any longer. If you fix it, it will keep breaking down. I want you to buy a car.'

At that very moment, as I faced a new crisis of belief (the impossibility of buying an expensive new car), Melody Meserve called me for the first and last time ever. When I shared with her what God had just spoken to me, she said, "If God told you to buy a car, that is what you need to do!"

"But you don't understand. I don't have a job and I'm broke! I'm just trying to figure out how to pay for the AC repair. How am I going to buy a car without any money?"

Melody assured me, "Just trust God to work it out."

When we arrived at the VW dealership, I asked the service manager where the used cars were. He directed me to the lot just a quarter-mile up the road. Leaving my old VW to be repaired, I walked up the road and over to the only red Mustang convertible on the lot. It was in horrible shape, so I quickly concluded that I wasn't hearing God's voice correctly. As I turned to walk back to the repair shop, a used car salesman appeared and asked if he could help me. I replied, "I thought I was here to buy a used red Mustang, but I guess not, because this car is in really bad shape!"

The salesman responded, "Have you ever considered buying a VW EOS hardtop convertible?"

"I'm sure I can't afford that!" (When I used to make six figures, the old me seriously considered buying a \$75,000 Lexus hardtop convertible.)

The salesman replied, "You'd be surprised."

While I was test-driving the new car, I received a phone call from Chris Wooten, a relatively new friend that I had met at church that I was mentoring. He had just called me out of the blue to say hello and had just finished his shift at a car wash just a few blocks away. Sensing that this was a God-ordained meeting, I picked him up in the new VW and brought him back to the dealership while I worked out the details of buying the car. The whole time everything was unfolding, Chris kept shaking his head in disbelief, saying, "I can't believe you're buying this car without a job or any money!"

Well, I signed what amounted to a \$24,000 debt. Since I didn't have any money, I traded in my old sedan to waive the first two car payments. I knew I would crash and burn if God didn't help me find employment by the third month when my first \$349 car payment would come due.

But, true to his word, a few weeks later, the Lord provided me with a sales job with Knight Security Systems that included a \$700 per month car allowance, which covered my car payment, insurance, and maintenance with some left over for good measure. Praise God!

# *A Teaching Moment*

## **The Greatest Adventure of My Life**

*Following the Holy Spirit for twenty-plus years has been the most incredible adventure of my life. It's never been boring! I've moved fifteen times in twenty years (2003–2023). Ten of those moves were provisional moves around the Greater Austin area. It would have been nothing short of impossible to buy a VW EOS without a job or money, or to live a missionary lifestyle with little support except for the magnitude of God's faithfulness.*

## **His Supply ~ Philippians 4:19–20**

And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.

## **Fix Your Gaze ~ 2 Corinthians 4:17–18**

For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

## **Provision ~ 2 Corinthians 9:8**

And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.

## **Self-Reflection**

- Do I have a crisis of belief regarding trusting God's promise to supply all my needs?
- How are the stories in this book impacting me so far?
- Have you considered documenting your own stories in a journal to encourage others?
- Meditate on Matthew 6:25–26 and other Scriptures in this chapter to build your faith.



## CHAPTER 31

### *The True Vine and Branches*

*[Jesus said,] "I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I gave you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you." John 15:1-4*

I was excited when I secured a sales position with Knight Security Systems on January 3rd, 2011. For the first time in eight years, I had a monthly paycheck, medical insurance, and an affordable one-bedroom apartment. But, to make a long story short, I turned out to be a horrible salesman. I made one large sale to Austin Recovery and a few small sales before Knight fired me ten months later. Although I didn't initially understand, I realized later that God was pruning my mindset that had been linked to my past. The great secular salesman who had broken all sorts of sales records and could sell ice to Eskimos no longer existed.

When things didn't work out at Knight, I joined a start-up company called RevLocal, launching out of Dayton, Ohio. Although I made one very large sale, which shattered belief barriers for RevLocal's salesmen, I soon realized that no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't find the passion, energy, or determination needed to succeed.

My desire to get back into sales was so I could live a more normal life since living by faith had been extremely difficult up to this point. It's hard to be in full-time ministry without financial support and appreciation from those you serve. It takes supernatural grace and humility to be a trailblazer focused on pleasing an audience of One.

The biggest unsettled issue in my mind was wondering if my life would have been better if I had gotten back into sales earlier. The Lord knew I was struggling with that thought, so while he allowed me to try it again, it turned out to be a trust issue all along.

Traveling down the narrow road that few follow, the Lord graciously reminds us to trust him to provide, according to Matthew 6:25-26.



## *A Teaching Moment*

### **The Old Man Versus the New Man Lifestyle**

*Transitioning from my old life to new has been an extreme makeover. I spent my first forty years learning how to live according to worldly principles. I've invested the past twenty-plus years learning what Jesus meant when he said, "The gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it." Matthew 7:14*

### **Fear Not ~ Matthew 6:25–26**

[Jesus said,] "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?"

### **Reconciling ~ 2 Corinthians 5:17**

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.

### **Who Can Live This Way?**

The uniqueness of my testimony represents God's calling upon my life, supernatural grace, and the message God anointed me to convey. I believe that woven throughout this book are bread crumbs you can pick up and apply to your lifestyle. You can live an abundant life, too. It is available to you through faith!

### **Self-Reflection**

- Am I living a fulfilling life?
- Am I happy just getting by and being "normal"?
- Is my identity tied to my work?
- Who am I without a job or a title?
- What if God invites me to go on a great life adventure?

- Would I be willing to go if I knew it would be extremely difficult?
- What if I knew that I would experience amazing grace, signs, wonders, and miracles and live the abundant life Christ purchased for me?

**Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, thank you for speaking to me while reading Crisis of Belief, Pathway to a Spirit-Filled Life. I am willing to take this narrow path, so help me. I want to walk by faith, so hold my hand and teach me to follow you.*

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*The Battle to Advance God's Kingdom*



## CHAPTER 32

### *The Devil Tried to Destroy Me*

*We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. 2 Corinthians 1:8–10*

I met my last ex-wife at Northland Alcoholics Anonymous on Christmas Day, 2012. The Suburban Group location is where I had learned the life skills needed to live a sober lifestyle. Occasionally, I would visit to remind myself that maintaining sobriety is essential, and to see old friends.

I was talking to a friend in the lobby, when a beautiful woman burst in exclaiming, “Life is good!” She sat next to me while we ate, and as we talked, she related that she had also grown up attending the Lutheran Church occasionally with her mother. I let down my guard, quickly became smitten, and three months later, she asked me to marry her. I agreed, but only after she agreed to pursue Christ with me passionately, attend church regularly, and to allow me to baptize her.

The following year, I unexpectedly inherited some money which enabled us to move out of our cheap apartment into a 1,150-square-foot home on Mulberry Way, next to Hill Country Bible Church Lakeline (HCBCL) in Cedar Park, Texas. Since the house came with a fenced-in backyard, we bought two Chihuahuas who continue to bless me tremendously with unconditional love and unique companionship.

After careful prayer, we became members of HCBCL and eventually became leaders of a small group that met at our house on Sundays. Soon afterward, the Lord connected me with Pastor Doug James and Tom Law, who oversaw HCBCL Community Impact, and Pastor Bob Gilfillan, who headed up the benevolence ministry. I soon found myself volunteering under their leadership doing evangelism outreach and creating free promotional videos for various ministries like Twin Lakes Christian Compassion Resource Center, as they couldn’t afford a videographer.

