

I AM

“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’” Exodus 3:14 ESV



THOMAS BLACK

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Each event or story in this book has been recalled and retold to the best of my ability and recollection. Each event or story is true. No event or story has been imagined, fabricated, embellished, exaggerated, sensationalized, or dramatized in any way, shape, or form.

NOTE: The content contained in this book is for entertainment purposes only, and is not intended as advice and should not be relied upon or acted upon. Any conclusion formed from any content in this book is entirely the reader's.

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Note: Chapters and events are not in chronological order.

God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And He said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" Exodus Chapter 3 Verse 14 ESV

"Then shalt thou call, and the LORD will answer: thou shalt cry, and He shall say, 'Here I am.'" Isaiah Chapter 58 Verse 9a KJV

Chapter 1

Questions Answered

After reading my book *Ten One-Dollar Bills*, friends and church members approached me with questions. Here are most of those questions . . . and my answers.

How is the relationship with your birth mother? For the first couple of years my family and I would meet Nona and her daughter (and once with her children) at the Fatz Café restaurant in Clinton, South Carolina. And for many years she came to my house in Blythewood and enjoyed a Christmas meal and exchanged gifts. Cynthia and I have also visited her and her husband, Rick, in their home in Taylors. Our relationship has continued to be a blessing for both of our families.

Have you been back to Nicaragua to walk across the bridge? No, I have not. But my church's mission team leader at the time, Mike, has walked across it. But everyone can virtually walk across it thanks to Milosz with Bridges to Prosperity who shared his video of the bridge's opening celebration with the community. The video is on my website: www.tenonedollarbills.com

What is your most memorable comment? A church member had finished reading the book's second chapter while in the middle school's car rider line when her son got into the car and asked, "Mom, why are you crying?" She immediately stated, "Thomas' book is not about building a bridge . . . it is about faith."

At the end of chapter twenty-seven what do you mean by the statement, "God moved"? I meant that after everyone heard the sound of the rope snapping and then seeing the cable plummeting off the front of the far-side foundation (except for the end of the cable), and after getting to the other side of the river seeing the cable still secured to the rope, my initial thought was *God moved* . . . or, God intervened. However, years later after rethinking through the events of that day, I am certain that after tying the rope to the end of the cable, the men mistakenly pulled the excess cable to that far-side of the river and secured this excess cable with a piece of rope – which is the rope that broke when we began pulling the cable at the near-side foundation. The first rope tied to the cable did not break.

Is there anything you wish you had added in the book? At the end of the last paragraph in chapter twenty-seven I would have added, “And God also moved in the hearts of the people who donated their time and money in support of the bridge fundraising. Thank you.”

When are you going to write another book? This is *the most* asked question. I published my second book, *Lord, Increase My Faith*, in 2017. It contains more individual, faith-based stories. I also wrote a third book, *The Treasure*. And now my fourth book, *I AM*.

How did you find time to write a book? On weekday mornings I would wake up at 5:00 AM and type for an hour or more. On Saturdays and Sundays, I would type for seven or eight hours. Then I took a week of vacation to finish the rough draft.

AMAZON BOOK REVIEW: “Loved the idea of Thomas building a bridge for a small community in Nicaragua. I wish the book was more about the people he was aiding and less engineering jargon. Have to admit I skipped quite a few pages about rocks, sand, and measurements, and levels, and tools, etc. I am sure it would make a great gift for an engineer.” An Internet search will reveal books written by other authors about the Nicaraguan people and their customs.

Was your prayer answered for one person to hear about the need for a bridge and to feel led to fully sponsoring a bridge? Yes, that prayer was answered when one person contacted me and later handed me a check for \$25,000 to fully sponsor a pedestrian bridge for a community in Nicaragua.

Is the picture on the front of the book the bridge built in Nicaragua? Yes, it is! Milosz, who worked for Bridges to Prosperity at the time, took it. I had asked Milosz to take a photo that could be used for the front cover of my book.

Was any other prayer answered after the book was completed? Yes, a prayer for a high school classmate, who during that time was not a “believer,” to hear about my book and to read it. After being featured as a new author in the Clemson World magazine’s *Winter 2013* edition, I received an email from this classmate, telling me he saw my picture, the article, and downloaded my book.

Finally, told to me by a fellow Gideon who was handing out New Testaments at the dump in Nicaragua. He asked a young boy what he wanted to do when he grew up. That boy looked straight into his eyes, “I want to make a difference.”

Chapter 2

A Family Name

From my first book, *Ten One-Dollar Bills*: Then on Monday, July 18th (2011), as I shared the news with several co-workers about the bridge being completed, I got a phone call from the agency that had been searching over two years for my birth mother . . . they had located and spoken with her! At that moment, it was almost like the Lord was saying, “Thomas, you’ve been faithful to the cries of MY people . . . and now, here is YOUR blessing.”

After exchanging weekly e-mails over a two-month period, my birth mother and I had finally agreed on a day to meet. We chose to meet at a restaurant near Rock Hill. Though Nona had already answered all the questions I had asked, I still had several specific questions surrounding my adoption. Most importantly, I wanted to see if I looked like her.

When she saw me entering the restaurant, a wide smile immediately came on her face. We gave each other a short, friendly hug. The server seated us at a nearby table.

As Nona looked over the menu, this gave me a chance to unnoticeably look over her face. I had so many of her facial features. To be sitting directly across from my birth mother was truly a blessing given to me from God for having faith and helping His people build the footbridge in Nicaragua.

Then, for some unknown reason, she asked me about my name. I told her that I was named after my adoptive father, Thomas Black. She continued the conversation by making the statement, “My daughter asked me if I had told you something.” She reached and retrieved a large book from her bag.

Nona explained that this book was compiled by Sharon Presbyterian Church in Charlotte. She opened it to a pre-marked page. There on the page, below a photograph of an older man, was the name “THOMAS BLACK.” As I continued staring at the page, Nona smiled and said, “That’s my grandfather—your great-grandfather.” Under his name was the sentence, “Elder, Superintendent of

Sunday School for 24 years.” I smiled, because for several years I was the Sunday School Director at Jones Crossroads Baptist Church in Lancaster.

On the right side of the page was an up-close photograph of a historical marker. I began reading it, “In 1907 on the surrounding 96 acres, Thomas Franklin Black and his wife, Ida Parks Graham Black . . .” I immediately paused, looked up at Nona, and stated inquisitively, “Graham?” Nona looked straight at me, “Yes, Billy and I are second cousins.” There was a moment of complete silence as I continued looking into her eyes, trying to fully comprehend the words I had just heard.

Nona then explained that her grandmother (her mother’s mother) and Billy Graham’s father were sister and brother. I was simply amazed as I smiled towards the ceiling. *Wow, I am cousins with Billy and Franklin Graham. Now . . . who would believe this?* I wondered. That statement seemed to resonate in my thoughts all throughout my first book, “Ten \$1 Bills.” Whether people believed all the events surrounding the bridge construction in Nicaragua or not, no one could ever say *this* was a coincidence. God had a plan for my life from the very beginning.

Author’s Comments: On page 10 of Billy Graham’s autobiography, *Just As I Am*, he mentions taking family vacations “. . . with Aunt Ida and her husband, Tom Black, and their several kids, including cousin Laura, who was more like a sister to us.” Rev. Graham’s cousin Laura is Nona’s mother, who is my biological grandmother.

Now, an interesting fact I recently learned about my first and middle name, Thomas Spratt. Thomas Spratt (no known family relation) was among the earliest European settlers in York County, South Carolina, inheriting land from his father, Thomas Spratt (or Sprot), who had purchased it in 1750 located near what is now Fort Mill, South Carolina. My dad’s family had settled in Richburg, South Carolina, which is a half-hour south from Fort Mill.

And as of this writing, ‘Spratt’ as a middle name has been passed down several generations in my dad’s family, originally given to my great-grandfather, Samuel Spratt Black (1885 - 1975), then to his son, Leonard Spratt Black (1910 - 1984), then to his son, my father, Thomas Spratt Black (1933 - 2015), then to me, Thomas Spratt Black, Jr. (1969 -), and now to my son, Jordan Spratt Black. My Uncle Robert told me that when he would visit Grandpa Samuel, pulling into his driveway, he would see him in the upstairs window, seated, reading his Bible.

Chapter 3

Unexpected Blessings

During the summer months of August and September of 2011, when I wasn't typing an e-mail to Nona, I was fervently typing another chapter for the book I had started to write. I would often type all-day on Saturday and Sunday just to be able to e-mail my pastor a new chapter on Monday. But even though my pastor was a great editor, I knew the need for a professional editor was inevitable. I had prayed and even posted a message on my Facebook page requesting help, but no answer came. It wasn't until I attended a conference in Charleston that I would receive the answer.

On the Monday night of the conference there was a nice, sit-down dinner in the hotel's main ballroom. This was a time for everyone to relax and simply enjoy some candid conversation. Entering the large room, I noticed that almost everyone else was already seated. I quickly glanced over the people at all the tables before choosing to sit at the first one.

One of the conference's instructors started the conversation by telling of his hobby of writing short screen plays, acting, and filming them, and uploading the video to the Internet. I followed by sharing of my new hobby of writing a book about my involvement in building the footbridge in Nicaragua, and now the need for a professional editor. All at once the spouse of one of the conference attendees spoke up, stating that she was a graduate student at a university in Indiana studying to be a professional editor. Before our conversation ended that night, Amanda had learned enough about the book and seen my passion for the story that she agreed to edit the book . . . for FREE.

The month of September would surprisingly bring even better news, as I learned that the South Carolina Living magazine's staff had unanimously chosen the bridge project in Nicaragua to be one of the three featured mission stories in the October issue. There will be a full five-page article and photographs highlighting philanthropic work by electric cooperative members and employees. I was ecstatic because this magazine is mailed out to almost 500,000 homes and

businesses across the state of South Carolina, which would not only spread the need for pedestrian bridges in developing countries, but more importantly, the need for monetary donations.

That night I e-mailed Nona to let her know about the article to be included in the October issue of her electric cooperative's magazine. She shared the excitement in her reply, but more importantly, she was happy that her daughter Suzanne would be able to read about someone she knew or would soon know. In fact, it wasn't long after the article was printed that Nona and I were scheduled to meet again, this time near Simpsonville so that Suzanne and I could meet each other.

On the day of our meeting, I took the whole day off from work. I in no way wanted to be rushed—or even late—for our afternoon meeting. In fact, I decided to meet one of my best friends from high school, Dave, for an early lunch in Simpsonville. This would put me within a short driving distance from Mimi's Café.

That morning Dave and I sat and talked for well over an hour, him about his new job and me about my life-changing mission work and the book I was writing. The more I talked, the wider his smile seemed to get. Then I shared the exciting news of finding my birth mother and showed him the small photo book Nona had given me at our first meeting. It was filled with pictures of her brothers and sister, her grandchildren, her son Kirby, and her daughter Suzanne. Then we shared more about our own families, our teens' afterschool activities, and our faith. Before I realized it, the time had passed, and it was time for me to leave.

I arrived at the restaurant early so I could enjoy reading a book while I waited for Nona and Suzanne to arrive. I sat outside on the patio located near the front of the restaurant. It was a little breezy, but the sunshine was just enough to gently warm the fall air. After about ten minutes of reading and relaxing, I decided to poke my head inside the restaurant's front door to see if Nona had also arrived early; she had not. I told the hostess where I was seated, and if she could have someone bring me a glass of water.

