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## A Lesson in Humility and Love

*Darryl Bloodworth*

One of the scripture passages that has always been beyond my capacity to fully grasp is Philippians 2: 6-8:

*Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.*

Even with my lack of theological training I can understand this passage to say that Jesus gave up or limited his powers as a divine being equal with the Father to become human and die a humiliating death on the cross. How can we even begin to understand the depth of love that God has for us to send Jesus to do this?

I still can't fully understand such love or such humility, but a special period of time with my own father gave me a small glimpse of why God might do what he did.

My father was a professional baseball player. He spent over 10 years in the major leagues, beginning in 1939 and ending with the 1951 season. He even played in the World Series in 1950 when the Philadelphia Whiz Kids won the National League pennant. The Phillies lost four close games to the Yankees in the World Series, but it was an event my father always cherished. He had been to the mountain top of professional baseball, and he was fully aware that not all players ever got there.

After the 1951 baseball season my father managed teams in the minor leagues for five years before calling it quits with baseball. By the end of his managing career I had become a teenager and was playing high school baseball in our home town of Apalachicola, Florida. He never missed one of our home games.

Along with many of the other small towns in the Florida panhandle in the 1950s, Apalachicola had a town team. The players were usually men in their 20s or 30s who had competed in high school or college baseball, and they still wanted to play. Most Sunday afternoons there would be a game with one of the nearby towns. The town team's season didn't begin until the high school baseball season was finished. By the time I was in the 10th grade, I was fortunate to be skilled enough to play with the town team throughout the summer. I did so until I went off to college.

Occasionally my father would come play one of the hometown team games with us. By then, my father was in his 40s, and his abilities had diminished considerably from what they were in his heyday. But he didn't care; he just wanted to come play baseball with his oldest son. Here was a man who had been to the mountain top in baseball - playing in what were little more than adult sandlot games. I was thrilled to have this opportunity! Like most men of his generation my father was not a particularly affectionate person. However, his willingness to humble himself just to play baseball with me was an act of love and humility I will never forget.

God's love for us is much greater than any human father's love can be, but my own father's example helped me understand the *depth* of God's love.

## Awareness

*Joy Sutton*

Within about a week's time in early December 2018, my husband and I experienced two eye-opening incidents. Both of them might have had us meeting the Lord face to face, but they did not. Or both of them might have seriously injured each of us, but they did not.

The first happening was when Jim and I were coming home from church on a four-lane divided road. As we were driving along, a van from the opposite side of the street turned right in front of us. Jim was able to put on the brakes just in time to stop us *literally within inches* of hitting it. Our hearts were in our throats!

The second incident happened only a few days later. We were traveling on a busy two-lane road heading for the Christmas Art and Music Show in Winter Park. Suddenly a car came out of a driveway, hit our rear end, and jolted our car into the opposite lane. Fortunately, there was no on-coming traffic. A miracle!

My husband and I did not end up in what could have instantly been life-changing situations. Instead... we were alive and well. Thankfully we were able to open our home to celebrate the Christmas season with our extended family. It could have

been so very different! Gratefully we enjoyed a very blessed Christmas!

Jim and I believe *without a doubt* that the Lord's hand was on us!

These two sudden events which happened so closely in time literally and figuratively shook my husband and me into awareness of just how fragile life is. Surely there are many less frightening occurrences, but equally as important examples, of how God protects us each day for which we should give thanks.

## Be a Fool for Jesus

*Rev. Cameron MacMillan*

This is not a victory story...at least, not in the usual sense. Things did not go as hoped. Yet God was at work – in me.

Lately, I've become deeply aware of my need to actively pursue the Holy Spirit: the personal presence and power of God. So I've been praying and telling others about the journey I'm on.

One day two good friends and I were sitting at the new Starbucks in Maitland, catching up on life as well as talking about healing and the power of the Holy Spirit. Ironically, I had *just* shared with these friends a story about how another friend told me about looking like a fool when he offered to pray for someone. I told them confidently, "You have to be willing to look foolish, and sometimes God will do miraculous things." And wouldn't you know—Jesus wanted me to have the opportunity to do just that! Immediately a man wearing an arm sling approached us and asked if I would tie his shoes. He had broken his collarbone and told us the story of his difficulties. As I knelt to tie his shoes, the Holy Spirit reminded me of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. I felt our

Lord was giving me this opportunity to share in his humble service. Naturally, all I could think was *I need to practice what I preach and offer to pray for his collarbone.*

The man thanked me and went back to his seat.