It was a difficult year in many respects; my wife’s son’s best friend committed suicide, while another close friend was killed in a rock climbing ac-

cident just a month later. Not long after, the father of one his friends was killed when a car ran a red light and hit his motorcycle head-on. With one tragic death after another, my wife began to spend too much time with her single girlfriends, drinking and mourning the deaths of their sons who had grown up together. Eventually, she stopped answering her phone and coming home at night, and when she finally did call, she told me she no longer wanted to be married.

I reached out to everyone I could think of who might be able to help us reconcile since she wouldn't agree to do marriage counseling with our pastor at HCBCL Church. Unfortunately, she had made up her mind and checked out of our marriage. There was nothing I could do. Later, God redeemed this tragedy (see Chapter 38, *The Best Is Yet to Come*).

After my wife left me, it felt like I had been thrown into a mixed martial arts fighting ring with the reigning MMA heavyweight champion of this world, who was determined to destroy me. Satan attacked my mind, will, and emotions by whispering accusations into my ear; "I thought you were a Christian. How can a Christian get divorced? She wouldn't have left you if you had been a better husband."

Divorce is a terrible experience. I was exhausted physically, mentally, and emotionally. I cried. I yelled. I prayed. Nothing seemed to help. Like Jesus as he hung on the cross, I sobbed, "God, why have you forsaken me?" When God didn't answer, I curled up in a tiny little ball and prayed for the Lord to take my life and put me out of my misery.

Finally, I managed to pull myself together enough to buy a used Suzuki 1200cc motorcycle. My plan was to take a trip to the Colorado Rocky Mountains to clear my head, think, and pray until I heard from God. Bad idea. Before I left, I sensed in my spirit that I needed to write a will that included a do not resuscitate medical clause.

The very next day, I packed my gear and rode from Austin to New Mexico and stopped to visit my friend, Pari Rossi. Then I rode on to Pagosa Springs, Colorado, a place with many fond memories, and stayed with Pam Schoemig and her husband, Tom. During the week, my focus was to relax, take great rides, clear my head, and spend time praying.

The following weekend, I left Pagosa Springs and rode to Montrose, Colorado. The next morning, while eating breakfast, I became friends with Jolanta Ogrodny, who owned the Western Motel. Instantly, we recognized God's Spirit within each other, and Jolanta graciously agreed to allow me to store my gear in her office when I checked out for the next ride.

That morning I cruised through the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, which was a fantastic ride. Unfortunately, things took a turn for the worse. As I was traveling 55 mph through Delta, Colorado, a car ran

a red light and hit my motorcycle head-on. The driver was charged with reckless driving and driving with a suspended license.

I don't remember flying through the air or bouncing, but I do remember regaining consciousness. The first thought I had was wondering if I was still alive. The second thought was wondering if I had any paralysis. The third thought was that I needed to get up and out of the street before someone called an ambulance since I didn't have any medical insurance.

As I began to get up, I could hear people yelling, "Stay down!" I think someone told me I flew 30 feet in the air after being hit. An angel must have broken my fall because you don't walk away from accidents like this. The police officer who responded told me I was the only survivor of five recent motorcycle accidents. The doctors told me I had six fractured ribs, a fractured shoulder, and a partially deflated lung, and though I was in extreme pain, I was very fortunate to be alive.

Jolanta picked me up from the hospital a few days later and kindly invited me to stay at her hotel for a reduced rate until I was well enough to fly home. I took the next year off to recover and spend time alone with God, praying about what to do next.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***Satan Tried to Destroy My Spiritual Destiny***

*The enemy attacks our weaknesses in spiritual battlegrounds with names like Past Mistakes, Mental Strongholds, Stupid Decisions, and the Valley of Despair. These spiritual warfare battles are God's blessings in disguise because God turns situations like these around to teach us character-building lessons and to help us break free from all types of bondage that threaten to bind us for life.*

*The accident could have taken my life, or I could have become bitter at the man who put me in the hospital. Instead, the Holy Spirit reminded me to be thankful. Then I asked others to join me in praying for the perpetrator's well-being as I lay immobilized on my hospital bed.*

### ***Purpose ~ John 10:10***

[Jesus said,] "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."

### ***Blessing Instead of Cursing ~ Luke 6:28, 31***

[Jesus said,] "Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. Do to others as you would like them to do to you."

**Self-Reflection**

- Do you feel exhausted physically, mentally, and emotionally?
- Do you feel like God has forsaken you?
- Have you felt this way before?
- How can you rise above these overwhelming feelings?

**Encouragement**

Like a storm, emotions pass and give way to sunny days. The God of hope is greater than the god of depression. Place your hope in him.

**Prayer**

*Father God, I admit I feel hopeless and sometimes I can't even explain why. I feel walls closing in on me. I feel myself sinking deeper and deeper into a pit. I will cry out to you, just like King David did in Psalm 43:5.*

*Why am I discouraged?  
 Why is my heart so sad?  
 I will put my hope in God!  
 I will praise him again—  
 My Savior and my God!  
 Until this storm in me passes through.*

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## CHAPTER 33

# *The Road to Recovery*

*Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. James 1:2-4*

Back home in Austin, the road to recovery took time and countless visits to Elite Chiropractic. During those visits, Doctor Collin Hilliard and I became friends. When my lawsuit settled, I paid off the hospital bill and did videography and internet marketing work for Collin until I worked off the amount I owed him. Afterward, he hired me to continue helping him part time, which provided the necessary income for my living expenses.

In the depths of my despair after my wife left, I had a helpful conversation with a mentor who assured me that God hadn't disqualified me from serving him. He then instructed me to "get back on the horse" and remain faithful to finish the race to claim the prize (1 Corinthians 9: 24) that awaits when Christ tells me, "Well done, my good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

Over the years, I've learned that serving others is the best way to cure what ails us. One day Rita Auerbac asked me to create a promotional video for her non-profit ministry called Bags of Grace, which serves the homeless at CUTB and Bridge of Angels, and of course I said yes.

While filming at CUTB, I met Todd Adams. One conversation led to another, at which point I learned he attended a church near where I lived and had been seeking a partner to help evangelize the neighborhood. We agreed to go prayer walking in the community on a weekly basis and God worked powerfully through us as ministers of reconciliation.

During the summer of 2014, I prayed constantly since I had plenty of free time and lacked the strength to hold down a regular job or the passion needed to get back into sales. I told the Lord I needed help paying bills and that I would be willing to sell my house and use the equity to live as a missionary overseas. Since the Lord was silent, I kept praying throughout the summer, "Lord, just tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it." It wasn't long before he answered that prayer.



One warm evening at the end of summer, Todd Adams came to visit. He said, "I love what God is doing through us, leading people to Christ every time we go prayer walking. I came over to pray with you about doing it more often." I told him that I would do whatever God wanted, and believed God had just answered what I had been praying for all summer long. Then Todd prayed for God to confirm selling my home if it was his will.

The following day, Pastor Bob from HCBCL called me out of the blue. The first words out of his mouth were, "James, are you thinking about selling your home?" Since Bob and Todd didn't know each other, I nearly fell out of my chair.