Returning to my table outside, a gentleman came over to greet me. Oddly enough, he was wearing a sweatshirt with a large orange tiger paw on the front. After exchanging brief introductions and the coincidence that we both graduated from the same university, I then explained to him who I was waiting for. A big

smile came upon his face. As the server sat down my glass of water, the gentleman asked me if he could buy me something else while I waited. I kindly acknowledged his generosity with a polite smile and a “no thank you.”

A short time later Nona walked up from the parking lot. She greeted me with a big smile and a hug. This was only our second face-to-face meeting, so seeing her brought a big smile to my face as well. As she sat down, the gentleman who had spoken to me earlier happened to come out of the restaurant, apparently looking for his date. Now seeing Nona, he came over and somewhat shared in our reunion and offered to buy us something to drink or an appetizer. Again, I declined his offer, figuring he was just trying to be nice. With the evening sun now beginning to set, Nona and I both agreed that it was time to continue our conversation inside.

Walking inside, I excused myself to take a phone call from Cynthia. Upon returning, I noticed Nona had already been seated and had ordered an appetizer. I was somewhat surprised when Nona said the server told her it was sent compliments of a friend and pointed to the man seated on the other side of the room. I took a quick glance over and saw that it was the same gentleman who had offered earlier. Nona reassured me that he was just trying to be nice and share in our excitement. I agreed. But before I could even order a glass of tea, the server returned with two glasses of wine—compliments of the same gentleman.

Nona and I continued our conversation by talking about the book I was writing and some of the many stories that would be included in it. After I finished telling the story of the ten one-dollar bills, we both had tears in our eyes. Then we discussed the recent article published on the bridge project that was in the South Carolina Living magazine, and how I hoped and prayed that the story would encourage people to give towards the building of the next bridge.

Then a thought came to my mind, and since Suzanne had not yet arrived, I asked Nona if I could leave her alone for about five minutes. I briefly explained what I planned to do; she smiled and told me to go ahead. What I was about to do was heart-felt, and not something I wanted or needed to do to impress my birth mother.

I ran out to my truck and grabbed one of the extra copies of the South Carolina Living magazine. Entering the restaurant, I had no idea what I was going

to say or how this was going to turn out. I tried to shake off my nervousness by saying a short prayer and taking few slow, deep breaths. My next step would be a complete step of faith. I knew that faith was ME taking the first step . . . so I did.

I slowly walked over to the table where the gentleman was seated. I first thanked him for the appetizer—just to “break the ice.” Then I held the South Carolina Living magazine in front of him and opened it to the article on the bridge in Nicaragua. He grasped the magazine and began to study the photos as I began to give a brief explanation of the article; his friend also listened.

“My name is Thomas Black, and I am a Christian. Two years ago, my church sponsored a pedestrian walking bridge to help two communities in Nicaragua, because during the rainy season they cannot safely cross the river for several days. My church mission team worked with Bridges to Prosperity, who helped design and supervise the bridge construction. I was the project coordinator and spent three separate weeks at the bridge site performing the initial survey, getting the construction started, and helping pull the steel cables across the river. I now want to build another bridge for another community.”

I paused briefly to judge his reaction. Before I could continue, he broke the silence with, “I’m going to make a donation.” I was stunned to say the least. I showed him my church’s address at the end of the article, but I didn’t expect him to make a donation, just to share the need for these bridges with others. I thanked him again for the generosity he had shown to me and my birth mother, shook his hand, and returned to my table.

Nona instantly asked me how the conversation went, and if he liked the article in the magazine. The smile on my face probably gave away the answer to both of those questions. I told her that he liked the story and even made a comment about making a donation. She marveled at that statement.

We had almost finished the appetizer and basket of bread when our new friend came over to give us well wishes. Nona thanked him for being so nice. He said that he just liked doing nice things for other people, as he placed his checkbook onto the edge of the table. “Now who do I make this check out to?” he asked. “Sandy Level Baptist Church,” I replied, noticing that he had already signed and dated the check. I quickly turned away as he began to fill in the amount, but not before seeing the first number he wrote was a “5.”

I knew I had mentioned to him Vision 2012, which is 500 people giving \$50. After he finished, he folded and handed me the check and said that he would share the bridge article with his friends and maybe get a few more donations. I thanked him again as he turned and walked away. For a moment, Nona and I just looked at each other, amazed at what had just taken place. A complete stranger, hearing about the need for walking bridges for the first time, making a donation.

Nona and I both looked down at the same time at the folded check that I firmly held between my two fingers. Nona whispered me the question I was thinking, “How much did he give?” I slowly unfolded the check, glanced down, and showed her the amount—only because I could not catch my breath quick enough to tell her. The check was made out for \$500.

Chapter 4

My Salvation Testimony

Entering Sandy Level Baptist Church's fellowship hall for the Church Assessment Team's member-sharing meeting, I was not surprised to see the other church members seated and ready to begin. An email had informed me, other than answering questions, I would be asked to share my salvation testimony.

In the farthest corner of the room were four long tables arranged as a square, such that everyone was facing the center and each other. The chairs were arranged to allow for an empty chair between each participant, or what is referred to as "social distancing." I quickly took the first empty chair I came to. Tony and Danielle were seated to my left and Pastor Hanley to my right.

David and Joe introduced themselves as moderators for the evening's meeting. A short prayer was said, and David instructed each person to share their name, how many years they had been a member of the church, and their salvation testimony. Pastor Chris went first. And on-and-on it went around until there were only three people remaining: Tony, Danielle, and myself.

I felt a sigh of relief when David called on Danielle. I knew Tony would be next. I still had time in my mind to put together the timeline of events in my spiritual journey. And finally, it was my turn. And I began . . .

I grew up, in my early school-aged years, in Sumter, South Carolina, where my dad was a jet engine mechanic at Shaw Air Force Base. It was June and my cousin, Will, came to stay with me for a week – to celebrate my birthday. It was during that week that a neighborhood friend, Chris, had walked over to my house.

Chris, though only seven years old, was hard of hearing. So as Chris and I finished talking, Will loudly proclaimed, "Tommy does not believe in God." I do not remember any reaction from Chris, or any other words spoken by Will, but those words made me feel confused and embarrassed. I did not know how to respond, so I began talking about something else. I was just six or seven years old at the time.

Weeks later, while my mother was painting in her ceramics shop, a single-wide trailer directly behind our house, I remember sitting in the hallway on the metal grates of the built-in floor oil furnace. Directly in front of me was a flimsy, three-shelf metal bookcase. A set of Funk and Wagnalls encyclopedias practically filled the entire bottom shelf. On the top shelf were a couple of picture frames and other knickknacks and what-nots, including a small wooden box with the words “cuss box” printed on the front – with a narrow slot at the top to insert coins; my parents cussed.

The second shelf was filled with books covering all types of subjects. Wedged tightly between all of those books was a black, softcover book. Gently spreading the other books apart with one hand, I reached in and grabbed firm hold of it. I was careful not to pull any of the other books off the shelf. I stared for a moment at the words printed on that book’s front cover, “Holy Bible.”

I opened it and quickly scanned over the Table of Contents, fumbled through its pages, read a few sentences, and then quickly closed it. I carefully placed it back exactly where I had removed it. For some reason I was afraid of getting into trouble reading it. I wanted to learn more about God, but my parents never showed me that Bible. They never took me to church. Thinking back now, my cousin never told me anything about God either.

At night, my mom or dad would come into my room and tell me goodnight, always followed by, “Say your prayers.” And I would. My mom taught me this children’s model prayer, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep . . . and if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen.” I remember one night praying for lots of different animals, because I had heard a child on television do the same.

The next school year at Cherryville Elementary School the second graders were chosen to put on a play about Noah’s Ark. I do not remember the story line, but I do remember my part of helping “build” the boat by using a small hammer and banging on the large cardboard cutout of a boat. Many of my other classmates portrayed the animals. I learned from the other kids that this was a story from the Bible, but I could not have told you where to read it.

Author’s Comment: The story of Noah’s Ark and the great flood is recorded in Genesis, the first book in the Bible, in Chapter 12.

Another Bible story I remember hearing about in elementary school was that of David and Goliath. One day my teacher asked the class, "Does everyone know where to find the story about David and Goliath?" The whole class shouted out, "The Bible," except for me . . . "a Saturday morning cartoon." The only David and Goliath I knew was a Saturday morning television show which featured a young boy, David, and his large dog, Goliath. I got an odd look from the teacher, and from the other kids, too.

My mother drove me to elementary school every day. I would always stare at a church as we passed by it. Occasionally I would get brave enough to mention to my mother about wanting to go. And one Sunday we actually went. Being only seven years old, I do not remember anything about the worship service, only my mother telling me as we were leaving, "We are not going back." And, for whatever reason, we never did. And I never asked to go to church again.

Years later, after my dad retired from the Air Force, my family moved from Sumter to mom's hometown of Great Falls. She had a sister (Aunt Jo) and brother-in-law (Uncle Bob) who lived in Lancaster. Aunt Jo and Uncle Bob were founding members of Jones Crossroads Baptist Church. We began attending. It was a small membership church located about fifteen miles from our house in Great Falls.

Fast forward five years. I am riding in the back seat of my family's car leaving the Black family's Fourth of July celebration at Lake Wateree. I could feel the car's side-to-side movements as dad maneuvered around the tight curves on the loose gravel dirt road. As dad accelerated more going into the next curve, I felt the car lose traction and begin to slide towards the ditch. I got scared and cried out, "Dad, slow down! I am not saved yet." Both of my parents' heads immediately turned and looked in the back seat at me. The previous Sunday at church each of them had gone forward and got saved.

Author's Comment: Saved means accepting Jesus as one's personal Lord and Savior, and one day going to Heaven.

Later the next week the doorbell rang. Dad went and opened the door. From the carport walked in Pastor Hefley and my cousin, Tony. I sat down on the coach, with Tony and Pastor Hefley sitting on each side. I remember answering the questions asked by the Pastor, the last one if I believed Jesus is the Son of God and died on the cross for my sins? Of course, I answered yes.

At the beginning of the next school year, my ninth-grade teacher, Mrs. Nix, asked with a big smile, "Thomas, tell the class what you did exciting this summer." Everyone who heard her stopped talking and looked at me . . . and I froze. Knowing she was the pastor's wife at my Aunt Gail's church in Winnsboro, I knew she wanted me to say, "I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior." Instead, I stared back at her and said nothing. After several more seconds and sensing I felt uncomfortable answering her question, she simply smiled and said, "Its ok."

Once after a pep rally, the Assistant High School Principal, standing in front of a small group of boys, asked for someone to tell him who picked up the money from the bleacher. Shawn looked and pointed at me, "Ask him, he will tell the truth . . . he is a Christian." I immediately shook my head and said, "No . . . I am not." My remaining high school years I wore a religious mask when out with my best friends and at church. For years I fooled everyone – but not God. He knew my heart.

Then one night at the age of nineteen, while sitting home alone, I started thinking about my life, where it was going, church, and God. I was "saved" as a younger teen but knew I had simply gone through the motions. It was a decision made because it was the right thing to do at the time. It was what my parents wanted. It made them and other people happy. Now, kneeling on the living room floor, I began to pray.