Nudged by the Holy Spirit, I went over to him and said, “I’d be remiss if I didn’t offer to pray for your collarbone. I believe Jesus heals people.” He appeared nervous but answered, “If that’s what makes you happy and that’s what you believe, then that’s fine with me.” I leaned over him and gently placed my hand on his shoulder. He immediately responded, “Don’t touch! Do you have to stand *so close*? Do you have to lean over me?” I knew he was working his way out of getting prayed for. I also sensed that he was spiritually resistant to God. I quickly stood up and asked, “Is this okay if I pray from right here?” He replied, “How about over there?” and pointed to the door. I apologized saying, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to impose on you, just wanted to offer.” After my apology he responded, “It’s not necessary, but thanks anyway.”

Since others in the café witnessed my encounter, I left - feeling like a fool. However, I thanked God for providing me with this experience. As a result, I have become bolder in my offering to serve Him. Although



there was no healing, no glorious manifestation of the Holy Spirit, what I do know is, in that moment, I grew closer to Jesus—the Jesus who was mocked, spat upon, shamed, and crucified to make me his own.

## Danger in My Shower

*Elizabeth Gardner*

Although I had little time before my 11:30 hair appointment, I decided anyway to bathe and wash my hair in my large but narrow shower stall. Unfortunately, it has no grab bars. As I reached for the soap with my injured arm, I grabbed onto the soap dish. While holding on, suddenly the dish broke loose from the wall, and I fell backwards. Fortunately, however, I missed hitting my head on the small shower seat. I gratefully thanked God for sparing me further trouble.

Sitting there on the floor of the shower, I assessed my situation as water was gushing all around me. Having no strength in my knees, I was unable to pull myself up to reach the faucet handles to turn the water off. Not panicking, I began loudly yelling, “HELP.” Thinking all my windows were closed, I asked God, “Where are your angels? I need help in a *big way*! Then I added, “Lord, I do not want to die in the shower.”

What then happened was God’s way of answering my plea. My next door neighbor Clay heard my call when he came out to get something from his truck. To my surprise and great relief he discovered the window was open in my master bedroom next the bathroom. [Unbeknownst to me...my housekeeper had accidentally left it open.] Clay called out to me that he would

rescue me. Something I was confident he could do since he is a fireman and an EMT. Minutes later Clay and his wife Lynne crawled in through the window and found me huddled down in the shower.

With towels wrapped around me, Clay was able to stand me up so that I could get out of the shower. I breathed a huge sigh of relief! If left without any help, it's difficult to say what the outcome would have been. Hypothermia might have set in had the water turned cold. I might have fainted.

A window accidentally being left open, Clay being home and going to his truck at just the right time, he and his wife being able to get in through the window, and Clay knowing how to stand me up were each important to my being saved. *Amazingly* by the grace of God and His orchestration of what happened, I did not come to great harm.

## **God Anywhere**

*Karl Stephens*

Nearly every Friday afternoon about 1:30 I make my way to the chapel at Tomoka Correctional Institution. I do not go there to attend a church service, hear someone preach, nor sing praise and worship songs. Rather I join about a dozen incarcerated men as well as a few free world\* volunteers who gather in the chapel library to conduct our AA meetings.

For nearly 11 years I have participated in the New Beginnings AA meetings. Over those years I have met dozens of men who are trying to stay sober. Some of them have gone home, hopefully attending meetings on the outside. Others have not realized a great deal of success in their quest to stay clean. Yet others just don't feel the need to continue attending meetings.

Many of my Christian friends ask me why I continue to attend these AA meetings. Since my testimony is grounded in God delivering me from substance abuse, they wonder why I still feel the need to be there. For me, the answer is simple. New Beginnings is just one of the many places that I meet up with God.

During these meetings, I hear men like me share their stories about the struggles they have encountered with alcohol and/or drug abuse. I feel God is teaching me valuable lessons as I

listen to the others talk about their experiences. During this time, I also reflect on my own. Over and over again when I hear how lives have been saved, relationships restored and sobriety maintained, I realize God's compassionate love for each of us. I can see *firsthand* the patience and perseverance He has had with me, guiding me from the man I used to be to the man I am becoming. For that reason, I continue to gather in that circle to again experience God's presence and power. Most importantly, I am grateful that God makes Himself available, joining us as we share strength and hope.

