

Heavenly Miracles

*True Stories of
Supernatural Intervention*

By

Mark W. Swarbrick

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Printed in the United States of America.

1st Edition

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This book is dedicated...

To all those men and women of God who have ministered to me and been mentors who drew me to God and taught me to believe in a God of miracles.

Special thanks to...

Bonnie Swarbrick Morehouse for proofreading and editing the manuscript.

Previous publications by Mark Swarbrick...

Theistic Evolution: Did God Create Through Evolution?

Upcoming publications by Mark Swarbrick...

To Mormons with Love: A Pilgrimage Through Mormon History and Doctrine

1

Deadly Waters

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

I waited for the drowning man to reappear. “God, please help me save him,” I prayed fervently. I had stopped swimming just out of reach of the victim when he had disappeared. This was the third time he had gone under and this time he didn’t pop right back up. It was impossible to see him in the murky lake. If he didn’t surface, he was lost. The seconds ticked by as I waited helplessly. Suddenly he burst to the surface, coughing, sputtering and screaming piteously for help. Immediately I yelled to him, “*You must do exactly as I say or I will not help you!*”

He answered submissively, “OK.” I must have sounded like I knew what I was doing. I didn’t. I was 17 years old and I had never had any formal training in saving drowning people. I had a summer job working at a land development where we had been laying sod all day. After a hard day’s work four of us had headed down to the beach to cool off with a quick swim in the lake.

We swam out to the middle of the lake where there was a large wooden raft. After a while, one of the boys began swimming from the raft towards the opposite shore, but halfway there he ran out of strength and panicked. I looked at my two friends standing with me. For the first few moments we wondered if he was just faking it, playing a joke on us. But after he began going under and his cries for help became

frantic, I yelled, *“You better not be fooling around!”* Then I dove in and swam to him as quickly as I could.

Drowning people are dangerous. In their panic they can latch onto you and drown you. I knew this. Since we had just come from work, we were all swimming in our clothes, which is very tiring. I was already exhausted. He could easily drown me, so I was careful not to approach him until I knew he would submit to help.

But now what? How was I to save a man when I was no rescue swimmer? I had prayed for God to help me save him. God answered that prayer, not in the present, but in the past. One summer day when I was ten years old, I was swimming with my dad. He called me over to him and said, *“Mark, I want to teach you something. You might need this someday. If you ever have to save someone from drowning, there is a technique that is the easiest of all methods.”*

My dad had been an Eagle Scout and was often teaching us kids bits of survival lore. *“Roll over and float on your back,”* he instructed me. He then took me by the hair and swam, pulling me along behind him.

“Now you try it,” he said. *I will float on my back and you pull me.”*

“That won’t work,” I objected. *“You’re big and I’m little.”*

“You will be surprised. Just try it.” He answered.

To my amazement I actually could do it. And then the lesson ended. *“There you go,”* my dad said. *“If you ever have to save someone, that’s how you can do it.”*

Now, seven years later, all of that came back to me in a flash. I ordered my coworker to float on his back, which he immediately did. Then I swam within reach and grabbed his hair. Fortunately, this was the hippie days of the 1970s and there was plenty of hair to grab. I gripped his shoulder-length hair and headed for shore with him in tow.

It was grueling. I had doubts if I was going to make it. I swam and swam, but swimming with one hand, wearing jeans and pulling someone also wearing clothes is mighty slow going. On and on I swam but I was making very slow headway. When I thought I was close enough to shore, I stopped swimming and began treading water with one hand while I extended my legs, reaching for the bottom. There was no bottom. My coworker was not paddling or helping in any way so he just sank when I stopped to tread water. We both momentarily slipped below the surface. I had to have momentum to keep his head above the water so I quickly forged ahead, stroking with one hand, holding him with the other, all the while praying for God to please help me make it.

My strength was nearly played out. Once more I stopped swimming and frantically attempted the exhausting feat of treading water with one hand while stretching to feel for the bottom with my feet. I touched nothing but deep cold black water. The bottom was out of reach. Once more he sank beneath the waves. I quickly began swimming again, utterly exhausted. On I swam. I was so tired it hurt and I wondered how much longer I could go on. I reached the point where I could swim no further, but how could I quit? How could I just give up and let him die? So I kept on, holding his hair with one hand and stroking with the other, one stroke at a time, one after another. I can't go on, I thought, but forced myself to take one more stroke, and then just one more.

Everything was spinning. I gasped for breath. My muscles ached and burned as if on fire. I was beginning to cramp up. One more stroke. "God help me!" The phrase echoed through my head as a desperate plea. Another painful stroke, and another, and another. Finally, a few yards out from shore I reached for the bottom and found it. We staggered to the shore. We both collapsed on the sand, half in and out of the water, gasping for breath. He was much worse off than I was, fitfully coughing up lake water.

In the meantime, my friends had driven around to that side of the lake and they scooped him up, put him in the car, and took him to his family. For twenty minutes I lay there on the beach alone, completely spent, gasping for air, while the waves lapped at my feet.

I have often reflected on the events of that day and how God had answered my prayer before I prayed it. God's miracles aren't always visible until seen through the windows of time. God had given me a father who had a heart to teach me, many years before, what I would need to know that day. God did that. He did it to save from death someone whose name I do not even know. But God knew him and loved him and made provision for him. I had the privilege of being a conduit of God's care, as did my father. My dad had a phrase he often used to describe such things as this. He called it the providence of God.

2

A Bullet for a Friend

“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14)

My friend stepped in front of my gun just as I pulled the trigger. I remember it like it was in slow motion. I took aim, I was squeezing the trigger, the cylinder turned in the revolver and the hammer came back and, like a bad dream, suddenly there he was in front of the barrel of my gun as the hammer came down.

My friend Dan and I were out in the woods squirrel hunting, two carefree 16-year-olds enjoying the outdoors. We spotted a squirrel. Carefully we stalked closer but our alert prey eluded us and ran into a hole high up in a tree. I said, “Let’s sit and wait. He’ll be back out in a bit.”

We concealed ourselves and leveled our single-shot .22 caliber rifles on the hole and waited. Sure enough, twenty minutes later Mr. Squirrel poked his head out and paused. We waited. Suddenly he scurried all the way out of his hiding place and stopped in plain view. Perfect!

I was beginning to slowly squeeze the trigger, but before I could shoot Dan fired first and missed. The squirrel ran down the tree like a flash and we gave chase, trying to keep him in sight. He bounded quickly along the ground and then into a hollow log about seven feet long.

I laid my empty rifle down and drew my pistol, a 9-shot .22 caliber revolver. *“I got this!”* I said excitedly. He poked his furry little head out of one end of the log and I fired my pistol at point blank range and missed. He ducked back into the log and stuck his head out the other end of the log. *Bang!*

Missed again. And again, he went to the other end of the log and stuck his head out. I fired again.

Amazingly this scenario repeated itself seven more times, the squirrel running back and forth in the log as fast as he could and me firing in rapid succession every time he poked his head out. Why he didn't just run out the end and keep going, I don't know. He surely would have escaped that way. But instead he would pause and peek out each time.

I was swinging my pistol back and forth from one end of the log to the other as fast as I could and firing a shot every second. On the eighth time, when he stuck his head out, the excitement was just too much for my friend. He swung his foot in to stomp the squirrel with his boot. That's when it happened.

I was already squeezing the trigger just as he did that. I remember his foot coming right in front of my sights when the hammer came down. It all happened so fast. The gun went....*Click!* Was it empty? No. The squirrel poked his head out the other end of the log, I swung my pistol over and pulled the trigger. *Bang!* My aim was true finally and we had our supper.

I said to Dan, "Do you realize you stepped right in front of my gun when I pulled the trigger? I would have shot you in the foot, except that the gun didn't fire!"

"I know," Dan said. "I wasn't thinking."

"Let's take a look at the bullets, I said." I emptied the spent cartridges into my hand. There were eight empty shells and one intact cartridge that had not fired. We examined it closely. You could plainly see where the firing pin had impacted the back of the casing.

"Look at that!" I exclaimed. "That's the bullet that was pointing at your foot!" That is the only bullet that didn't fire!"

"Wow!" Dan exclaimed. "Can I have that bullet?"

“Sure,” I said, handing it to him. He put it in his pocket exclaiming, “That’s my lucky bullet!”

I shudder to think what would have happened if that bullet had fired. We were miles back in the forest where there were no roads. Dan would be in excruciating pain and would be losing a lot of blood. I don’t think he could have walked out. I don’t think I could have carried him. What would I do? Rig up a tourniquet for him and run for help? It would have been really bad.

Thank God, that bullet didn’t fire. What happened? A magic bullet? A lucky bullet? That pistol had never misfired. Not before and not after. I have fired thousands of rounds of .22 caliber bullets. I have never ever had one not fire. I have seen all kinds of gun jams, but I have never seen an unfired bullet with the marks of the firing pin on the primer. Not in any caliber. Not ever.

A coincidence? What are the odds, that out of nine bullets, the only one to be a dud was the one pointed at my friend? Or consider this: Out of the thousands of bullets I have fired, the only dud was this one? Just a coincidence? Inconceivable.

This was no coincidence. It was not just a “lucky bullet.” So, what did happen? I believe God sent his angel to supernaturally stop that bullet from firing. God, in his loving mercy saved Dan from intense suffering, perhaps even death, and saved me from the mental anguish of having shot my good friend.

Scripture tells us that God loves us, that even the hairs of our head are numbered, that He is with us in our rising up and our coming in and our going out, and that “*in Him we live and move and have our being.*” I believe that, not just because the Bible says so, though that is reason enough, but I also know it is true because of one simple fact: I have seen it.

We were not thinking about God that day in the woods, but God was thinking about us. He always is. Dan, wherever

you are these forty-five years later: God loves you. He loves us all.

3

Mystery Dog with No Name

“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...” (James 1:17)

“The animals...two of every kind will come to you...” (Genesis 6:20)

“Get off your bike! I’m going to fight you!” The schoolyard bully looked at me insolently. When I didn’t respond, he knocked my bike to the ground. “Come on you yellow-belly chicken-liver! What’s the matter? Are you a coward?” School had just been dismissed and I was a ten-year-old that just wanted to go home.

I’d been taught never to fight. My father was a pacifist. He told me never to fight back, even if attacked. He said that was the Christian thing to do, and being a preacher’s kid, I had to set the example, or so I was told. It would be many years before I would realize that many Christian theologians would not necessarily agree with that position.

Being conditioned not to defend myself exacerbated an already bad situation. In my late teen years, I threw this thinking aside and took judo, karate and boxing lessons, but in grade school, pacifism caused me lots of trouble. Being known for not standing up for myself put a target on my back for every wannabe bully in the school.

“I don’t want to fight,” I said, while I picked up my bike up and started to get on. He kicked it out from under me. “Is fraidy-cat trying to run home to mommy?” he taunted, with a snarl on his face. Three times this happened, with me trying to get on my bike, saying I don’t want to fight, and with him knocking it down. So finally I fought him and won. I pinned

him to the ground and said, “There. I fought you like you wanted and I’ve beaten you. Now will you go away and leave me be?”

“No, I won’t,” he stubbornly answered.

“If you want me to let you up, you had better agree,” I told him.

He remained obstinate, so I sat there on top of him and kept him pinned down, waiting for him to see reason. Just then the principal of the school walked out the door and saw us. Actually, all he was willing to see was me sitting on top of a kid. Since I was the victor, he made the assumption that I was also the instigator. He told the other boy to go home and he took me up to his office.

I was convinced then, and believe now, that the principal was a thoroughly wicked man. My opinion of him may be biased, but not without reason, as you shall see. I can remember him coming into our classroom and lecturing us on how the Bible was nothing but fairy tales and that it was filled with contradictions. I think the only thing he disliked more than the Bible was preacher’s kids.

He used to brag about his wooden paddle and how hard he could swing it. Many times I had seen him angrily shouting in a child’s face with a wild out-of-control look in his eyes. I think he enjoyed terrorizing children. Well, boys anyway. He loved the little girls and liked getting hugs from them. But he hated boys...at least some boys, me in particular.

In his office, he began scolding me and when I tried to talk he screamed in my face. “Shut-up! Did I say you could speak? I’ll show you what we do to bullies!” He got out his wooden board, the one with holes drilled through it so he could swing it fast with no air resistance to slow it down. “Bend over!” he ordered. I obeyed fearfully. *Whack!* I thought my back would break. He paused for effect. *Whack!* He waited again, so that apprehension would take its full effect. *Whack!* Three times he hit me with all his might. I could barely breathe or speak

for several minutes. It was a sadistic beating. That evening I would receive another scolding and spanking from my father, for “making trouble at school.” But that spanking was nothing compared to the board paddling I had endured.

Bullies weren’t my only problem. In our little midwestern town, sports was everything. On weekends you would see fathers playing ball with their boys, prepping them for the games. If you excelled at baseball, basketball and football you were sure to be popular. If you were merely proficient, you would at least be accepted by your peers. If you were unskilled in all these games you were certain to be ostracized.

While many dads played ball with their boys and encouraged them, my father just wasn’t into sports. He was busy working in the ministry. Not that I blame him. It’s just how it was. My dad had been an Eagle Scout and in later years I myself gravitated towards the outdoor sports of camping, hunting, fishing and trapping. Ball sports weren’t my dad’s thing and it was destined that they would not be mine either.

Thus it was I got no instruction on how to play ball or encouragement to do so. And at school, since all the other kids already were seasoned players, no instruction in the games was given there either. Thus, I was good at none of them and I became, as a consequence, persona non grata. At times I felt like an outcast and daydreamed of going to live alone in the woods, away from everybody.

God uses all things, even the bad things, to help us. God used my intense loneliness to draw me to Himself and to teach me compassion for others. That summer during Vacation Bible School, the Spirit of God began to work in my heart and I became very interested in the lessons about Jesus. One day while at home I looked with affection upon a small picture of Jesus that I had. Suddenly overwhelmed by love for the Savior, I kissed the picture of Jesus.

No sooner had I done this than I began to wonder if I was not being irreverently familiar with the Lord and perhaps had

done something displeasing to God. Many years later I came to understand that our Lord had said, “Suffer the little children to come unto me,” and that this moment was, no doubt, precious in God’s eyes.

Time went by. It was a day like any other. School let out and kids poured out of the school doors to go home. Then the strangest thing happened. When I walked out of the school, there standing in the playground was a dog. It was just standing there watching the kids leave. When I came out he started following me. Why me? I had given him no encouragement. We already had a dog and if I brought a stray home I would be in trouble, and the last thing I needed was more trouble.

“Beat it! Stop following me!” I tossed a stone in the direction of the stray dog. The dog stopped and stared at me, but as soon as I started walking again, he continued following me. I stopped and hollered at him and stomped my foot threateningly. Nothing would make him leave.

He followed me all the way home. I ignored him and went inside. The next day after school, there was the same dog, standing there waiting, and again he followed me home, in spite of more repeated attempts to discourage him.

The third day he was again waiting for me after school. Why this dog liked me and wanted to follow me was a puzzle. Out of all the hundreds of kids, why would he choose me to follow home? The next day he was there at the school again. I gave up trying to discourage him. It started to make me feel special that he picked me to be the one to follow.

Every day he was waiting for me after school. Now I looked forward to seeing him. Who else had a dog who was smart enough to know what time school got out and that loved a person enough to meet him every day and walk home with him? Every evening we would sit outside on the porch together. He would rest his muzzle on my leg and I would stroke his fur.

He never failed to be waiting for me after school. On Saturdays, if I would get on my bike to go anywhere, he was outside the house, waiting to go with me. He would trot alongside and keep me company. If I went to a friend's house, he would wait patiently outside until I was ready to leave. If I went fishing, he would lie next to me and watch me catch fish. When school was out for the summer he was my faithful companion wherever I went. If you saw me anywhere, you saw him tagging along. We were inseparable. In my loneliness, he brought me much comfort.

I loved my dog. I never gave him a name. He was just "*dog*." I begged my mother to let me have some dog food to feed him, for he was very thin, but she said, "We already have a dog. Your father is not going to allow us to have two dogs. We can't afford it. If we feed him he will never leave. You never should have got him to follow you home. If your dad finds out there will be trouble."

He was never allowed in the house. Only our official family dog was welcome there. "*Dog*" was an outcast, like me. He would sleep somewhere outside but would always be there waiting if I went outdoors. I would sneak him scraps from the table, but it wasn't enough. He got thinner and his ribs were showing. My steadfast friend was starving to death. Every day he grew weaker and thinner. Day by day he became more lethargic. He would lay his muzzle on me and look at me with sad eyes, not having the energy to lift his head.

