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# PART V

## GOD'S GRACE

## GRACE SIX TIMES

I had not had any classes scheduled on a particular site for a month or two so I decided to close my schedule so that students would not be able to book, and I wouldn't have to worry about repeatedly checking for last minute changes. One night a message popped up saying that Grace requested 2 classes with me. I wasn't quite sure of even how to accept since it was the first time a student had requested a class, let alone 2 classes. The whole process was new to me since I had only been approved to the site for less than a few months. I agreed to accept both.

About four days later, and before we had even met for our first class, she requested 2 more classes. After 4 were scheduled, I taught the first two with her. That same morning, she requested two more. In total, she had requested 6 classes. On this site, students usually book one class at a time with a new teacher. Thus far, I had only taught a few repeat students.

Of all the kids living in China, Grace searched for and found me. At the time, I was oblivious to the challenges facing our brothers and sisters living in countries that do not tolerate Christian beliefs. I missed the subtle clue.

It was only when I saw Grace 6 times on my schedule that I thought that maybe God was trying to tell me something. When I looked at list of scheduled classes, all I could see was Grace, Grace, Grace, Grace, and Grace. I looked up the definition of grace. Grace is "the unmerited favor of God towards man." Grace is a gift from Heavenly Father given through His Son, Jesus. Grace refers to the enabling power and spiritual healing offered through mercy and love. No one can return to the presence of God without divine grace.

Within a few minutes of my realization that God was sending me a message, two classes disappeared. I was having a lesson of my own. This was not about teaching English. I was the student learning about grace. God searches us out and offers His grace.

I may have been slow the first time but caught on faster a few months later at the start on the new year. A message from the online company said that in 2019 I had more classes with Grace than with anyone else.

You might think that would be enough grace, but just in case I'd forgotten, there was an additional reminder on a different teaching platform. In late February, I got a random question from a family that I worked with several times per week. In the message, the mom mistakenly wrote, "Grace,...."

She had messaged me many times in the past and had never started her message with, "Ty,..."  
It reminded me of when Desi had overheard her own name in the bathhouse to bring  
reassurance that everything will be OK.

Praise God for His grace!

## WHO IS FIRST?

Brent was in a medical cell and had even less control than in a regular cell. His small comforts of using the phone or looking at mail on a kiosk were gone unless permission was granted and given by a guard. To give some perspective, guards said that they didn't have time to take Brent to get a shower for 6 days. He finally gave up hope and tried to wash off the best that he could using the cold water from the sink in his cell, while hoping not to get thrown into isolation for having his jumpsuit down long enough to wash off.

We are still confused about the rules of that jail. One rule is that you must always have your jumpsuit on the whole way unless you are covered by your blanket while sleeping between certain hours. In a medical cell, the only toilet is in full view of the camera. How is anyone supposed to use the restroom or wash off without breaking the first rule?

It was a Wednesday night at about 7:30 PM. For over 23 years, it has been very difficult for me to talk about the birth of my oldest son. You would think that I would want to shout about it from the rooftops, but you'd be wrong. I was ashamed and thought people would judge me. They might think that I was stupid for wanting a home birth... unrealistic and reckless. These were the thoughts that kept me silent from sharing one of the greatest experiences of my entire life.

Now, I felt empowered by the Holy Spirit, breaking chains of doubt and fear. I had prayed earlier that day for chances to encourage others in their faith. Then, as part of the application portion of the Bible study, the pastor was asked people to share what helps them with their faith. I knew I had to them.

At that point in time, I had probably only talked about Roman's birth with ten people, all of them being family or friends that had known me for years. I was about to more than triple that number by speaking one time. I felt compelled and ready, even though I couldn't even tell you all their names.

I listened to the others as we worked our way around the room. Sitting beside me, Desi said that she was adopted by the best family ever. That was enough to make me cry. I was already nervous. My turn was next....

Hundreds of miles away and after asking all day, a guard finally sat the phone at the flap of Brent's cell door. He had been told, "sure," "in just a minute" and "not yet" all day long, but the first two comments had been lies from numerous guards as they turned and walked away. That made Brent even more upset than just being told, "no." He started to push the keys to call us.

I said, "When my..." Our phone rang.

Desi whispered, "It's Brent."

I had a choice. I could stop my sentence and quietly excuse myself to answer the phone. I love Brent dearly, know how much it would hurt him for me to miss his call, and knew there was a good chance that it was the only time I'd be able to talk to him that day. I also knew that this was a test. The timing was too perfect. The enemy wanted me to put my husband before God. The devil did not want me to talk about Roman's birth! It might encourage other believers!

With pain in my heart, I continued my sentence and went on with the story. Desi answered the phone and left the room. She was gone for several minutes. When she returned, she motioned to me with her eyes and the tilting of her head for me to stop talking and leave. I had almost finished relaying my experience. I ignored her and continued telling the rest of the story. I really wanted to hear what the half of the class had to say, but I also knew that Brent was sitting by himself, and that the joy brought to me by hearing other testimonies would be overpowered by the hurt and anger it would bring to Brent. We left the building and sat outside. Brent still had the phone and called again. I explained that it had been a direct attack from the enemy. I couldn't let the devil win that one and was grateful for the eyes to see past the manipulation.

Let's think about this for a moment. Who lies? Does God lie? Does the devil lie? The guards had lied repeatedly, and one had finally given Brent the phone at the exact time to prevent the sharing of God's good work. I don't know if the guards profess to be Christians or not, but what I do know is that they were being influenced to silence my testimony. Would the Holy Spirit or an evil spirit encourage that? When you think about this scenario in spiritual terms, the guards are clueless pawns. They do not realize or believe that they are part of a spiritual battle.

Guards had no way of predicting that I was about to give a personal testimony. There were many guards who denied access to the phone. Maybe they didn't feel like it. Should I hate them for spreading sarcasm or lies? No! Jesus says to pray for them! Those who lie repeatedly and without remorse are obviously falling into the devil's snare. Small behaviors each day either work for good or evil.

Many things in our lives that become habitual. I know that everyone makes mistakes and sins, but please, at least try not to sin! If you find enjoyment by sinning, please ask God and others for help. If you think that sinning is no big deal and rationalize that everybody does it, that is only partially true. Yes, everyone sins. It is a big deal though, that is why God sent Jesus to be our savior. Our culture is way too comfortable with sin.

The next day, Brent had the phone at his door available to him for about 6 hours. On Sunday, we had another test. Brent was given the phone and called exactly when our pastor got up and started his sermon. Brent had no way to know the time. The topic for the day: doubt. Desi and I left the sanctuary and went into a room nearby. I explained that we were at church, and I felt like this was another test of the devil. Brent agreed. Determined to bring good from the situation, we returned to the sanctuary but stood in the back to reduce distractions for about 5 minutes with Brent still on the other end so that he could try to hear also.

After about five minutes, we went back to the other room. Even though Brent said that he could only hear a few words, I was encouraged because in a sense, we were at church together. We talked for a few more minutes. Brent said that he thought he could hold on to the phone long enough that we could talk to him after the service was over. When we returned, I was able to write down some notes and scriptures covered during our absence from the screen to study later. Brent called again just as we were sitting down in the car to leave. It was the only time that day that he was allowed to use the phone

Tuesday, two days after Brent had to choose between putting God or his family first, he was put into a regular cell again. Although he was once again subject to the negativity of other inmates and the TV, the day before I typed this it was set to a marathon of horror movies all day, the phone is available most of the time. Brent called for a good morning, lunch, and good night prayers... along with any other time that he felt he needed to hear our voices.

## DID YOU FORGET US?

I was really in a slump and feeling very sad. Two days earlier and while shackled in a courthouse holding cell, someone in the same cell had purposefully peed on Brent. He had to remain in the urine-soaked jumpsuit until he could ask for a new one at the jail.