I said, "Bob, I am now."

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Do Not Disqualify Yourself**

*Sometimes life deals us hard knocks and gut punches. After this latest character development blow, I thought I would never get married again or ever succeed as a good husband. I had underestimated God's grace, redemptive power, and the purifying work of the Holy Spirit. I am happily married today to a godly woman whom God hand selected for me. Praise God!*

### **Run the Race Well ~ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadow boxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others, I might be disqualified.

### **Self-Reflection**

- What crises of belief (tests of faith) am I facing this season?
- Have I disqualified myself from serving the Lord?

### **Prayer**

*Lord, if there are any areas in which I've wrongly disqualified myself from serving you, please reveal them to me. Forgive me, Lord, if I have given up too easily. Please give me the grace and encouragement to keep moving forward and to wait patiently on your timing.*



## CHAPTER 34

### *One in a Million Odds—Wow!*

*During the forty days after he suffered and died, Jesus appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God. Acts 1:3*

During the summer of 2014, I prayed, letting the Lord know I would be willing to sell my house and use the equity to live overseas as a missionary. At the end of that summer, I sensed God answering my prayer, and I began praying for confirmation. There were over a million homes in the Greater Austin community, so this story truly highlights God's authority, influence, and sovereignty that impacts everyday life. Amazing!

I called Dow Kennedy of RE/MAX the day after God provided two confirmations to sell my Cedar Park home. After prayerful consideration, I told Dow I needed to sell it quickly, which prompted him to ask me how long I had lived in the house. When I told him I had no idea, Dow said, "Your home has greatly appreciated since you bought it. Unless you've lived in it for at least two years, you will have to pay taxes on the increase." Then he asked me again, "How long have you lived in it?" I repeated that I had no idea. After Dow looked it up, he said, "If you sell it thirty days from today, it will be exactly two years and one day." The first couple to see my home, Randy and Janie Fox, purchased it exactly thirty days later.

I had no idea where I would live or what I would do next, but I felt led to make a donation to Alan Graham who founded Community First Village, a 51-acre master-planned community that provides affordable, permanent housing and supportive services for men and women coming out of chronic homelessness. While Alan showed me the first 150-square-foot tiny home model, to my surprise, I felt led to ask him if I could live there. That is when Alan told me that some people were prayerfully considering buying fifth-wheel RVs so that they could live there as missionaries. I had no idea what a fifth wheel was, so Alan suggested that I check out the one set up close to the exit.

After praying about where to live and what to do next, including an invitation from an overseas ministry, God poured enough faith into me to put a deposit down on a brand new fifth wheel. Since the Community

First Village was in the beginning stages of construction, Alan suggested I move temporarily into a nearby RV park.

I got a great deal on a new RV which, fortunately, was loaded with upgrades paid for by someone who had canceled their order during its factory assembly. It arrived in Austin just days before I closed on my home, just as I was looking into local RV parks for a space. All of the nearby options were full and had long waiting lists to get in due to the influx of new arrivals from out of state. Frantically, I searched but couldn't find anything in Austin, so I expanded my search to include Bastrop, Round Rock, Elgin, Georgetown, and RV parks further out. With no possibilities available, panic set in.

Suddenly, I found myself facing yet another crisis of belief. I thought, "Did God really tell me to sell my home?" Quickly, I recalled that I did have three strong confirmations, then began trying to recall why I felt led to purchase the RV. Since those confirmations weren't as obvious, I got down on my knees and cried out, "Lord, I told you that I was willing to sell the house and follow you. I believed you led me to buy the fifth wheel. Did I make a mistake? Lord, I am confused. Jesus, I need your help. Show me what to do." I finished praying, got up off my knees, sat down in front of my computer, and found myself suddenly inspired to Google search—"RV park on Lake Travis, Texas." My search turned up a forty-unit RV park called Camper Resort, Lake Travis, the only one on the lake. Hope overcame my fears.

Chuck Foster, the park manager, answered the phone on the second ring. After asking me a battery of questions, Chuck agreed to interview me for the one spot that had just become available. When we finally met in person, Chuck asked me what seemed like a million different questions along the lines of, "Why should we allow you in?" (Months later, I found myself standing at Chuck's deathbed, asking a similar question about heaven: "When you die, why should God allow you in?") As the grilling continued, I wondered whether or not I would be permitted entry. Then his wife, Mary Ellen, joined us. Finally, Chuck threw his hands in the air and asked, "Tell me, why do you want to move here, and where do you live now?"

"I am selling my home and I just bought a brand-new fifth wheel which I need to move immediately."

Chuck responded, "We have a couple living here in a fifth wheel who are buying a home in Cedar Park."

I smiled, "I'm selling a home in Cedar Park."

"We found out last night that they are buying a home on Mulberry Way," Chuck continued.

“I’m selling a home on Mulberry Way,” I answered, incredulous.

Mary Ellen piped up, “Their fifth wheel is only fifty feet from here. I am texting them now to tell them to come down here quickly.”

As Randy and Janie Fox approached us, Chuck asked them, “Do you know this person?”

They looked at me and shook their heads, “No.”

“Are you buying his house?” Chuck asked.

Recognition hit, hard. Something unusual was happening. There must have been over million homes in the Greater Austin area. Randy and Janie had bought my house, and I was able to procure their spot! Incredible! Mary Ellen, a believer, recognized God’s hand in the situation, and I was welcomed into the Camper Resort RV Community.

As I was unpacking, a neighbor dropped by to introduce herself. Carolyn Parson said, “I hear you’re an ordained pastor and that you knew Pastor Duane Severance.”

“Yes, he was a dear friend,” I said, “I’m grateful that God prompted him to call me the day before he passed away so we could talk one last time.”

Caroline and I talked for a while before she asked if I would be willing to serve as a volunteer pastor at Lake Travis Crisis Ministry which she and her husband founded. I told her I would be honored since her invitation was another very strong confirmation that I was right where God wanted me to be. Praise God!

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **God’s Gift of Grace**

*The signs, wonders, and miracles that take place within these chapters remind me that God not only has a plan for my life (Jeremiah 29:11–13), but also that the preciseness of God’s pinpoint timing is very tangible. Wow!*

### **Ephesians 3:14–19**

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in Heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources, he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

**Self-Reflection**

- Does the God I believe in have unlimited resources?
- Do I believe I have a father in Heaven who loves me?
- Do I believe He can provide for me miraculously, just like the testimonies in this book?

**Prayer**

*Dear Father in Heaven, thank you for knowing all my needs and loving me with everlasting love. I come to you as your child. Help me experience your fatherly love.*

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CHAPTER 35  
*Kingdom Living—  
One Chapter at a Time*

*[Paul wrote,] “The Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it. Yet I have never used any of these rights. And I am not writing this to suggest that I want to start now. I would rather die than lose my right to boast about preaching without charge.”*

*1 Corinthians 9:14–15*

Settling into RV living, my routine consisted of volunteering at Lake Travis Crisis Ministries, praying, reading daily devotions, meditating on Scriptures, mentoring others, discipling people through Facebook, and listening to Christian worship music to keep me centered—pretty much what I’d been doing for the last twenty-plus years. During my “spare time,” I posted personal testimonies on Facebook which later became chapters in this book.