Then one day he was gone. I looked everywhere for him. I walked to the dog pound, a couple of miles away. The lady there said they only keep dogs a week before they put them to sleep, but she was sure that they had not seen him. I never saw my beloved dog again. I hoped that he had found a home where they would feed him, but I feared he did not. In a town of only 3,000 people, I would have seen him somewhere. I believe he chose to starve to death rather than leave my side. Dogs will often find a place to lie down in concealment when

they know their time is near, and that is probably what happened.

What a sad ending to the story. Fortunately, that is not really the end of the story. Like so many sad events in this life that just don't make sense, this one, like many others, will only make sense when viewed from the perspective of eternity.

Fifty years later I was in prayer. I was again going through a difficult time. Feeling melancholy I poured my heart out to God, "Lord, do you even love me?" I asked. I know, that is such a foolish question after all He has done for me. But God was patient and gave me a clear, but unexpected answer. This was one of those special moments where the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart loud and clear: "*I sent you that dog, didn't I?*"

Immediately the memory of my precious dog flashed into my mind. I had not thought of him in years. It had never once occurred to me that God had anything to do with the mysterious appearance of my dog. "You did that?" I asked. "*Of course I did, who else?*" came the answer.

I considered then the odd occurrence of that dog choosing me out of all the other children to follow, and his refusal to leave me even when I tried to chase him away. It was a miracle of God, and I didn't even know that until God revealed it to me. God, in his mercy and compassion, saw my loneliness, reached down and sent me a little comfort. Truly God is "*a very present help in a time of trouble.*" And now, many years later, he was again comforting me by assuring me of his love and showing me one of the many miracles He had done in my favor without my even being aware of it.

That is the true end of the story and it's a happy one. Today the Spirit of God has put another picture in my mind to comfort me. I see my faithful dog, who had the honor to be chosen and used by God to comfort a lonely little boy, that noble animal that once suffered for me, now stands in heaven with my master, Jesus, who also suffered for me. Side by side,

they wait in heaven's gates, waiting to welcome me into my new eternal home, just as soon as school lets out.

4

Battleground of the Soul

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

“Hey Swarbrick! We just stole a bottle of vodka. We’re heading up on the hill into the woods and we’re gonna get smashed. Come and join us!” My two friends just happened to come across me as they were walking away from the 4th of July carnival in our little Midwest town. My partners in crime fully expected me to happily capitulate and tag along with them, but this evening, things were not going to go the way they expected.

In my 14-year-old mind there had not been anything as important as being accepted by my friends. That was everything. It had been more important to me than my parents’ wishes, more significant than right and wrong, more valuable than even common sense. But unknown to my buddies, something monumental, indeed miraculous, had just taken place. I was no longer at the mercy of the whims of my friends, no longer captive to my desire to be accepted.

It had all started a few weeks earlier. It started in church. Now let me explain something. I hated going to church. Getting dressed up was a bother. I found everything about church utterly boring. Memorizing Bible verses, being told about Bible characters, none of it held my interest. But my dad was the senior pastor of Saint Paul Lutheran Church and I was required to go and play the part of a model preacher’s kid, a role for which I was rather unsuited and quite unhappy with.

Then I got a new Sunday School teacher. She was only sixteen, just two years older than I was. She was a born-again Christian, something I had no experience with.

She started asking questions to get us to think. "What makes a person a Christian?" she asked. "Going to church doesn't make you a Christian," she said. "Lots of people go to church, but just going to church doesn't automatically make them a Christian. Neither does just being good. There are many good people in the world that aren't Christians," she explained.

I wasn't sure where she was going with this, but she had my interest. If being good and going to a Christian church didn't make you a Christian, then what did? I wanted to know. I knew enough to understand that "being a Christian" was reportedly the only escape from hell and the only way to heaven. I had read in the Bible Jesus' words, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6). "Is it what you believe – is that what makes someone a Christian?" I asked.

"Belief does have a lot to do with it," she said. "But it's more than just what you give intellectual assent to. The Bible says '...even the demons believe – and shudder' and of course they aren't Christians. And in the book of James it says, 'faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.'"¹

"So Christianity isn't being good, going to church or knowing the Bible?" I queried. "Now I'm really confused. What exactly is Christianity then?"

"You're right," our young teacher smiled patiently. "The real center, the heart of Christianity, is not those things. Those things, like going to church and being good and reading the Bible, they are the *result* of being a Christian. The essence of being a Christian is not so much what you think *about* Christ, but rather it has to do with your *relationship with* Christ.

¹ James 2:17-19

My teacher explained further. "You see, all your life you have been in charge of your life. You decide what you want to do, what you are going to do, and how you will live. Now that may not seem like anything really bad, but God asks something beyond that."

"There is a story," my teacher continued, "in the book of Luke of a rich young ruler who came to Jesus and asked what he needed to do to have eternal life. He told Jesus that he had obeyed all the commandments of God in the Bible ever since he was a young boy. Jesus said to him, '*You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*' Upon hearing this the man went away very sad, for he was very rich."

For the first time, ever, I was listening intently about Bible things. She explained further, "The point here isn't that rich people can't be Christians. The point is that being a Christian requires a surrender of the will. That's what the rich young ruler couldn't do. He could not surrender his will. Being a follower of Christ means you have decided that for the rest of your life you will not do your own thing, you will do God's thing.

It means that you believe what Jesus said and you promise to try to obey Christ's teachings and live your life in obedience to God's will. Even Jesus, who lived a perfect life, had to surrender his own will to the Father's. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, '*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.*' (Luke 22:42) If even Jesus had to surrender his will to the Father's, how much more important is it for us to do the same?"

"Being a Christian," my teacher explained, "means surrendering your life to Christ. It means making a decision. That's what repentance is – a decision. You don't have to be a great sinner to miss heaven. Just stubbornly holding on to your own life and not giving it to Jesus is a sin that will cause you to miss out on God's glorious plan for your life."

She drew a circle on a piece of paper. Inside the circle, she drew a chair. On the chair was a big S. "This is your life before Christ," she explained. The S represents yourself sitting on the throne of your life." Then she drew another circle like the first, only this time the chair had a big C on it. "This is your life after Christ," she said. "The C represents that you have surrendered your will and put Christ on the throne of your life."

As these things were being explained to me, a battle was going on inside of me. A part of me felt like arguing. I challenged her, "You make it sound like you have to be some kind of holy fanatical saint, or else you're just not a Christian at all," I countered.

"Well, Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'² That does sound pretty fanatical, doesn't it? But if Jesus said it, we must do it, whether it seems fanatical or not."

"So, you're saying we have to be perfect to get to heaven." I argued.

"No," she patiently replied. "You don't have to be perfect. In fact, all your Christian life you will make mistakes and you will commit sins. But the difference is, after you accept Christ and invite him into your heart, everything changes. You are forgiven for everything. You know you are going to heaven. You know that God is involved in your life. You have a peace you didn't have before and the love of God is with you in a very real way. When you commit a sin the Holy Spirit will touch your conscience. You won't enjoy sin as before, because it is so shattering to the very real relationship you have with God. The difference between the saved and the unsaved is that the unsaved enjoy sin. Christians may sin, but they don't enjoy it because of what it does to their relationship with Christ."

² *Mark 12:30*

"This sounds pretty radical," said David, one of my classmates. "Totally dedicated to God! I don't think I have that in me. It sounds like something for monks or missionaries or something. I don't think this is me."

"What you have to understand," our teacher responded, "is that God doesn't want to make you into something or somebody you're not. He wants to make you into the very best 'you' that you can be. In fact, without Christ, you really aren't who God created you to be."

"God will change who we are?" someone asked.

"Yes! In Corinthians, it says, *'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!'* The Living Bible paraphrases it this way: *'When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand-new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!'* The New Testament speaks of this as being 'born again.' Jesus said, *'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'*³ It's like getting a new start in life – all your sins are wiped away and God gives you a new life inside!"

We could see that our teacher was excited and joyful about what she was telling us. She seemed to have some kind of "new life" in her that we didn't have. For days and weeks after hearing these things, my mind went around and around on them. On the one hand, I knew in my heart these things were all true, yet there was a part of me that recoiled from this knowledge. A tug of war was going on in my mind and I didn't know why. After a few weeks, I asked my teacher about what I was feeling.

"I feel like a war is going on inside me," I said. "A part of me wants to surrender to Christ. Another part argues and says it's all nonsense, that I already am surrendered to Christ, that I am a Christian and I don't have to do anything. Another part

³ John 3:3

of me tells me that I know in my heart that I really never have decided to follow Christ."

"That's the Holy Spirit drawing you to Christ," she said. "And the devil would desire to pull you the other way." There really is a war going on inside you. A spiritual war."

I went on, "And as I think about making this decision – basically just committing my life to God – I think how radically my life is going to change. There are certain things I will have to change, and here's the thing that scares me: If I make this change and do this, all my friends are going to desert me. They will call me a "Jesus Freak." This will be very hard."

My teacher looked at me intently and answered me earnestly, "Yes, sometimes being a Christian is hard. It takes courage. You are right -- there are some things you will have to leave behind, and many of your friends may abandon you and ridicule you. But I can promise you this: God will give you the strength to do it all. It will be his power working in you that gives you the courage and strength and God will give you new friends, better friends. He will give you peace and happiness and joy above and beyond anything you have known before. Nothing you have now can even compare to what he wants to give you, both in this life and the next."

"I feel like I know what you say is true," I said. "but here's what I'm afraid of, I feel like I'm standing on the edge of the world and I'm going to take this step of faith, I'll lose all my friends, my life as I know it will be gone forever, and then there won't be anything there. God won't be there. Nothing will happen. And I won't like who I am or what my life is. That is my fear. That is what holds me back."

"Yes, that is exactly how it feels," she replied. "It is like stepping out into nothing. That's why it's called a step of faith. You can't *see* that God is there. You take this step *believing* by faith that God will be there. The Bible says, '*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*'"⁴

⁴ Hebrews 11:1

And I can promise you, God will be there! Step out into that 'nothing' and you will find that you have stepped into the hands of God and it will be better than anything you can imagine!"

It was a few days later that I took the step out into the chasm of nothingness. It was the fourth of July celebration in our town. There was a carnival in the city park and at the edge of the carnival, Campus Life had set up a tent as a coffee house with a Christian band playing. My Sunday School teacher had invited me. After spending an hour or so listening to music and to my teacher's friends urging me to accept Christ into my heart, I walked outside to be alone and think.

I walked over beside a large oak tree. I was tired of thinking. I was tired of the battle raging inside me. I bowed my head to pray. It's been 46 years since then, but I still remember the words I prayed, "God I'm not sure if all this I'm hearing is true, but if it is, then I give my life to you. I surrender. I will follow you. Come into my heart and make me a new person. Amen." The war was over. God won, and so did I.

I didn't fully realize it right then, but a miracle had just happened. I was born-again and I was no longer the same person and something was about to happen that would prove it.

It was right then that my two friends walked up to me, telling me about the bottle of vodka they had stolen and asking me to get drunk with them.

"No, I think I'm going to stay here," I said quietly. I'm going back inside this Christian coffee house and listen to what they have to say."

"What! Don't be an idiot. Come and have some fun with us. You don't want to hang out with those goodie-goodies." My friends were incredulous that I wanted to miss out on their fun.

"No, I want to stay and listen to them."

"Have it your way then, Jesus freak! You're such a loser! See ya," They sneered.

My friends disappeared up the hill into the woods. I walked back inside and sat down. I told my teacher and new friends that I had just made my choice for Christ. They rejoiced and encouraged me, sharing Bible verses that proved I now had eternal life.

The amazing thing was how easy it was. I was so worried about what my friends would think. I was afraid of being ridiculed. But once I asked Jesus into my heart, I had a strength like never before. Their ridicule didn't even bother me. Not at all!

As the days and weeks passed I found that everything I had been told was true! I had changed. I was a new person. I had a power and a joy in me that wasn't there before. I was excited about life and about God's love and care for me. I didn't want to stop reading my Bible. It just came alive to me and reading it was like eating the most nourishing food I had ever had. It felt good!

I found that the big 'nothing' that I feared was really nothing to be afraid of. When I stepped out into what I was afraid would be boring emptiness, I found that I had stepped into the hands of God and a life of love and wonder.

Yes, I lost my friends. But after I did, I realized they weren't very good friends, and God gave me friends that were true friends indeed. The change that happened to me on that day was real. I was born again. My life changed. The reality of God in my life has been constant and sure and strong. Even when I have been unsteady and weak, God has always been there. And best of all, I was assured of eternal life through Christ!

Maybe that was not the most spectacular miracle in my life, but it is the one that brought about the other miraculous incidents that have happened since.

5

Terror at Twilight

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

I began having unusual nightmares as a pre-teenager and they went on for years. I would get out of bed and sleepwalk. My eyes were wide open but my conscious mind was not awake. I would wander the house while my family slept, pathetically moaning, “*It hurts! It hurts! Oh, it’s terrible! Terrible!*”

The terrifying dreams would all start the same way. The judge’s gavel would come down with a horrible sound of finality, a pronouncement of guilt followed and then a sense of doom would overwhelm me. The sentence was immediate. An eternity of torment, with no hope of escape or reprieve. Doomed for eternity. Thus, the nightmare would begin, but for me it was not a nightmare. Any suggestion that it was only a dream only aggravated my terror, for I knew it was real and it was going to last forever.

Then the noise of hell would start. A repetitious uncaring monotonous mechanical noise of a relentless impersonal machine that would crush you without noticing. You were no longer a person or a soul. You were of no more consequence than a speck of dust. No one cared, I was all alone; no one knew or would know what I suffered. Not ever.

There were three things in this personal hell that tormented me. One, the pain. It hurt all over. Two, I was so tired, so very tired, and there was no rest and there wasn’t ever going to be

any. Three, no hope. There was no escape and there never would be a reprieve. This situation would go on for eternity. I knew that with a terrible certainty. There was absolutely no hope, not in a hundred years, or a thousand, or a billion years. An eternity of suffering. It was the absence of hope that brought the most anguish and terror.

My parents and sisters would wake up and try to help me. My dad would say, "*Mark, it's only a bad dream. Go back to bed.*" This would only heighten my misery. I knew it was real. I was in Hell and I was there forever. If only it was a dream! But I knew it was real. But no one else knew that. It increased my anguish to realize that no one understood that what I was experiencing was real. I was doomed for eternity and it was impossible for me to tell anyone about it.

My sister told me that when I was sleepwalking, I would have this spooky look in my eyes, like I was no longer there but was controlled by demons. She said I appeared as someone possessed.

Eventually after thirty or forty minutes of this painful and tiring agony my parents would get me to lie down in bed and I would fall asleep. The next morning, I would have no memory of the event whatsoever. "*Did you know you had a nightmare last night?*" They would ask. "*I did? No, I don't remember anything.*" I would answer. And it was true, I could not remember a thing about it.

It was a little embarrassing, but it was like it was happening to someone else, for I was completely unaware of it. My parents eventually took me to a psychiatrist. "*Don't worry; he will grow out of it,*" he said confidently.

He had no clue what was going. The nightmares continued, week after week, month after month, and the years rolled by with the nightmares coming uncontrollably and I would wander the house at night, like a ghost in agony, whimpering, "*It's terrible! It hurts!*"

I can only imagine the consternation this must have caused my parents. I didn't worry about it too much in my waking hours, for I didn't remember any of it. Well, almost any of it. Every now and then I would have a small piece of remembrance hit me, like a momentary flash of *deja vu*, then it would be gone.

Then at age 15 I got saved. I gave my heart to Jesus. My spiritual understanding was awakened. The Holy Spirit lived inside of me.

Then one night it happened. The nightmare began, as it always began, the pronouncement of guilt, the sense of doom, and gradually the horrid hellacious nonsensical uncaring noise of the underworld began to cruelly pound louder as I began the terrifying descent into Hell.

But something was different this time. My conscious mind was somehow awake while I was dreaming. And then the revelation hit me: I suddenly knew what this was; I was being tormented by Satan! That's it! I was being afflicted and lied to by demons!

Immediately following that realization was a powerful conviction: I did not have to put up with this anymore! Righteous Indignation rose up within me. I belong to Christ now! Satan has no right to do this to me! I had been washed by the shed blood of Jesus. I was not going to hell. Not now, not ever. In my dream, I shouted loudly, "*In the name of Jesus – STOP!*"

Instantly the noise of hell stopped and the feeling of doom departed. I fell into a peaceful sleep. When I woke up the next morning, I remembered everything. Amazingly I could even remember my previous nightmares. I rejoiced and felt confident that I never had to fear this torment again. If such a dream ever returned, I knew I could banish it with the name of Jesus!