Brent had been moved to a different cell. He called and said that he didn't feel safe. While he was sleeping, someone got into his box and took several pieces of candy. While he was in the shower, someone used one of his clean socks as toilet paper. His coffee also looked funny. Since it appeared as if someone was messing with his other stuff while he was in the shower and based upon stories he had heard from the other cell, he thought it wise to dump his coffee.

Brent's personal weakness had become an easy target. Brent has always been sensitive to noise, especially abrasive or purposefully negative forms of media. The TV was louder than what it had been before his arrival and according to another inmate, sleeping patterns had changed. There's no law against having the TV turned on full volume in a cell that echoes with people yelling over the program. It is a tactic to try to persuade someone to request solitary confinement... but that has different challenges.

While Brent was in the shower, someone used his clean sock by the shower as toilet paper. His coffee also looked funny. Since it appeared as if someone was messing with his other stuff while he was in the shower. Based upon stories he had heard from the other cell, he thought it wise to dump his coffee. The other inmates made it very clear, he was not welcome in the cell.

I have tried to be patient. I have prayed for the Lord's will to be done and trusted that He has a plan. It is just very hard to see or to imagine it sometimes. We are utterly helpless. I couldn't concentrate on anything but was trying to read a book about the Holy Spirit, miracles, and the modern church. It was difficult, but I managed a short prayer. I have seen His work and experienced His help so many times. I thought for sure that He would have delivered us from our torment by now. Did God forget about us?

When writing about this, we were down to one running car for our family. I wasn't used to sharing a vehicle. Thinking it would be a minor inconvenience, I had allowed Isaiah to take the car for several days and assumed that we'd just stay at home. Somehow, in one day, people wanted two different things from my home. Isaiah had already talked to one of the guys for about an hour and a half and said he was safe, so we agreed to meet him on the front porch. Normally, we'd go to a public place and wouldn't have strangers coming to our door.

The man planned to pay for the item with a check to also serve as a receipt. Desi said that was fine, but if he wanted, I could also write him a statement that he had paid in full. He agreed and went to the bank for more cash. I asked for his name so that I could make out a proof of

purchase while he was gone. He said his name, but I was too confused to write. I asked him again. He thought I was having trouble spelling because of too many double consonants. Nope. That wasn't it. Emmitt Elliott

That name might not mean anything to you, but to me it meant that God had not forgotten us... and seems to have a sense of humor. I needed to be more patient. Let me explain. Emma is my daughter that ran away. At the time, all criminal charges for Brent and me were from Elliott County. Emmitt Elliott seemed to combine the two.

We talked for about an hour and a half about a variety of topics. I shared the story of our cross-country trip in the \$650 RV. Since that had happened and we arrived safely, then I am sure that this will work out. After recounting that experience, I had been drawn out of my foggy stupor and was ready to type again. God wasn't finished though.

The same day, two people drove from two hours away to get my old truck cap. It had been advertised for free for about three months. At least ten people had called during those months saying that they were going to get. They didn't. One other local had showed up but decided not to take it. It seemed odd that they would travel from so far away when nobody nearby was interested. We did a little Facebook snooping before sending our address.

We saw that he had several posts about prayer. After they had loaded the cap, I asked one of them if he was a praying kind of man. He said he was so I asked if he could pray for my family. He hopped back out of his truck and said, "How about right now?"

Thanking God in advance, the two older gentlemen, Desi, and I held hands in a circle and prayed... right there, half in the driveway and half in the alley. He said, "Consider it done." Before leaving he said that he would have his wife and church pray for me also. It seems that God arranged two divine appointments for me in one day. I didn't even have to go anywhere. They both came to me. God did not forget us.

## PRAISE GOD!

I will confess a grievous sin to you. As a parent, I failed to teach God's Word and power to my children as they were growing up. I cringe at my own neglect to my most important job as a parent. I believed in God and Jesus but did not take them to meet with other believers. I kept my beliefs relatively quiet and quit praying with Brent. I talked to God and read my Bible less often.

In turn, it was harder for me to see His work in my life. Although God or the Supreme Intelligent Being was never in question, the belief in salvation only through Jesus began to waiver. Why did so many people fight about Jesus' role? It seemed exclusive and like God had given people of other religious backgrounds an unfair challenge to gain His acceptance. How could God be loving and condemn those born into an Islamic culture?

In society, I blended, drifting along with the distractions of contemporary culture. I still had conservative core beliefs that kept me from many temptations but was falling into Satan's snare. Satan planted small seeds of fear and doubt, cunningly cultivating them over decades. Satan knew that if he could keep me frozen in doubt or fear, it would be my family's demise. My children would be ill equipped for spiritual battle. They would be deceived and not even know it.

As I had grown closer to God through my recent hardships, my blaring flaw tormented me. How was I to teach my adult children about Jesus? They didn't want to hear my ramblings. They thought I was weak and only turning to Jesus because of my desperation. I admit I'm weak and desperate, but they didn't see how I had been given true freedom.

In my weakness, I had allowed and even begged Jesus to take over. When I felt strong, I thought I could handle life's challenges by my own strength and abilities. It is only when I was completely broken that I had asked Jesus to take all my burdens. I had intentionally and literally prayed saying, "You'll have to take care of this. I don't have a clue as to how to even begin." There are many areas of my life for God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit to work. My guess is that it will take my lifetime and more. However, God didn't need to wait until the end of my life to work.

It occurred to me that I'd been given an enormous amount of time. After the initial shock wore off, my first goal was to find a new job. Gradually, it became increasingly clear that God was not concerned about my finances. He wanted me to seek Him first, praying and reading His Word as much as possible. At first, I felt guilty spending so much time doing this. The world's standards insist that earning money is top priority. Reading a book is a hobby for your free time. It's not supposed to take up all your time unless you are studying for some type of test that will advance your career.

Any member of the military knows that training is important. Being part of God's army also requires training. The weapons are very different because of the uniqueness of the battle. If you recognize the power of God's Word, you understand that studying it is essential for fighting spiritual battles. If you don't see the power of prayer, then in a sense the prayer time is like a whimsical wish or daydream of sorts. If you have no faith, you very likely will see no results.

For years, I thought that two or three minutes spent reciting a memorized prayer would be enough for each day. I thought that I could do this while multitasking. I could pray and drive a car or wash dishes at the same time. Although you can pray while doing a menial task, I suspect that it might produce a limited connection... think of it as a slow, dial up internet connection. God says that He wants to be number one in our lives. How can we in good conscious say that He is number one if we don't even devote individualized attention to Him? Time with God is not supposed to be divided like one of four tabs open on a computer. He is not satisfied as an app ignored but quietly running in the background. Yes, God wants us to constantly recognize Him in our hearts as we go about our daily lives, but He also wants individual time with us.

Jesus set an example for us. Jesus deliberately withdrew from others so that He could talk with God with no distractions. If Jesus, being perfect and knowing the importance of focused prayer, wanted this time to communicate, then with all my faults I imagine I need so much more.

I gave up on my ineffective physical efforts having an impact on my children's spiritual lives and told God that He was going to have to reach them. I didn't give up but changed my strategy in prayer. Ephesians says that we don't fight flesh and blood. We fight principalities of evil that we have never even seen. If this verse is true, then the true enemy is never a person. We fight realms of darkness influencing evil works through people. God offers the Holy Spirit to anyone who is willing to accept. It is so important that we remember that evil trembles at Jesus' name.

Roman was in Alaska. Isaiah was in North Carolina. Emma and Maddi were in Kentucky. I was in Ohio. God would have to do it. I just hoped it wouldn't take 40 years to see some evidence. I was determined to be a quick study. Learning from examples God had provided in the Bible seemed like a good place to start. Approaching in humility, lining up with God's will, and bringing glory to God seemed like key components of a worthy prayer.

I felt humble and was sure God wanted my children to know Jesus personally. If God would grant this prayer, I would give the glory to God for being willing to orchestrate events to reach my children. In fervent prayer, I asked God to bind Satan, demons, and evil spirits in all assignments or plans surrounding my children. I asked God to touch their hearts. I asked for God's Harvesters to go and get them... to intervene... I was persistent in my prayers.