At this moment, I stopped and tightly closed my eyes, holding back the tears building up in my eyes. Everyone in the meeting was silent. A minute went by before I continued.

I poured my heart out to God. I asked for forgiveness for all the times I denied being a Christian. (The tears now flowed freely down my face in front of everyone.) I invited Jesus into my heart and life. I was sincere this time. It was real this time. I was saved.

"And you are a Gideon, too!" Danielle quickly interjected with a bright smile. Tony, her husband, turned and gave her a quick look. I wiped the tears from my face, smiled over at them, and continued my testimony.

From there I finished my engineering degree at Clemson University, got married, moved to Blythewood, and joined Sandy Level Baptist Church in 1999. Ten years later I attended our church's Nicaraguan mission team meeting and later went to Nicaragua to help build a walking bridge for two communities. I authored a book, Ten One-Dollar Bills, telling my whole faith journey. And finally in 2013, while promoting that book, I was approached about joining the Gideons International ministry . . . and I did.

Chapter 5

God, Are You There?

In the 1980's television show 'Mork and Mindy' Mork was an alien from the planet Ork. He was sent by his superior, Orson, to study the people on Earth. To communicate his weekly reports back to Orson, he would repeat over and over, "Mork calling Orson . . . come in Orson. Mork calling Orson . . . come in Orson." He would continue this until Orson replied. As a new believer, I would often role play, just for fun, with God in an analogous manner; "God if you are there, then do this."

For my grandmother's brother, Rob McCorkle, his "God moment" came while checking a leak on top of his metal roof. It was hot and he became sweaty. Before he knew it, he was sliding down the metal roof towards the edge. Just before the edge he cried out, "Help me, Lord." He suddenly stopped! His pants had gotten caught on a nail. He believed God had saved him. Others simply laughed after they heard the story.

For me, as a teenager growing up in the small town of Great Falls, I cut grass for my neighbor, Diane, at her house to earn weekend spending money. To get to Diane's house, I would ride my dad's old Craftsman brand lawnmower a small distance on Golf Course Road, then turn right into her long dirt driveway. Her yard was not that big, and I would cut it in less than thirty minutes. It was on one such occasion during the slow ride back to my house that it began to rain. Just for fun I shouted out, "God, if you are there, please stop the rain until I get home." Needless to say, I got soaking wet. Fast forward fifteen years.

Working at my desk at work to finish a couple of last-minute tasks, it began to rain. Leaving my office and walking down the long hallway towards the exit door into the garage, I mumbled a simple statement, "God, if you are there, then do not allow me to get wet."

When I opened the door and walked into the garage area, I could hear the rain pelting the metal roof. It was deafening. I continued walking down the

concrete ramp to the rear exit door. I knew past that door there was only about thirty more feet of covered truck shed to walk under.

Exiting the building, I walked past Dennis and another lineman who were talking. To use this moment to test my faith, I knew I could not stop and talk with them. I continued walking at the same brisk pace towards my truck – which was parked another fifty feet away.

Amazingly, the closer I got to the end of the truck shed covering, the lighter the rain became. Not breaking stride, I continued the straightest path towards my truck. I took what I knew was my last “dry step” and closed my eyes, knowing the next step would result in a wet face. As I took the next step onto the wet concrete, it happened. The rain completely stopped! The chatter from my two co-workers stopped, too. For a moment they stood in complete silence.

As I continued walking to my truck, I overheard Dennis ask the other man, “Hey, wasn’t it just raining?” A big smile came on my face as I made my way to my truck, but not before feeling a single drop of water run down my right cheek. I am unsure if it was a last drop of rain or a tear. It did not matter to me, because the rain had stopped. God was there.

Another instance was when visiting my wife’s aunt and uncle in Gulf Shores, Alabama. At the beach they informed everyone that the beach was different from other beaches – it was a steeper entrance into the ocean from the beach. This was apparent as I entered the water, finding it difficult to stand straight in one place. And the waves were much stronger, too, creating a strong undertow.

Looking down at the sandy beach, I reminisced of the times on the beach at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, when my cousin, Will, and I looked for shark teeth. The teeth he would find would always be nearly perfect, while mine all looked like they had been tossed around in the ocean for years.

Looking around, I closed my eyes and quietly prayed, “God, show me you are here by allowing me to find a shark’s tooth.” I opened my eyes as the next wave crashed and rushed through my slightly parted legs. I looked down, and there tumbling between my legs, was a shark’s tooth! I quickly bent down and picked it up. The tooth was perfect and unblemished; it was beautiful. In fact, it is the one I am holding in my hand on the front cover of this book.

Chapter 6

Is Seeing Really Believing?

A well-known story in the Bible surrounding this question, “Is seeing really believing,” involves one of Jesus’ disciples, Thomas. Even after the other disciples tell Thomas they have seen the risen Lord after his death and resurrection, Thomas doubts. Thomas proceeds to tell them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” (John Chapter 20, Verse 25 ESV)

Thomas doubted for eight days before Jesus showed himself again to the disciples, including Thomas himself. Jesus, knowing Thomas’ doubt in his mind, said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John Chapter 20, Verse 27 ESV). And after doing these things, Thomas then believed and exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!”

Yet even today, after reading these first-hand accounts in the Bible, people doubt. Jesus knows our human nature; that people only believe what they see. Jesus finishes the encounter with Thomas (and the other disciples) by stating, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John Chapter 20, Verse 29 ESV)

Is seeing really believing? In the Bible, based on Thomas’ personal encounter with a risen Jesus Christ, the answer is unequivocally yes. So why is it so difficult for other people to believe? Is it because they were not there? But that is impossible at this point. Should not it be just as easy to believe now after reading John’s first-hand account of this encounter between Jesus and Thomas?

And I know that no commentary or words from another person can convince someone that Jesus is who He said He is . . . the Son of God. In fact, in the Bible, not everyone believed Jesus was the Son of God – even after seeing firsthand all the miracles He performed. For us, we must believe with FAITH.

Chapter 7

The Spiritual Realm

What about the spiritual realm. Is there physical proof that the body has a soul? And if so, when a person physically dies, does their soul remain here on earth, or does it go to Heaven? Many stories of hauntings have later been proven to be hoaxes. Séances, though convincing, later proven to be cleverly staged trickery. But there was one occasion where Cynthia, my wife, and I both saw something we could not explain.

It occurred when we were living in Great Falls, in the house I grew up in. We had one child at the time, Shelley. Cynthia had brought some furniture from her parent's home: a bassinet, a changing table, and a child-sized wooden rocking chair. Our house was small, so that rocking chair sat off to one side in the dining room. It sat in front of the fixed portion of the sliding glass door.

It was late one evening and I was going outside to check on something. Cynthia was standing in the kitchen, cleaning off the counter. We were talking as I walked by her. As I passed in front of that rocking chair, it slid straight back towards the wall, rocked a few times, and stopped. I paused briefly, then turned back to Cynthia, and asked, "Did you see that?" She said, "Yes."

I immediately began rationalizing out loud what I, or we, had just seen and heard. I said, "I am barefooted, so if I would have hit the rocking chair with my foot I would have felt it. Plus, only one side would have moved . . . it moved straight back. It was like a child was sitting in the chair, and as I walked by, was afraid of me stepping on their feet, so they pushed themselves (and the chair) out of my way. It slid straight back at least two inches."

So, whose "spirit" was sitting in that chair? To be clear, no small child had ever died in that house. My mother passed away while in the Fort Jackson military hospital. I believe it was Mary, Cynthia's mother's twin sister who passed away unexpectedly as a baby.

Another “spiritual” encounter occurred late one evening while burying a conduit beside the sidewalk which ran through my church’s cemetery. Finishing up for the day, I looked over and stared at the confederate stainless banner flag placed on the graves of the confederate soldiers. On impulse, I decided to remove a few of them. Immediately my Apple watch began ringing. It was Cynthia.

“Thomas, you have to come home now,” Cynthia frantically exclaimed. “What’s wrong?” I asked. “The papers I had on the floor all of a sudden started moving,” she explained. In my mind I knew what I had done coincided with the papers moving on the floor at my house. Did removing those flags disturb the spirits of those confederate soldiers? It sure seemed like it did. I respectfully put those flags back on their graves . . . that night!

Chapter 8

Praying at the Altar

The lottery: people all dream of winning it, especially when the amount exceeds two-hundred million dollars. People go out and buy lottery tickets filled with multiple lines of five numbers and a number for the power ball. Some have a set of special numbers they play each week, while others let the computer pick all the numbers.

Regardless of their method, most begin spouting out to family and friends all the things they would buy with the money. And, like others, their priority is to give ten percent, or a tithe, to their church; are they hoping God is listening and will grant them that winning ticket. But after weeks of not winning, I quit playing and continued with my daily routines.

Then one week there was hype on the early morning news; the lottery jackpot was now worth more than six-hundred million dollars. More people started buying lottery tickets, and my family was no different. Each week we would buy a handful of tickets and wake up the next morning to check the rows of numbers. Most mornings were the same, matching only one or two.

I am not sure when this started, but I began praying to God to allow me to win the lottery. After all, in the Bible it says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (Matthew Chapter 7, Verses 7-8 ESV)

I quickly established a Tuesday night routine. First buy a lottery ticket filled with five rows of random numbers and then go to the church to empty the Tricia’s Trunk clothing donation box. After taking the last bag of donated clothes upstairs, I would go into the sanctuary. Pulling out the lottery ticket and kneeling at the altar, I would pray for God to allow me to win. I would pray for several minutes before ending with, “But God . . . Your will be done.” Then I would stay quiet for a few more seconds before leaving to go home.

Chapter 9

Random Numbers

It was while teaching Vacation Bible School (VBS) that the day's lesson was on Jonah. God instructed Jonah to go and deliver a warning message to the people in Nineveh. Instead, Jonah boarded a ship going in the opposite direction. The lesson emphasized how God intervened and hurled a great wind upon the sea, threatening to sink the ship. The ship's crew cast lots to see who was responsible for the evil that had come upon them. The lot fell on Jonah; Jonah confessed to fleeing from God's command.

Then the crew threw Jonah overboard and the sea became calm. A great fish swallowed Jonah. Then I discussed the miracle of Jonah surviving after being in the belly of the great fish for three days, and how God commanded him a second time to go to Nineveh. Jonah obeyed God and went to Nineveh.

After the children had left the room, I commented to another VBS leader, "I do believe God was in the lots. God was in control of each bounce because they had to point to Jonah. So, the rolling of the lots could not have been random. If Jonah was not the one chosen to be thrown overboard, then the story would not be what it is in the Bible. "People throw lots to make a decision, but the answer comes from the LORD." (Proverbs Chapter 16, Verse 33 NCV)

My thoughts now turned to the lottery; are the winning numbers random? If the winner prayed and chose their numbers or had the computer choose their numbers, then God must have allowed those numbers to be drawn. During the drawing of the lottery numbers, God would be in control of each number drawn. Not a single number could be random *if* God's answer to an individual's prayer is to win the lottery. "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." (Matthew Chapter 21, Verse 22 ESV)

Chapter 10

Draw Near to God

“Tommy . . . we were close,” were the words spoken with certainty by Uncle Robert, as he held up two fingers clenched tightly together. His demeanor was serious. That was May 26, 2010. One passage of Scripture immediately came to mind: “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James Chapter 4, Verse 8 ESV) To draw nearer to God, I began reading my Bible daily, listening to only Christian music, and praying more.