The Devil's plan for me was an eternity in hell, and he couldn't wait to begin the torture, so he started it early with

me, tormenting me with night terrors. Once I belonged to Christ his claim on me was broken. I never forgot how my Lord delivered me from Satan's grasp. It gave me a faith that there is great power in the name of Jesus! I believe that is one of the reasons God has used me to help others with prayer. I know for a fact God can deliver miraculously. And that faith moves the hand of God.

Many years later while sitting around the table with family at my sister's house, one of my son's friends began telling about his panic attacks that had tormented him for years. As he described his symptoms - the fear and anguish that would overcome him that would make him think he was going to die - the realization hit me: He is being tormented by demons!

I told him so. *"You are a Christian now,"* I told him. *"You don't have to put up with this anymore. We can pray for you and you can be delivered from this torment."*

I was one hundred percent confident that God could and would deliver him. As we talked he got a scared look on his face. *"It's happening now! I think I need to be in a hospital – I feel like I'm going to die!"*

I heard the fear in his voice. It reminded me of how I was once tormented in a similar way, and that same indignation rose up in me against Satan's trespass into our friend's soul.

"No. You will not die. It's only this," I said. *"Playtime for these demons is over. They know it and they don't like it."* I laid my hands on him and we all prayed that he would be forever delivered of these panic attacks.

"It's gone!" He exclaimed after we finished praying. *"I feel okay now."* I talked with him a few years later and asked how he was doing. He said he had never had another panic attack since.

Another time, I had just tucked my eight-year-old son into bed. I was walking down the hallway to my bedroom when I heard him call after me, *"Can we leave the light on?"* I was tempted to say *"no"* and just go to bed but the Holy Spirit

checked me. I was prompted by the Spirit to go talk to him, for I sensed this was no idle request.

I sat down beside him on the bed and asked if he wanted to talk for a while. I asked him about wanting the light on and what was he afraid of. He said that when he was over at a friend's house, they had watched a horror movie that had an image of ghostly face of a partially decomposed dead girl. He could not get that picture out of his mind. At night, he told me, the image would come and haunt him.

He wanted to talk about God. I explained about the power of God to deliver us from such things. He had questions. How do we know if we are saved? Can God really protect us? What if we do something wrong? I answered all his questions, making sure to explain the way of salvation. I asked him if he wanted to ask Jesus into his heart. He did. I walked him through a prayer of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

After he asked Jesus into his heart, I reaffirmed that God can take the image away, and that we could pray and make that happen right now. I prayed for him. I turned off the light and said goodnight. "Dad," my son exclaimed, "*The picture is gone. I can't even remember what it looked like!*" We rejoiced together. "Are you okay with the light off?" I asked. "Sure Dad, I'm not afraid anymore."

The devil is a bad devil and God is a good God. Satan wants to hurt us and God wants to help us, if we will only turn to him. There are some afflictions in this life that psychology and pharmacology have no cure for. Sometimes that is because the root cause is not physical, but spiritual. In cases like that, turning to God through Jesus Christ is the only answer.

6

Walking the Wrong Road

“These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold--though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.” (1 Peter 1:7)

“You did *what?*” My father was incredulous at what he just heard me say. His exclamation was more of a challenge than a question.

“I became a Christian last night,” I repeated happily, but a bit more cautiously.

My father wrinkled his brow as though he were studying a problem. “What do you mean by that? You have been a Christian all your life! You were baptized into the Lutheran Church as a baby.”

I had thought that my dad, a devout Lutheran minister, would be happy if I told him that I had decided to follow Christ. I had miscalculated.

Before I share how the rest of this conversation went, let me explain something, which I know now but did not understand then. And that is this: Everybody has a different experience of God. As long as that experience is through Jesus Christ, it is valid. Romans 10:9 says, *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* As long as your faith is in that and you are presently dedicated to following Jesus, then all is well.

After a tremendous emotional struggle, I had decided to follow Jesus. Just the night before, I had been born again. The Holy Spirit lived inside of me. My worldly friends had forsaken me, and I didn't care. I had Jesus. I was filled with a love for others and a desire to read my Bible, to get closer to God, to do right, honor my parents, and be with other born-again Christians. That was all I cared about.

My spiritual eyes had been opened, and I was sure that I knew everything. Of course, I didn't. To my way of thinking, if your experience with God was not similar to mine, you were not a Christian. Half a decade, plus a dozen years later, I realize that is not the case.

John the Baptist is a case in point. Scripture tells us he was filled with the Holy Spirit before he was even born. His religious experience was quite different from ours. My father was like John the Baptist. He knew from the time he was a child that he wanted to serve God as a minister.

My Dad never had a rebellious stage. He understood the Gospel clearly, that we are all sinners in need of salvation through the atoning blood of Jesus and that our Heavenly Father expects us to walk in holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit. He one hundred percent believed that Jesus is God, our Lord and Savior, and that he rose from the dead.

According to Scripture, my dad was a Christian, even though he never had a born-again experience in the manner that I did. My father's ministry touched countless people and furthered the Kingdom of God far more than my ministry has. When my father went to be with Jesus at the age of 92, people came from hundreds of miles away to attend his funeral and remember his love and caring way of ministering to others. I will be doing good if I can do half as well.

But I know all this only in hindsight. Back in 1970, when I told my dad that I just got saved, I did not have that understanding. I was a teenager, and as you have likely heard, they know it all. I had just turned 15 years old and my father

was a seminary graduate with many years of ministry behind him. We both thought we knew more than the other. We both had the conception that Christian experience must conform to our own limited understanding. We were about to misunderstand each other in a big way. Like the two proverbial ships passing each other on a foggy night, we could hear each other's foghorn but could not make out where the other was coming from.

Back to our conversation. How was I to explain to my father that I had not been a Christian? I thought about telling him about some of the wicked things I had been up to. That would surely do it. Fortunately, common sense got the better of me before I opened my mouth!

"You were baptized as a baby," my dad repeated.

"Dad, I didn't have any choice in my baptism," I responded. "I needed to *decide* to follow Jesus."

My Dad considered that for a moment and said, "Well, that's what confirmation is for. You stood before the Church and with your entire class you confirmed your faith in Christ."

"It didn't mean anything to me," I explained. "I just did what I was told to do. You can't schedule a decision like that. It has to come from the heart." I continued, "When I was confirmed I had not yet made any decision about anything." I thought that this logic would settle the issue. I was wrong.

"No," my Dad said. "You would not have done that. Why in the world would you get up there and be confirmed if it meant nothing to you?"

"Because that is what was expected of me. It's what I had to do."

"What?" My dad was incredulous. "Nobody made you get confirmed. You could have waited if you needed time to think about it."

"Of course I couldn't," I argued. "I'm the preacher's kid. I've always been told I must set an example. After three years

of classes, and all my other classmates getting confirmed, how could I be the only one not to be confirmed? So, I just went along with it so as not to make waves, but I'm telling you, I made no decision then to follow Christ. But now I have. I have repented and turned my life over to Christ and everything has changed inside of me. Before I didn't care about God or Jesus, not much anyway. But now I do!"

My dad was quiet for a moment and then said, "Well, all that you have had is a deepening of your faith. That is all." The conversation was over and he walked away.

I understand now that it was hard for my father to accept that the Lutheran way had not reached me. All the church-going and classes gave me a good theological framework and tilled the soil of my heart and prepared me, but it took a ministry from Campus Life, which had sort of infiltrated our church, to reach me. And that just didn't sit right with my dad.

For six months, I went to Campus Life Bible studies every Sunday afternoon and attended other functions. I loved every minute of it. It was pure joy to be with other born-again Christians and talk about Jesus and study His Word. But then one day...

"Mark, your dad doesn't want you to go to Campus Life meetings anymore," my mother told me.

"Why? I want to go! What's wrong with my going? It's good for me. We study the Bible. All my Christian friends are there and that is the only time I can see them." I was getting upset.

"Your father feels that since all these kids in the group are older, some even college age, that they will get you doing things older kids do, like drinking."

"That is preposterous! Nobody in Campus Life would drink or do anything like that. We all just love God and want to learn more about Jesus!"

“I know. I am just telling you what his concern is and that we won’t be driving you anymore to the meetings.”

Unfortunately, I did not have the wisdom to take it to God in prayer and ask God to intervene. I have no doubt that in time, God would have changed my parents’ minds. But in discouragement I acquiesced. My parents, with good intentions, were overprotective. God allows such misadventures to test and strengthen us while Satan exploits them to tempt and destroy us. We are indeed, locked in a great spiritual battle.

As the months rolled by I got lonely for friendship and I gravitated to friends of my own age. And these friends did drink. Eventually, so did I. That, and then some. I had come to a fork in the road and, without knowing it, I took a wrong turn. Maybe I did know it but I didn’t care. Not enough anyway. I was embarking on a road leading away from God’s plan for my life. Unknown to me, I was on a new road that would be fraught with peril and pain.

7

Tumbling into Tragedy

He (Jesus) did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man. (John 2:25 – Parentheses mine)

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God...It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:26-27,31)

The way of sinners is hard. (Proverbs 13:15)

By the time I was 17 years of age I had slid into what can be called my hippie stage of life. With shoulder-length hair, I found acceptance among the hippie drug culture. Bell-bottom jeans, a fringed leather jacket, and a Chevy Super-Sport convertible completed my transformation. I found respect and acceptance and plenty of fun times partying with my friends, getting high on pot (marijuana), acid (LSD), cocaine and speed (methamphetamines). I lived for the weekend parties.

Then I met Gail. She was beautiful. She was 16 and I was 17 and we were very much in love. She was the first girl to tell me that she loved me. My love developed more slowly, growing roots deep down into my being that would be there for a lifetime. We were soulmates. We would talk hours on end on about what we thought of different things. We had much in common. We both liked getting high and, although we didn't think on it much, we were both secretly running from God.

Gail's mother was a born-again Christian and was praying for her daughter. As for me, I could not forget that Jesus had

saved me and delivered me, and now I was walking in disobedience against Him. I still believed, but I did not want to obey. I intended to obey later. I just wanted to have fun first.

Gail believed in a loving God, as did I. One day I talked to Gail about Jesus. I told her how I had given my life to Jesus when I was 15, and that when I was walking with God, everything was better. I was happy and things just seemed to work out for me as God answered my prayers. I broached the subject of us both committing our lives to Jesus. I would if she would. She thought all that was very interesting and talked with her mother about what I had said. “He’s good for you,” her mother said. “Stay with him.”

But we didn’t talk about Jesus a lot. There would always be time for that later, or so I thought. Right then neither of us wanted to give up our sinful self-centered lives. We were having fun. We were trapped by sin and didn’t even know it.

I remember I was worried about dying before I repented. One time, on a trip back from the western states, I refused to sleep at all while my friend drove the thousand miles straight through the night. I had to stay awake and keep my seat belt on. If we crashed, I reasoned, I needed time to repent before I died. I feared waking up in hell. The Holy Spirit was working on me.

When Gail was almost 18 and I was 19, she decided she needed to move from Illinois down to Tennessee for a while to help her sister. We had been through some things, being on-again off-again. Stable lovers, teenagers do not make. We met at a restaurant for dinner after not seeing each other for a while.

“I don’t want to go to Tennessee,” Gail said. “But my sister needs my help and wants me to come. I feel it is the right thing to do. She needs me, so I must go. Mark, you know me better than anyone in my life, and even though you know me so well, you still love me.”

“Yes, I do,” I said quietly.

“Why don’t you come with me to Tennessee?” Gail asked.

I considered the question for a moment. “No, I don’t think so. I’m going to Colorado. I always wanted to see the west and I’m going to Boulder.”

She went south and I went west. I had a lot to sort out in my mind.

I drove from Illinois to Boulder, Colorado. I got a job at a brick factory and enjoyed making new friends and exploring the mountains on weekends. It gave me time to think. I had stopped doing drugs and the fresh mountain air and the new environment helped me clear my head.

I got a lot sorted out in my mind. I thought a lot about Gail. I could not get her out of my mind and I finally realized I never would. It was time to settle down and I wanted to spend my life with her. I needed to go to Tennessee. I just needed to work a couple more weeks, get a full paycheck and then I could jump in my car and hit the road and head for the South.

It felt good to have some clarity on my direction. I went to a pay a phone to call my parents just to chat. I didn’t know that phone call would bring my world crashing in on me.

“Mark, we have some bad news to tell you,” my Dad said soberly.

“Oh?” I said, afraid to ask what it could be.

“Sue called us the other day. She said that you would want to know. Gail was killed in a car accident in Tennessee.”

My mind went into full-blown denial. I could handle Gail being injured. Then I could pray that she would recover. I could do something. You can’t do anything when someone is dead. Surely, she can’t be dead. I heard it clearly, but it just could not be so. It was too terrible to conceive.

“Did you say she was killed?” I asked. I knew that’s what he said. I just didn’t want to believe it.

“Yes,” my dad said soberly, “Gail was killed.”

I couldn't talk. I managed to get out, "Dad, I have to go. I will call you later."

"Mark," my father said softly, "I want you to know that God is big enough to take care of you, and to take care of Gail too."

At that moment, I knew all too clearly the cost, the danger, the deceitfulness of sin. For it was not just that I would never hold her again in my arms, that we would never walk hand-in-hand and share our deepest thoughts. What really was torturing me was that, as far as I knew, she died without Christ. She had run out of time.

I appreciated my Dad's efforts to comfort me, but I just wanted to scream in the phone, "She died and went to hell! Isn't that what we believe? And now it's too late! How can God comfort either one of us now!"

Of course, I didn't say that, but I thought it. "I have to go now," was all I could manage and I hung up the phone. I drove to a secluded place and just bowed my head and cried. I cried many times for months.

I left the next day for Chicago, though I was severely short on cash for the trip. I had to talk with her mother. I slept in my car. I didn't eat, except once when I stopped for a meal, then I hit the road again. It took a couple days to get to Chicago. Then I went straight to Gail's mother's house.

It was a sad meeting. Her mother went through her photo album of Gail and also showed me the newspaper clipping of the accident. "Gail was deeply troubled for many years, her mother said. "She was always running away, but she always came back. This time she's not coming back." We cried together.

Her mother told me what had happened. "A co-worker was giving her a ride home from work and he turned in front of a truck. She was in a coma for three days before she died," her mother said quietly and then continued, "I took the train to Tennessee and spent those three days at her bedside. I told her

over and over, ‘Gail, if you can hear me, turn to Jesus. He is the only one who can help you now. Call out to Jesus.’” Gail died without ever waking up from the coma.

Over the years I have thought a lot about what Gail’s mother said. I have read enough accounts from people that have had been in comas to know that they very often do hear what is said to them. I think it very likely that Gail heard her mother’s words. I believe it likely she would respond also, for she believed in a loving God and in Jesus. She just thought there was more time. So did I. I think, like me, she was just wanting to have more fun first. But I know the character of Jesus, that he would save someone, snatching them from the approaching fire, if they asked for mercy.

I hold onto that hope. I just have to trust God with it. I cannot have the assurance that Gail is in heaven. That is the danger of sin. I am only left with hope, not total assurance.

That tragic event changed my life forever. I was never the same. I kept asking myself, “What if...” What if I had chosen to return to following Christ, and had led by example, and had witnessed to Gail with the help of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps then Gail would have come to Christ.

They say time heals all wounds, but I think some hurts just get buried under life’s experiences. You think they are gone, until a thought, a song or a memory uncovers them momentarily. Some tears are only truly wiped away in heaven.

Where is the miracle in this story? It is here: God used this terrible tragedy to change my life and bring me back to Jesus. God can bring good out of evil. Scripture promises that “*all things work together for good for them that love God and are called according to His purpose.*” (Romans 8:28).

8

The Rocky Road Home

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?" – Jesus Christ (Luke 15:4)

"My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins." (James 5:19-20)

It was a dark night at the abandoned rock quarry. I stood on the edge of the high cliff gazing down into the pit of inky blackness below. A chilly wind blew through my hair as I contemplated my leap from the rocky edge.

No, I wasn't about to kill myself, but I was inches from a terrible death and I didn't know it. I had driven with a carload of friends to a quarry for an evening of swimming. At this quarry was a tall cliff that we jumped from into the water. It was quite high and it was an exhilarating rush to make the leap into the chasm below. I had done it many times in the daytime, but never at night.

A couple of our friends had not been with us before to this quarry and did not know about our cliff jumping spot. I decided I would pull a practical joke on them when we arrived and I clued my other friends in on it.