Two days later, we were talking on the phone to Roman. He said that he needed to go because he had been invited to a Wednesday night Bible study.

The following Wednesday, we were talking on the phone with Isaiah. He said it was the weirdest thing, but he was just getting back from Youth Group. He told two friends that he would go with them, lost the friends while playing frisbee, found himself lost in a church, and then found a small group of young adults playing music. The group needed help with the percussion because the person attempting that part had no sense of rhythm. Since Isaiah had played the drums in high school, he was the missing piece to this group.

They stopped practicing to go with a larger group, study part of the Bible, and play a game about gathering flashlight pieces. Later, Isaiah and the other musicians performed the song that they had practiced earlier. Isaiah said that he had fun, there were lots of nice people, and that he planned to go back to continue playing the percussion piece.

Later that night, some people asked Isaiah to go to a big house where someone had passed away. The family was trying to give away everything in the house before they sold it. They told Isaiah to get anything he wanted. This was helpful since he was on a very tight budget. The inspiration and kindness though were priceless. Isaiah had seen the aftermath of the massive theft from the homestead. It was easy to become discouraged. To see such love offered to a stranger afterwards brought new life to a fragile heart. That was the true blessing.

On one hand, most people don't ever have the degree of theft we'd endured. On the other, most people aren't offered such opportunities.

Earlier, the same day, we had Family Court. My mind had anticipated only negativity. On the way, I asked God to please let something positive come from it. My prayer was answered. Before court, my lawyer was able to share some additional information that had been given to him.

I'd love to share with you what it said, but I'd rather not go to jail for breaking the confidentiality of a juvenile court record. Do you remember the First Amendment to the Constitution that says that Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech? In Kentucky, Section 610.340 prevents me from saying anything. There is no freedom of speech for any parent regarding any document, statement, or action related to Family Court.

Let me just share my opinion. Anytime an institution is given legal authority to operate in complete darkness, legally silencing everyone involved indefinitely, there may be an opportunity for evil forces to work. One family at a time, the court restricts parents from having a voice. United, and with a collaboration of many stories from many families, citizens might notice a problem and demand more transparency. The devil relies on the division and

fear of legal ramifications to continue to kill, steal, and destroy. Very few are willing to fight the giant. Forgiveness of such a system is necessary for any healing to begin.

Let's get back to the good part. With just a few adjustments to our traveling plans, Desi and I were able to make it on time to our Wednesday night Bible study! God didn't answer my prayer over 40 years. Despite legal restrictions and thousands of miles of distance, God had shown me in one week's time that He was active in all five of my children's lives. Praise God!

## THE SIMPLE THINGS

After six months of weekly video visits with Brent, we looked into different camping options to see if we could reduce or eliminate those camping fees. It was costing over \$100 per month just to camp once per week. We found a couple of cheaper places to camp, but none of them have access to running water or flush toilets. We can handle these primitive conditions much easier than the modern facilities provided with an overhead camera in drunk tank. We planned to stay at one of the free sites again, so we did not pack any towels or showering supplies. We figured that we could skip one day.

We went to one of the places but did not feel comfortable. We are tough, but use statistics, logic, and “gut feelings” when setting up for the night. We weren’t feeling right about the first place. We drove to our other free backup along a mountain ridgetop. There were a couple of vacant spaces, but out of state cars and an unmarked car with official plates were beside them. We didn’t like the feel of that either. For all we knew, it was a moonshine bust. Why would people leave their cars and hike in the dark on a steep mountainside? I don’t know but didn’t want to stick around to possibly find out something that I didn’t want to know.

We decided to go to the regular campground with flush toilets and showers. It looked safe and we didn’t have any alarm bells warning us. Another family was camping nearby. We decided to stay, even though we weren’t prepared. Safety was our main concern... not refreshing showers. Did I mention that it was in the 90’s that day? In late September, the weather was unusually hot and humid. The previous week it had been in the 70’s during the day and low 50’s at night. When camping, this can be quite a difference. In short, we were feeling kind of icky.

Desi just wanted to rinse off and get the kink out of her hair that had been left from her ponytail. I went with her. She announced that there was a bottle of shampoo in the shower. Wahoo!!! Neither of us had towels, but I had worn a long jean skirt the previous day. A skirt can work as a towel. Desi used her T-shirt from the previous day. Getting a shower may seem like a little thing to you, but I feel so much more prepared for the day when I can stick to a regular routine and wash my hair in the morning. I felt so blessed for this shampoo.

The story gets even better. Desi got what she needed from the bottle and put it by the shower door so that I could have some. I went to the next shower stall with the treasured shampoo. Guess what I found. Conditioner!!! Yes, my excitement reveals how tough I really am. I thought I was going to cry. I had mentally prepared for taking a hike to the “great outdoors” for a restroom break. Now I found myself with the comforts of shampoo, conditioner, and hot water.

For years, I’ve not seen any hair care products left behind by another camper but have read campground rules that nothing is to be left behind in a bathhouse. Cleaning staff is responsible

for removing anything extra. We had camped approximately 30 times in the past 7 months. The one time I was unprepared, what I wanted (not even needed) was available for me.

I relayed this story to my mother-in-law a few days later. She said, "If God takes care of you that much for the small things that you need, just imagine how much He is taking care of you for the big things that really matter."

Maybe God thought He'd send some assurance that He was looking out for me. He would meet my needs... and some of my wants too. The shampoo and conditioner were provided in the same bathhouse as where I had been when I'd checked my phone and found Grace listed six times. The security and understanding of God's favor are so much more than the simple shampoo and conditioner.

## A BEAUTIFUL DAY

This may seem like a little thing to you, but I'm telling you anyway. Learning to see God's work in the small stuff helps grow our faith to overcome big challenges.

The church I attend was planning a free community outreach event on Saturday. The goal of the event was to strengthen young families already familiar with the church and to potentially add new families. The date had been set far in advance. Big inflatables were rented, hay wagon rides would be available, and face painting would be offered. Yes, there would also be plenty of food and an invitation to visit again. The Sunday before the event, a lady reminded us to pray for good weather. She did not want any excuses for why people would not show up.

It was a rather dreary week. Forecasters were predicting rain. When I woke up on Saturday, it was obvious that it had just rained. It was cold outside with lots of gray clouds. It looked like it could rain again at any moment. I didn't want to go out there.

Remembering the lady's prayer request, I said another prayer. "God, we are not asking for nice weather for ourselves. We just want a chance that others can be drawn to this event and that their hearts may be touched to know You better."

I'm sure my prayer was just one of many knocking at His door. We had no control over the weather. What would He do? Over several hours, the clouds slowly dispersed. About an hour before the outdoor event was to begin, the sun was shining brightly. I couldn't find one cloud in the sky. It was the perfect temperature for kids to run around having fun.

Some might say that the weather is unpredictable this time of year. True enough. If you have good motives and can potentially bring glory to God, why not say a prayer. If God had sent the clouds away a little sooner, people would be less likely to give Him the glory. The weather would have followed the weatherman's prediction. The fact that it looked so miserable just hours before the event heightened our awareness of how we were blessed when He answered with an absolutely beautiful day.

A fun day is nice, but did the efforts really matter? The next morning, there was rejoicing that over 200 people were at church. From a general show of adult hands in the sanctuary, about 20 were visiting for the first time. It did matter. God intervenes when we try to bring others closer to Him.

## SPEAK TO ME

I was at church asking God to speak to me. Once every few months, a person has a word from God to share. I told God that if someone would just say something, that I would know that the message was for me. A singer that I've never heard speak before said that she felt compelled to share a story.

She has since moved away, but at the time said that she visits the jail with Pastor Gary...AKA Mr. Hallberg. She said that usually when women are asked why they came to church, they say to be closer to God. Instead of the common response, a woman said that some of the other inmates were talking about God, so she came to learn more. The lady at church wanted us to remember to just talk about God. The Holy Spirit will compel hearts.