As I was praying one afternoon, the Spirit prompted me to contact Chuck Stevens. Afterward, Jess Bielby asked me to set up a prophetic ministry meeting at Chuck’s home church. Weeks later, another prophet from Salado contacted me to set up an appointment with Jess at another home church called the Watering Well.

At these gatherings, we were prophetically ministered to. Multiple prophets confirmed God’s calling on my life and prophesied that God wanted me to write a book. Incidentally, I pretty much flunked English, so writing a book was quite the monumental task. But knowing God’s anointing was upon me gave me the encouragement I needed to begin the process. Looking back, I am truly amazed at everything the Lord has helped me do, including revising the third edition of this book, which aligns perfectly with the verse in Revelation 12:11;

*“And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die.”*

This is the reason this Scripture reference is written above the mountain path on the cover of this book.

Reflecting on God's gift of grace, I'm reminded that God's timing is always perfect. It's never early or late but always precisely on time, usually at the last minute. Hopefully by now you can recognize these common threads that have been interwoven throughout my testimony. Walking by faith *is* the pathway to a spirit-filled life.

In 2016, the central Texas Memorial Day flood broke records, overflowing Lake Travis and flooding the RV camps on the Colorado river below ours. As the rising waters threatened our camp, I earnestly prayed that God would provide someone to help me move my fifth wheel to safety.

Shortly thereafter, I received a phone call from Laura Berndt Gunther. She encouraged me to pray about going on a mission trip to South Dakota, where she serves the Lakota Sioux First Nations people on the Cheyenne River and Standing Rock reservations. After some prayerful consideration, I accepted Laura's invitation and was on my way to South Dakota. Holy Spirit prompted me stop in Wichita, Kansas to see Jess Bielby, who had previously ordained me through Gospel Associations. During that meeting, I learned that I could ordain whomever the Lord chose and oversee those whom I ordained. Immediately, I thought of Laura, who works full time serving different ministries without compensation. Laura has also been a very helpful partner in editing and distributing my books within the first nations reservations.

When I arrived in South Dakota, I stayed with Laura's family and served with her in and around Mobridge and on the reservations, observing her labors, challenges, and unwavering dedication to God's work. I also met with pastors from various denominations concerning Laura's ordination, which they affirmed. Many of them came to participate in her ordination ceremony, which I oversaw. As you may recall, Laura gave me my very first Bible and a copy of the book *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby, so the significance of my ability to conduct her ordination brought great joy to my heart. Praise God!

While serving in South Dakota, Laura lined up opportunities for me to share my testimony at several churches, including one pastored by Donna Archambault, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. After the service, I learned Donna produces the only Christian radio show within a one-hundred-twenty-mile radius (KLND 89.5, Little Eagle, SD), reaching the Lakota Sioux spread over nine reservations. She's invited me to the station multiple times since where we've given away several boxes of *Crisis of Belief* through her program.

Like Laura, Donna does not seek compensation or recognition for her selfless efforts. Out of curiosity, I casually asked Donna who her ordination was through and much to my surprise, she said she wasn't yet



ordained. She confided that she experienced spiritual warfare often because many didn't think she should be leading a Native American church or hosting a Christian radio show since she had not been formally ordained to serve as a pastor.

It broke my heart that she had never been publicly honored for what God had established through her, and after seeking God and consulting with Jess, I told her it would be my honor to ordain her. Pastors from other ministries, including Pastor Laura, participated in the ordination ceremony at Donna's church a few weeks later. It was a beautiful way to acknowledge her unwavering commitment to establishing Christ's Kingdom in the community of the Lakota Sioux.

While serving with Laura, we finished the first edition of *Crisis of Belief*, and soon afterward, placed the first order for several boxes of the books to be shipped directly to Nila Campbell to hand out at a glorious tent revival we coordinated weeks later in Aztec, New Mexico.

Over the years, I've kept in touch with Pastor Laura and Pastor Donna, occasionally shipping them several thousand dollars' worth of books, funded by love offerings, to distribute freely in order to undergird and strengthen the church in their respective realms.

One day, the Lord connected me to the apostle Lucy Bona, whom he had anointed to minister to the needs of the Sudanese church in Houston, Texas. After reading the first edition of *Crisis of Belief*, she said, "I've never read a book like this." She then invited me to share my testimony with the local Sudanese Christian community. During our visit, we were able to donate a couple of boxes of books to help disciple everyone who asked for a copy. At this time, I was also able to pay someone to build our website, making it possible for thousands to download free copies of the book.

After Houston, the Lord opened a door for me to partner with Lucy to coordinate a seminar with the Sudanese church that met annually in Kansas City, Missouri. This created the perfect opportunity to bring together Pastors Donna, Laura, and Jess Bielby as guest speakers. Unfortunately, after the conference ended, Jess and I parted company after a sharp disagreement which reminded me of Acts 15:39, where Paul and Barnabas parted ways. As a result of my disappointment, I felt led to rip up my ordination papers. But, we have since reconciled, praise God!

Until then, I had believed that ordination was necessary to do ministry and to receive funding. Without ordination credentials, Christ reminded me once again that he would provide all of my needs. Here, I finally understood that everyone who becomes Spirit-filled—ordained or not—is chosen, appointed, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the great commission.

P.S. the flood didn't touch my RV!

Jesus said:

*“You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit.” John 15:16*

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **Everyone Has a Personal Testimony**

*Everyone who is Spirit-filled has a story to share with others who are lost. What was your life like before you became a Christian? What happened that drew you into Christ’s waiting arms? What is your life like now that you have a personal relationship with Christ Jesus? Share your story!*

### **Power of the Spirit ~ Acts 1:8**

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere and to the ends of the earth.

### **Preach the Good News ~ 1 Corinthians 9:16**

Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn’t preach the Good News!

### **Jesus, Take the Wheel**

I like to think I know where God is leading me, but often he only shows me the next piece of the puzzle, whispering, “Follow me.” Perhaps we would be too overwhelmed to follow if we knew everything up front. I’m sure I would, so I keep reminding myself to let go of the steering wheel and allow Jesus to drive.

### **Our Guide ~ Psalm 32:8**

The Lord says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.”

### **Guard Your Heart ~ Proverbs 4:23**

Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

### **Self-Reflection**

- Everyone has a personal testimony. What is your testimony that leads others toward Jesus?

- Write down your story and create a ten-minute and a thirty-minute version, and pray for opportunities to share it.

**Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, thank you for rescuing me from eternal death into a life of hope and purpose—my testimony. Please give me the courage to share my story with others. Let me produce fruit of lasting value as your witness (John 15:16).*

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## CHAPTER 36

# *The Ministry of Reconciliation* *—Sharing the Good News*

*[Jesus said to Paul,] “I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. Tell people you have seen me, and tell them what I will show you in the future.” Acts 26:16*

It was August before I would return to Camper Resort on Lake Travis. While I was retrieving something from my car, I happened to bump into Mary Ellen, the park manager who asked if I had heard that her husband, Chuck, was sick with age-related health issues. I replied no, but that I would pray for him. As I prayed, I became very concerned. I couldn't stop thinking about the unusual look I had seen on Mary Ellen's face. I asked the Lord if I should go to their RV to lay hands on Chuck, but since the Lord didn't answer me, I assumed that Chuck couldn't have been very sick.