"Hey John," I whispered. "It will be pitch dark when we get there. Let's go up to the top of the cliff and I'll jump off. It will totally freak them out because they won't be able to see

that's where the quarry is and they will not know there is water below!"

I found myself on top of the cliff with all my friends. It was really dark below. I couldn't see a thing. But I had jumped off this cliff many times before in the daytime, so I could calculate how many seconds I would fall before I hit the water. I knew it was safe.

As I gathered my courage to jump, I was suddenly impacted with a massive wall of fear. Terrible dangerous fear, so strong it felt like something supernatural. I determined to ignore it and stepped to the edge of the cliff. The fear increased. The more I tried to ignore it, the stronger it became. It was an odd, unnatural fear that seemed to have a life of its own.

There was a peculiar noise in the distance. I had never heard this noise at the quarry before. It bothered me. I stepped back from the precipice. "Come on," I said. "Let's go down the trail to the water."

As we walked down the ravine, the noise got louder. It sounded like some kind of small engine. When we got to where the water's edge should be, there was mud. "The water level must be low," I said. We kept walking and the lower we went the more rocks and mud we saw.

Soon to my horror, the truth of the situation became evident in the darkness. The engine we could hear had to be a water pump. The quarry had been pumped totally dry! I had nearly jumped to my death. It was only the mercy of God, who sent me a powerful warning of fear that stopped me from jumping.

Once again, God had protected me - the God who I had put on hold on for several years. He was still watching out over me, even though I had been ignoring Him.

After Gail's death, I did my best to put my broken life back together. I kept thinking, "Where is she now?" I knew I needed to find my way back to God. I went to a few Campus

Life meetings but I could not seem to recapture what I had lost. I didn't know why. I needed God's comfort and I couldn't seem to find it. There was a terrible pain in my heart that nothing would soothe. I felt empty and I longed to be filled with God's Spirit and experience the life and I had once known when I had given my life to Christ as a 15-year-old.

A thought kept recurring: *Life is too serious to fritter it away partying and living for pleasure alone.* Life, I realized, was a matter of life and death. I didn't want to go into eternity without knowing Jesus and I didn't want anyone I cared about dying without the Lord either. It was time to grow up.

The problem was, I could not find my way back home to God. The devil tried to whisper to me that it was too late. I had turned my back on God. He wouldn't accept me. But I knew better. When I got saved I read my New Testament cover to cover, over and over. The scriptures reveal a Jesus who will always take anyone back who repents, no matter how they have failed. So I kept seeking. I had stopped the hard drugs, but would still go drinking with my friends. I felt lost. I needed to find God and I couldn't seem to do it. I needed God to find me.

One day I was sitting on the courthouse lawn in our little midwestern town. This was a hangout spot for youth. I was playing my guitar and a handful of other hippies were sitting around me, enjoying the summer evening.

I saw a man walking up to us. He had a big beard and under his arm was a big Bible. He smiled and walked right up to me and said, "Can I talk to you about God?"

"Sure," I said. "Go ahead. My name is Mark."

"My name is Jim Hall," he said. "Did you know that Jesus is the Son of God and he died on the cross so you can have your sins forgiven?"

"Yes, I know that," I said.

“Well, that’s good. But just knowing that isn’t enough. What you must do is repent, and give your life to Jesus and ask him into your heart so you can be born again. That’s what you need to do.”

“Yes, I know,” I answered readily. That is what I need to do.” I figured the next thing that would happen is that he would invite me to his church or something, but that’s not what happened.

“Jim looked me in the eye and said, “Then why don’t you kneel down with me right now and we will pray together and you can ask Jesus for forgiveness and you can turn your life over to him?”

My first thought was, *No! I can’t do that in front of all my friends! I’ll never hear the end of it. I’ll be teased relentlessly!* But suddenly a scripture flashed into my mind, the words of Jesus, *“Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”* (Matthew 10:32-33) I realized Jim was right. This is exactly what I needed to do if I was serious about being a Christian. I had to take a stand for Jesus right now in front of my friends. God knew what I needed and He had created this moment just for me.

I knelt down with Jim and he led me in a prayer while all my hippie friends looked on in amazement. It was one of those prayers that results in a miracle. I found my way back to God. Jim asked me to get in my car and follow him to his church, which I did. A little Assembly of God church, where I found friends, fellowship and what I needed most – my way back to God. The prodigal son had come home.

9

Walking in Power

These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues...they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:17-18)

“What do you think happens after you die?” My friend’s question did more than just surprise me; it totally amazed me. I was living in the midst of a miracle, happening through me at that very moment.

The conversation with my friend was directly related to an amazing incident that had happened a few days before. Prior to this event, I had not ministered to anyone about Christ. I really didn’t know what to say or how to say it, nor did I have the boldness to do so. That was all about to change.

At this point I am around 20 years old and had been attending a small Assembly of God church. I had just been saved for the second time. One of the church members invited me to a Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship. At the meeting the evangelist taught about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, preaching from the text in Acts, chapter one, verses four through eight:

“...He commanded them...to wait for what the Father had promised...you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses...”

The preacher said that when we had been saved the Holy Spirit indwelt us at that time, but that there was another operation of the Holy Spirit that comes after salvation. He directed our attention to Acts 19:1-2, where Paul found some

Christian believers in Ephesus and he asked them, “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit since you believed?*” They replied that they had not, so Paul laid his hands on them and they received the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

He went on to explain that this wasn’t just for the people in Bible days, but was for us now also. He read from Acts Chapter 2 – “*You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.*” (38-39)

This baptism, the preacher explained to us, will open the door for us to operate in the gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy and healing, for the purpose of powerfully leading others to Christ. He quoted 1 Corinthians 4:20, where Paul said, “*The kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power.*”

At the conclusion of his sermon we had a time of worship, wherein he encouraged us to speak to the Lord out loud, praising Him and thanking him for his love. After a time, he spoke again and said that he would now pray for us to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He told us to keep worshipping God and that we could expect the Holy Spirit to come upon us and that we would be begin to speak in tongues, a language we had never learned.

Sure enough, it happened just as he said. I was amazed to find myself worshipping in another language, what the Bible calls speaking in tongues. There is a glorious feeling of God’s presence that comes whenever you worship God, but I found that worshipping in tongues brought about a stronger sense of God’s presence.

I didn’t realize it fully at the time, but my life had just passed through a door, into a new dimension, one of walking in the miraculous power of God. It was a few days after this experience that I was driving along and saw one of my old

friends walking along the street. I stopped and offered him a ride.

Suddenly, as I was driving, I felt a powerful conviction come over me that I should tell my friend about Jesus. I felt the Spirit of Christ saying with urgency, “*Tell him about me!*”

I was feeling shy and resisted, but the sense of urgency just got stronger and stronger. I remember thinking, “I am supposed to have the Baptism in the Holy Spirit now and have power to witness, but I don’t feel powerful!” We rode along in silence while I wrestled with my thoughts.

So, I prayed. I said, “God, I don’t know what to say. I don’t know how to get the conversation about you started. If you want me to talk to him about you, then you have to get him to start the conversation.” I breathed a sigh of relief. The ball was in God’s court now. I was released from my responsibility. I didn’t really expect my friend to say anything. I didn’t expect God to answer my prayer. I had a lot to learn about God!

It wasn’t but a few seconds after I prayed that prayer that my friend turned to me, and out of the clear blue sky asked, “What do you think happens to us when we die?”

Needless to say, I was amazed at how God answered my prayer! The ball was back in my court for sure! I started by telling him about heaven and hell, and how Jesus died for our sins so that we could be forgiven and have new life, both now and forever. What was so amazing was that I talked on and on with ease. The Holy Spirit was bringing scriptures to my mind and leading me in what to say. I did have power to witness!

I learned that being filled with God’s power is totally different than having power of my own. I understood what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, “*I delight in my weakness...for when I am weak, then I am strong.*” When I acknowledged my weakness to God he answered with his power through me. What joy it was to see that all the miraculous wonder and power through Christ that we read

about in the book of Acts wasn't just for them back then, but for us today!

As the years have rolled by, God has used me in many ways to minister in power through prophecy, healings, words of knowledge, and spiritual discernment in countless circumstances. But it is all God's power through Jesus, not my own. And it all started, just as Jesus said it would: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.*"

10

Miracle in the Church

“Is any among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.” (James 5:14)

I struggled to grab the microphone on the CB radio, but I failed to reach it. I was too sick to sit up. “James, I need your help,” I whispered hoarsely. “Get me the radio mike.” We had just moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, but we had not found a home yet. We had our travel trailer parked in the national forest near town. That was home for now. My wife had the car; she was at work at the Pizza Hut. I was at “home” with the kids. I was extremely ill and as the hours ticked by I got worse and worse. I felt as though I was about to die. I needed to get to a hospital.

I needed my wife to come home and drive me to the hospital, but how? I was too sick to even get up and I had no car available. This was before the age of cell phones, so there was no way to reach anyone. The two-way CB radio was the only way. My son heard me weakly calling for him. He came and I asked him to please reach the microphone and put it in my hand, which he did.

“Breaker one-nine, anyone got a copy?” I called and then released the transmit button. Nothing but static. “This is a mayday call. Does anyone copy that has a landline?”

Immediately someone answered loud and clear, “I copy. How can I help you?”

“I am very sick,” I said. “We are camped in the national forest and I need someone to call the Pizza Hut and tell my

wife that I am ill and that she needs to leave work and come take me to the emergency room.

They said they would and shortly thereafter I was at the hospital, where they gave the usual song and dance, “It’s some kind of virus, nothing we can do. You will have to ride it out.”

As the days, weeks, and months rolled by I continued to be sick. Eventually we moved to Phoenix. Although I was somewhat better than that terrible night, I still remained very ill. Then we moved to Wickenburg, Arizona. Seven or eight months went by and I was still sick. I had seen many doctors who had tried all manner of antibiotics. Nothing worked. Some doctors thought it was Valley Fever, caused by a mold that lives in the soil of the area. Another doctor said it was walking pneumonia.

I remember praying for God to heal me. I told God, “I am so sick and tired of being sick and tired. I need to either get better or die. I can’t stand being in limbo and too sick to do anything.”

One day in church the pastor called for people who needed healing to come forward for prayer. I had not yet done this. I don’t know why. It is something the Bible says to do. So, I went forward for prayer. The pastor anointed me with oil and laid his hands on me and prayed. I closed my eyes.

Suddenly a vision flashed through my mind. In my mind’s eye, I saw beams of light shining down through heavenly clouds, like you often see it before sunset. One of these beams of light was shining on my head and the beam of light was filled with sparkling pure goodness. That is the best way I can describe it, pure goodness, and this goodness was flowing into me. It felt so good to feel this purity, this love and kindness and goodness and righteousness flowing into my soul, and even those words don’t fully explain the experience. All I can say is, it felt wonderful.

He finished praying and I went back to my seat and sat down. I thought to myself, “Wow, that felt good!” After a few

minutes, I thought to myself, “I still feel pretty good.” After the church service, we walked out into the sunshine and I thought, “I feel spectacular!” Then it dawned on me – I wasn’t sick at all! I felt great. For the first time in almost a year I felt perfectly healthy! And I stayed that way. It was not just an emotional high. I was finally well.

I was overjoyed to have my health back. The doctors could not fix me. My own prayers for myself didn’t do it. It was only when I did exactly as the scripture said, go to church and ask for prayer there. I guess God wanted to emphasize the importance of being part of a church and has therefore placed great power there.

When Naaman went to the prophet Elisha to be healed of his leprosy, he left very angry because Elisha had not come out of his house to see him but had only sent a messenger outside to him saying, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.” Naaman was offended and he left for home, unhealed, complaining, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.” But Nathan’s servant reasoned with him, saying, “If the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed’!” So Nathan obeyed the prophet’s instructions. He washed in the Jordan River and the result was that he was miraculously healed.

Some people say, “I’m a Christian but I don’t have to go to church.” That’s true. You don’t have to. Naaman didn’t have to bathe in the Jordan River either. But if you want God’s full blessings and power manifested in your life, nothing works like obedience. Sayeth the Word of the Lord: “*Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together.*” (Hebrews 10:25)

11

Miracle in the Heart

“And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.” (Mark 16:20)

“I felt something!” I exclaimed, as I stepped back from the person I was praying for. It was the most spectacular answer to prayer I had seen yet. This all happened in the same church that I had been healed in, but this was about a year later. A lot had happened in that year. The pastor had taken a liking to me. After learning that I had completed Bible college and had credentials with our denomination, he had appointed me as his associate pastor. Then he retired. I was voted in as senior pastor.

Little did I know that I just inherited a church that was about to undergo a baptism by fire. There was a tremendous spiritual battle about to ensue in that little church. I was soon to find out that many in the Church had some very unorthodox ideas. There was an adult Sunday School teacher that was well liked by everyone. He was always happy, smiling and charismatic. He had great influence. The problem was that he had some crazy notions.

Due to the misleading of this teacher, about half the church did not believe in the deity of Christ. The fact that Jesus is God, the Second Person of the Trinity, is a cardinal doctrine of Christianity, something believed by all Christian denominations. In fact, denial of Christ’s deity is a mark of a cult.

Jesus asked his disciples, “*Who do people say that I am?*” And then, “*Who do you say that I am?*” Jesus told the Pharisees, “*Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.*” (Matthew 16:13-15 & John 8:24) The question of Jesus’ identity as God is paramount, and the answer is made abundantly clear in the Gospel of John, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us...*” (John 1:1-5,14)

This teacher taught that Jesus was not divine. He told the adult Sunday School class that all Bible versions except the King James were of the devil. He had a hang up about saying “Holy Ghost” instead of “Holy Spirit.” You were sinning if you didn’t say “ghost.”

I remember teaching a Wednesday night Bible study and had mentioned that Jesus is divine, when members of the congregation began shaking their heads and verbally disagreeing with me! What’s more, I was not preaching from the King James; I was using the New American Standard Version – one of the so-called “Devil’s Bibles!” This was my first pastorate and I had my hands full!

I tried to handle the situation carefully and tactfully, telling the errant teacher in private that we appreciated him, and valued him as a member of the ministry team. I said that he was free to believe what he wished, but as far as teaching in the church, he simply could not be allowed to teach against the Biblical doctrine of the deity of Christ, and that we needed to know where he stood on this issue. He grew angry and threw his membership card down. “I quit,” he exclaimed and walked out, never to return. Within a week he had gone to everyone in the church, told them we had “*run him off,*” creating dissent and misunderstanding among church members. Next Sunday half the church was missing.

At the same time that this was happening, the Word of Faith movement was spreading through churches and had infiltrated ours. This teaching is also called the “*Name it and*

Claim it” or “*Gab it and Grab it*” doctrine. Adherents believed that anything you want you could get from God, provided you said the proper incantation. You just had to speak it into existence. According to their theory, we were all “*little gods*,” and since God spoke the world into existence, we, as little gods, could make anything happen that we wanted by speaking it and then fully believing it would happen.

This teaching was not only counter to our denominational stance, it was in contradiction to the teaching of Scripture, which holds that God is good and loving, that He does still work miracles and often does answer our prayers in marvelous ways but that nevertheless He is sovereign and sees the whole picture. We see only partially. We see “in a glass darkly,” as the Apostle Paul put it. So when we pray, we should ask. We don’t demand. We don’t order God around. We supplicate with humility. We pray as Jesus did, “*Not my will, but Thine be done.*”

The Word of Faith doctrine can be very destructive, leading people to discard Christianity altogether when they learn that Christianized magic just doesn’t work. Word of Faith followers were often intolerant of anyone disagreeing with their position. They had the true gospel, they thought, and anything else was of the devil as far as they were concerned. They were militant in proselytizing others to their persuasion.

We had one young man in a wheel chair from a broken back received in a 4-wheeling accident. He was told by one Word of Faith adherent that it was his own fault that he was in a wheel chair because he had not exercised faith to demand his healing. You can imagine the spiritual and emotional damage being caused by such teaching.

So, at the same time I was dealing with the Deity of Christ issue, I also had this false teaching in the church. Many more people in the church left because I would not agree with their unbiblical doctrine. A number of people had the idea that truth didn’t matter, that the Church should just be a happy-clappy

social club where everyone could be blown about by whatever wind of doctrine they fancied.

Now I said all that to say this: I believe we had some of these fantastic miracles happen in our church because of the ongoing spiritual warfare. We were under assault by doctrines of demons, and God was going to use miracles to point people to the truth. God was about to confirm the truth of the deity of Christ and the sovereignty of God through miracles. While the *name-it-and-claim-it* group could produce no real miracles, true miracles began happening as I preached scriptural truth.