How could I apply this to my life? I should talk about Him and not worry about if someone agrees with me. Just share the Good News.

## OVER THE HILL

In early December, Desi and I left our home at approximately 5:30 AM so that I would be present for court at 11:30 AM. We didn't like to leave so early, but it was the best solution we could find so that we'd be neat in appearance before the judge. In the winter months, campground water lines are turned off. I try but don't always remember to pray before a journey. This morning I didn't forget. I prayed for God to put a bubble of light, a shield of protection around the car, to protect both the car and our bodies from harm. After the Scion incident, I had learned to ask for favor to protect our vehicle also. Our car was only three years old but had liability insurance only. The premium for full coverage with a new driver and after I had recently collided with the deer was too expensive. We paid the required minimum to be legal but trusted God more than any insurance agent.

During our trip, it rained almost the entire way. About halfway there, I saw a semi had run off the road and was sitting in the grassy mud along the three lanes of traffic running in each direction. I was grateful that only one lane was blocked with the numerous emergency vehicles and that traffic was flowing with just a very small delay. It looked like the semi just ran right off the road. It appeared to be unharmed. It also looked like quite a challenge to figure out how to get it out of the wet grass and mud.

We traveled onward and arrived safely. We had a mentally tough day in court. Brent's trial that had been set for the early part of February was moved to May 27<sup>th</sup>. It had crushed our spirits. That would be over one year waiting for the trials! Every month meant additional months of very limited income combined with the big expenses of trying to keep in contact with Brent. It meant four more pretrial dates paying two different lawyers.

Even though it was a difficult thing to hear, there was a silver lining. The judge set our next court date for January 13<sup>th</sup>. That was also the same date that was set for family court. If you look hard, you can see His favor. Because my lawyer travels from quite a distance, his travel time is the greatest expense. It is really a blessing to have two appearances in two different courts on the same day set for only two hours apart. As we left the courthouse, Brent's lawyer told us to drive safely. "We will," Desi responded.

Distracted with the thought of waiting four more months before trials, Desi started to drive towards the town where Brent was housed. We knew that we had good cell service in that area. We were certain that Brent would call as soon as he was able because he had been visibly upset at the delay during the proceedings. There were two possible routes. She chose the very curvy road instead of the straighter road because the straighter road was farther out of the way and a greater area had no cell service.

It was still raining, and I had just reminded Desi that I was uncomfortable with the g-forces that I was feeling. All the sudden, the car was fishtailing. Then we hit a big puddle, went across the road, through a barbed wire fence, and down a steep hill. We went down approximately 35 feet and then upon reaching a bunch of wet leaves, slid to our left about five feet. The car came to a stop. About three feet ahead was a big tree about 18 inches in diameter.

This didn't seem to be our day. On the other hand... Wow! We were incredibly "lucky." Let's talk about this luck... The state highway patrol officer told us that we should buy a bunch of lottery tickets because we were extremely lucky. In his opinion, our car should have flipped because of the angle of the hill. I don't believe in luck. I believe in God's protection!

For some reason, it must have been God's will for us to safely continue our journey with just a small financial price to pay. Maybe God knew that our experience would somehow increase the faith of others who were involved at the scene or who would hear the story later.

For whatever the reason, through the ordeal we met nice people. Our bumper got a small indent from the metal fencepost and a scratch from the barbed wire. Desi and I walked away without a single physical injury. Despite difficult times, God must want us alive. He also appears to be willing to protect belongings that He thinks we will need either now or in the future. Perhaps the homestead and supplies weren't protected because God knows that they won't be needed in our futures. Perhaps God doesn't want us to focus on farming or primitive survival skills. A homestead might be too distracting or time consuming. Maybe God has a different future planned for us.

Like a fruit tree, we may have been given a drastic pruning for great growth and abundant fruit. I trust that God knows what He is doing and that all things will work together for good.

## ASHLEY

We went for evening video visits with Brent and his friend Will. There were two women sitting in the waiting area with bags of personal belongings. We had to pass them to go to the visitation area. We sat down at the kiosk until it was time to click the start button. While we were waiting the girls were talking to each other and the guards. We heard one of the guards ask one of them if she was ready to use her phone call to call her dad. About three minutes later she came out with the guard discussing that she hadn't been able to contact her dad. It was quiet for a while and then we heard pretty singing. At that point it was time for our visit with Will.

We had a 15-minute gap between visits, so Desi got up to compliment the singer. Now, there was just one woman. Desi asked if she was the one singing. The woman admitted it was her, putting her head down in embarrassment. In the conversation Desi mentioned that it was uncommon for two to get out at the same time. The woman replied that they had just been pardoned by the governor. Desi told her that her singing was beautiful. Starting to open up, she said that she has liked to sing since she was three years old but never really in public.

Desi remembered that she couldn't reach her dad. Desi asked if she wanted to use our phone to try again. At first, the woman declined. As Desi walked away, she said that the offer still stood. The woman changed her mind. She called her dad and told him that she'd been released. She thanked us for allowing her to use our phone said, "You're really nice. It's uncommon these days." We said it wasn't a problem and we try to help when we can.

During our visit with Brent, we could hear her soft singing in the distance. The waiting room with its massive block walls had amazing acoustics. After the visit, Desi complimented again, saying we liked both Alison Krauss songs. We made some more small talk about music. Before I knew what was happening, I asked if we could pray with her. She said, "Yes. I pray all the time."

I asked for any specific prayer need on her mind. She didn't want to go back to the way things were. She wanted different friends, to start over, and to resist making the same mistakes. After praying with her, we finally introduced ourselves. Sometimes, we do things backwards. We wished Ashley good luck starting over and went on our way. I couldn't put my finger on it but felt like something was left undone. Later that night, I wished I'd have given her my extra copy of War Room by Chris Fabry.

I know this will sound weird to most, but if you've ever been homeless or away from home and sleeping in your car to save money, you'll understand. The next day, we went to the library to change into new clothes. Desi finished first and went to the car. I was taking too long. For some reason, even though I knew Desi was waiting in the car, I felt the urge to clean the sinks in

the library restroom... all of them. I had brushed my teeth and wanted to make sure that I left it better than I found it.

About half of a mile away, Ashley had awakened at the Best Western. She had enjoyed her first night in a long time of sleeping with no lights. She braided her hair and was very glad to have some fresh fruit for breakfast. Although she'd have to cross four lanes of traffic, Ashley decided to walk to the library.

Unknown to either of us, God had set a Divine Appointment. I was running a little early. That's probably why I felt the sudden urge to clean the sinks. The few minutes it took to do this made it so that Ashley was entering the library at the exact same time that I was leaving. Desi couldn't figure out why I had not come out to the car. Coming back through the library entrance, Desi found me talking to Ashley.

Remembering my wish from the night before and how strange it was to see her again the next morning under the circumstances I just described, I was confident that God had arranged for us to meet again. Not wasting my second chance, I told her that I had a book I wanted to give her. Ashley didn't want to have it in the library for fear that someone would accuse her of stealing it. Fear... isn't it interesting how the devil likes to use that trick again and again. Will God trump that one?

Kindness matters! Thinking of our interactions just hours before and knowing she had nothing to fear, she told us her hotel room number and asked if we could drop it off at the front desk. They would give it to her. Since it was shortly before the holiday season, I'd been working on getting Christmas cards ready to send. We left a Christmas card with her book at the front desk. Because Desi had just made the [nofearjustlove.com](http://nofearjustlove.com) website for me, I added that reference on the card. It was the first time I ever told anyone about the website. Fear lost. Love won!

If Brent weren't in jail, we would've never gone to visit or offered our phone to someone in need. If we didn't have the inconvenience of sleeping in our car, we wouldn't have gone to the library so early to prepare for our day. God is creative and can use anything or anyone for His good purpose!