More and more I am learning that this just isn't the God I once understood Him to be or just a higher power, but a personal God who is genuinely concerned about what we are doing in New Beginnings - a God that is *anywhere!*

\* "Free world" - people who are not incarcerated.

## **Miracles Do Happen**

*By Raymond Lisle*

Some people believe that God does not work through miracles in this day and age. For the first 22 years of my life, I thought the same thing even though I have been a Christian since childhood. However, everything changed on one fateful evening, March 31, 2018.

At the time, I was playing drums in the worship band at Saint Peter's Episcopal Church in Lake Mary. That night I was returning home from a rehearsal in my beautiful 1999 Toyota Camry which I had inherited from my grandmother. I was driving westbound in the left lane on very busy I-4 when suddenly; I noticed that my car was not responding when I pushed down on the gas pedal. All I accomplished was revving the engine. I knew immediately that something was terribly wrong, but I had no idea what it was. At this point, I was about a mile north of the next exit, AND I could not pull off of the road because there were concrete construction barriers on either side. Just as I coasted to a stop in the left lane right next to the wide median, I heard a very loud bang. Immediately, smoke and flames shot up from under the hood. An acrid smell came through the air conditioning vents. I quickly grabbed my essentials – wallet, keys, and cell phone – before dashing out. I jumped over the concrete barrier beside the

road and ran about 30 feet ahead of my car in the median – thinking I would be safe from any projectiles if my car exploded.

Not even five seconds after that, an off-duty rescue truck pulled in right behind my car. The driver ran out with a fire extinguisher, lifted the hood with a gloved hand, and put out the fire. His name was Doug. Doug stayed with me for about 15 minutes to make sure I was okay and to help me call AAA to report my car breakdown. Using his flashlight, he took a quick look at the engine and determined that my car was, without a doubt, totaled. Doug told me that the loud bang I had heard was an explosion inside the engine which had blown off a chunk of the engine head cover. Its impact had visibly deformed the hood that was immediately above it. Doug then showed me where the fire had started melting the tubing, and that the fire had been extinguished when it was less than an inch away from the fuel line.

It was at that point that I realized if Doug had not been on the road at the *exact* time of my breakdown, there was little doubt that my car would have exploded. I would have most likely been hit, if not killed, by a flying projectile. His being there at just the right time was nothing short of a miracle from God. Giving Doug a big hug, I thanked him for saving my life, and I thanked God for sending him to do so.

It is because of this incident that I try my best to live each day to the fullest. If it were not for God's miraculous intervention, I might be in a coffin under six feet of soil instead of recounting this story. I owe my existence today to God's divine and miraculous protection.



## The Gift

*Kim Spear*

*“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 14:11)*

Prior to the 2008 recession, my family and I were blessed to be living in Florida where the real estate market was booming. We became accustomed to a higher level of income and standard of living. My profession as a real-estate paralegal enabled me to greatly profit during that time. However, once the recession hit so hard, we were greatly impacted financially. Quickly things started to change. I was fortunate, however, that I did not lose my job as many others in the industry had. But in order for me to remain employed, I had to settle for a significant pay decrease. Little by little, our life style declined. Thankfully, in the process of this challenge, God by His grace provided for our basic needs.

During our hard times, I recall clearly the day God called me into deeper service to him. I was in our local Publix supermarket where I had shopped for years. I had \$100 cash in one hand and a stack of coupons in the other. I remember thinking to myself, *“I can not believe that at this time in my life I only have \$100 in cash, and I need coupons to purchase groceries. I have worked hard in my career, and have to come to this?”* Yikes, how prideful I had become. So... there I was standing in the

checkout line praying I would not go over my allotted \$100 and that if I did, that the coupons might cover the deficit.