One Sunday morning a man came forward for prayer. The doctors said he was dying of heart disease and only had a short time to live. He was of the *name-it and claim-it* persuasion. I prayed for him that God would heal him and overlook his errant doctrine. God loves us, not because we are right about everything, but because he is a God of love.

While I prayed for him, I could barely hear myself think, for this man was loudly and defiantly ordering God to heal him. He was claiming his godhood, calling his healing into existence, and claiming it was going to happen because he said so. I felt a sadness in my spirit, for I could clearly hear the Holy Spirit bearing witness to me that he was not going to be healed. He died not long after.

We were facing an attack of Satan through false teaching. As a young pastor of my first church I was alarmed that so many had left. I had tried to be gentle and respectful while still standing for the truth, but it seemed I was in a no-win scenario. People I loved and cared about still quit the church. The district was expressing concern also, telling me, "*We want a big church out there and if you can't build it, we will get someone who can.*"

The Bible says in Isaiah 59:19, "*When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.*" God began to provide help by

performing miracles in our midst and people began coming to Christ.

One lady who came up for prayer asked for healing of her sister, who was dying of inoperable cancer. The next week she testified that her sister's doctors confirmed that she was suddenly cancer free and in perfect health! She went all over town telling people that it was because we prayed for her at our church.

Soon we had many visitors coming for healing because of this woman's report. And we began having many more amazing healings, and then even more people came. I don't think this happened because of me, or because our church was anything special. I think it was because I made sure that our church taught that we must submit ourselves humbly to God's will and at the same time beseech Him in faith for our needs and expect good things from the hand of a loving God.

Then the most spectacular miracle happened. It was a Sunday morning and I called for anyone who needed prayer to come forward. Several people did so, and I asked an elderly gentleman what he needed. In a voice filled with pain, he said, "*I just had open heart surgery a couple weeks ago, and today my chest is hurting terribly. I can't stand the pain!*"

I could see by the look on his face that he was in excruciating agony. He could barely talk. I reached out to touch him. I remember thinking I should touch him very gently, since he had recently had his rib cage sawed open. I closed my eyes to pray and gingerly let my fingers touch the front of his chest. I took a breath to speak but never got the chance. That's when it happened.

Suddenly I felt his chest go *POP!* I felt it. I heard it. It startled me. I had not even said any words of prayer yet. I stepped back. I didn't know what had happened. "*I felt something!*" I exclaimed.

"*So did I!*" He said excitedly, a big happy smile spreading across his face. "*The pain is gone!*"

We worshiped and praised God for this miracle. I don't know what was wrong or how God fixed it. Perhaps because they had sawed his rib cage in two, it was a bit out of place and needed to be moved into place. I don't know. All I know is, I did not touch him hard enough to do anything. When my fingers gently touched his chest, he was instantly healed of his pain. Did God push his bones back into place? What's for certain is that he came forward to humbly ask Jesus to help him, and Jesus did, because he is God, because He is sovereign, and because he cares. Miracles do happen!

12

Miracle on the Mountain

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”
(Psalms 139:7-10)

“I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.”
(Exodus 19:4)

I was going to fall. I knew it. I was going to fall and I was going to die. I clung to the side of the rocky cliff and looked down from a dizzy height at the valley far below. I could clearly see that when I fell, I would keep falling and crashing into sharp jagged rocks. My battered body would roll down cactus-covered ridges, smash into boulders and fall over precipices. It had taken three hours to climb this high. The deadly fall back down this mountain would be quick, but brutal and traumatic.

We were climbing a mountain called Vulture Peak. The view from the top was known to be spectacular. A police officer who attended the small rural Arizona church I pastored was guiding us, having made the climb himself once before. It was me, my dad, my daughter and a couple friends from church.

Most of the climb is a steady uphill hike for a few hours, but near the top it becomes an arduous steep scramble on all fours. Then just before the top is a crevice with a cliff that had to be scaled. That is the most dangerous part of the climb. One

false move there and a person can fall to his death. That's where I had my trouble.

I was clinging to the side of a smooth vertical rock face with few handholds. I had to climb up a few feet to get to the top of this precipice. While clinging to this cliff, I realized that if my next handhold was not solid, I would surely fall. I froze with panic and that's when that terrible certainty washed over me: I was going to fall and I was going to die. I was never more sure of anything. It had the gripping power of a terrifying premonition. Fear had me frozen to the rock wall like a cat clinging to a screen door, afraid to move in either direction.

I continued to cling to the side of the cliff, afraid to move, while my muscles began to tremble from the strain. I could no longer stay where I was, yet there was no way back down and no way to safely move ahead. The fear and panic I felt was as intense as a nightmare.

It was then that I closed my eyes and said a silent, but very fervent, prayer: "*God help me!*" And that's when God showed up. What happened next defies description, but I shall try. Never in my life have I experienced such a dramatic answer to prayer. It was above and beyond what I expected or imagined.

The moment I said that prayer I had a profound experience of the presence of God. I am not talking about a feeling. It was something real and tangible. God was there. It was as though a veil had parted and I was suddenly aware that God was there, all around me, next to me and with me. God was as ubiquitous as the air. I suddenly realized in that moment that He had been there all along, all my life, every second, even though most of my life I was not consciously aware of it. But now I was suddenly and acutely aware of that fact, and for a moment, I could sense a reality that I had believed theologically but had never fully experienced. My eyes were opened and I saw Acts 17:28 come to life: "*In Him we live and move and have our being.*"

Coincident with the sensation of God's presence was a deep awareness that He was my parent. I was his child. God is our father. I had known that doctrinally, but now I felt it profoundly in a way that is hard to describe. God was *my* father. I felt it. He was personally interested in *me*. In that moment I fully understood that being a parent is intrinsic to who God is. He is all about being interested in our lives. It's what he does. He is infinitely aware and attentive to every minute detail of our existence. I was suddenly deeply aware of all this in an instant. I didn't merely know it. I was living in that reality. *I belonged to God.*

Simultaneous with that experience, which happened in a heartbeat, there came a voice, which I recognized instantly as the voice of God: "*You will not die today, but you must move now!*" It was not just a thought in my head. It was an audible voice, but different than any sound I had heard before. It came with the authority of God and it was louder than out-loud, yet at the same time I knew that no one else could hear it. How I knew that, I have no idea. I just knew it.

There was one other aspect about this that is most peculiar. At the time none of this seemed one bit out of the ordinary to me. Of course, it was extraordinary! Yet at the moment the fact that God was revealing himself and speaking words to me did not seem impossible or abnormal. In retrospect I am amazed that the event seemed so natural at the time. Perhaps God made it that way in order not to frighten me, but I also think that whenever God does anything it is perfectly in line with his nature, and thus, whatever he does *is* natural. In our world, such a thing is supernatural, but in God's realm all that he does is natural, and for one very brief moment, I was in His reality.

The next sensation I felt was great relief. All my fear totally vanished. God had assured me I wasn't going to die and I believed it. But with it came a command, "*You must move now!*" I didn't dare disobey.

I looked up and saw what looked like a reasonably good handhold. With confidence I reached for it and pulled myself up. In a moment, I was over the dangerous spot and I clambered up onto the flat expanse on the top of the peak.

The rest of the story is rather anticlimactic. Everyone else climbed up and we all wandered around admiring the view. I found a quiet spot to sit down, looked out over the valley below, and contemplated my experience. The whole thing – the powerful overwhelming flash of awareness and the voice – it all only lasted five seconds at the most, and then it was gone.

I felt ecstatic about what had just happened, and thought of sharing it, but then I thought, who would believe me? How could I even properly convey all that had just happened? No one even realized that I felt to be in any danger. Also, it was a deeply personal experience, a sacred moment, that I was not sure God wanted me to share. Decades passed and I told not one soul.

After reflection and prayer, I have sensed no word from the Lord against sharing it. So now I have told you. As God is my witness, this is exactly how it happened, twenty-six years ago, when God worked a miracle on the mountain.

13

Demoniac in a Hot Tub

“The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’ And He said to them, ‘I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy...’” (Luke 10:17-19)

“I’m afraid to sleep,” the frightened young man said. “The demons come into my bedroom at night. They sit on my chest and try to suffocate me.”

I was visiting my son and his wife. We decided to go down to the apartment complex’s hot tub and soak for a while. It was late in the evening and we hoped we would have it to ourselves, but as we arrived, we saw there were already two people in the hot tub. We didn’t know them, but God knew us all and had a plan in mind.

It was unknown to us at the moment, but one of them was a Christian and the other was a very troubled young man tormented by demons. The Christian had been witnessing to the man about Jesus, but he had been getting nowhere. He prayed, “God, send me some help.” He told us later that when he saw us approaching the pool, he felt the witness of the Holy Spirit, “Here comes your help. I’m sending them.”

At first, we went to the pool and swam, but then my daughter-in-law came over and told us, “That man in the hot tub is trying to witness about Jesus to the other guy. I think we should go over there and see if we can help.” So we headed over to the hot tub.

The three of us settled into the hot tub and as we heard the conversation, we understood immediately we were all part of

God's plan to reach someone for Jesus. We interjected ourselves into the conversation and all four of us began to tell him more of how Jesus could bring him into ultimate truth and salvation.

Our troubled friend was ranting on about how the universe is god, the trees are god, we are god and other nonsensical esoteric lies of Satan, and while he talked rapidly his every sentence was laced with profanity. Nearly every other word was a filthy one. There was something very unusual about the way he talked; rapidly, and the way he cussed was odd. It wasn't the normal way people use profanity. It was as if he was under compulsion to spew out filth in disjointed nonsensical phrases. It was demonic.

One of the prophetic gifts of the Holy Spirit suddenly came into play when God gave me a flash of insight into what this man was going through. I said to him, "Let me tell you something. Right now, you feel like you are in a fog. You feel like you cannot even think your own thoughts. Your mind is filled with confusion."

He stopped talking and looked at me in astonishment. I knew the Holy Spirit had revealed that to me and he wondered how I knew exactly what he felt. I continued, "And here is the reason you can't think straight: There are demons around you right now. They are affecting your mind and they are making you feel that way."

He spewed forth more profanity, "I don't know @\$@ why I'm @\$@# talking like this," he said. I can't @!#\$#@ stop. This is not me."

"I know. It's the demons trying to control you," I continued. "Satan loves profanity. But we can pray for you right now if you want us to and we can force the demons to stop." Then the Spirit clearly guided me to tell him something else. "But you must ask us to pray for you. We are not going to pray for you unless you want us to. I promise you God will

stop these demons if we pray, but you have to ask us. It's your call. Do you want us to pray for you?"

At that point he became extremely agitated. The demons stepped up their antics and he became more animated and vocal, spewing out profanity and talking nonsense, but we could also see a great battle was going on inside him. We ignored his rantings and we all kept telling him about Jesus. Every few minutes I would ask him again, "Would you like us to pray and stop these demons from clouding your mind?"

Finally, after what appeared to be a great internal struggle he said, "Yes. I would like that. Pray for me!"

We all gathered around him and laid our hands on him. We took authority over the powers of darkness in the name of Jesus and commanded them to leave. Immediately he calmed down and, for the first time, sat quietly.

"Can you think clearly now?" I asked.

"Yes!" He looked around at all of us. I don't know what to say," he said quietly. "You are all shining!"

"Ok good, let me explain something," I said. "The demons are gone for the moment, but they can come back later. If you want permanent deliverance from them, you need Jesus in your heart. If you will confess your sins to God and turn your life over to Jesus and put your faith in him, he will take up residence inside you. You will belong to him. Then the demons will no longer have any power over you."

We all continued to encourage him to come to Jesus. He explained to us how the demons tormented him at night, how they would come into his bedroom and try to kill him. "Nighttime terrifies me," He said. As he talked to us, he did not use bad language anymore. He only used one bad word and then quickly apologized for it.

We told him that we would help lead him in a sinner's prayer to turn his life over to Jesus. After about twenty

minutes of good conversation with him and sharing scriptures, he finally said, “Yes, I’m ready to give my life to Jesus.”

We led him in prayer and the angels in heaven rejoiced as another soul was delivered out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

14

Miracle of the Easter Kitty

“A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, but even the compassion of the wicked is cruel.” (Proverbs 12:10)

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (Psalms 34:18)

“*No! Not here,*” I exclaimed to myself as my car engine died. I desperately tried to restart it to no avail. Of all the places to break down, this was the most dangerous. I was westbound on the 101 freeway in Phoenix, Arizona. I had just taken the elevated exit to Interstate 17. This is a single-lane ramp that takes you high above the city. There is no shoulder, no safe place to go if you break down. You simply block traffic and pray you don’t get rear-ended by another vehicle.

My car slowed to a crawl where the ramp split to go north or south on I-17. Right there, between where the two lanes split, there was a tiny piece of real estate just large enough for my car. I had just enough momentum to coast into it. There I sat stranded. Cars rushed by within inches on either side of me.

This was not the beginning of a bad day. It was, rather, one more episode in a series of bad events of which this was the last straw. It was Easter Sunday and I was returning home from church. Normally attending church is an uplifting experience, but on this day it was not so for me.

I go to a large mega-church, which has the disadvantage of sometimes making a person feel lost in the crowd. Attending a large church alone, when one is accustomed to being surrounded by family, can be a depressing affair. The pain was worsened when I spotted the woman who was then

my wife sneaking into church with her new boyfriend. I saw her again in the parking lot after church as she ducked down in her car, trying to hide her adulterous shame.

Although I was innocent in the impending divorce, that knowledge did not stop the hurt, the loneliness, or my self-recriminations for having made a foolish matrimonial choice. Only someone who has gone through a divorce knows the feeling of being thrown away, discarded like a worthless piece of refuse. At such times, one wonders about many things: Where is God and does he care what I'm going through? Does he love me? Am I being punished? Is God mad at me? Such are the questions that can torment your mind when you are hurting.

This was my state of mind as I stood in front of my car and called on my cell phone for rescue. As I stood there, feeling miserable and dejected, I heard a strange sound. It was coming from the metal crash barrier in front of my car. I investigated and found that the sound emanated from deep inside the metal framework. It seemed to be an animal in distress.

“Meeooooouh! Meeooooouh!” It sounded like a cat, crying pathetically over and over. If an animal could talk, this one almost was. It was the most plaintive wail I have ever heard a creature make. I called, “Kitty, Kitty?” Immediately this tiny kitten crawled up out of the girders and into my arms. It climbed up my shirt and buried its head in my neck, trembling and piteously crying over and over.

I am not much of an animal person. I'm especially not a cat person. In fact, I'm allergic to them. But this little kitten touched my heart as he clung to me and cried. I wondered how in the world he could have gotten to this seemingly god-forsaken spot.

There is absolutely no way an animal, especially a small kitten, could have gotten here on its own. There was a concrete wall bordering the freeway for miles and there was constant

heavy traffic day and night on this ramp. No animal could possibly walk to this place, for the traffic never lets up.

I realized that there was only one way this kitten could have gotten here. Some drunk and wicked teenagers must have thought it would be funny to throw a helpless kitten out of a car on the top of a freeway overpass where there was no chance of it ever escaping without being run over.

How long had this kitten hidden inside the metal barrier, hearing the constant rush of traffic, frightened, cold, hungry, thirsty and alone, with no hope of ever escaping? The cruelty of its situation was overwhelming. I stroked its fur and spoke gently, assuring it that all was going to be okay. The kitten clung to me and cried wretchedly. My heart went out to this little bundle of fur that clung to me for salvation. I identified with this kitten's plight. I knew what it felt like to be carelessly tossed out, thrown away, and cruelly discarded like a piece of garbage.

I took my new friend home and gave him some milk and food. My daughter said she could find a home for him. When she came over she said, "Dad, this is no ordinary cat. This is a special breed and they are expensive. This is a hypoallergenic cat."

"A what?" I said.

My daughter explained, "A hypoallergenic cat is a breed that has less of a certain protein in its saliva. It's this protein that some people are allergic to."

"Oh, so that's why this cat doesn't make me itch!" I said. "I usually can't hold a cat without it driving me nuts."

A couple days later my daughter told me she found a home for the kitten. "Dad, you aren't going to believe what happened. I gave the cat to a lady that I take care of that is on the hospice end-of-life program. Her cat had just recently died and so I gave her the kitten and she started to cry."

"Really? Why?" I asked.

“She was crying tears of joy. She said it was the exact same breed and the same color as her cat that had just died, that it looked exactly the same. She said it was like God gave her cat back, to comfort her in her final days.”