I continued the Tuesday night routine for several weeks: purchasing lottery tickets, emptying the clothing donation trunk, and stopping to kneel at the altar to pray – for God to reveal the numbers to me, unsure of how He would do that. Maybe God would reveal the first number and then reveal the other numbers after a fervent prayer. Or maybe since I am an electrical engineer, the numbers have a mathematical relationship to figure out from the other numbers. How *would* God answer?

What about the answers to prayer I have experienced in my life: the rain stopping just as I walked out to my work truck. Finding the perfect shark’s tooth with the next crashing wave. My experiences when building the bridge in Nicaragua, with my prayers answered then, too. After I whispered a prayer for God to show me the person to whom I, as a Gideon, should hand my first New Testament to, that my eyes would instantly lock eye-to-eye with the worker in the restaurant who wanted a pocket size Bible for his birthday (that actual day), and whose mother had shopped all over Lexington and could not find one. Then a stranger gave him what he wanted for his birthday.

And finally, after replacing the driver’s side window glass in my son’s Hyundai Sonata and trying for over twenty minutes to get a practically impossible to reach connector back on, taking a break and praying to God for His help, and then on the fourth attempt watching in almost disbelief the connector slide effortlessly on.

¹²“Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.
¹³You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah Chapter 29, Verses 12-13 ESV) But is there a difference in physical circumstances playing out according to a person’s prayer and a person making a decision based on hearing God’s voice? What if I missed hearing His voice?

Chapter 11

The Numbers

January 13, 2016. The estimated Powerball jackpot was at \$1.5 billion just hours ahead of Wednesday night's drawing, with same-day ticket sales to push the record-breaking amount even higher. Lottery officials said 85.8 percent of possible number combinations had been selected by midday, increasing the chance that someone would win the world's largest lottery jackpot. But the odds of winning were still extraordinarily slim.

That prior Friday while sitting at my desk busy making a list of to-dos, I heard a soft whisper in my mind, "19 . . . 27." I stopped and sat still for a moment. Then I heard the voice again, "19 . . . 27." And yet a third and final time, almost emphasizing their importance, "19 . . . 27." I jotted them down on a yellow sticky note. I sat still for a moment, thinking about what I had just heard.

The lottery drawing on Saturday night had produced neither the 19 nor the 27. The nightly news was featuring a special segment on the best practices for picking winning lottery numbers. Some hints included not picking all the numbers within the same multiple of ten series (i.e., 11, 12, 14, 17 and 18, or 31, 35, 36, 38 and 39) but choosing numbers from multiple of ten series (i.e., 7, 11, 17, 25 and 38). The reporter finished the segment by stating, "Some people choose numbers based on the month of their parent's birthday." Unfortunately, Cynthia and I had already purchased ten lottery tickets filled with numbers for the night's drawing.

My mind drifted back to the previous Friday as I glanced over each ticket to see if any single line had the numbers 19 and 27 – none did. I wrote them down on a small piece of paper and began thinking about birthdays: my dad was born in April and my son, Jordan, was also born in April, the fourth month of the year; I wrote down 4. Then I quietly said to myself, "Ok God, what are the next two numbers." I immediately heard a voice in my head, "8 and 12."

I now had four numbers spoken to me, 8, 12, 19 and 27, and one number from my birthday list, 4. I had a strong feeling about the number 4, which also had a mathematical relationship to the series of numbers: 12 minus 8 equaling 4. Worst case, I now had two sets of four numbers: 8, 12, 19 and 27, and 4, 8, 19 and 27. I looked over at all the lottery tickets spread out on the kitchen counter, looked up, and said, "God, show me the fifth number."

As I glanced over all the numbers, searching, I almost immediately found myself in a tranced stare. Among all those random numbers, my eyes were locked onto the number 34. I wrote it down with the other numbers. Then I said another short prayer, "Ok God, what is the power ball?" Almost immediately I heard His voice, "Write them down." So, I did: 4, 8, 19, 27 and 34.

Cynthia was at the sink washing dishes when I started to tell her that "God gave me the numbers to the lottery." But when I went to speak, not a single word came out. Anyways, I still needed to figure out the power ball number. Could it be mathematically hidden within the sequence of numbers I had been given? I looked over the numbers again and began adding them together: 4 plus 8 equals 12, 12 plus 8 equals 20 – that does not make any sense. 27 minus 19 equals 8, 34 minus 27 equals 7 – neither seemed significant: another dead end.

Later that night, unable to sleep, I got up and went into the kitchen. I re-focused my thoughts on the sequence of numbers I had written down. Then I had an idea. Starting with the last number in the sequence, 34, I added its individual digits: $3 + 4 = 7$; that is the 7 in the 27. Then for the 27, I added the $2 + 7 = 9$; that is the 9 in the 19. Finally, I added the $9 + 1 = 10$, that is the 10 in . . . the 10 and in the title of my first book, *Ten One-Dollar Bills*, the answer to the fundraising for the bridge in Nicaragua, and now . . . the winning power ball number in tonight's lottery? Now, what are the odds of that happening?

I quickly turned on the eleven o'clock news. The lottery numbers were being drawn: 8 . . . 27 . . . 34 . . . 4 . . . and . . . 19. "And the power ball is . . . 10." There were three winning jackpot tickets sold: one in California, one in Tennessee, and one in Florida. For me, I have no regrets for not going and buying that lottery ticket. I am sure that each of these winners made sizable donations to charities and non-profit organizations, just as I would have.

Chapter 12

Prostate Cancer Diagnosis

It was April 7, 2023, when I received the biopsy results on MyChart, an online patient portal where a patient can review their test results. The biopsy, with ultrasound guidance, focused on two anterior prostate lesions found by the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan in February, and twelve random prostate tissue samples. The MRI was a result of my prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test steadily increasing, going from 5.47 in 2020 to 7.02 in 2022. PSA is a protein made by the prostate gland. I was informed that a level greater than 4.0 of PSA in the blood could mean prostate cancer, and a biopsy was the only way to find out.

The biopsy's pathology report assigned each tissue sample a letter, followed by a brief description of the location from where it was taken. Then followed a section with the heading 'Diagnostic Opinion,' which is where I began reading. On page one: benign, benign, benign, benign, benign, and benign, which means a non-cancerous condition. Good news so far. I scrolled to page two. Benign, benign, focal adenocarcinoma . . . cancer . . . I have prostate cancer.

Before I could read any more, my phone started ringing. It was a nurse from the Lexington hospital's urologist's office. She knew the biopsy results were just posted to MyChart. She also knew the results were not good. Her job was to make sure I had seen the results, reviewed them, and to answer any questions.

Of the twelve random samples, only one tested positive for cancer cells, and of the two tumors, or region of interest (ROI), one tested positive for cancer cells. The two positive samples were each followed by a Gleason score and Grade Group. The nurse encouraged me to read the *Prostate Cancer Early Stage* patient guide to educate myself before my follow-up appointment with the urologist, when he would explain the results in more detail and discuss treatment options.

After we hung up, I began reading the patient guide given to me by the urologist during my previous visit, given in anticipation of today's positive test results. It explained in detail what cancer is, the causes and risk factors for developing prostate cancer, the types and symptoms of prostate cancer, the

types of prostate cancer tests, the clinical terms Gleason score and Grade Group, and treatment options. The random sample which tested positive was assigned a Gleason score of $3+3=6$ and Grade Group of 1. The patient guide explained the first 3 means the cancer present has a cell pattern which looks more like normal prostate tissue in most of the sample. A cancer assigned to a Grade Group of 1 is less aggressive and likely to grow and spread very slowly; there is minimal risk, and it may never need treatment. This was referred to as active surveillance.

However, the sample from the tumor was assigned a Gleason score of $3+4=7$ and a Grade Group of 2. The patient guide explained the 4 means the cancer has an abnormal cell pattern but because it comes after the 3, most of the cell pattern in the sample looks more like normal prostate tissue. A cancer assigned a Grade Group of 2 is considered moderately aggressive and likely to grow and spread; there is low to intermediate risk and treatment may be needed.

The patient guide explained that the need for treatment is based on several factors, the most common being age or life expectancy, risk factor, Gleason score, and Grade Group. The type of treatment is based on the number of positive biopsy samples, tumor size, and if it is determined the cancer has spread outside of the prostate gland. Based on everything I had read so far concerning my MRI and test results, as well as having no physical symptoms, my cancer had been caught early. It seemed that all available treatment options, including active surveillance, were on the table for me.

During the follow-up visit with the urologist, I began the conversation with, "This past week I read more about each treatment option and had conversations with other men about their treatment experience. Taking all things into consideration, I have decided on proton beam radiation at the University of Florida Health Proton Therapy Institute in Jacksonville, Florida." He agreed with my decision and signed the required pre-authorization paperwork for UF Health. I thanked him and as I went to walk out, he held out his hand, "Leave that with me. I will have it scanned and emailed to UF Health for you."

Days later I received an email from UF Health's Patient Intake Coordination. Attached were a Proton Cancer Consultation Questionnaire and an information packet which contained details about proton therapy and their facility. There was also a link to patient testimonials on their website.

On April 20, 2023, I received a second email from UF Health informing me they had received all my medical records and test results from my urologist. Then days later I received confirmation of approval for a consultation visit for May 11. It would be a quick, one day trip. My wife, Cynthia, drove us to Jacksonville, Florida that day for the consultation visit. I also had a required chest x-ray. Everything went well that day, or so I had thought.

On June 4 I reviewed the results of the chest x-ray. The x-ray showed a small, calcified nodule within the upper lobe of the right lung. I immediately emailed the nurse at UF Health asking for an explanation of the results. The next day I got a reply from Caroline, "Yes, typically something like this small nodule would not be of concern as it is most often related to old disease like a previous respiratory infection or something irritating the lungs even like allergies."

A PET/CT (Positron Emission Tomography / Computed Tomography) scan was scheduled for June 16 to give them a detailed three-dimensional image of the inside of my body as to whether this area needed any following up on. I knew it was to determine if the cancer had metastasized or spread outside the prostate to other parts of my body. More prayers . . . more unknowns . . . and more worry for me and my family.

I was thankful and relieved after reading the first line of the results, "No evidence of metastatic prostate cancer by PSMA PET/CT. (PSMA is a biomarker that is found on prostate cancer cells, including those that have spread beyond the prostate.) The PET-CT scan was the last thing needed to ensure the cancer was contained within the prostate. Finally, after over four months of tests and prayers, proton beam radiation was now confirmed to be the best treatment option for me. Now, to talk to my CEO about being away from the office for six weeks, schedule my treatments, and find a place to stay.

I was given two radiation treatment options, 29 and 40; I chose 29 to minimize my time away from the office. My CEO fully supported my decision to take radiation treatment in Florida. In determining when to begin the first treatment, I suggested that I wanted to be home for Thanksgiving; November 22 needed to be my last treatment day. Caroline agreed, and began counting, careful not to include observed and unobserved holidays in her count.