Then it happened... the GIFT. I looked in the next aisle over and in the line stood a man. He was in tattered clothes which were totally mismatched. As I gazed at his face, I saw that it was beautiful! His piercing blue eyes were as blue as the sky, and his complexion appeared like silk. He had a countenance of peace that permeated from him. I gazed into his cart and the contents took me back to my childhood: spam, Vienna sausage in a can, a pint of milk, a loaf of generic bread and hash. When I was a young girl, one of four children, my father was just out of seminary and had started a job as an assistant rector; his salary was only \$5,000 a year. Our family meals consisted of the foods I saw in this man's cart. My gaze returned to his face - his blue eyes sparkled. I felt as if he were looking right through me. His smile was so authentic that it could only have come from a place of deep love in his heart. I was overwhelmed by what I was experiencing. To my amazement, I heard myself asking my cashier to please get the man's receipt from her co-worker and that I wanted to pay for his groceries. She came back with the receipt, added it to mine and the total was \$99.99. I stood there shaking - doing everything I could to hold back the tears. The other cashier came over and told me the man had pulled out his pockets to get money, and they were empty. He had *nothing*. AND... I had *not even seen* this

happen before I made my offer. I looked at both cashiers. The only thing that came out of my mouth was, "I am *so blessed!*"

Only moments later I walked out looking for this man. He was *nowhere!* I proceeded to get in my car. The tears I strained so hard to hold back came out like a gushing river. In the midst of this cleansing, a peace came over me. It was in that moment I heard clearly the voice of the Father, "Provide for my people, and I will provide for you."

What a blessing it is when our eyes are opened and we can boldly say; "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose". (Romans 8:28) I realized then that our Heavenly Father is the one and only one on whom we can totally depend.

## The Lord Provides

*By Vicki Brown*

The youth group in my church wanted to go on a mission trip in July of 2018. However, it would be possible only if we raised \$4,000. Throughout the previous year we raised \$3500. With only a month to go, we decided to have a rummage sale to reach our goal.

As the two-day sale was coming to a close, we still lacked \$43. We were getting ready to pack up the unsold items when a Haitian couple arrived in a van. In her broken English, the woman asked, "Shoes - how much?"

"A dollar each," we answered. "Which ones do you want?"

"All," she replied to our amazement. "Clothes -how much?" she inquired.

Our answer was the same, "A dollar each. How many do you want?"

"All," was her answer once again, and again we were astonished.

As we talked with the couple, we found out that they were acquiring items to be shipped to Haiti. On October 4, 2016, Hurricane Matthew had devastated the people living there and left them in great need. These items were to help in their healing.

When we tried to figure out how much they owed, we

decided to ask them how much money they had; their answer, “\$43.” We were flabbergasted! We gladly gave them all the items for that amount – even adding in some kitchen items. We graciously accepted that amount – knowing that God had provided us with *just enough* to make the mission trip possible – furthermore, the items were going to people in dire need.

Our day ended in our praising God - with joyful tears in our eyes - for the care He had provided us *all*.

## **The Prodigal Father**

*Charles Norman*

All of us have our regrets in life. As one who is serving a life sentence in prison, I certainly have my regrets. One of my most painful ones is that for most of my life my relationship with my father was a distant one. Although my father had worked unselfishly and tirelessly to support our family, there had always been a communications blackout between my father and me. When he became sick with what turned out to be his final illness, I yearned to know more about him - his life, his thoughts, and his feelings, none of which he had shared with me. As the end appeared to be near for him, I realized that if we were ever to bridge the emotional gap between us, I had to build that bridge.

I was finally presented with the opportunity. Christmas had always been a big event in our family. As Christmas approached I decided to ask my father to come to the chapel service at the prison as his Christmas present to me. Although I was hopeful, I wasn't sure he would come because he had just returned home from the hospital. Also, he had been alienated from the church most of his adult life, and seldom went to services with us. But when someone is dying, there is time only for the truth. I wanted my father beside me in church. When I

asked him to come, I heard my daddy sigh on the other end of the phone. “I’ll be there, Son,” he whispered.

Days before the service was to be held, I had the opportunity to speak to the preacher - Reverend Johnny - about my history with my father. I also told him about my father’s health, his distaste for church, and that this might be the last chance I would have to connect with him. He smiled knowingly, clasped my shoulders with his hands, and told me to let him and God handle it. I had my doubts.

Finally the day arrived. I spied my father in the line of visitors – looking frail and weak! In spite of his physical condition, he had insisted on driving himself to the service.

Often a visiting pastor at prison chapel services will preach a sermon about the “prodigal son,” perhaps so the prisoners can relate and identify with him. However, Reverend Johnny didn’t do that this time. Instead, he spoke about a “prodigal father” who loved his family so much that he sacrificed his life through years of hard work, but in the process lost something precious - time together with his wife and children. The children grew up not knowing their father. As a result, both children and father drifted away on their own - needing most what they got the least.