I have often thought about that day, and the more I have considered it, the more I realize that was truly a God moment, a special time wherein God intervenes and shows Himself in an exceptional miraculous way.

I’ve lived in Phoenix sixteen years. I have never seen a car stranded where mine was that day. What are the odds of that happening when there is an animal stranded there that needs to be rescued? That’s more than coincidence. Clearly God made provision to save that helpless animal.

As I considered all this, the Holy Spirit ministered to me: If God loves and cares for that little kitten, so cruelly abandoned, then He also cares for me, who was likewise being cruelly abandoned. In fact, God cared so much that He orchestrated this whole scenario to show me the depth of His loving care.

What some mean kids intended as evil, God orchestrated for good. A little kitten, whom some considered to be worthless, was in reality a unique breed, a very special creature with a God-given purpose, not to die alone, but to live and be a comfort to a lonely dying lady in need of companionship. So also, though someone I had loved considered me worthless, God saw me as special and had a divine purpose for my life.

I am amazed when I realize that God worked all this out, to save a kitten, to assure me of His love in the midst of my despair, and bring comfort to someone I didn’t even know. How wonderful and loving God really is!

Today I am not alone. I am remarried and we have a darling 4-year old who brings enchantment into our lives. During quiet times, I often think about the miracle of the Easter kitty and what God did that Easter Sunday. On the day

we celebrate Christ's resurrection, God saved a lost and terrified kitten, resurrected hope in a man going through divorce, and brought joy and comfort to a dying lady. The memory of it all assures me that, as Psalms 46:1 says, God truly is a "very present help in a time of trouble."

15

Stopping a Murder

“He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His beloved Son...”
(Colossians 1:13)

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

“I have a gun. I’m on my way to kill him now!” The man who said these words to me was a complete stranger. It was a quiet Saturday afternoon. I was alone at the church. I was in my office working on my sermon for Sunday when a man walked into the foyer of the church. I stepped out of my office. “Can I help you?” I asked.

“I’m looking for the preacher.” He said matter-of-factly.

“That would be me.” I answered.

“Do you have time to talk to me?” he asked quietly.

“Sure, come on in my office.” We entered my office and I sat behind my desk and invited him to sit down in one of the chairs across from me. “Tell me what’s on your mind, friend.” I prodded gently.

“The man looked down at the floor for a moment, turning his cowboy hat around in his hand. He looked up and said. “I have a gun. I’m on my way to kill him.”

I waited for him to continue.

“This evil man. He seduced my wife and stole her away from me. We were so happy and I love her so much. I just can’t take the loneliness and pain any more. I have a gun out in the car. I was on my way over there just now. I know where

they are. I plan to kill him and then kill myself. I just don't want to hurt anymore. I saw this church on the way and something told me to come in here and talk to someone." He stopped and looked at me with pathetic sadness in his eyes.

In moments like these I am so thankful to for the gifts of the Holy Spirit that help us know what to do and say when it really matters. When a thirsty soul is dying, you really need to have some Jesus on tap!

"What we really need right now," I said, "is the presence of God to help us sort this out. I would like to start with prayer. Would that be all right?" I asked.

"Sure." He said. I bowed my head and prayed. After we said "Amen" I looked up and said, "God loves you and so do I. I feel the sadness of what has happened to you. The first thing I want to say is this: In case you decide to go through with your plan, you need to know what is going to happen right after you commit murder and suicide." I paused. I could see he was listening earnestly, hanging on my every word. "First of all, I said, "right after you die, you are still going to feel all the grief and pain you are feeling right now. You are not going to be asleep or unconscious. Your spirit will leave your body and you will still be hurting. You will still miss your wife. You will still be angry. Only it will be much worse. The demons will drag you down into the darkness of hell and you will suffer pain you cannot imagine. Your loneliness will be far worse, for there will be no one to talk to, no one who cares about you."

Fortunately, you still have options. First of all, I want you to know that I sympathize with your pain. I feel bad about what you are going through. More importantly, you must know this: God knows all about it. God feels sorry for you. He wants very much to help you. And I can promise you that God is capable of healing the terrible pain you feel. He is able to walk with you through this and bring you out on the other side, whole and healed. I'm not talking about some platitude like

“time heals all wounds.” What I mean is that God will work a supernatural miracle and help you, right here and now.”

“How can God do that?” He asked.

I picked up the large leather-bound bible on my desk and opened it to Revelation 3:20 and read the verse out loud. *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”* I handed him the Bible and asked him to read it himself. “That’s Jesus talking.” I said. “There is a God-shaped vacuum in every human heart. We try to fill it with other things or with a person, but only God can really fill that void. He created us to have fellowship with Him and live our lives in communion with Him.

All we have to do is to put our faith in Jesus. He is our creator. He came into the world as a man and lived and died on the cross so that his blood would wash away our sins. He came back alive after being dead three days and now he invites all to come to him and ask Him into their hearts. The Bible says that if we do that, his Spirit will enter into us and make us a brand-new person. I read to him from 2 Corinthians 5:17, *“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”*

When that happens then you are what the Bible calls “born again.” You will never have to fear hell or punishment from God for your sins. They are all forgiven and you can look forward to an eternity of joy in God’s kingdom after this life. But there is more. It is not just future goodness that God has for you. Right here and now, when you repent of your sins and turn your life over to Jesus, he is going to help you feel better right now!”

I stopped talking so all this could sink in. He asked a few questions about God and the Bible. I answered as best I could. We talked a bit more about his life and some things that had happened to him. After a while I asked him, “Would you like to take that step of faith? Would you like to give your heart to

Jesus and have God inside you helping you deal with the pain?”

“Yes, I would! He said. “But I don’t know how. What do I do?”

“You just decide and tell God about it. We can do that right now in prayer. If you like I will lead you in prayer. Would you like to do this now?”

“Yes,” he said and we bowed our heads.

“Just repeat after me,” I told him. “Jesus, I believe in you. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. I believe you rose from the dead and are alive now. I ask you into my heart. Please forgive all my sins. Help me to live a new life and follow you as you lead me and help me. Please have mercy on me and heal my broken spirit. Amen.”

The man, whose name was David, looked up, wiping tears from his eyes. “Wow! I feel different! Like a thousand pounds has been taken off my shoulders!”

“Yes, that’s because you have left the domain of the devil’s darkness and you are now in the light of God’s kingdom.”

“Yes! I feel for the first time in a long time that there is hope! I feel...I don’t know, I feel light as a feather!”

“God has begun the supernatural healing you need in your spirit.” I said. You will still have times of sadness and pain, but it’s different now. You are not alone. God is with you, and there is a whole church of people here that will be care about you and pray with you and help you begin a new life in God. And whenever you are feeling down come by and talk to me, or call me. I’m here for you.”

I told him when our service times were and encouraged him to come. And he did. He was there every Sunday for service. Day by day and week by week I watched the sadness in his life melt away and be replaced by the joy of the Lord.

After about a year he met a beautiful young lady and she began attending with him. God had put his life back together.

These are the kinds of miracles that are God's specialty. Jesus said, "*It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*" (Luke 5:31-32) When a person's life is lying in ruins, God can come in and bring hope where there was none and shed light where before there was only darkness.

Dave, wherever you are, if you should read this, it has been many, many years. God still loves you. So do I. May you ever walk with Jesus. See you in heaven, my friend.

16

The Stolen Motorcycle

“If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. “Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. “Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. (Matthew 5:40-42)

“You’re in a bad fix,” he said with a smirk. The man opened his trunk, took out a tire iron and began walking towards me menacingly. He was big and tough and even if he didn’t have a weapon, I was not sure I could take him. And there were two of them. My blood ran cold.

I was stranded in the middle of an abandoned lot in the worst part of the town, a city with one of the worst crime rates in the country. Not a good place to be after dark, or anytime for that matter. A car had just pulled up and two men got out. How did I get myself into such a predicament?

It all began with a stolen motorcycle. I was the owner of an auto repair garage and gas station. One of my employees, by the name of Terry, brought a motorcycle by the shop and offered to sell it to me for only \$300. I looked it over. It was a Kawasaki 900 CC, bored out to 1100 with a racing cam installed. I had never driven a bike with such speed and power.

“Why so cheap?” I asked.

“Because I don’t have a title for it and I need the money.”

“I don’t want anything stolen,” I said.

“Its not stolen. It’s just a lost title.”

“Understand something,” I said. “Before I buy this, I would have the police come down and inspect it first. Are you okay with that?”

“Sure, call them.”

So I did. I made an appointment with the police to look at it and Terry brought the bike by the shop for the police to examine. I was confident it wasn't stolen, for if it was, he certainly wouldn't stand there while the police came to see it. The police came down and looked the bike over. They wrote down the vehicle identification number that was stamped on the frame and said they would get back to me. A couple days later they called me and said it all checked out. It was not a stolen motorcycle. So I bought it.

In those days you could get what's called a “bonded title” for a vehicle by buying a bond from an insurance company and the Motor Vehicle Department would accept that and give you a title. That is what I did and this motorcycle became my daily driver.

Fast forward several months. One morning I came out of my house to get on my motorcycle and go to work at the garage. My bike wasn't there. For a moment I thought I must have left it somewhere. Then I realized my beloved bike had been stolen from me.

I made a police report but there really wasn't much the police could do. Weeks went by. The guy that sold it to me originally no longer worked for me, but one day his girlfriend came down to the shop. She had something to tell us.

“I want to tell you something about your motorcycle, she said. She explained that her boyfriend Terry, who sold me the bike, was also the same person who stole it from me.”

“Terry stole it from me?” I was taken aback. Terry and I had always gotten along. He did give me an uneasy feeling sometimes. Underneath his friendly exterior I sometimes detected something menacing.

“Yes, he stole it from you, and not only that, he stole the bike to begin with.”

“But I had it checked,” I objected. The police said it wasn’t stolen.”

“I don’t understand that,” she answered. “All I know is that he stole the bike before he sold it to you. I’m certain of it. He stole it from someone in Rockford. And he has it again now. He is working on selling it to someone else up in Rockford. Then he will steal it back again if he can. It’s what he does.”

“Would you go with me and my wife to the Rockford police and tell them what you have just told me?” I asked.

“Yes, I will.”

The three of us took the 40-mile trip to the city of Rockford and made a report to the Rockford police. Things went bad after we left. Driving through a slummy part of the city, I had a flat tire and I pulled off into an empty parking lot. I went to work on changing the tire and discovered my tire iron was missing. I had no way to remove the tire or jack up the car.

We were standing in the parking lot considering our options. This was before the age of cell phones. Then it happened. A car pulled into the empty lot and who steps out but Terry the thief! Here I am with my wife and Terry’s girlfriend. We were 40 miles from home. It wasn’t like we had ever hung out with his girlfriend. How was I going to explain this? There was just nothing I could say. We had just finished reporting him to the police and I felt like he just knew something was up.

Terry and the man that was with him stepped out of their car. “What’s going on?” Terry asked.

“I got a flat tire and I don’t have a tire iron,” I said.

He walked to the back of his car, opened the trunk and took out a tire iron. “Well, you’re in a bad fix,” said Terry, in

a way that didn't sound too friendly. He started walking directly towards me, tire iron in hand. I didn't move, but I felt myself tense up with fear. I was sure this would be a fight for my life.

Terry walked up to me and then right past me. He knelt down and started changing my tire. I thought for sure he would ask me what in the world was I doing in Rockford with his girlfriend, but he didn't say a word. When he finished changing my tire, he simply said, "There ya go." He got in his car and left. To say it was surreal would be an understatement. I think there must have been invisible angels surrounding us.

Months went by and one day I got a call from the Rockford police. They told me that my motorcycle had been recovered. It had been involved in a high-speed police chase. The rider had launched himself from the motorcycle while it was in motion and took off running. He escaped and the motorcycle crashed into a tree. I was told I could pick it up at the Rockford police impound building. "Bring a pickup truck," said the officer. "It's a wreck."

When I got there and saw my bike, I barely recognized it. Flat tires, broken handlebars, bent rims, dents and scratches. It was a basket case. I loaded it up and took it home. I stripped the bike down to its frame and bought all new parts, about \$700 worth. That was a lot of money in the 70s.

I had all my shiny new parts stacked up on the bench in my repair garage. I decided that since I had the bike disassembled, this would be a good time to paint the frame. As I was painting, I sprayed over the VIN number that was stamped on the frame. As I did so it filled in the indentations and the number completely disappeared, covered with a layer of paint. "Well, that's not good," I thought to myself. I took a rag soaked in solvent and cleaned the paint off the number so it was visible. But as I cleaned it I noticed something. The number had always appeared to start with Z1F and that is the number the police had checked on and that is the number on

my title. But when I wiped it off, suddenly it showed clearly as starting with Z1E.

My heart dropped. Someone had filled in part of the E to make it look like an F. My cleaning removed an alteration that someone had made! I immediately walked into the office and called the police. I told them exactly what had happened, and would they please check the number again, this time running it as Z1E.

They called me back the next day. Yes, the bike was stolen a year earlier from Rockford. I asked if I could have the phone number of the owner so that I can work directly with him on a satisfactory resolution. They would not do that. They said someone would get back with me on what is to be done next. I never heard back from the city police. Not ever. Several weeks later a State Police cruiser pulled up to my gas station. I went out and talked to the officer. It was then that I found out that police departments, at least at that time and place, did not speak to one another.

“I understand you have a stolen motorcycle. I have come to take it.” I explained to him that first of all he would need a truck, as the bike was completely disassembled. It had some new parts installed, but most of the new parts were on my bench. Some had not yet arrived but were ordered, paid for, and were on their way. The officer said he was taking everything. I said that he had no claim to my new parts. They were not yet part of the motorcycle.

At that point the officer became angry and belligerent. “I can take you and throw you in jail right now for being in possession of stolen property!”

“No, you can’t,” I countered. “I have followed the law every step of the way,” I recounted to him how I had called the police to inspect the bike before I bought it, how the bike was stolen from me, that I had communicated with the city police in our town and in Rockford about the bike.

I explained how I had discovered the altered VIN number and had alerted the local police to that fact. I explained that I had a bonded title and my possession of the bike was completely legal. "I don't want to keep the bike from the owner," I said. But the thing is, it is just a pile of parts right now. He is going to have to buy all these new parts himself to get it running. He may as well buy my parts and that way I am not out so much. I'm still going to be out the money I paid for the bike. Can't you just give me his number so we can work it out," I pleaded.

"You have a title?" asked the officer.

"Yes, I do." I said. "I have a bond from my insurance company and the first owner has the option of filing a claim and being compensated by my insurance company if he wants to. Please just give me his number and this can be easily settled."

"I want that title," demanded the officer. "I need to take it with me and make a copy."

"I am not giving you my title." I said. I knew very well that I would never see it again if I let him take it. "I will show it to you. I will even make you a copy, but I am not going to give it to you."

"I can throw you in jail," he threatened.

"Be that as it may, I will not give you the title. I have behaved reasonably and legally. You do not have the moral or legal right to arrest me. You have no right to take my title or my new parts. Have you even talked to the local police? They will verify everything I have told you. I'm not the bad guy here."

The officer finally left and said they would be in touch. I contacted my attorney. He told me I was on firm legal ground and that I should just tell them there is a mechanic's lien on the bike and that takes precedence.

The State Police never got back to me, so I called them every couple of weeks to ask if there was a resolution. A few months went by and one day I called and they told me that they had closed the case because they could not figure out what to do about the matter. I said that if such was the case, would they now finally just give me the phone number of the first owner so I could call him. They gave me the number.

Now here is where things really get interesting. I called him up and explained that I had his motorcycle. I gave him the whole story of how I had acquired it, how I discovered it to be stolen. I explained that the bike had been severely damaged in a high-speed police chase after it was stolen from me. I said that he can come get the bike, but that it was a pile of broken parts. If he would like the new parts, all I wanted was what I had paid for the parts.

Well, unbeknownst to me, the police had given this poor guy as much run-around as they had given me. They had told him months before that they had found his motorcycle, but they couldn't return it to him because there was this shady character (me) who was using legal technicalities to keep it from him and that they were powerless to do anything about it. This of course was understandably very aggravating to him. As a result, he was not in a mood to work things out. He got agitated and hung up on me in anger. I called him again a couple days later but got the same result.

A couple weeks went by and God began to deal with me about the motorcycle. Jesus' words kept coming to my mind, that if someone wants your shirt, give him your coat too. It was a bit of an emotional struggle but I finally submitted to the Lord. I called the guy back on the phone. God wanted me to just give him the bike and all the parts and that's what I intended to do.

"Listen," I said. "This is Mark again, the guy that has your bike. I have been praying about this and I feel that God wants me to just give you the bike with all the new parts."