Angie Presley called me a few days later while I was watching the UT football game with some friends. “I'm at the hospital with Mary Ellen. Chuck isn't doing very well,” Angie said, “Should you be here?” I told her I wasn't sure, but would pray about coming. After I hung up, everyone started talking about Chuck's condition. Silently I prayed, but didn't sense that the Lord wanted me to do anything at that time, so we finished watching the game.

While I was spending time with the Lord the next morning, he told me he wanted me to go see Chuck, but to make sure that Mary Ellen wasn't in the room. Later, she would explain to me why that had been important.

I called Angie and told her what I had heard from the Lord and she agreed to send me a text message telling me when it was OK for me to visit Chuck so we could be alone. She then informed me that Mary Ellen had been sleeping in Chuck's hospital room and that she hadn't left the hospital in two days. Angie also shared that Mary Ellen had said she planned to go back to the RV park to take a shower and change sometime later that day.

As I waited for Angie's text, I continued to pray, but she never did text me back. As I prayed, the Lord told me to be in Chuck's room at 3 p.m. that afternoon. Obediently, I arrived at the hospital at exactly 3 p.m. to find

Angie anxiously waiting in the hallway. She apologized for not texting me and said Mary Ellen had just left.

I walked into Chuck's room to find him lying in bed, awake. He asked, "Are you staying here, too?"

"No," I said, "God sent me here to pray for you and talk to you about where you will spend eternity."

After we talked about life and death and the proper interpretation of Romans 6:23, I asked Chuck, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross and that through faith in Christ, rather than works, you can receive the gift of eternal life?"

Solemnly, Chuck answered, "Yes."

Then I asked, "Are you 100% certain that God will allow you into heaven when you die?"

Again, Chuck said, "Yes."

Angie was waiting in the lobby when I left Chuck's room. Mary Ellen had called to say she was on her way back to the hospital with her son David. When they arrived, I shared the details of my conversation with Chuck and much to my surprise, Angie and Mary Ellen broke down crying at the news. Through tears of joy, they related that many friends and neighbors had been praying for Chuck's soul for years because they were concerned about his salvation.

A few days later, I received a group text from our RV community saying that Chuck's health was deteriorating rapidly. I hurriedly returned to the hospital, but Chuck had passed seconds before my arrival. The situation was sadly surreal as I watched the nurse remove the breathing apparatus from Chuck's lifeless form. Silently, and with great sorrow, I prayed as I stared into the still, sallow face. The Lord then enabled me to connect the spiritual dots between Chuck's merciless grilling concerning my admittance into Camper Resort Lake Travis and the free-will decision each of us makes determining where we spend eternity and our entry therein.

While preparing to give the eulogy for Chuck's funeral, I felt led to go to Mary Ellen's Facebook page to review the posts she had made before she ever knew he would fall ill. My jaw dropped in disbelief when I saw the two posts she made on September 2, 2015, just a couple of weeks prior to his hospitalization.

The first post she made was a question; "At your funeral, what kind of music would you want to be played?" The second post was the following poem, which comforted Mary Ellen greatly because in a prophetic way, it confirmed and assured her that Chuck was indeed in heaven with God in the company of the saints.

## ***As I Sit in Heaven***

*As I sit in heaven and watch you everyday,  
I try to let you know with signs I never went away.*

*I hear you when you're laughing, and watch you as you sleep.  
I even place my arms around you to calm you as you weep.*

*I see you wish the days away, begging to have me home.  
So I try to send you signs so you know you are not alone.*

*Don't feel guilty that you have life that was denied to me.  
Heaven is truly beautiful, just you wait and see.*

*So live your life, laugh again, enjoy yourself, be free.  
Then I know with every breath you take  
You'll be taking one for me.*

*Poem by Hazel Birdsall*

Six days later, we held Chuck's funeral at Camper Resort. As I delivered the eulogy, it was eerie to reflect on how we had met, God sending me to Chuck's room to minister to him, and seeing who attended his funeral to celebrate his life.

If you die tomorrow, will you spend eternity with God and those you love, or will you be separated from them forever? What will people say about you at your funeral? How many people do you think would even bother to attend? Although these questions might seem direct, my father's unexpected death and countless others like his have caused me to get my affairs in order.

Approximately fifty folks, including family, friends, and neighbors showed up to celebrate Chuck's life and his acceptance of Christ as his Savior before he died. Just as it had happened at the funeral in Springfield, God blessed me with a captive audience. Afterward, Mary Ellen's daughter's boyfriend asked to meet with me privately because he was convicted by the strong evangelical message baked into the eulogy. It turned out to be a divine appointment that ended with him asking Jesus to become his Lord and Savior. Praise God!

Randy and Janie Fox not only bought my home on Mulberry Way in Cedar Park, but we became great friends. Four months after Chuck passed

away, Randy unexpectedly became sick and died. He was only fifty-eight years old. Months before his death, he had read the draft of the first edition of this book. Afterward, we sat on his back porch while he grilled me with questions for over an hour. I am so glad we had that conversation.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***This Life Is Temporary***

*We don't know when our earthly lives will end. When we die, Scripture tells us that we will either be with Christ Jesus or separated from him for eternity. Nothing compares to knowing Jesus, who taught us the greatest commandments—to love God and our neighbors. Look for opportunities to share the gospel with family, friends, and others. The best testimony is how we live.*

### ***The Greatest Commandment ~ Matthew 22:36–40***

“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

### ***Reconciliation ~ 2 Corinthians 5:18–19***

And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.

### ***Your Ministry ~ 2 Timothy 4:5***

Keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you.

### ***Self-Reflection***

- Do I have a sense of urgency to share the Good News with others so that we can be together with Christ for all eternity?
- What keeps me from sharing my testimony with others? Is it a lack of confidence?

- A great way to gain confidence is by reading your testimony out loud to yourself.

**Prayer**

*My Lord, thank you for showing me the truth that this life is short and temporary. Please give me the urgency to share the gospel with others.*

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*Godly Marriage and Perfecting the Saints*



## CHAPTER 37

### *Next Stop, Kansas City*

*[Jesus said,] “What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” Matthew 10:29–31*

A quick summary: I bought an RV, planning to live as a missionary in Community First Village in Austin to serve the homeless, but the Lord rerouted me just before I sold my home. As I sought out a decent RV park to settle in, every one in the Austin area was full. After praying desperately, a google search led me to find a spot at Camper Resort Lake Travis. Mary Ellen Foster, the park manager, recognized God’s hand at work after learning that a couple living in the RV park was buying my home on Mulberry Way (one in a million odds!).

Within days after moving into Camper Resort, God opened a door for me to serve as pastor at Lake Travis Crisis Ministry. There, a series of prophetic words inspired me to write two books, this memoir and *Sanctified: Roadmap to Redemption*, between 2015 and 2018. Minutes after I uploaded the second book to the publisher, Angie Presley and Mary Ellen Foster called to inform me that Camper Resort would be closing indefinitely. The camp’s entire septic system needed replacing, along with other extensive repairs, partly due to the Memorial Day flood.