In preparation for my first radiation treatment, I was required to come two weeks prior for a final consultation, simulation scans, and receive a pre-treatment procedure to insert SpaceOAR™ hydrogel. The SpaceOAR™ hydrogel is inserted between the prostate and large intestine to prevent the radiation from damaging the large intestine. Cynthia and I would also tour the Hope Lodge located on the campus of the Mayo Clinic. The Hope Lodge provides free lodging for adult cancer patients, and their caregivers, needing to travel more than 40 miles for treatment. It was a nice facility.

Cynthia signed the necessary paperwork to be a caregiver, so she could stay on the weekends. Before leaving I confirmed my treatment dates and received check-in instructions. Everything was done. My first in a series of 29 treatments would begin on Monday, October 12.

Author's Comment: I recommend for men, beginning at the age of 50, include PSA in their annual bloodwork. Learn your family history and other risk factors for prostate cancer.

Chapter 13

The Hope Lodge

I spent the following week making lists and choosing clothes to take to Florida, which meant matching shirts with shorts, counting underwear and pairs of socks, and packing my truck. I was both excited and nervous. Leaving, I was putting months of tests, doctor visits, and studying treatment options in my rear-view mirror. The next four and a half hours of driving would give me more time to reflect on the previous six months since being diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Arriving at the Hope Lodge in Jacksonville, Florida, I quickly went inside to get checked in and get the luggage cart. It would soon be dark, and I had lots to unload: a cooler full of frozen and refrigerated food, clothes, shoes, dumbbell weights, and snacks. I would wait and go to the grocery store the next day for milk and eggs.

After hurriedly hanging up my pants and shirts in my room, I took the cooler and headed to the kitchen. There are two large kitchens shared by the thirty-six residents, each equipped with three stoves, three dishwashers, and three refrigerators. Everyone was allotted a twelve by thirty-six-inch space in a refrigerator, and about the same size space in the freezer side. The very bottom and majority of the right side in each refrigerator was the “shared” section, with common use items like ketchup, mustard, and salad dressings. Across the room from the refrigerator were the dry storage cabinets for canned goods and boxed food items.

Since I had not eaten supper, I pulled out a can of chicken noodle soup. By now there were others in the kitchen unpacking groceries or fixing supper like me. I looked around the room; I did not know anyone. I began having an anxiety attack, like it was the first day of college. I brushed the feeling aside and began looking for a soup pot, quickly opening and closing cabinet doors. I could not find one. I then felt the cold stares. I became panicky.

Finally, I stopped and said aloud, “Yes, I admit it, I am the new guy who does not know where anything is.” Everyone nearby stopped and turned around. One man walked over, held out his hand, and introduced himself, “Hi, my name is Larry,” while grabbing a pot from under the counter. He smiled and handed it to me. And from that day forward, we were friends. Not only because we seemed we were always in the kitchen at the same time, but the doors to our rooms were directly across the hall.

In the days to come, I found myself doing the same thing, introducing myself to someone new in the kitchen, and finding out if they were a caregiver or the person receiving treatment. Larry and his wife were caregivers to her daughter, Denise, who had leukemia and had received a bone marrow transplant at the Mayo Clinic. A lot of times at night I would sit and eat with them. Most of the time Denise would sit with a knitted cap on her head, but other times she would not, revealing her bald head. This made me realize that the Hope Lodge was an accepting place for everyone, since we all had one commonality . . . cancer.

It did not take long to meet other men at the Hope Lodge who were receiving proton beam radiation treatments at the University of Florida Health Proton Therapy Institute. We would sit and share stories of how each researched prostate cancer treatments before deciding to come to Jacksonville for proton beam radiation. These men and I coming to the same conclusion was encouraging to not only myself, but to them as well.

At my treatments, it was suggested I exercise thirty minutes a day to maintain physical strength. This was not a problem for me, since for the past five years I had developed a daily morning regiment of strength training with heavy weights in my garage. The Hope Lodge had an exercise room with three treadmills, so I began walking for thirty minutes each morning.

One evening while returning from the grocery store, I noticed people walking on the concrete sidewalk which snaked beside the road to the Hope Lodge. I remember at the Hope Lodge there being a map of the Mayo Clinic campus on the counter where you signed in and out. I looked at it more closely when I got back to the lodge and sure enough, there was a sidewalk encircling the entire campus. That first night I completed one lap.

The next evening as I was walking, I noticed people walking from the building to their cars to go home. I decided this was a terrific opportunity to share with a few people whom I would encounter each night a green business card with my website address, so they could download a free copy of my books. This went well, as I handed out two to three business cards each night. Later that week I decided to walk two laps so that I could meet more people.

After one week I had developed an exercise routine: walking thirty minutes in the morning on the treadmill and walking two laps around the Mayo Clinic campus in the late afternoon. Thankfully, I remembered to bring extra business cards, since I was handing out so many. Sharing the story of the 'Ten One-Dollar Bills' was still exciting for me, especially seeing people's faces when I offered them a free book.

During the morning walk on the treadmill, I would look up music videos on YouTube or a Bible devotional to listen to on my phone. Then one morning I got the idea to look up sermons by Dr. David Jeremiah, a preacher whom my Gideon friend Don recommended. I had no trouble finding his sermons on YouTube. Thankfully, most were between thirty and forty minutes long, meaning only a few extra minutes on the treadmill were needed each morning to finish a sermon.

The first sermon I listened to dated back to July 25, 2021, and was titled, 'The Spirit and the Flesh.' I listened more intently when Dr. Jeremiah mentioned his cancer diagnosis and treatment. "Almost exactly at this particular time twenty-five years ago," he began, "I was diagnosed with lymphoma, a type of cancer that, at the time, had a very poor survival rate. Shortly after my diagnosis, I went to the Mayo Clinic, and I was operated on immediately. The surgery was called a laparotomy, and, really what it was is they cut me open from stem to stern, like a fish. After my surgery, I was taken to another floor to recover, and I remember this like it happened yesterday."

"On this particular floor," he continued, "the patient rooms were in a circle and the nurses' station and desks for staff were in the middle. And as soon as it was possible, the doctors told me I should get up and try to walk. So, knowing this was an important part of my recovery, I pushed myself to do a full lap around the nurses' station, starting at my room and passing every other patient's room until my room came up again and then I went back in and got in bed."

“My goal that first day was one lap; that is all I wanted, one lap. And that was pretty challenging, and I was barely able to finish it. So, the next day I decided . . . I am going to do two laps today. My plan was to do one more each day than I had done the day before. So, I set out walking slowly around the circle. By a strange coincidence, the doctor who had performed my surgery was dictating his notes about me when I shuffled by his desk.”

“All I remember hearing him say was, ‘A pastor from California who has Stage 4 large cell lymphoma cancer.’ Now, that might not seem important to you, but nobody had told me I had Stage 4 cancer. I had cancer but I did not know I had Stage 4 cancer. I was not even sure what that was, but I knew it was worse than Stage 3. Somehow, I completed those two laps and got back to my room. And I remember sitting there feeling really scared. And overwhelmed.”

“But then, that feeling completely left me and was replaced by another. I realized, ‘I am not in control of my life.’ I told myself that. But the Spirit of God is in control of me. And a sense of what I can only describe as peace began to come over my heart. I am going to let God do His work, and I will do mine. My only thought was, “Well tomorrow I am doing three laps. I do not know what you are doing God, but I am doing three laps tomorrow. Right.”

My routine for the final couple of weeks of treatment was to listen to Dr. David Jeremiah while walking on the treadmill in the morning, and in the evening walking two laps around the Mayo Clinic campus. Each evening, on my first lap, I would hand out two or three business cards to employees and students who were leaving, and hand out three or four more during the second lap around the Mayo Clinic campus, sometimes to other walkers.

Most people would continue walking to their car after receiving the card. But other times they genuinely wanted to know more about the story. And each time I would give them the first part of the story, the part where I received the ten one-dollar bills.

Strangely, one evening while walking my normal two laps, I did not meet anyone. I stopped in front of the Hope Lodge and thought for a moment about what to do. I remember during one of Dr. David Jeremiah’s sermons that week he had said, “We have to do what we need to do, then God will do what He needs to do.” Dr. Jeremiah walked a third lap. But it was now getting dark. I said a short

prayer and said to myself, *If Dr. Jeremiah, who has cancer, can walk a third lap, then I can walk a third lap.* Then I set out walking that third lap and what would be five miles.

During that third lap I met two people, handing each a business card and telling a brief synopsis of my first book. Then from a short distance, I saw a lady briskly walking towards the crosswalk leading to the parking lot. I tried to gauge if our paths would cross. It would be close, so I began walking a little faster. After making the left turn on the sidewalk at the intersection, she was slightly ahead of me.

“Hello there,” I said. She stopped and turned back towards me. “Would you like a free copy of my book?” while holding out a green business card for her to see. “Sure,” she said, “What is it about?” “It is a from a time when my mother was in the hospital losing her battle with cancer. I was studying in the hospital waiting room, trying not to flunk out of my Junior year at Clemson University. They had called the family in, and my great aunt came from Lando. She handed me a card. Then she just stood there and smiled. So, I opened it, and there in front of me were all these dollar bills; ten one-dollar bills. My aunt said, “You are going to be here all week, and sometimes you cannot find change for the drink machine or cracker machine.”

And that is just the beginning of the story, but all I am going to tell you. You will have to read about the rest. She smiled and asked, “Did the bridge get built?” Like the card says, “The incredible true story of how God blessed ten one-dollar bills and built a bridge in Nicaragua.” She still looked inquisitive, so I said, “Yes, the bridge was built and at the end God answered my one prayer, and that was to allow me to find my birth mother. And when they were putting the final wood planks on the bridge’s walkway, I got a call from the agency who had been looking for my birth mother . . . they had found her.” After brief pause, I continued, “By the way, my name is Thomas, and I am adopted.” With a startled look she stated, “My husband’s name is Thomas . . . and he is adopted, too!”

“God, are You there?” “**I AM.**”

Author’s Comment: I finished my 29th radiation treatment on November 21, 2023, the Tuesday before Thanksgiving holiday. In October of 2024, my PSA level dropped to 1.7 and to 0.50 in July of 2025, well below the 10.5 result in 2023.

Chapter 14

Ten Years

On my living room wall hang three shadow boxes. One contains a three-and-one-half-inch long arrowhead; the second is a tribute to my adopted father's twenty-three-year Air Force career and includes a picture of him in uniform; and the third is a tribute to my adoptive mother's love of bowling and includes a picture of her bowling team taken during a tournament in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Several years ago, while helping Cynthia clean the house, as I dusted the top of my mother's shadow box, in the photo a banner with the date of the tournament suddenly caught my attention . . . 1978. Why? Less than ten years from when that photo was taken, my mother would be diagnosed with breast cancer and then lose the battle two years later in 1989. I stood there and stared at that picture for almost a minute. In ten years, she went from living a vibrant, enjoyable life to fighting the final battle for her life . . . one that she would ultimately lose. All the dreams she had for me were put aside during that final week as she lay in a hospital bed. I remember the last words she spoke to me while staring into eyes, "Take care of your daddy."

In those ten years, my mother would see me grow up through my teenage years. She would support me in the middle school band and hear all the noisy practicing on my trombone. For fun we would compete for the high score on the Atari video game system's *Super Breakout* game. Then in high school, attending four years of marching band competitions. My senior year I drove a bus route and joined the tennis team. After graduation I started college at The University of South Carolina at Lancaster.