“No, you listen. I have prayed about this too and God has told me to let you keep the bike.”

“Oh wow,” I said, “You’re a Christian?”

“Yes, I am,” he said, “and now that I know that you are a Christian too, then I really want to give you the motorcycle.”

We talked for a while, each of us trying to give the bike to the other. It is so amazing how God can change the heart! I said to him, “Let me do this for you: I will reassemble the bike and get it running again. I’ll put all the new parts on and you just give me half what I paid for the parts.” He finally agreed to drive down from Rockford so we could meet in person and work it out. Work it out we did. He came down, drove the bike, gave me about \$350 for the parts and took the bike.

I don’t know where he is now. I don’t remember his name, but I am sure I’ll see him in heaven where we will rejoice together and reminisce about the day that Jesus changed our hearts and minds. And therein is the miracle. Christianity is not dead dry religion. It is a very real relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He lives in our hearts, speaks to us and changes us from the inside out. It is miraculous. This episode is just one of many, where time and again, I have seen God dynamically move in the hearts of his people and direct their lives.

I don’t know where Terry is today. He had quite a scam going: Changing one letter of a VIN number and selling and stealing the same motorcycle repeatedly. It must have taken some nerve to stand next to that cop while he examined his altered VIN number. I hope Terry didn’t graduate to more serious crimes. This I do know. God can change the human heart. He changed mine. He can change Terry’s. My hope and prayer is that such will be the case, that he would find Jesus so that we can all rejoice together in heaven.

One day the lion shall lie down with the lamb. The thief on the cross went to paradise with Jesus. There is room for

another. May there be a former motorcycle thief redeemed by our Savior. May Jesus' love change us all! Let it be so, in the name of Jesus.

17

Unanswered Prayers

You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily on me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves...Why, LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? (Psalms 88:6-7,14)

New Mexico Territory, March 19th, 1851

“Help! Help! Oh, for the love of God, will nobody save us?” The woman shrieked and screamed urgent cries to God for deliverance as the savage Indians fell upon this mother of seven. The band of Indians had approached their lone wagon on the old Fort Yuma Road near the Gila River crossing in what is today Arizona. After feigning friendship, the Indians pulled out their clubs and bludgeoned the family to death. Roys and Mary Oatman were killed, along with four of their children. Five, if you count the baby which Mrs. Oatman was carrying in her womb.

One 14-year-old boy was clubbed, tossed over a cliff, and left for dead, but later revived and survived. Two of the daughters, Olive and Mary, were spared and taken captive by the Indians and spent the next year being treated with cruelty as slaves of the Yavapai Indians. After a year, they were sold to the Mohaves, who treated them with kindness and accepted them as part of the tribe, so much so that when Olive was “rescued” from the Mohaves, she cried and grieved deeply for some time thereafter at being torn away from the tribe that had become her family.

Mary was often sick. During a year of famine, she succumbed to the privations and died. Through all this the girls maintained their faith in God and set aside time every day

to pray and worship. When Mary died, the Indians were amazed at how Mary faced death, without fear and with praise for God on her lips. One account says that in later years, when Christian missionaries approached the Mohaves, they were welcomed and listened to because of the impact that Mary Oatman had made upon the Indians as she faced eternity.

Whether that part is true or not, one thing is for certain: The Oatmans suffered from unanswered prayer. It is a condition that is common to mankind. We have all experienced what people call unanswered prayer.

Some time ago I was praying about a situation in my life that I have often puzzled over. While pastoring a small church in rural Arizona I often prayed that God would bless the church and that it would grow. It never really did. I never could understand why. It was not for lack of effort or prayers. It has puzzled me for years. But recently, in prayer, the Spirit of God spoke to my heart loud and clear. *“I love you too much to have let you succeed at that time.”*

As the Holy Spirit whispered that to my soul, it made perfect sense to me, for I suddenly realized that the pain of failure and other life events since that time have changed me into a different and better person. Gone is the personal ambition to succeed, replaced by a compassion and mercy for the weak and a desire to only do God’s will, whether that involves success or seeming failure. God had humbled me. I would not change a thing that God has brought to pass for it has worked within me an *“eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”* (2 Corinthians 4:17)

The fact is there are no unanswered prayers. Sometimes God says “No,” and other times he says “Wait.” God always answers. It is just that sometimes we don’t hear, because we only hear what we want to hear.

Philippians 1:6 says that *“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion...”* God uses pain and suffering to perfect us, and for the Christian, that usually

means we will have unanswered prayers, for when do we ever have pain and suffering and not pray for deliverance? 1 Peter 4:1 tells us that *“he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.”* God does not deliver us from every hardship because he is the God who brings good out of evil, as it is written, *“We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God...”* (Romans 8:28)

In the movie Star Trek V, The Final Frontier, Captain Kirk makes a profound statement. The villain Sybok has just taken over the Enterprise by using his mystical ability to remove from a person’s nervous system all effects of stress, pain and unhappiness. The resulting euphoria renders the subject malleable and a willing follower of Sybok.

After bringing Doctor McCoy (Bones) under his spell, Sybok wants to work his charms on the Captain. Doctor McCoy suggests being open minded about it. Kirk answers with this:

“Bones, You’re a doctor. You know that pain and guilt can’t be taken away with a magic wand. They’re the things we carry with us, that make us who we are. We lose them, we lose ourselves. I don’t want my pain taken away. I need my pain!”

Great lines, and what truth! The things we do suffer through as Christians do make us who we are and as we walk through the valleys with Christ, we become more Christ-like.

I have been blessed with seeing some amazing miracles in my life. I believe He does them in the lives of all Christians, and we will all see them if we look for them and not pretend they were matters of circumstance or luck. Yet I have also had many “unanswered prayers,” or to put it more accurately, prayers that were not answered the way I had hoped at the time.

The Apostle Paul tells of his experience with such times. He says, *“There was given me a thorn in the flesh...I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said*

to me, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness.”* (2 Corinthians 12:7-8)

Imagine that. The great Apostle Paul raised the dead, healed the lame and performed many other remarkable miracles, yet when he had a physical ailment and asked God for healing, God says “no.” Did Paul complain it was not fair?

Listen to what he says: *“Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”* (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

As a Pentecostal preacher I am fully convinced that God blesses us with miracles today in answer to prayer. The Bible says so and I have seen it with my own eyes and ears. God performs miracles today, but not always.

And now I present the reader with a conundrum. Jesus said, *“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”* (Mark 11:24) So, if God does not always answer prayer as we wish, how can we pray with total confidence that we will get what we ask?

There are certainly theologians who can give a lengthy answer to this puzzle that would be far more sophisticated than I can supply. Let me share how I deal with it in my mind. When I pray, I am fully convinced that God hears and cares and that it is extremely likely, that if it is God’s will to answer as I ask, He will do so. If I have doubts about it being God’s will, then I ask him to do it only if it is His will. I don’t pompously demand; I humbly beseech. My attitude is one of expectation that God is going to do what is best and I trust Him with that. I put my faith in God that He is listening and will do what is best. My faith is in Him, not in a specific result. I direct my mind to expect good things from a good God while trying to listen to see if God is saying “no,” or “wait.”

I believe this humble approach, asking with faith, but *asking*, not demanding, moves the hand of God more effectively than attempting the mental gymnastics of trying to work up a false faith that demands what we want from God. Consider which approach is most likely to work with our own sons and daughters: “*Dad give me the car keys!*” or “*Dad, if it’s alright with you, I would like to borrow the car tonight.*” The child who believes in the goodness of a parent to grant a reasonable request and trusts that the parent knows best if the answer is “*not now,*” is far more likely to receive the desired answers than a child who pompously demands their own selfish wants.

Let us remember that when we don’t get what we prayed for, when we encounter suffering and trials, that God is performing another miracle, one that will cause “all things to work together for good to those who love God...” (Romans 8:28). It is the miracle of unanswered prayer. Garth Brooks in his famous song *Unanswered Prayers* says it well:

Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers

Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs

That just because he doesn't answer, doesn't mean he don't care

Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.

18

Are Modern Miracles Scriptural?

"For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." (Acts 2:39)

There is an unfortunate teaching that prevails in some circles. It is this: God doesn't work miracles anymore. The spectacular and marvelous workings of God we read about in the book of Acts; they are strictly a thing of the past. That was just for them back then. Miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, prophecy, words of knowledge, laying on of hands for healing - that has all passed away and was only meant for the 1st century Church. Those who promote such things today are, at worst, quacks and frauds; at best, they are simpletons who don't understand how to properly interpret scripture. This is the official position of some.

This doctrinal position is very dangerous. It will limit God's working in the lives of people. The reason why is because of the principle: *According to your faith be it unto you.* Here is the passage where Jesus speaks of that:

"And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, 'Believe ye that I am able to do this?' They said unto him, 'Yea, Lord.' Then touched he their eyes, saying, according to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened..." (Matthew 9:27-30)

Faith is frequently required for God to do wonderful things. In Matthew 13:58 we read:

“And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.”

And in Hebrews 11:6 we see:

“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”

Those who believe the diabolical doctrine that God cannot, or will not, work miracles anymore, will suffer spiritual harm. Their faith will be damaged. If they don't believe God will do anything miraculous, then in accordance with their faith, so it will be. They will see no miracles. Jesus still asks, *“Do you believe that I am able to do this?”* If the answer is no, then *“according to your faith be it unto you.”*

There are entire denominations who disbelieve in miracles for the Church today. They assert this as an absolute dogmatic truth and reject even the possibility of genuine supernatural miracles occurring today. They insist that after 100 AD all miracles and signs had ceased forever. They claim that by the time the apostles died, all supernatural signs had died out as well. Because they don't believe in miracles, they never see any miraculous events in their churches, which of course reinforces their belief. It is a self-fulfilling doctrine.

Certainly, God is sovereign and no one commands the hands of God. We pray with supplication, not command. Those who teach that God always heals in every instance are in error. Paul left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20) and the Lord refused to heal Paul, telling him *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* (2 Corinthians 12:9) Those of the Word of Faith movement who teach that we can name it and claim it and speak things into existence are bordering on cultic belief. Charlatans on television who pretend to work miracles for money, selling bottles of holy water, are crafty snake oil salesmen.

Nevertheless, the existence of the counterfeit does not negate the reality of the genuine. God still works miracles.

Those who say he doesn't, and who castigate those who believe He does, would do well to heed the words of Gamaliel, *"If it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"* (Acts 5:39) May such be reminded of the words of God to Abraham and Sarah, who also doubted His miraculous power: *"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"* (Genesis 18:14)

Fortunately, there are three testaments that utterly demolish the doctrinal error of "no miracles today." These are the testimony of current events in the lives of believers, the testimony of Church history, and the testimony of Holy Scripture.

Testimony of Believers

This book is a perfect example of the overwhelming testimony of believers. I am not the only one who tells of God's miraculous intervention. The miracles I have described in this book really happened. I made none of it up. I have not exaggerated. To do so would be disingenuous. To embellish and overstate what God has done would be sinful. I know there are some who, in their zeal, may have aggrandized events without careful attention to facts. I decry such a thing. Honesty is always the best policy.

I am not some special exception. I have found that most Christians have experienced events in their life which they attribute to the miraculous intervention of God. Read the accounts of persecuted Christians in underground churches in Communist countries. They are filled with miraculous stories. Missionaries working with remote tribes in the jungles of South America have amazing accounts of the blind receiving their sight, demons being cast out and the sick being instantly healed. These wonders are happening all over the world, right now.

Muslims in Iran and other third-world countries are having visions of Jesus and are turning to him as their Lord and

Savior. Persecuted Christians are ministering in the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit as they testify about Jesus under threat of imprisonment and torture. The testimony of believers living today refutes the notion that God doesn't work miracles.

Testimony of Church History

Anyone who has studied the writings of the Ante-Nicene fathers knows that miracles continued after the time of the apostles. Eusebius, Church historian of the 4th century, quotes Irenaeus, who wrote the following words describing miracles in the Church during the latter end of the 2nd century:

Irenaeus - 2nd Century

"In His name...some drive out demons really and truly, so that often those cleansed from evil spirits believe and become members of the Church; some have foreknowledge of the future, visions, and prophetic utterances; others, by the laying-on of hands, heal the sick and restore them to health; and before now, as I said, dead men have actually been raised and have remained with us for many years. In fact, it is impossible to enumerate the gifts which throughout the world the Church has received from God and in the name of Jesus..."

"In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God." ⁵

Justin Martyr - AD 165

"For one receives the spirit of understanding, another of counsel, another of strength, another of healing, another of foreknowledge..." ⁶

⁵ (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:6:1)

⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*

Tertullian - AD 215

“And thus we who both acknowledge and reverence, even as we do the prophecies, modern visions as equally promised to us, and consider the other powers of the Holy Spirit as an agency of the Church...so that no weakness or despondency of faith may suppose that the divine grace abode only among the ancients...”⁷

Novatian - AD 270

“He who places prophets in the Church, instructs teachers, directs tongues, gives powers and healings, does wonderful works, often discrimination of spirits, affords powers of government, suggests counsels, and orders and arranges whatever other gifts there are of charismata...”⁸

Augustine – AD 354-430

There are some who claim that Augustine disbelieved that God worked miracles in his time. Those who say this are either wickedly disingenuous or else woefully ignorant of the facts. Augustine early in his ministry did think that miracles ended with the apostles but then he witnessed a revival in the north of Africa. In his book, *The City of God*, Augustine testified that he saw miraculous healings, blindness cured, and even people resurrected from the dead. This changed his mind. Page after page of Augustine’s book recounts healings of breast cancer, gout and other ailments. He tells of paralytics totally healed and demoniacs restored to sanity. He wrote,

“For even now miracles are wrought in the name of Christ...The miracle which was wrought at Milan when I was there, and by which a blind man was restored to sight, could come to the knowledge of many; for not only is the city a large one, but also the emperor was there at the time, and the occurrence was witnessed by an immense concourse of people.”⁹

⁷ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume 3*

⁸ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: p. 641*

⁹ *The City of God, P. 433*

“I cannot record all the miracles I know...when I saw, in our own times, frequent signs of the presence of divine powers similar to those which had been given of old, I desired that narratives might be written...”

These witnesses – from Irenaeus in the 2nd Century to Augustine in the 5th century - all give testimony to miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit operative for hundreds of years after the time of the apostles. This is proof positive that miracles did not end in the 1st century as is the dogmatic assertion of some.

Likewise, there are accounts of miracles all the way through Church history up to the present time. Certainly, their abundance has ebbed and flowed based upon the faith of the Church. When scriptural truth was suppressed and people lost faith, miracles would be scarce. When the Word of God was taught accurately and faith grew, so also did the manifestation of God’s miraculous power in the Church. The Pentecostal revival of the 20th century is exemplary of renewed understanding and faith resulting in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit being manifest in countless denominations throughout the world in modern times.

Testimony of Scripture

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

The New Birth

No discussion of miracles would be complete without mentioning the greatest miracle of all – the new birth in Christ. If Christianity was nothing more than learning doctrines, attending services and trying to be good, it would be a terribly dull and dreary affair. How wonderful and thrilling it is that becoming a Christian begins with a miracle; Jesus enters into

you and miraculously changes you from the inside out. Your soul is flooded with peace beyond comprehension and you are born again. As it says in Romans 5:5:

“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

If God did not work miracles today the new birth in Christ would not be possible. Denying miracles is tantamount to denying that Christ really does something real and tangible in the heart of the believer. It reduces Christianity to nothing but boring, dead and dry religiosity. If it is, as some say, that miracles were only for the 1st century, then who can say whether the miracle of salvation and the new birth are for today? Perhaps that also was something that was only for the time of the apostles. The same arguments used against miracles today would apply equally to being born again. Denying miracles for today calls into question the entire practice of the Christian faith.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

In Acts Chapter 2 the Holy Spirit came upon a gathering of believers (approximately 120 people) and they spoke in tongues. A crowd gathered and heard the tongues and wondered what this was all about. When Peter preached to the crowd that gathered, he told them:

“This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions...I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy....and it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’” (Acts 2:16,17,21)

Note that the Old Testament prophesy did not say God’s Spirit would be poured out in only the 1st century, but in the last days, and it would be poured out on “*all flesh.*” If the 1st century was the last days, then certainly today, two thousand

years later, we are still in the last days and therefore God would still be pouring out his Spirit on all flesh.