## THE MISSING RING

Between the down time of video visits, Desi really liked to stop at a Christian thrift store. While shopping, a volunteer at the store was visibly upset. She had lost her ring that was very special to her. Trying to look for a ring in a thrift store is like looking for a needle in a haystack. The woman asked Desi if she would pray for her to be able to find her ring.

In the car, we discussed the situation. Compared to our recent losses, losing a ring didn't seem like that big of a deal. I didn't think a ring could make a difference in anyone's faith or salvation, so I thought it was "small potatoes." I felt a little silly asking God for help with such a thing. Then again, who am I to judge what is important or not important? Maybe it could help someone's faith grow stronger if it were lost and then found. We prayed that God would help the woman find her ring.

A few weeks later, we were at the same place. Desi saw the woman who had lost her ring and asked if she had found it. It was the woman's first day back in the shop since she had lost her ring. She was surprised that Desi remembered her problem and excitedly held out her hand to show that the ring had been found.

On the day the ring was lost, and as she was leaving, she looked down at the ground before she got into her truck. It was laying in the gravel. The lady felt that God must have helped her find it because normally she wouldn't have noticed something so small in the gravel. The lady's faith had been strengthened when the ring was found. The Bible does tell us that we should pray about ALL things.

I was glad that we had taken just a minute to petition God. The facts that Desi showed an interest, remembered a stranger's problem, and asked about the result weeks later allowed for the sharing of the praise report. The lady had completely forgotten their conversation but was quickly reminded and excited to share that her prayers indeed had been answered. To me, it's fascinating that two strangers who live hundreds of miles apart from each other can meet again three weeks later to share and answer the mystery of the missing ring. That must be God.

Don't be afraid to ask others for help or to share good news! If the lady had kept her problem to herself, even if she would have found the ring later, we would not have been encouraged from her experience. Don't fear that your story is too small to be shared in praise reports. Collective sharing by lots of believers shows how active God is in caring for His children!

## GENESIS 42:36

Upset by the shutdown of churches in March of 2020, I had quickly searched online for other believers meeting virtually. The first two groups I found would not allow anyone to join who had not previously visited their local congregation. Discouraged, I prayed that God would lead them to be more accepting and kept looking. On my third try, I found a group based out of Illinois with about 15-20 participants and had been quietly attending for a few weeks. I found the group very encouraging and treasured time spent with the other believers.

One morning I joined the meeting about a minute early. Pastor Vito was the only one online. He said that Betsy, the one who had organized the virtual meetings, wanted to pray for my family. They didn't know about my family's circumstances. If I were honest, these people could shun me and block me from the "safe place" I had grown to look forward to each morning.

I was glad for the warning. My thoughts raced. The night before, Brent's blood pressure was 220. He had been given emergency medication for several days because it had been consistently high. His vision was blurred, speech was slurred, and the blood pressure in his arms had about a 15-point difference. The PRAY FOR EMMA sign came to my mind. I could be vague and ask for prayer for my husband with high blood pressure. I could say to pray for my daughter who needed help. I really felt the need to unload it all though. How can God's glory shine brightly if we try to keep people in the dark about how desperate we are for His divine help?

Out of more than 30,000 verses Armando, Betsy's husband, said that Genesis 42:36 was really on his mind. Of all the scriptures, why was that one little verse on his mind? Standing alone, it seemed a strange scripture to ponder and discuss... unless he was being influenced by the Holy Spirit.

"Their father Jacob said to them, You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!"

That verse hit me too close to home. In my mind, Emma was no more, and Madison was no more. The thought of Brent's blood pressure and danger that it posed had my heart aching. I was very concerned that a force was trying to take Brent. The thought was too much to bear. It felt like everything was against me.

There is an important point here to remember. Our feelings do not always accurately portray facts. Jacob was wrong. From what he could see, Jacob was speaking the truth. In hindsight, Jacob was soon reunited with all his children. Perhaps Joseph was given the dream about the sun and moon bowing to him to encourage Jacob when he saw the blood-stained coat. Maybe

Jacob thought that the dream was wrong or wasn't from God. Maybe the dream was provided so that when Joseph asked Jacob to come to Egypt, Jacob would have an easier time doing it.

There are many maybes. What we do know is that God chose to reveal the dream while Joseph was still with his dad. We know that Joseph talked about it. God could have waited until Joseph was alone in the pit or later in jail to bring encouragement, but He didn't. My conclusion is that God wanted Jacob to know in advance, not just Joseph.

So, when this scripture was brought up on the same day they wanted to pray for our family, I couldn't hold back. If asked, I would be real and tell them about my true concerns for my family. As I was thinking this, Vito said he really felt the Holy Ghost working. Without warning, Vito disappeared from the zoom call. The prayer meeting continued for various other needs. I thought that if someone else mentioned prayer for my family, I would speak openly. If not, I'd keep quiet.

With about three minutes left for the call, Vito came back and said that his phone battery had died. He asked if they had prayed for me. When it was discovered that they had not, they asked how they could best pray for my family. I said that I felt the scripture was perfect for me since my adopted daughter ran away, made accusations, and my husband had been waiting in jail for the past 14 months as he awaited trial. His blood pressure had skyrocketed to 220 and I was greatly concerned that I was going to lose him too.

I continued. Despite these circumstances, I was greatly encouraged by Armando's choice of scripture because although these were the words spoken, they were all wrong. They were based on Jacob's feelings, not reality. I also told them about when Desi, Isaiah, and I went to trade the motorcycle, lost the GPS signal and we had traveled in the wrong direction until we stopped right where the sign said, "PRAY FOR EMMA." After unloading all that, Vito said that I was a person of substance. Then they prayed for my family.

So, what happened next? Medical staff at the jail doubled Brent's calcium blocker. The next day Brent's blood pressure was at 145. The following day it went to 130. Thank you, Lord, for intervening.

## CHECK THE MAIL

After a year and 7 months, a judge terminated custody of Emma and Maddi. For a long time, we had hoped for a reunification, but as time dragged on it became increasingly apparent that we had been legally bound from that goal. There had been numerous times in the past that we thought this would happen, but for one reason or another, there was always another delay. On September 18, 2020, at 1:00 PM via a Zoom video call, the process was finalized. Once again, I'd love to tell you more, but law prevents me from divulging details of a juvenile case.

When Desi checked the mail, we had an envelope with no return address. When opened it revealed a beautiful autumn scene along a country road. It looked very similar to the homestead area except for the curves ahead sign. It was from Philip Yancey.

Brent had read the book What's so Amazing about Grace and liked it so much that he wrote a letter to the author expressing his thankfulness at the opportunity to read it. Brent had given our address in case there would be any further correspondence. At the jail, Brent would only have a scanned version that would have disappeared from his screen in about a month's time. More realistically, because the card was handmade with a real photo attached, the jail would have thrown it away because they do not allow inmates to get a card like that. We would have never known that it was sent.

Anyway, our mail is almost always delivered between noon and 2:00 PM. It is very likely that the mail was delivered during the same time that we were having court. The written note reminded us of God's grace.

God didn't have to do that! The card could have come at any time or not at all. Brent's letter had been in transit several months earlier. Because of the address used, there was another delay. Yet, because of God's influence and timing, it arrived in our mailbox at exactly the time He knew we would need some encouragement and be reminded of His grace. We could not have arranged it if we had tried.

I thank God that we were able to see His grace and were not consumed with disappointment or feelings of rejection. When Desi showed me the card, I couldn't hardly believe it. Instantly, I was overcome with how good God is and how He cares for His children. God loves us. We have His grace. We have His unmerited favor. Even though it is difficult to see, we need to trust that the day's events were favorable. It amazes me that we didn't even ask for encouragement. It was a gift... a bonus... reminding us of how He works in mysterious ways extending grace.