One afternoon, as I sat in my RV at my computer, a sparrow started tapping on the window to my immediate right. The little bird tapped persistently on that glass for five straight days. Intrigued, I looked up Scripture verses on sparrows, prayed, and researched sparrows online, but nothing brought a word of God’s wisdom or understanding. Then, on the sixth day, the Lord finally spoke a thought impression into my mind. The Lord said, “If you want to know the meaning of the sparrow, go to Glory House Church on Sunday.” Many and fond are my memories of Glory House Church where I was first introduced to spiritual gifts, and since I hadn’t visited in seven years, I looked forward to attending that Sunday.

During service, many corporate prophetic words flowed through Glory House’s ministry team. Remembering the sparrow and God’s advice, I asked, “Lord, what is the meaning of the sparrow?” As I waited for God’s

reply, I realized Pastor Mark Henderson’s sermon aligned with the text message I’d been sending myself daily on God’s behalf asking, “Do you love me?”

The next words out of Mark’s mouth were, “The world has yet to see what God can do through a person completely consecrated to Him.” And right before he ended the sermon, he pulled up a slide of a sparrow with a verse out of Matthew; “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need” (Matthew 6:33).

As I prayed about whether to sell my RV or to move it elsewhere, Laura Berndt Gunther contacted me. She invited me to go with her to the International House of Prayer (IHOPKC) in Kansas City for an eight-day program called Immerse. IHOPKC’s 24/7/365 Harp and Bowl prayer, intercession, and worship is modeled after the house of prayer, temple, courts, and altar referenced in Psalm 84:1–4.

*How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O Lord of Heaven’s Armies.  
I long, yes, I faint with longing  
to enter the courts of the Lord.  
With my whole being, body and soul,  
I will shout joyfully to the living God.  
Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow builds her nest  
and raises her young at a place near your altar,  
O Lord of Heaven’s Armies, my King and my God!  
What joy for those who can live in your house,  
always singing your praises.*

I’d been to IHOPKC before, and wondered if God might be relocating me there to spend a season going deeper in prayer.

Laura kindly lined up accommodations in Kansas City for Wade Ferris and me, with Wade graciously covering the cost of the event, making it possible for me to attend. In return, I offered to drive, and after picking up Wade, we embarked on what should have been a twelve-hour drive up I-35. Unfortunately, my transmission gave out in Waco, Texas. After a tow to a local dealership, they offered us a free loaner car until I told them we were heading across state lines into Missouri. When I learned it would cost us an additional \$500 to rent a car for the week, I found myself facing yet another crisis of belief that nearly canceled our trip to Kansas

City. Since I couldn't afford the \$500, I prayed that Wade would be able to cover the rental if it was the Lord's will for us to press on. Happily, Wade pulled out his credit card and we persevered. In hindsight, this trip greatly affected our respective futures since both Wade and I later relocated to Kansas City, Missouri, and met our spouses there.

During the conference's scheduled breaks I evaluated the cost of relocating and prayed about selling my fifth wheel to raise money to keep serving full-time in ministry, and as we drove around the city during the week, Wade and I noticed the number 33 appearing everywhere. It happened so often, we started laughing every time we saw or heard the number 33. Upon my return to Austin, I called Don Vaughn, the RV Outlet Mall salesman who had sold me the RV. When I asked him how much it was worth, he said, "I can give you \$21,000 retail as it sits, but you might get \$33,000 if you sell it yourself." (33 again!)

I felt confident the Lord wanted me to move to Kansas City, so I detailed the RV in preparation for sale and spent the morning posting pictures on my Facebook profile instead of attending church that Sunday. Later that afternoon, as I prepared to post multiple ads over RV magazines to find a buyer, Mary Ellen and Angie called to tell me that they had just eaten lunch with Ken Bjork, who we knew from church. Much to their surprise, he said he had been thinking about buying an RV, so they inquired if they might bring him over to see mine. After inspecting it, he said he was interested, but not enough to give me a security deposit.

Suddenly, I found myself facing another crisis of belief as the Lord directed me to do the opposite of what common sense would dictate and told me not to advertise the RV at all, and to remove the one Facebook post saying, "If you want to get the full \$33,000, wait for Ken to buy it, and trust my perfect timing." As I waited on Ken, I sold a few things and gave away everything else I owned. I had previously collected truckloads of foodstuffs, mostly rice and beans that I gave to Pastor George Crisp who gratefully picked it up to supply four orphanages in Mexico who were in desperate need. Praise the Lord!

Since Ken still hadn't called and I was planning to move in a few days, I found someone to transport my fifth wheel to an RV park in Kansas City. While making last-minute arrangements over the phone, Ken called on the other line and offered to buy my RV for exactly \$33,000.

The following morning, I received a call from a company I had worked for informing me that I had pension money coming of which I had no knowledge, available immediately for withdrawal. Suddenly, I had all the funds I needed to relocate to Kansas City and to continue serving Christ full-time for the next four years. Praise God!

## *A Teaching Moment*

### **God's Perfect Timing**

*Whenever I recall the testimonies herein, which are spiritual markers, my faith is strengthened. I am amazed at how precise God's timing is in arranging circumstances, situations, people, and places. Although God's gift of grace is still somewhat of a mystery to me, every story is 100% genuine, and all align with God's truth found in Scripture.*

### **Seasons ~ Ecclesiastes 3:1**

For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven.

### **The Love of Christ ~ Ephesians 3:18–21**

And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

### **Self-Reflection**

- Is my faith in God growing?
- Is my intimacy with Jesus growing?
- Have I fallen in love with Him and His Word?
- Do I trust him to do amazing things in my life?
- No matter where we are today, we can grow deeper.
- Ask the Father for more faith, hope, and love.

### **Prayer**

*Dear God, I want to know and trust you more. Teach me how to love you, and help me honor your name. I am asking you to give me more faith, hope, and love.*



## CHAPTER 38

### *The Best Is Yet to Come*

*The man who finds a wife finds a treasure and receives favor from the Lord. Proverbs 18:22*

I didn't know what to think about IHOPKC before I spent a season participating in the 24/7 prayer movement. Unlike many who have said they've watched IHOPKC live stream for years before moving here, I had not. But it was comforting to find that whatever was being taught always included a handout backed by Scripture references.

When I arrived in Kansas City, I was excited and, to a degree, anxious about the unknown. As I stood in line at the coffee shop next to the Global Prayer Room (GPR), the Holy Spirit came upon me, leading to me prophesy to someone standing behind me. God then led him to connect me to Juliet Canha, a district pastor who has been part of IHOPKC for over twenty years. Juliet recognized God's anointing on my life and invited me to serve under her and her husband Randall's leadership in different capacities and connected me to the IHOPKC prophetic ministry.

One day, I felt God's prompting to drive over to the GPR to pray about serving on a prophetic ministry team. As I got out of my car, I saw Brent Smallwood coming out the front door. I hadn't seen or talked to Brent since serving on his prophetic ministry team when I lived in Springfield eight years earlier. Wow, talk about God's perfect timing! Meeting with Brent confirmed that the Lord wanted me to get back into the prophetic flow. Soon, I was serving weekly in the GPR on three different teams, allowing me to meet visitors from all over the world.