As Reverend Johnny spoke, I glanced at my father and saw tears streaking down his cheeks, something I’d never seen in my entire life with him. As my own eyes filled with tears, we heard

Reverend Johnny urge us to reflect on our lives and relationships before it was too late: to talk together and tell those we love that we loved them.

In the weeks and months that followed, Daddy came to see me on as many weekends as he was able. We talked about our lives candidly, and said, “I love you” to each other. I finally appreciated my father as a man who had led a hard life, who had strong beliefs about right and wrong. Although his family came first and he loved his wife and children, he had been unable to verbalize his love. He believed his actions spoke louder than words. At the end of his life, he realized many things that he had not thought about nor understood before, as did I. We made amends as best we could.

My father is now dead, but he died reconciled to his son and to his heavenly Father who loves him. I thank God that He brought this about before it was too late.



## Touching Experiences

*Mary Lou Boyle*

One of the first clients I treated when I opened my massage practice was a young man who complained of muscle spasms in his entire back; he was in constant pain. I had never known of someone experiencing such encompassing muscle spasms, and I faced the daunting task of giving him relief.

I always prayed when beginning a treatment, and on that day I doubled my pleas to the Lord to help him through me. When the treatment was completed, I asked him, "Did you receive any relief at all?" He told me, "This is the first time in months that I've been pain free. I can't talk about it - I'm close to tears!" I blurted out, "It wasn't me - it was the Lord!"

This was the first, but certainly not the last time that a client and I cried together. A mere seven hundred hours of massage therapy training can't produce a therapist able to meet the needs of people suffering from the myriad of painful conditions I saw in my practice. But, praise the Lord, *He* can! I'm blessed that He allows me to know the joy of touching His children through my massage practice.

One another day, a well dressed, middle aged man walked into my spa asking for the "decision maker." I immediately closed up as I was sure he was a salesman. One of my many faults is my

lack of patience with salespeople. Sure enough, he was representing a credit card company. But, somewhere during the initial conversation, one of us mentioned the Lord, and entire atmosphere and conversation changed. We shared our love of Jesus, and our walks with Him. Soon, we were praying together. I have since wondered what my next client might have thought had she walked in and had seen her grandmotherly therapist holding hands with a man young enough to be her son or grandson! On this day, God blessed me in a different way. Instead of finding myself in a situation where I was ministering to a client, He sent one of His blessed children to share with me. By the time the 'salesman' left we were laughingly arguing about which of us had received the bigger blessing that day.

## **When Death Becomes Your Victory**

*Evelyn Falco*

The death of a loved one can affect us in many ways. It can bring a bond of unity, or it can bring division. It can also be a test of our faith and strengthen us. To a believer it should never be a source of dread or fear.

In recent years I have attended several funerals of family and friends. The most recent one was for Charles, my ex-husband and the father of my two children. Although we had been divorced for many years, time healed the wounds of that separation. We became good friends as we together cared for our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. We came to rely on each other for strength and encouragement.

Charles's illnesses had lasted for several years. His current treatments were not giving him any relief. In fact, he'd have to be hospitalized after each one. Doctors told him there was no chance of that improving. Hearing that there was not chance of his regaining his quality of life – doing those things that were so important to him – caused him to make the decision to suspend all treatment. When I heard about his decision, it was hard for me to comprehend.

I was blessed with the opportunity of spending a portion of his last few days on earth with him. We talked about family and friends. He thanked me for raising his children; I thanked him for the example he set for them. We talked about living and dying. Most of all, we talked about trusting God. It was during these conversations that I was able to sense a peace in him. I knew he felt ready to leave us and be with the Lord.

For the days and weeks following his death, I was able to understand his decision to let his illness run the course without medical intervention. It began to make more sense to me. His choice signaled the strength of his relationship with Jesus Christ. The intimacy of that relationship forged that inner strength that could not be easily shaken... not even in death. He knew, what we should all know, that to be absent in the body is to be present with the Lord.

God has a wonderful way of teaching us our most valuable lessons. Through my own personal experiences and even in the sharing of experiences with others, I am being lead closer to Him. He has handled me with gentle and patient love now that I am in the twilight years of my own life.

I pray to God I will never have to make the “pull the plug” decision. I pray He will call me to Himself peacefully in the night. But if not, I have only to look at Charles’s demonstration of

courage. Through witnessing Charles's act of bravery, God showed me what it means to have *"a peace that surpasses all understanding."*

I will be forever grateful for all these moments we shared. I was glad to see him in such peace.