## GENESIS 42-46

About the time of Armando's message of Genesis 42:36, a trial student sent me a message through my online work. It was confusing because of her broken English. She wanted to talk with me but couldn't figure out how to pay the company. She had to wait for her daughter, who had better English, to help her. Most people would have probably put in minimal effort to help her since she didn't have an official account and there was no monetary incentive for the extra communication. Since I had prayed for God to send me the ones He wanted me to connect with, I responded with care through various messages.

About four months later, she was a diligent student and rewatched our lessons several times for the greatest understanding. In mid-September, Karine said something that made me instantly think that I was supposed to help her outside of the typical teaching platform for free. To be sure my feeling was of God and not myself, I decided to try a fleece. I told her about [nofearjustlove.com](http://nofearjustlove.com) and said that if she went to the website that I thought it could help her. If she sent an email to that site, I would offer to help her learn English using the Bible as our reading material. I didn't tell her that was my intention. She sent a message. I was about to see a continuation of Genesis 42:36.

With the recent Feast of Trumpets and 10 days of prayer for The Return event fresh in my mind, I had wanted to start another Bible study as quickly as possible. Every extra prayer would help. Instead of waiting until the following week to begin, I suggested a test to make sure that Zoom would work for us. She had experienced technical difficulties in the past and I thought that we might need some help getting started. God must have been with us because with just a three-minute delay we were able to get it sorted out. After we talked, got set up and acquainted with the new format, she asked when we would have the Bible study part. I said that we could start either on Monday or now if she wanted.

She went to get her Bible saying that she read from it every day. She came back with a children's Bible. She was still in Genesis. Hmm... I was confused but asked where she wanted to start. She said Genesis 42-46. In kid friendly terms, Joseph saves his family from hunger and the family is reunited. That is a happy ending!

In our next class I discovered that Karine's husband is a pastor. She thought she'd told me before but hadn't, at least not in English that I understood. They felt led to move from Armenia to California as missionaries. She said that the United States has plenty of church buildings, but it is sad because they're empty.

We were about to start the lesson, and Karine wanted to go to 1 Samuel where Jonathan and David became best friends. I was surprised that so many chapters, stories, and whole books would be skipped. Karine explained that the previous day her Bible had mysteriously gone

missing. She had grabbed her daughter's Bible because she didn't see her own right away and didn't want to make me wait. If she had she been able to find her Bible, I would not have been given the extra encouragement of the family reunifying.

Once again, I thought of the timing and wondered about my future. The day before this happened, an earthly judge had terminated parental rights to Emma and Maddi, while a reminder of grace sat in my mailbox. A day later, the One True King sent a message of hope through Karine wanting to read Genesis 42-46. I believe the Highest Judge. One day we will be given the chance to reunite. God's grace will not be conquered. Joseph and Jacob waited a very long time. I'm NOT saying that it will happen soon. Legal constraints prevent that. I do believe it will happen "in the land of the living." In faith, I look forward to that day.

God's timing and how He puts everything together really is quite incredible!

## COMPLETELY HEALED

On September 26, 2020, I watched The Return event hosted in Washington DC. Many well-known religious leaders spoke encouraging America to repent and seek God. At one point, working through a translator, two people speaking Spanish asked for those who needed healing to reach upward and accept it. I knew that God had already healed me a few years earlier, but I raised my hands anyhow and prayed a short prayer. If there was anything else wrong that God knew about and wanted to fix, that He go ahead. I couldn't think of anything but figured that I didn't want to miss out.

The next morning, I easily reached down to the floor and picked up a towel. If you're under 30 and have never had back issues, this might not sound like a big deal, but for me, it was incredible! For YEARS, when in a standing position, I could not reach my hands below my knees. Both my chiropractor and MD had told me that I'd never bend like that again. Strategies had been developed for picking things up from off the floor.

Without thinking, with my legs together and knees completely straight, I was able to touch the floor! I repeated it just to make sure it had not been imagined. As I sit here typing my final revision, I did it again because it is so AMAZING! God completely restored my back. My only actions for this gift were to raise my hands and tell God that He could fix anything.

Those two things do not scientifically result in any change. I'd been happy for so long to be pain free and to have strength that I had forgotten about my previous flexibility. God remembered and completely healed me! What a Great Physician! Praise God!

## WORDS OF LIFE

Healing words can come from a variety of sources, but in the Bible, we are told to have words that speak life and healing. In the morning I had joined a virtual prayer closet. The scriptures of the day were Psalms 62:5-8 and I Peter 5:7. Like any part of the Bible, I appreciated it, but it didn't seem to resonate the way other verses do sometimes.

That day I had a combined Bible and English lesson with Karine. I wondered why she had cancelled her free lesson the prior day. It was out of character for her. Karine was very upset because of the war it looked like Armenia was fighting. To her, the conflict was personal, and the destruction made her very sad.

With the verses still fresh in my mind from several hours earlier, I told her about the message I had just heard. As I read from Psalms, Karine said that gladness had been brought to her whole house. I didn't know it, but her family was listening to our conversation. They had found the words from a stranger thousands of miles away to be comforting. They weren't my words. They are God's. The blessing could have stopped with one family when they heard the scripture... but it didn't. When I relayed the family's reaction to the one who had originally, she was blessed for knowing that she had been used as God's instrument to bring hope to a saddened family.

On earth, we are God's hands, feet, and voice. Yes, He can speak, but sometimes He uses others to send His message. The devil can work in the same way. Sometimes we do not realize what we are doing. Please, think about your words before you say them and your actions before they are done. If they are words that heal, they are from God. If they seek destruction, they aren't. Remember, your mouth reveals your heart.

## GOD'S PROTECTION

We had court on zoom and a video visit with Brent, so we left early in the morning to go to my lawyer's office, an approximate a 5-hour drive. We were behind a big dump truck. A deer came out of the woods and ran right into the right front corner of it. The truck was about 30 feet in front of us going about 45 mph. The driver wasn't worried and barely slowed down. If the deer would have run out about three seconds later or if the one in front of us was going just one mile per hour faster, our car probably would have been totaled... AGAIN! God protected our vehicle and our safety from the unpredictable wildlife. Thank you, Jesus!

On the same morning, a guard talked to Brent in the hall to discuss some problems in the cell. Once again, violence was offered as a solution to "take care" it. When questioned as to why Brent continued to ignore the advice, he simply replied that it wasn't biblical. Pushing further, the guard gave an illustration of loved ones being assaulted. Brent said that his first suggestion would be to get away as quickly as possible and then to ask security of nearby stores to review the video. That way, charges could be pressed making it less likely for others to face the same treatment. It was a more difficult scenario for Brent to answer because he is very protective of his family.

On the same evening, after our video visit, we started driving in the dark to a secluded place where we regularly go "car camping." As we neared our destination for the night, Desi said that we were being followed. In a rural location, the car behind us had turned, not once, but twice after us. Once at a far distance from us, they were getting closer. When we pulled onto the dead end, one lane, gravel road destination, there was no doubt in our minds. At the first opportunity, we abruptly pulled over onto a small patch of grass so that the vehicle behind us would be forced to pass us.

With their headlights shining brightly 10-15 feet through our rear window, I held up the phone so that we would be ready to call or livestream video if needed. Instead of passing us, the vehicle quickly turned around in the middle of the dirt road where there was only about three feet of grass on either side and big potholes. I'm not sure why, but they would not pass us. Suddenly, they could not get away from us fast enough. My guess is that if they had pure intentions and just wanted a place to camp, they would have gone to a spot. It was when they realized that we were aware of them and had a phone ready to record any interactions that they fled from us instantaneously.

We decided to head back into town. Because of covid restrictions and the time of year, campgrounds had been shut down. We spent the night in a Cracker Barrel parking lot. Thank you, God for protecting us from the dangers that we do not see. Your hedge of protection is greater than any force of evil that may try to come against us.

## THE ONES WHO NEED LOVE CONTINUED

Approximately three and a half years ago, I told God to just give me the ones who need love. My perspective of this request has been redefined. God has opened my eyes. I have seen and talked to thousands of people. From the ones who face the next decade or more confined behind block walls to the ones living in luxury with no financial restraint to anywhere in the world, ALL NEED LOVE!