After Peter's sermon the people asked what they should do. Peter answered:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (Acts 2:38-39)

So, this same gift of the Holy Spirit, this gift that resulted in the miraculous manifestation they had witnessed, was promised also to the crowd, and to their children and *“all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”* So, this miraculous experience was promised to everyone who accepts Christ. The words of Jesus reinforce this:

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:11-13)

This is clear evidence that the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with its accompanying miracles of tongues and prophesy is for believers today as much as in the 1st century.

The Teaching of Jesus

Jesus clearly taught that God would perform miracles in response to the prayers of his followers. There is no indication that this was a temporary promise that was to be limited to the 1st century. Jesus plainly said, *“whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these...”* This is irrefutable. *“Whoever believes”* includes all Christians of all time.

Denying miracles today is tantamount to denying the veracity of the words of our Lord. Consider Jesus' words:

As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:20-24)

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:12-14)

"And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues..." (Mark 16:17)

Are Jesus' words still true today? Who would dare call our Lord a liar? To deny the possibility of miracles today is to stand in direct opposition to the very words of our Lord and Savior.

The Prescription for the Church

The New Testament contains some specific instructions for the Church in regard to miracles. These passages are rendered impotent and pointless if miracles are not for today, and if that be the case, then there are whole sections of Scripture that we may as well hack out of the Bible. The prescription for healing is one example:

"Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in

the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up...” (James 5:14-15)

Has God’s word been rendered null and void? Those who deny God’s miraculous power must declare this scripture devoid of truth and power. Why then even keep it in the Bible? It is either God’s truth or it is not. One must decide. I thank God that I attend a church that still believes in this scripture and regularly prays for the healing of the sick. I can testify to God’s instantaneous healing power, for I have experienced it personally and dramatically. I have been immediately healed through the laying on of hands and I have prayed for others and seen them healed.

The prescription for prophecy in the Church is another example. The Apostle Paul said:

“But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.” (1 Corinthians 14:24)

I have seen this very thing happen more than once. It is powerful and effectual for bringing sinners to repentance and comforting Christians. When God reveals something to a person, and they prophesy to another something that they could not possibly have known other than through God’s revelation, the effect is nothing short of amazing. I have seen it help to bring sinners to Jesus. I have seen Christians cry tears of joy as the love of God is ministered with supernatural power. How sad that people want to take this away from the Church. The denial of moves of the Holy Spirit like this are in direct violation of the command of Holy Scripture:

“Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good...” (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21)

“So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.” (1 Corinthians 14:29)

Will Tongues Cease?

The proof text that is most often used to justify forbidding people from speaking in tongues and which is used to justify despising prophetic utterances is 1 Corinthians 13:8-11:

“Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.”

Typically, only the four words “*tongues they will cease*” is quoted and the context is ignored. This passage is about love. It is not about the gifts of the Spirit passing away in the 1st century. Verse 1 of this chapter introduces the subject with:

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal...”

The whole point of the passage is that love is eternal and that exercising gifts for any reason other than love is utterly pointless. Verse 11 gives us the time frame for when prophecy and tongues are going to be no more. It is when “*the perfect comes.*” When the perfect Son of God sets up his perfect Millennial Kingdom upon earth, then these gifts of the Holy Spirit will no longer be needed.

Do Tongues Cause Division?

It is alleged that speaking in tongues causes division. This is an oft repeated accusation. It is true that some churches have split over the question of gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, this only happens in a denomination that dogmatically refuses to accept the gifts of the Spirit as outlined in the Bible. Speaking in tongues is one of the most controversial of the gifts. Paul recognized this and was prompted to instruct the church with the admonition: “*Do not forbid speaking in tongues.*”

Tongues, for the most part, is a private prayer language. Paul made it clear that tongues was mainly for private devotions, rather than public worship:

If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? (1 Corinthians 14:23)

“For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 14:2)

“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” (1 Corinthians 14:18-19)

It is not speaking in tongues that causes the contention and division. It is the violation of the scriptural ordinance to not forbid speaking in tongues; that is what causes division. How people pray in private is between them and God. They should not be dictated to in such matters by an overreaching ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Why did Paul find it necessary to write the instruction that tongues not be forbidden? Because he knew, that both then and now, there would be people that would try to forbid it. Why? Because the world doesn't understand tongues. It is strange to them. Speaking in tongues doesn't fit in with the world. Not at all. They think it is foolishness. We must remember that it is a temptation to want to fit in with the world. Paul knew there would be unspiritual people that didn't want the world to think them strange.

We must recall the wisdom of 1 Corinthians 1:27:

“God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise...”

Do Pentecostals Say Tongues are Paramount?

Those who believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit (listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10) are for today are often so thoroughly harassed and harangued over tongues that much time is spent refuting those who contradict the plain text of Holy Scripture. Consequently, it is often assumed that Pentecostals believe that speaking in tongues is the most important issue of Christendom, and they are often accused of the same.

As a Pentecostal minister I can tell you unequivocally that knowing Jesus as your personal Savior, loving God from a pure heart and our neighbor as ourselves is of uttermost importance. All else is secondary to that. If any do not wish to pursue the gifts of the Spirit, so be it. They are still brothers or sisters in Christ.

Tongues – Why Does it Matter?

Jesus told the disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses...” (Acts 1:8)

This baptism, or immersion, in the Holy Spirit would endow them with gifts of the Spirit to empower them for ministry. We have already seen that this promise was not just for the apostles, for Peter declared in his sermon on Pentecost that it was for all those who accepted Christ.

When a person accepts Christ, they are then and there indwelt by the Holy Spirit, resulting in the new birth. However, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a different operation of the Holy Spirit that happens at some point after being born again. It may be immediate, or it may be some time later. When the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus, he found some Christians and he asked them:

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? (Acts 19:2)

From this we see that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an event that happens subsequent to salvation.

How does one know if they have received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit? In Acts chapters 2, 8, 10, and 19 we have accounts of people receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. In each case they spoke in tongues. In Chapter 8 tongues is not specifically mentioned, but the fact that Simon saw something so spectacular that he offered money to be able to impart the gift indicates that it was most likely tongues that he witnessed.

This brings us to the significance of tongues. It is the evidence of having received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and it is this event that endues the believer with power to prophesy, to be used in healing, miracles and all the other supernatural empowerments from God. The Holy Spirit Baptism is not required for salvation but it certainly empowers believers to mightily and effectually bring the gospel to those who need salvation.

Summary

God's word predicted that times would come when people would lay claim to godliness, but deny that God still moves in power:

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be...having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Timothy 3:1,5)

So it is. Whole churches deny that there is miraculous power in the name of Jesus. It is a fulfillment of prophecy. The testimony of countless Christians alive today stands against this. So also, the historical record of Christianity down through the ages declares that God has indeed moved in power in response to faith and prayer. Last but not least, indeed it is foremost, the testimony of Holy Scripture declares unambiguously that God's miraculous power is available today.

Satan still prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The minions of deception and darkness still exert their demonic influence upon the world. We need God's miraculous help now as much as ever. How wonderful it is, and I close with this, that God's word in 1 John 4:4, Hebrews 13:8 and 1 Corinthians 4:20 are all still true today:

"Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world."

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

"The kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power."

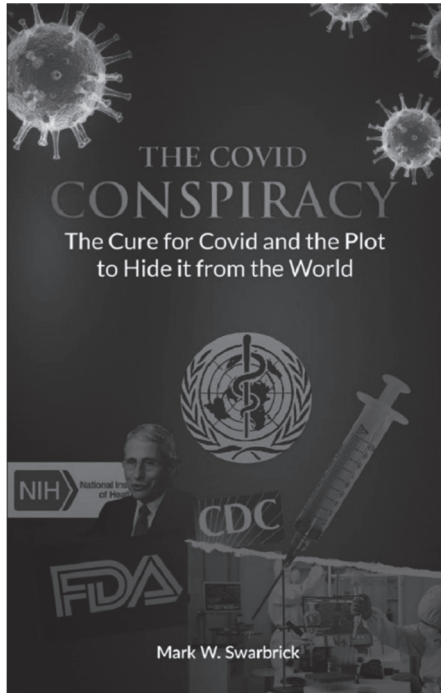
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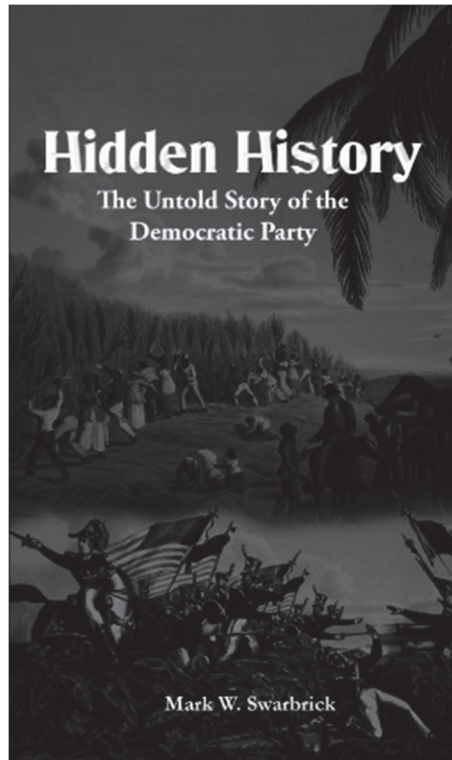
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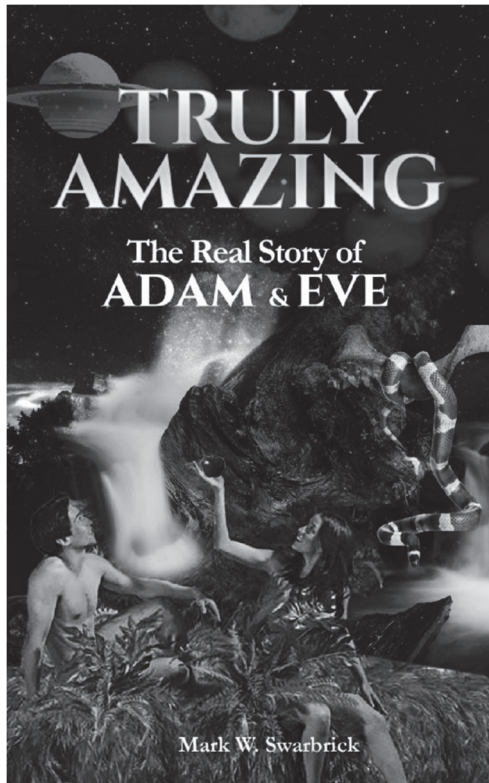


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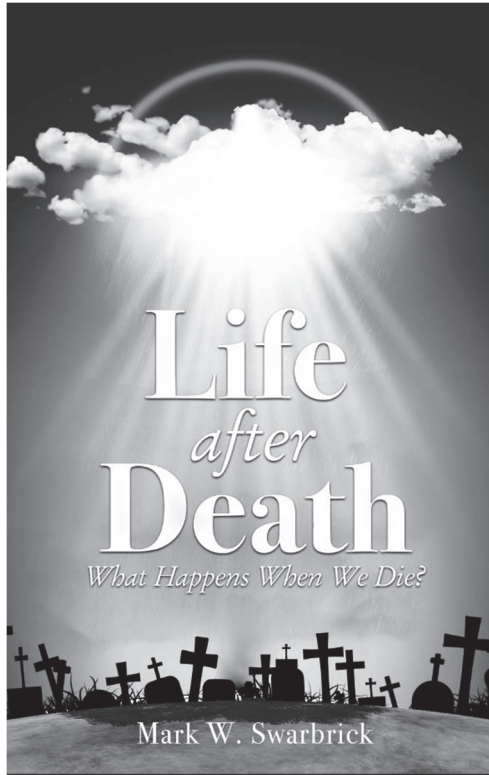


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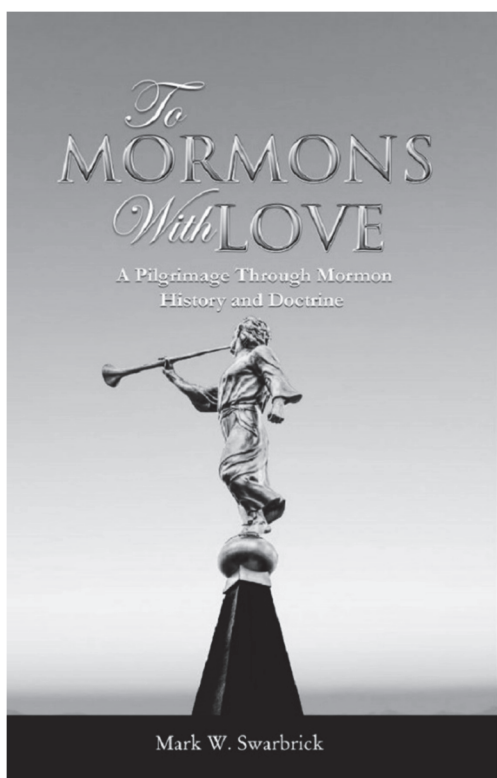
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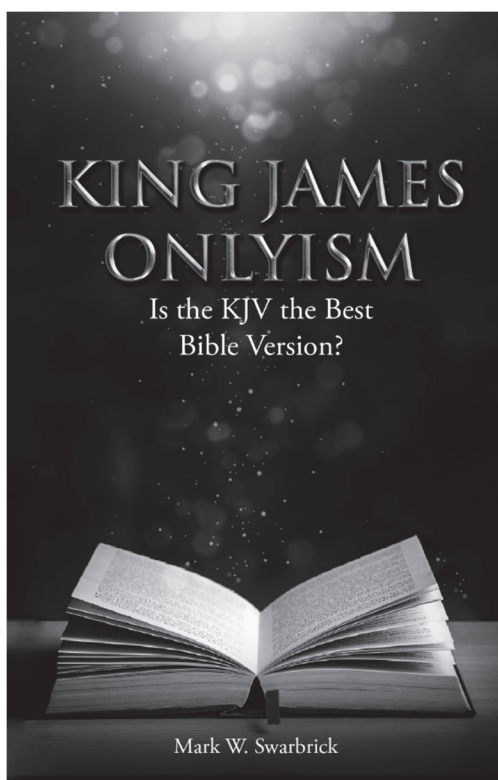


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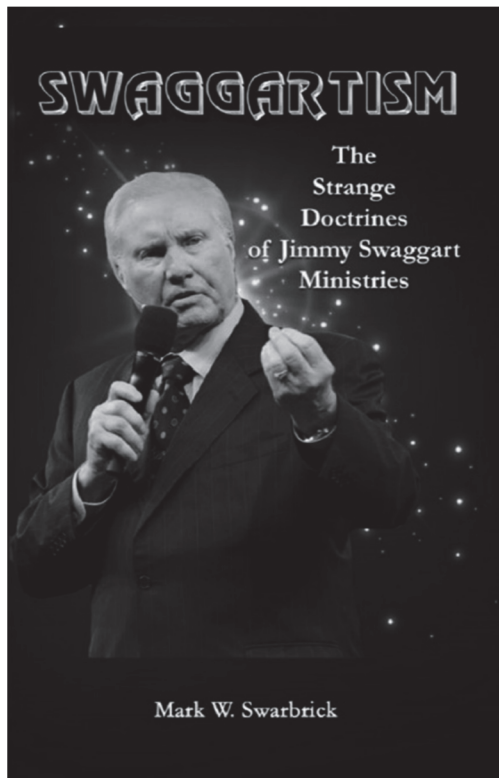


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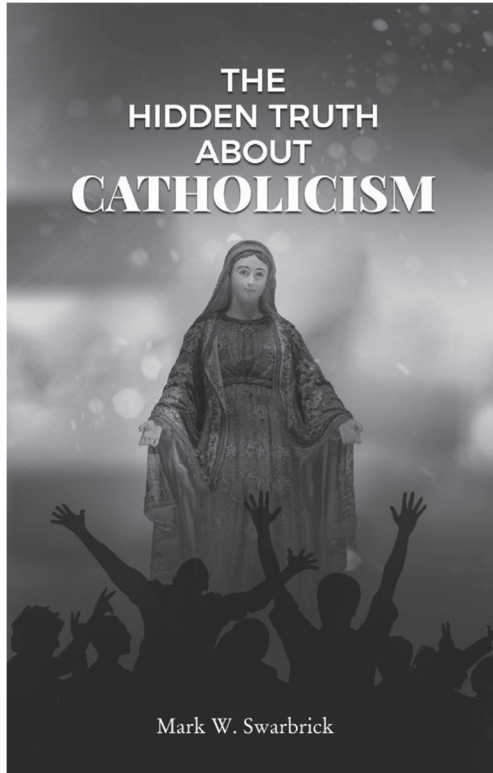
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