The summer of 1987 was when my mother discovered a lump in her left breast; it was cancer. The next two years would become almost a blur for our family, with mom's chemo treatments, my college, and mom helping to plan her high school class reunion – a reunion she would not be able to attend due to the return of the cancer in the fall of 1989. But earlier that summer she would see me and my best friend, Jesse, compete in the Flopeye Fish Festival's homemade

paddle boat race. I designed the paddle boat, and dad helped me build and test it. Jesse and I finished fifth out of eight entries – and not that we outraced anyone, but only because two boats broke, and one team gave up. We did not give up. At the finish line, located at the old Spring's Park beach, our parents were there to congratulate us for finishing the race. They were proud of our accomplishment. Even another team, whose boat was obviously professionally made, came over and congratulated us for building a successful boat. I still remember mom sitting in a chair on that beach, smiling at me as I walked up the beach towards her. Mom passed away six months later.

My purpose in sharing all of this is to remind everyone that years pass quickly, and the time to plan that dream vacation, to sign up for that church mission trip, or to start writing a book is today. No one wants to look back ten years from now and have any feeling of regret.

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’ – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” James Chapter 4 Verses 13 – 14 ESV

Chapter 15

Answered Prayer

It was during the annual Harman family beach vacation on Hilton Head Island that the bike accident occurred. I was riding my bike with other family members in the parking lots connecting to the swimming pool. Entering the last parking lot before the pool, I saw my daughter, Shelley, riding her bike coming towards me. I recognized the fact that if we both continued on our current trajectory, we would have a head-on collision. Not wanting to frighten her, I refrained from yelling out any words of caution, believing she would eventually veer more to her right to avoid me. Apparently, she thought I would do the same, as she did not alter her course. Before I knew it, we were face-to-face. I immediately steered to the left to avoid a direct head-on collision, but our bikes still side-swiped, with her bike crashing into my right leg and knee. My bike and I immediately fell to the pavement; I was in excruciating pain. I lay there for almost five minutes before the pain subsided enough for me to try and get up. It was difficult, but with some help from Shelley, I did it.

I wobbled along, pushing my bike on towards the pool. I continued on the bike path behind the pool building, deciding to go back to our condo to rest my leg and knee. Surprisingly, there was a small pickup truck parked in the middle of the paved bike path, with a worker who had just finished washing it. It angered me that he would block the bike path with his truck, and being hurt and not able to ride my bike on the road, made the pain even worse.

As I continued towards the truck, the worker saw me, looked at me limping and pushing the bike, and let out a giggly laugh. That was it. That was the straw that broke the camel's back as they say. The anger boiling inside of me rushed out and in a spontaneous reaction to his laugh, I hobbled and stood behind his truck, firmly planted and stabilized my right leg. Thin one swift motion, I lifted my left leg up and firmly planted my foot (thankfully I was wearing tennis shoes) as hard as I could into the tailgate of his truck. I stepped back; there was a large dent. Then I glanced over at the worker. He was in complete shock and did not say a word to me. I picked up the bike and continued hobbling along to the condo.

Within thirty minutes I was being questioned by the resort's security officer. I told the officer the whole story, accepting full responsibility for the damage to the truck's tailgate. I signed the report acknowledging I would pay for the repairs. Worse than that, I had to explain to my family what had occurred. I had a lot of remorse for my thoughtless actions that day. Thankfully, my leg and knee got better, and the rest of our vacation was uneventful.

A few weeks went by without any word from the resort. I was expecting the repairs to be made the week after the incident. I eventually called the staff member to get an update. He said things had been busy and he had not had an opportunity to schedule the repairs. Then he made a statement I was not prepared for, "You know, you are not only going to pay for the repairs, but for the time my employee will spend taking the truck to the repair shop, and the time going back to pick it up." At that moment I was not in any position to disagree.

I talked with another parent at the baseball field, who worked at a garage, about the damage, asking him what he thought the total repair cost could be. He said that based on my observation of the dent (that it was large), the repair shop should be able to pull it out. I liked his opinion. I asked him if \$500 would cover the repairs, and he agreed it would. This amount would directly affect my family's finances. Then, I turned to God in prayer, asking Him to remove the dent from the truck's tailgate so that my family would not be affected financially. I prayed this prayer every day.

After another week, I placed a call to the staff member. I left him a message. Then I prayed again, asking God to remove the dent so that my family would not be affected financially. I dreaded having to mail a check for \$500 for the repairs. My wife would be furious. I would have to explain it all again to my family.

Then my cell phone rang. It was a call from the Hilton Head resort staff member. "Hello." I let him do all the talking. "My employee just called me from the repair shop," he began, "He told me that when the technician went to look at the tailgate, there was no dent. I asked him to make sure he took the right truck, and he assured me the dent was there before he left the parking lot." I asked, "So there was no sign of the damage, not even to the paint?" His reply startled me, "My employee said there was no sign of there ever being a dent in the tailgate."

“The only thing I can figure,” he continued, “is that the truck sat in the hot sun all day, and that while my employee was driving to the repair shop, he drove really fast over a railroad track, and that sudden bump caused the dent to pop out.” “Could have,” I said, “That is what I prayed for. What do I owe you?” “You do not owe anything,” he replied. I let the conversation end there, knowing that God had answered my prayer, because there are no railroad tracks on Hilton Head Island and it is a flat island. “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” John Chapter 14, Verse 13 ESV

Another answer to prayer came more recently at my church’s participation in the Town of Blythewood’s “Big Grab” yard sale. I was standing near the entrance inside our fellowship hall welcoming shoppers, handing them a business card promoting my books and handing New Testaments to students.

I had just finished helping a young man plugging in a stereo to make sure it worked when a lady stopped me and, while looking down at the sides of a long rectangular cardboard box, asked, “Is this a Christmas tree?” Flipping the box over one more time I saw the words, “Christmas tree.” “Yes, it is,” I quickly answered.

“This is an answer to my prayer. I have been witnessing to a family, and this is going to be their first Christmas,” she excitedly stated. “Why, did they just become Christians?” I asked. “No, they are Jehovah’s Witnesses and have never celebrated Christmas. This is going to be their first Christmas tree,” she explained. “Can we make sure all the lights work?” “Wow . . . and yes,” I said in almost disbelief, “that’s amazing we had a tree for sale. We can plug it in right over there.” The tree was practically brand new, so all the lights worked in each of the tree’s three sections. I gave her a business card and asked her to email me a picture of the tree when it is put up this Christmas (2025).

Author’s Comment: If you want to see prayers answered or God work, you must actively participate in your church’s yard sale, fall festival, Christmas play, and/or Easter drama. Be the person to welcome visitors to these events. Purchase your own small New Testaments to give to visitors. Pray. And finally, be active in a church congregation that will challenge and help you grow as a Christian.

Chapter 16

The Fence

In the sixth grade I rode the school bus to and from middle school. Back then the Great Falls Middle School was located on Highway 200 across from Green Lawn Cemetery. Also across from the school, located at the intersection of Highway 200 and Underwood Avenue, was a church. Every morning, I noticed a group of students flanking the church's five or six rows of steps, some sitting and some standing. The church yard provided them with a safe haven to smoke cigarettes before eventually using the crosswalk to attend school. One morning I even witnessed a fight occurring next to the highway at the crosswalk.

I assume this spectacle had occurred for more than just a few years. But the church must have had enough of their steps being used as a middle schooler's playground, because the next summer the church had a chain link fence installed with a gate. The gate was closed and locked. The kids could no longer sit on the steps but only stand along the edge of the fence to talk and smoke their cigarettes. And for the next thirty years the fence would remain the church's first line of defense in keeping the kids out. The old middle school would eventually close its doors in 2012, giving way to a new, modern middle school built beside the existing Great Falls High School on Sunset Avenue.

For years, each time I drove by that old school, I would glance at the run-down building and its gym with an ever-growing number of busted out windows, then look over at the church building across the street. A few years went by after the school closed, and one day while driving by I noticed that the chain link fence had been removed from around the church. I suppose the church's steps were no longer susceptible to unwanted guests. As a student, I was not a Christian, so the fence never bothered me. However now as a Christian, I realize the fence represented an unintended symbol to the world which said, "Stay off. Stay away. You are not welcome here."

I pray that I will never unintentionally put up any type of barrier to the unsaved, and to seize every given opportunity to share Jesus with them. Amen.

Chapter 17

It's Just a Tag

"Dad, my car is making a weird noise," were the words I heard from the other end of the phone." "I will drive it after I get home tonight, Jordan," was my immediate response. I knew a car with over 270,000 miles, that it could be anything making whatever noise he was hearing.

And after dinner, just as I had promised, I got into Jordan's car and headed up the driveway and out onto Surreywood Lane. The new motor was very responsive as the automatic transmission smoothly shifted through its lower gears. I let a couple of the windows down but still heard nothing. I put the windows back up before making the left hand turn onto Blythewood Road.

Again, the car accelerated smoothly through all the gears. Now reaching 55 miles per hour, I let up a little on the accelerator and felt the transmission drop down a gear and settle into overdrive. After only a few seconds, I felt the transmission slip. Then, again. And again. Each time I could hear the noise Jordan was hearing.

Arriving back home, I broke the news to Jordan. It was the transmission. I knew the repair cost could be as much as three thousand dollars . . . or more. So that night I began searching for transmission repair shops. I started with Johnson's Automatic Transmission Service in Lugoff. They had repaired the transmission in Cynthia's Ford Mustang not long after we were married. Unfortunately, they called me back and informed me they presently did not have a service technician who could work on foreign transmissions. They recommended another shop in Columbia. I called them.

The second repair shop told me they did not rebuild foreign transmissions either, because they said it is cheaper to replace the transmission than to have it rebuilt. Learning this, I hung up and called the Hyundai dealership. The transmission replacement would cost about the same, so Jordan decided on the Hyundai dealer since they had done a great job with the car's engine replacement earlier in the year. We dropped the car off at the dealership the following day.

A few days later the dealership called, letting me know the car was ready to be picked up. Jordan was excited it was fixed so fast. I went home for lunch early, ate a quick bite to eat, and we quickly headed out to go and pick up his car from the dealership.

After paying for the repairs at the dealership, the service department assistant went out to the back parking lot to get the car. Jordan and I patiently waited outside. And we waited . . . and waited some more. Finally, the car pulled up to where we were standing.

Jordan noticed it first. The right screw attachment of the Atlanta Braves front tag was broken. The tag was damaged. Jordan said something about it to the shop representative. He stated, "I got the car washed. Normally people tell me not to wash their car when I ask if they wanted it washed." "But you did not ask us if we wanted it washed," I quickly quipped. He did not know what to say, so he took a picture of the tag with his cell phone. "I can see if the shop can fix it," he offered. "I don't believe they can fix it," I replied. "My son will need to buy a new tag. We will bring you the receipt," were my final words to him before Jordan and I left the dealership.

When we got back home, Jordan immediately began searching the Internet for a new Atlanta Braves license tag. Unfortunately, he could not find one like it. The tag was given to him, so he did not know where it was purchased. Thankfully he found one he liked and ordered it.