# PART VI

# EXTRAS

Sequentially, June 16<sup>th</sup> happened first, but doesn't really reflect the main point of the book. Resting in the Holy Spirit is a controversial topic among different denominations. I didn't want anyone reading this to discount the whole book because it is not what they have personally experienced. Roman's birth was an extreme experience. Once again, I was concerned that telling that story too early would be too much for anyone to believe who didn't personally know me. The ice cream story took place after I asked God for the ones needing love but before our arrests. It seemed like a distraction for me to tell you about it in sequence. Finally, Psalms 40:10 relays my response to God saying, "Write it down."

## JUNE 16<sup>TH</sup>

On June 16<sup>th</sup> in the early 1970's, a little baby girl was born. In her childhood and early teen years she became close friends with Brent. For years, they attended the same church and were in classes together at school. She was known for having many seizures. Brent instinctively knew when she was about to have one or was quietly seizing. He was able to help minimize the severity and was allowed to walk her out of some. In time, Brent's family moved away and the two slowly drifted apart.

On June 16<sup>th</sup> of 1973, another little baby girl was born. This time it was me. At some point, Brent asked me my birthday. He was surprised when I said June 16<sup>th</sup>. He had always struggled to remember dates and times. In this case, he said that he would not forget. He already had many years of trying to remember that day.

There is a 1 in 365 chance that a best friend and wife would have the same birthday. Some things are just strange.

## WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

I was about 14-15 years old when these events unfolded. Brent was an acquaintance I had seen at school. He used to invite me to youth group at his church. He intrigued me, but I was certainly not going somewhere with a boy that I barely knew. The church he attended was known for being a bit more expressive in their services. He went to an Assembly of God. I attended a Church of Christ.

We were both Christians but differed in how we worshiped Jesus. My narrow perspective and interpretation of the Bible got in the way of recognizing that we were all members of His church. There are many buildings and congregations of people showing their love in a variety of methods. The collective group of people believing in Jesus is the ONE church.... past, present, and future! God intervened.

Trish, a nice girl I knew from Spanish class, invited me to go to youth group with her. I agreed. She and her brother arranged to pick me up and drop me off at my house. Wouldn't you know it? It was the same youth group! It became a pattern for Trish and her brother to transport me each week.

Brent and I started spending more time together. I liked him very much... enough that for a long time I resisted calling him my boyfriend. In high school, everyone knows that boyfriends and girlfriends often break up after just a short period of time. Friends were safer. Friends could remain friends for a very long time. I wanted him to be around for a long time. After about six months of slowly becoming best friends, I was willing to risk the girlfriend label. He started to go with my family on Sunday mornings because I wasn't allowed to miss services with my mom and dad.

Brent thought that these services were boring. Compared to my past experiences in other congregations, they were rather exciting. We had a quartet that would lead our voices in songs from the hymn books. There certainly were not any musical instruments. Music might overshadow the meaning of the words and disrespect God. That would be sinful!

Brent was used to several instruments that would accompany the singing congregation to modern lyrics being projected on a screen. I thought that modern songs weren't serious enough to sing in a church service. Singing to God was a serious matter... not a joyful one. People would lift their hands in praise or clap... that would be complicated if holding a song book.

As Brent and I progressed in our relationship together, we found ourselves praying together almost every day. One day, we were praying and talking about God. Brent asked me if I wanted to feel the Holy Spirit. I wasn't exactly sure what he meant or what might happen by

my answer, but I loved and trusted both God and Brent. I didn't think either of them would want to hurt me.

We were sitting down. I'm not sure if Brent said anything else or not but remember that he just reached over and gently tapped my forehead. I immediately fell back. I absolutely did not that! When I realized what had happened, I had a mixture of emotions. I was confused, surprised, and completely at peace. Why did I fall over?!?!

It seemed a physical impossibility that I would lose my balance like that. It was not logical at all, and my brain could not make sense of it. I had no knowledge of this type of experience. I knew it was some sort of religious experience, but I thought that religious experiences only happened in church buildings. We were in a personal home. If you think about the definition of the Christian church, it involves PEOPLE seeking God through Jesus, not places. God sent the Holy Spirit through Brent.

Shortly thereafter, I was alone in my bedroom praying. Outside it was dark and raining very hard. Continually praying, I went over to my window as tears streamed down my face. I knew I was sad but didn't understand the uncontrolled crying. The weather mirrored my face. I unloaded all my stress on God.

I spoke words that I had never learned. I didn't know where these words came from or if they were even words. In my heart, they felt like words. All I knew was that I had something to say, even though I didn't know what it meant. As these unknown words rushed from my mouth, I had an incredible sense of peace. Gradually, the crying stopped. Nothing in my life had changed. The same circumstances that had originally left me feeling so sad and overwhelmed still existed. The only difference was that God had taken away my heartache.

For decades, I told no one. I'd never heard of it happening to anyone else and was afraid that people would think that I was crazy. For all I knew, I was a hormonal, blubbing teen going through some sort of melt down. Can someone be peaceful and crazy at the same time? What was that?!?

Approximately 30 years later, I am finally understanding and being given words to articulate what happened so many years earlier. I was slain, resting, or consumed by the Holy Spirit. I was talking in tongues. You can think I'm crazy if you want. It's OK. I would merely suggest that you hold back your judgement.

Some may read or hear this and completely understand. Others will think I was influenced by the power of suggestion. There was no suggesting. I had never seen, heard, or read about these things in the modern world. I had read and heard about apostles speaking in tongues, but thought it was a one-time exclusive event that happened only when the original Christians

met right after Jesus went back to heaven. I did not physically see a flame of fire resting over my head. I thought that to have the Holy Spirit or to speak in tongues, you had to physically see fire. Praise God that He doesn't rely on our understanding!

About two and a half years ago, God said, "Write it down."

I mentioned this to someone at church who, without batting an eye, said, "Oh, your testimony." That is word I've been looking for. In any case, I don't know who I am writing my testimony for... myself, my family, or an audience not yet found. It is OK. I will, with the Holy Spirit's help, write and let God figure out the rest.

I pray that each one reading will one day fully understand.

## ROMAN'S BIRTH

If I ever had doubted the existence of God, Jesus, or heaven, this experience sealed the deal. There is no doubt in my mind. I am 100% sure that heaven and angels exist. Since I am 100% confident of this, I must also believe in the existence of the devil, demons, and evil spirits. Why would Jesus talk about these beings and places if they weren't real? There's so much going on in this world that we as humans can't see because of our limited eyesight.

When Brent and I were young, newly married, financially poor, and uninformed of our rights, we found ourselves expecting a baby. We were both very modest people. We faced the hard reality of obtaining medical care in an area of our lives that we were both extremely private. We went to the first appointment where a nurse confirmed that we were going to have a baby. Then we went to a different doctor for my first exam. It was horrible. The doctor kept saying that I needed to relax. How could I relax in a completely sterile, impersonal, and imposing environment? My next appointment was to have an ultrasound to see the age of the developing baby.

We went to our appointment, but Brent was told that he was not allowed in the room for the ultrasound. The nurses said that it was hospital policy. They said there wasn't enough space in the room for him to stand, to uphold doctor / patient confidentiality, and to ensure safety if the age of the developing baby would upset my husband. With the last remark, they implied that the developing baby might not be Brent's! They reasoned that he might get angry and possibly cause harm to the equipment, staff, or myself. The nurses gave me a choice. Go in by yourself or leave.

They obviously didn't know us. We left feeling hurt and outraged at the same time. It seemed unfair. Looking back, the staff either lied or hospital policies have changed. Much later in life, I learned about the Patient Bill of Rights.

Because we were so upset at the exclusion of the father in the development of his baby, we sought other options. We studied as much as possible and planned on a homebirth. This was in the days before the internet. At that time, we were unaware of how to contact a midwife and had very limited funds. We prepared our apartment the best that we could for our bundle of joy. We had everything we needed and more. We found lots of good things at yard sales from neighboring communities.