When Juliet suggested I start a friendship group in my home, I agreed, despite the challenge to form a new group when I hardly knew anyone, except Dora Wang. Dora and I had previously met at the Immerse conference as we were paired up during breakout sessions, and as I extended an invitation to my home gatherings, she would help out with the women who attended. Not long afterward, we both joined the Upper Room prayer ministry and altar ministry teams.

During that year, I never considered dating. The thought of dating anyone was the furthest thing from my mind since I still carried the stigma of my failed marriages. Like Dora, I felt led to come to IHOPKC for a season to pursue Christ, not to fall passionately in love! However, we became

great friends that year and I noticed my spirit being drawn to hers as we prayed together on different ministry teams.

Before long, I invited Dora to attend a Chris Tomlin concert with me. Afterward, she asked me if I liked her. When I admitted I did, she told me she had never married, but had dated someone for a long time. We agreed to date, but after while she told me she didn't believe in just dating any longer, which frightened me. Again, I felt like a deer, frozen in fear, in the path of an oncoming truck. The mere thought of the remote possibility of getting married again made me want to kick Dora out of our friendship group and run!

During this monumental crisis of belief transition period, prayer helped me realize that fear, rather than faith, had taken the wheel. Spending time in prayer, which restored my sanity, helped me see that unlike my other relationships, Dora was the only woman I had dated after we had already built a wonderful year-long friendship. Further, neither one of us was in the dating mode because we were each focused on pursuing a relationship with Jesus.

To Dora's credit, she did her due diligence and counted the cost before we married. Not only did she read *Crisis of Belief, 2nd edition* three times, she asked to see the last three months of my financial statements to see how responsible I was with money. We then attended premarital counseling with Juliet and Randall, who later performed our nuptials.

The Bible describes marriage as a mystery. While I don't understand the variables and dynamics which enable two Christ-centered people to mesh, I do know the Holy Spirit chose Dora for me—someone I would not have chosen for myself.

God brought us together to bless us, teach us unconditional love, strengthen our ministries, and reconcile the hurts in our respective lives. Our marriage is a blissful partnership because we both love the Lord and submit to His leadership. It's also peaceful; and though my helpmate and I occasionally engage in healthy arguments, power struggles quickly evaporate when we turn to the Holy Spirit for help. Praise God!

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***A Marriage-Worthy Partner***

*I wish my parents could have taught me the biblical lifestyle that sets the groundwork for dating and marriage, but I had to learn the hard way from my own bad choices. But God is the God of new beginnings! Today, I am happily*



*married, finally understanding God's design for marriage and the warnings thereof found in Scripture. For example, the Bible teaches us that we should not marry an unbeliever or be unequally yoked because it weakens our relationship with Christ and compromises our moral standards (2 Corinthians 6:14). On the flip side, I had character issues that needed to be resolved before I became a worthy marriage partner. After God knew he could trust me, he selected Dora Wang as my perfect helpmate. I am so grateful. I love her dearly!*

### ***The Helper ~ Genesis 2:18***

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."

### ***A Worthy Wife ~ Proverbs 12:4***

A worthy wife is a crown for her husband, but a disgraceful woman is like cancer in his bones.

### ***Be Considerate ~ 1 Corinthians 7:33***

A married man must consider his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife.

### ***The Virtuous Wife ~ Proverbs 31:10***

Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? She is more precious than rubies.

### ***Honor Your Wife ~ 1 Peter 3:7***

In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered. (NIV)

### ***Self-Reflection***

- Can I envision the traits and character of a Christian marriage partner?
- What are they?
- What adjustments need to be made to become a great husband or wife?
- Proverbs 31:13–31 describes the characteristics of a godly wife.
- Ephesians 5:22–33 describes the characteristics of a godly husband.



## CHAPTER 39

# *The Discipline of the Holy Spirit*

*God's discipline is always good for us so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward, there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those trained in this way. Hebrews 12:10–11*

After Dora and I got married, the Lord blessed our ministry which became even more fruitful. Sometimes as many as forty people crammed into our little townhouse living room for the Sunday night home group. We then became lay zone pastors and relaunched our home group at a semi-public facility. We named it the Coffee Connection and watched God expand it to eighty-two active members. Around this time, we led a prophetic ministry team and a prayer group, and trained people to serve on the prayer altar team. As I devoted twelve hours weekly to prayer, wrote the second edition of this book, and continued my Facebook ministry, Dora helped me and worked part-time at the IHOP University (IHOPU). To help pay the bills, we both cashed in our pension funds. Cowabunga!

When we first launched the Coffee Connection in 2021, Joni Ames from North Carolina was our first itinerant guest speaker. Although I had never met her before, she prophesied over me: “‘James,’ the Lord says, ‘I am releasing new formalized orders to you rolled up in a scroll with a bow wrapped around it that involves maps. There is testing coming and great treasures to be found.’ God says, ‘Everything you’ve done, you have done with determination and courage. You have been put to the test over and over, and just like Moses, you were found faithful in ALL the tests, so I know I can trust you. That is why this next adventure with Dora will open up to you. You’ve been hidden, but this time I am going to elevate you, which is necessary to accomplish everything that I am going to do through you.’ The best is yet to come.” Coincidentally, Joni had no prior knowledge of the plaque hanging on our bathroom wall that says “The Best Is Yet to Come,” and yet, it was no coincidence at all!

When God speaks a word of promise, trials often precede its fulfillment. The ministries we were leading were growing fast and we felt the need to foster intimacy by encouraging small discussion groups, but we couldn’t find anyone willing to lead them. Fortunately, God gave us the creative strategies we needed, and suddenly we had fourteen small group leaders

with eighty-two active participants. Wow! The community life in the groups was inclusive and participative: people meeting new people, fellowshiping, sharing meals, with testimonies, guest speakers, and the activation of spiritual gifts.

But everything changed after a conference call on a cold, snowy day in the middle of February 2021. Without going into all the details, we were essentially removed from our church leadership positions, even though there was nothing remotely like moral failure.

When God ‘cross’ examined our hearts, our reputations were crucified. Instead of giving into the temptation to defend ourselves, the Spirit helped us reexamine our motivations for serving the Lord and his church body. We reminded each other that our motivation is love, and our identity is in Christ, not achievements. As long as we stayed focused on pleasing an audience of One, we found the peace we needed to graduate. This very difficult test from God purified the contents of our hearts.

*My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20*

The Valley of Crucified Thoughts is where mindsets are tested by fire and are purified like gold. Accelerated growth opportunities, like what we suddenly faced, forced us to embrace Christ’s character dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit. But, we could have chosen bitterness which wounds and shipwrecks the church body under the banner of victim mentality.

As we traversed that narrow pathway which continues to grow even narrower, my wife and I reminded each other to pray for church leaders who aren’t perfect, but are nonetheless responsible for watching over our souls. Ultimately, they are accountable to God. We recognized that this test was an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to teach us greater discipline that we may mature in our spirit.

## *A Teaching Moment*

### ***Trust God’s Leadership***

*When we are corrected and perfected, humility and a pure heart are the eternal fruits that God is after. Correction is painful, but it can also be a fruit-*

*ful experience that prunes Christ's church body, so we become even more fruitful. I recommend that you read Crucified by Christians by Gene Edwards.*

**Pruning ~ John 15:2**

[Jesus said,] "He [God] cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.