The tag arrived the following week. Its red and blue colors were much more vibrant than the other tag, making it an instant eye catcher. Jordan then texted me a copy of the receipt, which I copied and emailed to myself so that I could print and take to the dealership on Saturday. Leaving early Saturday morning for the weekly Gideon prayer meeting, I noticed the broken tag lying on top of the other trash in the trashcan. I reached in, took it out, and carried it with me to show whomever I would be talking with at the Hyundai dealership.

I was confident pulling into the dealership. There was plenty of available parking on this Saturday morning. Once parked, I reached over and grabbed the tag and printed receipt and briskly walked the distance to the entrance door to the service center. Upon entering, I immediately noticed they only had a skeletal crew on Saturday, as there was only one employee behind the desk, and he was

in deep discussion with another car owner over the additional repairs needed to be done to his car. I placed the tag and receipt on the counter and waited.

Finally, another employee came into the room. She was taking care of something else but briefly acknowledged me and said she would be right back to help me. A few minutes later, she returned and stood directly across the counter from me, taking a glance down at the tag. Since she had no idea of the pending issue.

I started at the beginning. "A couple of weeks ago your service department replaced the transmission on my son's Hyundai Sonata . . . and they did a great job. I paid the bill, and my son and I waited outside for the service department assistant to come back with the car. We waited a long time before he finally drove up with the car. My son immediately saw that the front tag was damaged, as it was now hanging down at a slight angle due to one tag support being broken. The assistant said he ran the car through the car wash, so that it would look nice, and was sorry the tag got damaged."

"He said, 'Most people, when asked, would decline the car wash if they thought it would damage their car.' I told him that he did not ask if we wanted the car wash. He then went back inside the dealership to get his cell phone and a screwdriver. When he returned, he took a picture of the damaged tag on the car. Then he quickly removed the tag and handed it to my son. I told him we would buy another tag and bring him the receipt, and he agreed to those terms. So here I am."

She paused, then said, "I agree. We owe you money for your tag. I will take this to the accounting manager and get it approved. Write down your address to where the check can be mailed. I will call you on Monday . . . just to confirm everything." I said, "Thank you; and my son did not buy the most expensive tag, but the one he wanted." I left the Hyundai dealership that Saturday morning feeling satisfied with the outcome of our conversation.

Monday morning at work was busy, and I had not thought anymore about the tag until my cell phone rang just before I was about to leave for lunch. I answered. It was the service department representative from Stivers Hyundai, "Mr. Black, this is Stivers Hyundai, and I have reviewed your information with management, and they have decided not to pay for your tag."

“Oh, is that right? Well, why not . . . it was damaged by your car wash, and you were driving the car,” I calmly stated. He continued, “My manager told me that if I wanted to pay you for the tag, the money would come out of my paycheck, and I am not going to do that.” “Well, I certainly can understand that. But I was told on Saturday that my son would be reimbursed for the purchase price of the new tag. And he did not buy the most expensive tag he could have bought. So now, no one is going to take responsibility for the broken tag?”

“Put yourself in my shoes, and it was your car tag that was damaged at a car dealership, how would you feel? You would want them to pay you for a new one, right?” I reasoned. “I do not think the same way as you,” he responded, “I would just buy a new tag and forget about it.” And that was the way the conversation ended, or should I say, dead ended. During my lunch hour I played this conversation again in my mind.

Getting back from lunch and sitting back at my desk, I still felt disappointed and upset, but not with the representative, but that the dealership would put me, the consumer, in the middle between them and their employee. Now to me, this dealership has a human resource (HR) issue, and that’s what I intend to tell them when I go back there in person to plead my case for the broken tag. Fully realizing their decision to not reimburse my son for the cost of the new tag is likely final, I will tell them that I forgive them and walk out.

At that moment I flushed all thoughts about the tag from my mind. But the next second my cell phone sitting on my desk began ringing. The name came up, ‘Hyundai.’ Why would they be calling me back? Maybe they changed their mind and have now decided to reimburse my son for the cost of the new Braves tag. I answered, “Hello, this is Thomas.”

“Hello, Mr. Black. I just listened to the conversation you had with my employee this morning,” the voice on the other end began, “and it did not go as it was intended. I apologize.” Almost in disbelief that this was even happening, I responded, “he was pretty clear that the dealership nor himself were responsible for the damage that occurred to my son’s car tag as a result of the carwash, which by the way, I did not ask for.” “I understand, and again, I apologize for the confusion,” he responded, “You will be receiving full payment for your new tag.”

I immediately texted Jordan and Cynthia, "Stivers is sending us a check for \$37.66 for the tag. And there is a lot more to the story you would not believe." Jordan replied first, "Sweet. Ooo story time at dinner." Cynthia replied next, "OK yay!! Yes, look forward to the story." They both "hearted" my reply, "Yes, God was working behind the scenes because the first call I got this morning was that they were not going to pay for it."

Chapter 18

Lord, Forgive Forrest

“Tommy, turn off the recorder,” my Uncle Robert abruptly spoke while looking me in the eyes. I reached down and turned the recorder off. Still looking at me, he continued, “This next story is one I do not want recorded, but I want you to hear it . . . I want you to know about it.”

“Do you remember my nephew, Forrest . . . and what happened to him?” he asked. “Yes, I remember him. He accidentally shot himself in front of his girlfriend while he was showing her a handgun,” I answered. “Well, he continued, “he survived in the hospital for a while, but the last couple of days he was unresponsive to family and even close friends. He just lay there in that hospital bed, breathing, with his eyes closed. He was not getting any better, but he was not getting any worse either. He was basically being kept alive.”

“One day I had an idea,” Uncle Robert continued. “I went to see Forrest. He was in ICU. I walked into his room. I pulled a chair where I could sit and see his face. He had not opened his eyes for days now. I said, ‘Forrest, this is your Uncle Robert.’ He did not move. ‘Forrest, I am sorry for what has happened to you. Everyone knows you did not mean to do this to yourself.’ Then, I closed my eyes and prayed, ‘Lord, Forrest did not mean to shoot himself . . . it was an accident. He is sorry . . . and he wants You to forgive him.’”

“Tommy, I know it is not Biblical for someone to ask the Lord for forgiveness for another person, but it is what I felt like I needed to do . . . for Forrest. And when I opened my eyes and looked at Forrest, he opened his eyes and looked over at me. Then, he closed his eyes again. And that was it. He was gone. I truly believe the Lord forgave him.” And that was Uncle Robert’s last story.

Author’s comment: From what I recall when it happened, Forrest’ girlfriend did not like guns. Forrest picked up a handgun, showed it to her, and held the barrel directly underneath his nose. He had taken the clip out of the gun. He did not realize there was a bullet in its chamber. Playfully, he pulled the trigger. BANG! The gun went off. The bullet followed his nasal canal into his brain. He was 21.

“A Love Story”

Songs are good up in the moon

Light of graceful night.

Bells are ringing up in the sky

From the church not very far.

written by Forrest at age 5



Chapter 19

Know Jesus as Your Savior

Do not assume because you are “a good person” or you go to church, that you are on the road to Heaven. The Bible teaches that you must turn away from sin, trust Jesus as your Savior, and follow Him as your Lord. If you will do that, God promises to give you a new beginning and a new life that is both abundant and eternal. Right now, wherever you are, you can begin a relationship with God. It is the most important thing you will ever do.

A Personal Journey*

The Bible is the foundation for Christianity. It contains the answers to all of life’s vital questions and changes the very lens of the worldview through which we view reality. Most importantly, it teaches us how to have a true, meaningful relationship with God.

Jesus loves you! He desires to have a relationship with you, and to give you a life full of joy and purpose. Why do you need Him in your life?

1. BECAUSE YOU HAVE A PAST

You cannot go back, but He can. The Bible says, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). He can walk into those places of sin and failure, wipe the slate clean, and give you a new beginning.

2. BECAUSE YOU NEED A FRIEND

Jesus knows the worst about you, yet He believes the best. Why? Because He sees you not as you are but as you will be when He gets through with you. What a friend!

3. BECAUSE HE HOLDS THE FUTURE

Who else are you going to trust? In His hands you are safe and secure – today, tomorrow, and for all eternity. His Word say, “For I know the plans I have for you . . . plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen.” Jeremiah 29:11-12 TLB

* Taken from *DAILY DEVOTIONAL – THE WORD FOR YOU TODAY*

These verses illustrate the plan of salvation:

GOD LOVES YOU

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 ESV (English Standard Version)

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8 ESV

ALL ARE SINNERS

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23 ESV

“As is it written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one.’” Romans 3:10 ESV

GOD’S REMEDY FOR SIN

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23 ESV

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 ESV

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” 1 Corinthians 15: 3-4 ESV

ALL MAY BE SAVED

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” Revelation 3:20 ESV

“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13 ESV

“But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31 ESV

PRAY

As a Christian, you can talk to God through prayer and share your heart with Him. No matter where you are in your spiritual journey, He is faithfully listening for you to call on Him. To begin your new life in faith, pray this simple prayer:

“God, I confess that I am a sinner and I am in need of salvation. Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose again to bring me new life. I ask to receive Your forgiveness and grace and choose to follow You as my Lord and Savior. Amen.”

“But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31 ESV

SEEK

The church is the body of Christ, designed to bring Him glory through worship, to teach Biblical doctrine, and to equip its members for evangelism. After making your decision to receive Christ, I encourage you to prayerfully seek a healthy Christian church in your local community that will help you continue to grow in your walk.

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.” 2 Peter 3:18 ESV

FIND

Assurance for the believer comes directly from God’s Word. The Gospel tells us that because Christ died for us, anyone who trusts in Him may know that their sins have been forgiven, once and for all.

“Because, 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 with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Romans 10:9-10 ESV

“Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears my Word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life.” John 5:24 ESV

MY DECISION TO RECEIVE CHRIST AS MY SAVIOR

If you would like to begin a personal relationship with Jesus today, please pray this prayer: “Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins. I am sorry for all the wrong I have done and ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and a new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

“Confessing to God that I am a sinner and believing that the Lord Jesus Christ died for my sins on the cross and was raised for my justification, I do now receive and confess Him as my personal Savior.”

Name: _____ Date: _____

SEEKING A CHURCH

After making your decision to receive Christ, I encourage you to prayerfully seek a local church, congregation, or assembly that will assist you in growing as a new Christian by the clear teaching of the Bible. Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Be baptized as an expression of your faith. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith.

ASSURANCE AS A BELIEVER

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” 1 John 5:13 ESV

Imagine what God could do in your life if you read through the entire Bible.

Download a FREE copy of the Bible, God’s Holy Word, from my website or scan the QR code with a smartphone.

Start by choosing the English Standard Version (ESV), which is easier to understand than the traditional King James Version (KJV), or language of choice. Then select the New Testament and begin reading one chapter a day in the book of John or use the topical Helps (God’s Help in Crisis, Help with Life’s Problems, and Godly Living each in Today’s World) listing numerous related topics with Scriptures for answers and Spiritual comfort. A complete listing of these Helps is at the end of this book for easy reference and convenience.

About the Author

Thomas Black, a 1992 graduate of Clemson University, presently works at Fairfield Electric Cooperative in Blythewood, South Carolina. He is a Gideon and a member and deacon at Sandy Level Baptist Church in Blythewood. He and his wife, Cynthia, are the proud parents of two adult children, Shelley and Jordan. In 2012 he published his first book, *Ten One-Dollar Bills*, in which he tells of his experiences while serving as the project coordinator for the Gavilan-Patastule Suspended Bridge built near the town of Matiguás in Nicaragua. Thomas published his second book, *Lord, Increase My Faith*, in 2017.