Brent asked me what I really wanted for the baby. I didn't want to tell him because it was so expensive. He persisted and I finally confessed that I really wanted a video recorder so that we would always have our first moments captured. The cost was huge for us but somehow, the video recorder was purchased and ready for our new baby to join us.

The day approached and I was having severe backpain...duh... contractions. We timed them and they were still far apart. Because my back hurt and I had not taken any medication at all since learning of my pregnancy, I asked Brent to massage and push on my back. He kept asking, "Are you sure?" I kept wanting him to push harder because it still hurt. I was used to his massages working and taking away my discomfort. Now it wasn't working. I suppose that's why women say labor is painful. A massage won't make the pain disappear... trust me.

This pain went on for about a day. At least the contractions were closer together at about 5 minutes apart. This painful process progress seemed never ending. I was already tired, and my water had not broken. We started to second guess our decision to have the baby at home and drove to the hospital.

At the hospital, the staff was outraged that I only had one visit with the doctor. They were also upset that I refused to sign a paper that permitted extra people in the room to observe my child's birth. That's right. They wanted me, a very private person, to demonstrate the birthing process to complete strangers. No thanks! Staff told me that everyone says the same thing but changes their minds when the time for delivery comes. Well, I'm not everybody!

I went to a delivery room and was hooked to all sorts of machines to monitor both the baby and me. Pitocin was given to increase the speed and intensity of contractions. At some point I noticed what I thought were toolboxes in the delivery room. They appeared to have been hidden behind pictures in the room. I realized they were cases for medical supplies.

I asked a nurse what time the staff had a shift change. In my research, I had read that the number of cesarean births dramatically increases before a shift change. Speculation may lead some to conclude that it is for the staff's convenience. I did not want this to happen to me. I looked at the clock approaching a new hour and again asked my simple question. Nobody would answer me.

Someone came in and notified the doctor that I had not signed a paper. The doctor became very upset and asked Brent if he was going to watch me die. Brent signed about five papers in about as many seconds. Immediately, approximately ten people came into the delivery room. My heart dropped. Why would about ten people come into the room the second that Brent signed papers and I was at my most vulnerable?

I felt so violated and my heart sank. The feeling wasn't just my imagination. My heart monitor relayed my instant distress. The doctor yelled for them to all leave. The heart monitor relayed my instant distress at the arrival of the people. If they all entered the room to save me, why did they all leave when my vitals got worse? I suspect they were there to observe now that the proper paperwork had been signed. I was devastated.

Without warning, the lights and all other electronic monitors went out in the delivery room. Staff scurried everywhere. The doctor demanded to know why the backup generators weren't kicking on. Nobody knew. They were upset because my unborn baby's heart rate had been dropping before the room lost power. Now all machines had stopped working. Nobody knew when the next contraction would be... except for me.

Amid the confusion, I said, "There's Roman."

Everyone froze. Time stood still. "Where?" the nurse beside me asked.

"Right there." I pointed in front of me, but slightly to the left. Roman Hershberger was standing right beside the doctor on the left side. I was not upset by his presence. In fact, I was greatly comforted and forgot about the intrusion of people or that I was in the middle of giving birth.

I recognized his face even though there was a white shining brightness, such that the doctor's headlamp was very dim in comparison, all around him. When I saw Roman, it never occurred to me that he had fallen off a ladder several months earlier and had died. All I knew was that I was so happy to see him. He never said a word but just appeared and stood by the doctor smiling.

The staff looked at one another. The nurse beside me said, "You are going to have this baby on this contraction. You are going to push with everything you have."

I nodded in agreement. The contraction came. I pushed with all I had. The nurse pushed on my womb at the same time. The doctor yelled that she had the head. With another contraction and another push, my son came into this world.

I felt such a sense of peace, but suddenly everyone else went crazy again. The nurse yelled that she had lost my pulse. The doctor yelled that they were losing me. I thought to myself, how could they be losing me... I was right there. That is all I remember before losing consciousness.

The next thing I remember was that all the electricity and lights were back on. Roman was gone. My heart monitor showed a flat line, and I was zip tied to the hospital bed. I heard the nurse say that she still couldn't get my pulse. Then, she said, "Wait, I have it..." I watched my heart monitor as it changed from a flat line to a line that indicated a heartbeat.

I asked why I was zip tied to the bed. They said it was for my own good. I asked where my baby went. They said he was being taken care of. Someone asked if I had a name for the baby. Brent and I had discussed James, Roman and a few other names, but we had not decided for certain. I looked at Brent and asked, "Roman?"

Everyone looked at Brent to see how he would react. They had no idea of who Roman was to me. To them, Roman had been a hallucination caused by a lack of oxygen in my brain. Brent shook his head in agreement. Everyone seemed relieved that Brent was satisfied. With an exasperated and agitated tone, the doctor looked at Brent and said, "You are lucky to have your wife and son. You almost lost them both." Then she left.

Later I was told that the electricity in the whole hospital went out for a second. Backup generators kicked on for the hospital, but the electricity on the floor where I was at stayed off for about a minute. In my delivery room, all electricity stayed off until after my son Roman had been delivered. I firmly believe that the electrical interference came from Roman, our friend from church who had recently passed away.

Roman Hershberger was raised in an Amish family. He fell in love with a Mennonite woman named Carol. Despite their devotion to God, both were excommunicated from their congregations for marrying someone of a different religion. They found a new place to worship in the same building as my family. We tend to classify ourselves as members of different denominations. Let's put differences aside, unite, and show love towards one another. There is just ONE CHURCH!

My dad, Roman, and Brent had worked on some construction jobs together. Brent and I agree that Roman Hershberger was one of the kindest people that we have ever met. I firmly believe that Roman is now fully alive in a new way that none of us can quite understand. He was sent to help my family in a time of great need. Praise God!

You might think that I would have immediately gone and proclaimed this experience to everyone I knew, but you would be wrong. Instead, I was told that I had hallucinated. I was crushed and didn't believe it, but fear took root. I feared that if I told my story that people might think that I was a liar, mistaken, or just crazy. The longer I let this fear rule me, the more ashamed I became that I had been quiet about such a wonderful gift. Now, I had acquired fear and shame.

A little over three years ago, I was talking to God. Four simple words came to me. I have thought about them almost every day since. Sometimes, they come to me many times in a day... depending upon my circumstances. "No fear, just love." It is very close to the verse in I John 4:18 that says, "Perfect love casts out all fear."

You can think I'm crazy if you want. I will not fear that label. I will love you regardless.

## A SWEET TREAT

I love ice cream even though it has too much sugar. It's a weakness. Don't even get me started on mint chocolate chip or strawberry with chocolate chips added. I try not to buy it because then I eat it. I rationalize with myself that it isn't all evil. God won't get upset for my indulging. If I eat more than I should, I'm the one suffering with reduced flexibility and pain in my joints. Finally, after several weeks of wrestling in my mind, I broke down and bought some.

The same day, Roman went free diving. He found about twenty cartons of good quality ice cream in a variety of flavors. We had salvaged the occasional container in past winters, but this was by far the most ice cream ever found at one time. Our freezers were packed. I could have kicked myself. I wasn't patient enough.

What a lesson! I thought I'd resisted long enough. Not even on sale, I had paid full retail when an enormous blessing was around the corner. I don't really think that God was concerned about the ice cream. I think He tried to get me to understand that He will provide for me and wants to bless me. Remembering this instance helped me to be more patient when I wanted a different chair. If God provided for my frivolous wants such as ice cream and a different chair, I'd be mistaken to think He's deserted me and won't meet my needs. I must be patient and wait for God to work in His time.

Psalms 40:10

I did not hide Your righteousness in my heart;  
I spoke about Your faithfulness and salvation;  
I did not conceal Your constant love and truth from the great  
assembly.