**Spiritual Leaders ~ Hebrews 13:17**

Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them a reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.

**Humility ~ Philippians 2:7-10 (KJV)**

Jesus made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

**Self-Reflection**

- Have you been hurt, offended, or betrayed by a fellow Christian or church organization?
- Have you considered the possibility that God orchestrated your painful experience to help you grow in mature love?
- How does the story in this chapter relate to you?

**Prayer**

*Father God, thank you for helping me find my identity in you. Please help me to forgive others when I feel betrayed or rejected. I desire to please you, so I ask that you help me align myself in humility under the authority you've put in place, and examine my motives for serving your church body.*

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## CHAPTER 40

# *Fulfilling Our Calling to Be Witnesses*

*Timothy, my son, here are my instructions for you, based on the prophetic words spoken about you earlier. May they help you fight well in the Lord's battles. Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. 1 Timothy 1:18–19*

During this correction and perfecting season, Dora and I took advantage of Christian inner healing counseling sessions offered through Fore-runner Church which helped us process what had happened at IHOPKC, bringing us closer together. We wrote this third edition of *Crisis of Belief*, which we hope will impact many lives, and we took a vacation revisiting some of our favorite places in Colorado.

While enjoying the hotel hot tub at one location, a young man joined us who was covered in tattoos. The Holy Spirit led us to share the gospel with him, after which he invited the Lord to dwell in his heart. We baptized him right then and there, a glorious experience that Dora and I will always cherish. After encouraging him to join a local Bible-based church, we gave him a copy of *Crisis of Belief*, 2nd ed. Praise God!

During a transitional season, we continue to experience God at work around us, enabling us to grasp the God-ordained opportunities to become Christ's hands, feet, and voice to those he placed in our path. And we continued to reflect on recent personal prophetic words spoken over us based on 1 Corinthians 14:1-5, including one by Marshall Edwards which this book partially fulfills.

“James, I saw you in your quiet time. Armor clothing came upon you while praying and reading your Bible, as described in Ephesians, chapter 6. The breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, feet fitted with the swiftness of the gospel of peace, the belt of truth, shield of faith, sword of the Spirit, and the cloak of zeal that the book of Isaiah mentions. You dived through the Bible onto a lush hillside. There was an army behind you, and you were the captain that led them into war. You gave the war cry before rushing down into a battle.

“Although it will be difficult, you will overcome it as you fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. Through Jesus, you will overcome. And connected to that is Revelation 12:11. ‘They have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and their testimony. And they did not love their

lives so much that they were afraid to die.”

Recently, we received a dramatic personal prophecy related to this book. On the evening of April 9th, 2021, Prophet Christ Reed, who pastors Morningstar, and moves powerfully in the prophetic realm with accurate words of knowledge, visited IHOPKC/ Forerunner Church for the first time. After preaching a sermon on the fear of the Lord, he ministered to people individually. Although my wife and I weren't there, and we weren't watching the livestream broadcast, Chris called out my phone number before the IHOPKC community, inviting whoever owned that phone number to respond.

What unfolded for us began days earlier after I received a surprise phone call from Kirkland Mann. I didn't know Kirkland, but we talked two days before when he called to inquire about attending our friendship group. Kirkland was sitting in the audience when Chris called out my phone number. Suddenly a thought impression came to him, which led him to pull my number back up on his phone. After he dialed my number, our call dropped, so I called him back. After Kirk answered his smartphone, he handed it to Mike Bickle, who held the phone so that Chris Reed could simultaneously speak into the telephone and microphone during that night's live broadcast.

A portion of my phone conversation with Chris went as follows:

Chris: "Apostle Paul was close to Timothy. Does that mean anything to you?"

James: "My middle name is Timothy."

Chris: "You've been on a divine journey with the Lord, but he is taking you further to apply the gifts of the Spirit and even the Spirit of counsel and might, to heal people suffering from anxiety, depression, and PTSD. I see you digging for gold with Dora 'The Explorer.' Does that mean anything to you?"

James: "That's the nickname my wife Dora's family in Singapore gave her!"

Crowd: "Ahh...ahh..." (Clapping)

Chris: "I see you digging for gold and picking up stones from the riverbed that you will use to build a testimony once you get to the other side. Don't doubt it. Only believe that in this journey, you will learn things you would have never learned on your own. From these stones, you will build a memorial to the power of God and the people he heals through your life who are suffering from anxiety, depression, and PTSD."

*To hear the prophetic word in full, go to YouTube "The Fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11) Guest speaker Chris Reed on April 9, 2021" at the two-hour mark, or copy and paste <https://youtu.be/e0TktAXPYNI?t=120m39s> into your browser.*

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

*Crisis of Belief* is my testimony. It documents what I've witnessed, experienced, and learned firsthand while living as a missionary in America for the past twenty-plus years. Every disciple of Christ will experience crisis of belief challenges throughout their faith journey since the narrow path is unpredictable. God doesn't tell us where he is leading us, how long each new season will last, where our finances will come from, who we will meet along the way, or when we'll arrive.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (NIV)

I've experienced overwhelming joy in learning, serving, and participating in the growth of God's Kingdom. Nothing gives this temporal life greater meaning than being citizens of God's Kingdom and partnering with Christ as a pilgrim passing through this age. Jesus never promised that being a Christian would be easy, but he did promise us he would never leave us nor forsake us.

### **Self-Reflection**

- Make a list of everyone you would like to spend eternity with. If you've benefited by reading this book, we hope you will prayerfully consider sending each person either a print version or a free electronic copy which can be downloaded at [crisisofbelief.com](http://crisisofbelief.com).

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, fill me with your Spirit. Teach me how to be your disciple. Let my life be a blessing to others that fulfills the two great commandments and the great commission. And point out the people that you would like me to share this book with. In Jesus' name, I pray!!*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### *James Butt and Theodora Wang*



James and Dora are missionaries living in the Kansas City, Missouri, area who serve the local church. Our non-profit includes a discipleship book and social media ministry to build, equip, and strengthen the end-time church. We look forward to the day when we will hear Jesus say, “Well done, my good and faithful servants. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!” (Matthew 25:21).



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A window will open up and invite you to rate the book from 1 to 5 stars and then write a headline and a brief review—and it really can be brief! Most readers want to know whether you liked the book or not. And if so, why? No need to be fancy. If you want to elaborate, that’s great!

Thank you,

*James Timothy Butt*

A scenic view of a mountain valley with a winding road and a small town in the distance. The mountains are covered in lush green vegetation, and the sky is filled with soft, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

## A Peace that Transcends Understanding

“Upon finishing James' autobiography, I was filled with great peace. If you are a believer, your faith and trust in our Lord will be strengthened and deepened as you read this book. You will be reminded of all God has done in your life, just as He's done in James' life. If you are a seeker or a new believer, rest assured that the same Jesus that time after time heard James' fervent prayers is your Savior too. The Lord came alongside James, spoke to him, comforted him, set up divine appointments, and provided the grace and mercy James needed in every situation. That's the God we serve! As we go through life, we may not get it perfect, but the good news, as James can attest, is that God can cause all things to work together for good. He just needs to have our hearts. Thank you, James, for being so open and honest with your story.”

*Cary Martin—Husband, Elder, Father, Servant*