Helps

Where to Find Help ... When

Afraid Psalm 34:4, Matthew 10:28, 2 Timothy 1:7, Hebrews 13: 5-6
Anxious Psalm 46, Matthew 6:19-34, Philippians 4:6, 1 Peter 5:6-7
Backsliding Psalm 51, 1 John 1:4-9
Bereaved Matthew 5:4, II Corinthians 1:3-4
Bitter or Critical I Corinthians 13
Conscious of Sin Proverbs 28:13
Defeated Romans 8:31-39
Depressed Psalm 91, Psalm 118:5-6, Luke 8:22-25
Disaster Threatens Psalm 91, Psalm 118:5-6, Luke 8:22-25
Discouraged Psalm 23, Psalm 42:6-11, Psalm 55:22, Matthew 5:11-12, II Corinthians 4:8-18, Philippians 4:4-7
Doubting Matthew 8:26, Hebrews 11
Facing a Crisis Psalm 121, Matthew 6:25-34, Hebrews 4:16
Faith Fails Psalm 42:5, Hebrews 11
Friends Fail Psalm 41:9-13, Luke 17:3-4, Romans 12:14, 17, 19, 21, II Timothy 4:16-18
Leaving Home Psalm 121, Matthew 10:16-20
Lonely Psalm 23, Hebrews 13:5, 6
Needing God's Protection Psalm 27:1-6, Psalm 91, Philippians 4:19
Needing Guidance Psalm 32:8
Needing Peace John 14:1-4, John 16:33, Romans 5:1-5, Philippians 4:6, 7
Needing Rules for Living Romans 12
Overcome Psalm 6, Romans 8:31-39, I John 1:4-9
Prayerful Psalm 4, Psalm 42, Luke 11:1-13, John 17, 1 John 5:14, 15
Protected Psalm 18:1-3, Psalm 34:7
Sick or in Pain Psalm 38, James 5:14-15, Romans 8:28, 38-39, II Corinthians 12:9-10, I Peter 4:12, 13, 19
Sorrowful Psalm 51, Matthew 5:4, John 14, II Corinthians
Tempted Psalm 1, Psalm 139:23, 24, Matthew 26:41, I Corinthians 10:12-14, Philippians 4:8, James 4:7, II Peter 2:9, II Peter 3:17
Thankful Psalm 100, I Thessalonians 5:18, Hebrews 13:15
Traveling Psalm 121
In Trouble Psalm 16, Psalm 31, John 14:1-4, Hebrews 7:25
Weary Psalm 90, Matthew 11:28-30, I Corinthians 15:58, Galatians 6:9, 10
Worried Matthew 6:19-34, I Peter 5:6-7

Teaching About Some of Life's problems

Adultery Matthew 5:27-32, I Corinthians 6:9-11
Adversity Matthew 10:16-39
Anger Matthew 5:22-24
Anxiety Matthew 6:19-34
Conceit Luke 18:9-14
Covetousness Mark 7:21-23
Crime Matthew 15:17-20
Death John 11:25, 26
Deceit Matthew 23:27-28
Depravity John 3:19-21
Divorce Mark 10:2-12
Doubt Matthew 14:28-31
Drunkenness Luke 21:34-36
Enemies Matthew 5:43-48
Excuses Luke 14:15-24
Extravagance I Timothy 6:7-12
False Confidence Matthew 7:24-27
Falsehood Revelation 21:8
Faultfinding Matthew 7:1-5
Fear Luke 12:5
Flesh Romans 13:14
Greed Luke 12:15-31
Hatred Matthew 5:43-48
Intemperance Proverbs 20:1
Judging Matthew 7:1
Lip-service Matthew 7:21
Lust Mark 4:18, 19
Pride I John 2:15-17
Revenge Matthew 5:43-48
Self-exaltation Luke 14:11
Self-righteousness Luke 18:11-12
Sin John 8:34-36
Submission I Peter 2:13-17
Swearing Colossians 3:8
Temptation I Corinthians 10:13
Tribulation John 16:33
Worldliness I John 2:15-17

Suggested Readings

Historical Highlights

The Creation [Genesis 1 and 2](#)
The Fall of Man [Genesis 3](#)
The Flood of Noah [Genesis 6-9](#)
The Call of Abraham [Genesis 12:1-9](#)
Deliverance of Israel from Egypt [Exodus 11-14](#)
Dedication of the Temple II [Chronicles 5-7](#)
The Babylonian Captivity of Israel II [Chronicles 36](#)
Revival of Israel after Captivity [Nehemiah 8 and 9](#)
Promises of the Coming Messiah [Isaiah 9: 2-7](#), [Psalm 22](#), [Isaiah 53](#)
The Birth of Christ [Matthew 1:18-2:23](#)
The Triumphal Entry [Luke 19:28-44](#)
The Last Supper [Mark 14:12-26](#)
The Garden of Gethsemane [Matthew 26:47-56](#)
The Betrayal of Jesus [Matthew 26:47-56](#)
The Resurrection of Christ [Luke 24](#), [John 20](#)
The Ascension of Christ [Acts 1:1-12](#)
The Coming of His Holy Spirit [Acts 2:1-21](#)
The Conversion of Paul [Acts 9:1-31](#)
The Heroes of Faith [Hebrews 11](#)

Spiritual Standards

The Ten Commandments [Exodus 20:1-17](#)
The Sermon on the Mount [Matthew 5-7](#)
The Golden Rule [Matthew 7:12](#)
The Greatest Commandment [Matthew 22:36-40](#)
The Righteousness of Faith [Romans 3:19-28](#)
The Royal Law [James 2:8](#), [Romans 13:8-10](#)
Christ's New Commandment [John 13:34, 35](#)
Christian Love I [Corinthians 13](#)

Dynamic Doctrines

God's Greatness and Man's Weakness [Isaiah 40](#)

The Twofold Revelation of God [Psalm 19](#)

Man's Universal Guilt [Romans 1:18-2:16](#)

Atonement [Leviticus 16](#), [Romans 5](#)

The New Birth [John 3](#)

Justification by Faith [Ephesians 2:1-10](#), [Galatians 2:16-21](#)

Christ, the Good Shepherd [Psalm 23](#), [John 10:1-18](#)

The Second Coming of Christ [Matthew 24](#), [II Thessalonians 1:7-2:12](#)

The Last Judgment [Revelation 20:10-15](#)

The New Heaven and New Earth [Revelation 21 and 22](#)

Christian Virtues and Character

Abundant Life John 10:10
Citizenship Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1
Cleanliness II Corinthians 7:1
Consecration Romans 12:1,2
Contentment I Timothy 6:6
Courage Psalm 27:14
Diligence Romans 12:11
Duty Luke 20:21-25
Endurance Luke 21:9-10, II Timothy 2:3
Faith Matthew 8:5-13, Mark 11:22-24
Faithfulness Matthew 23-25
Forgiveness Mark 11:23, 26, Ephesians 4:31, 32
Freedom John 8:31-36
Fruitfulness John 15:1-8
Godliness Titus 2:11-14
Happiness Matthew 5:3-12
Holiness I Peter 1:13-16
Honesty II Corinthians 8:21
Honor I Peter 2:17
Honor to Parents Matthew 15:4
Hope I Peter 1:13
Humility Luke 18:9-14, Philippians 2:3-11
Joy Luke 10:20, John 15:11
Kindness Colossians 3:12, 13
Labour John 9:4
Love Luke 10:27, I Corinthians 13
Obedience Luke 10:27, I Corinthians 13
Overcoming John 16:33, Revelation 3:12
Patience Hebrews 10:36
Peacefulness John 14:27, Romans 12:18
Perseverance Mark 13:5-13
Prayer Luke 11:1-3, Ephesians 6:18
Pure Thinking Philippians 4:8
Purity Matthew 5:27-32, II Timothy 2:22
Reading The Bible John 5:39, Psalm 1, Psalm 119:97
Resolution Psalm 89:7
Righteousness Matthew 5:6, Matthew 6:33
Sincerity Philippians 1:9, 10
Steadfastness I Corinthians 15:58

Stewardship I Corinthians 4:2, II Corinthians 9:6,7
Temperance I Thessalonians 5:6-8
Trust Psalm 37:3-5, Proverbs 3:5, 6
Truth John 14:6, John 17:17, Ephesians 4:14, 15
Victory I Corinthians 15:57, I John 5:4
Watchfulness Mark 13:34-37
Worship John 4:23, 24
Zeal John 2:13-17, John 6:27

Practical Precepts

Christian Home Relationships [Ephesians 5:22-6:4](#)
A Model Wife and Mother [Proverbs 31:10-31](#)
Marriage and Divorce [Matthew 19:3-9](#), [Malachi 2:14-16](#)
The Sin of Adultery [Proverbs 6:23-33](#)
The Prodigal Son [Luke 15:11-32](#)
Employer-Employee Relationships [Colossians 3:22-4:1](#)
Business and Professional Principles [Psalm 15](#)
Separation from Worldliness [II Corinthians 6:14-7:1](#), [I John 2:15-17](#)
Decisions about Doubtful Things [Romans 14](#)
Christian Fruitfulness [John 15](#)
Heavenly Wisdom [James 3:14-18](#)
Christian Responsibilities [Romans 12 and 13](#)
Christian Stewardship [II Corinthians 8 and 9](#)
Christian Witnessing [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [John 17:18-20](#)
Prevailing Prayer [Romans 12 and 13](#)
Heavenly Priorities [Matthew 6:25-33](#)
Brevity of Man's Days [Psalm 90](#)
Consequences of Forgetting God [Hosea 4:1-11](#)
The Causes of War [James 4:1-4](#)
The Value of the Soul [Mark 8:36-37](#)

10 commandments

The Ten Commandments were originally given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, as recorded in Exodus chapter 20:

"I am the Lord your God..."You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

"You shall not murder.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

Exodus 20 ESV

When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus referred to them and summarised them as follows:

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Matthew 22:37-39 ESV

On another occasion he told an enquirer:

He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 19:18,19 ESV

Help in Time of Need

- The Way of Salvation
- Comfort in Time of Loneliness
- Comfort in Time of Sorrow
- Relief in Time of Suffering
- Guidance in Time of Decision
- Protection in Time of Danger
- Courage in Time of Fear
- Peace in Time of Turmoil
- Rest in Time of Weariness
- Strength in Time of Temptation
- Warning in Time of Indifference
- Forgiveness in Time of Conviction

Suggested Readings

- Historical Highlights
- Spiritual Standards
- Dynamic Doctrines
- Practical Precepts

Practical Teachings

- Where to Find Help
- Teachings About Life's Problems
- Christian Virtues and Character

10 Commandments

Gideon Bible helps

The helps provided here are a guide to key verses and study topics.

Bibles That Are Easy to Use

We want to make sure that when people turn to the Bible for help, they can easily find the guidance they need, especially if they've never read the Bible before. At the front of all Gideon-placed Bibles is a section called Bible Helps, which informs readers where to find verses on meaningful topics.

You can follow the Bible Helps here also by selecting from the menu.