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I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY for giving me the material for this book. God is the One who orchestrated the creation of this book. No, this book is not the Bible, but without Him, I could not have written these words.

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Chapter 1:

SERPENT OF OLD

IN THE MIDDLE OF A HOT AND SANDY DESERT, AT the edge of sunset, a golden-brown skinned man shuffles through the hot sand. He stops and glances into the distance, searching for a road sign or a road, but sees nothing. Gritty sand flies into his dry mouth. He smacks his mouth and forms his mouth to spit. He cannot form the saliva. His stomach and legs cramp. He sinks to his knees and the sand crunches. The aroma of the desert fills his nostrils and he exhales. He wipes the sweat from his eyes and softly huffs.

I've been walking through the desert for forty days! He thinks. *God, I need something to drink.* Wind whooshes above, causing him to duck, as it kicks up sand. A large shadow casts over him and the hairs on the back of his neck stand on edge. He jerks his head upward, but sees nothing. His heart hammers in his chest and he takes a deep slow breath. "It's probably nothing. Just keep moving. Let's get out of the open." Goose bumps gather on Hezekiah's skin as crisp cool air comes

across it. He shivers as he turns his gaze toward the horizon. “Great, the sun is starting to set,” he says.

“I need to find shelter now. I don’t feel like dealing with any creatures tonight.” Hezekiah shuffles further through the sand and peers into the distance.

“Yes, a cave! Maybe I can find some water too!” The cave resembles a volcano. Minutes later, he is inside the cave, and sees a small bubbling stream of water. Hezekiah rushes to the stream and gulps down water. He steps back and exhales. “Yes. Thank you.” Hezekiah shivers. He glances around for sticks and rocks. He gathers some rocks and sticks from inside the cave and arranges them to start a fire. Hezekiah summons the sword of the Spirit. He swipes with his gold buster sword and a small burst of fire inflames the sticks on the rocks. Hezekiah lets go of the sword and it disappears back into his spirit.

He sits down, rubs his hands together, and exhales. He gazes into the warm flames and reminisces about what God did through him in the city of Light. He remembers the faces and names of people he saw accept Christ into their hearts. Their gleeful faces cause him to smile. Hezekiah blinks his eyes a few times, yawns and lays on his side, and closes his eyes and snores. While dreaming, he sees a town of people; a million-plus army in shadow; and gold fiery armor.

A big drop of water splash onto Hezekiah’s head. Hezekiah opens his eyes and rubs his hands through his curly, black, hair. He glances upward and sees nothing. He wipes his hands on his pants, lays back down, and stares into the fire. “I wonder what that dream was about?” says Hezekiah. He blinks his eyes, closes them, and exhales. A big glob of liquid splashes onto his face.

“What the...” The sent of the transparent substance reaches him. “Ewe, this smells awful!” his nostrils fill and wrinkle with the reeking odor of stool and brimstone. The Spirit Warrior looks up to see the source of the drops of water. More big drops of what now looks like drool splash into Hezekiah’s face. “What, the...this is disgusting.” The man of God stands up and moves to face the strange drops of thick

water that smell and taste like sulfur. He looks up, rubs his eyes, and gasps. A dark-red dragon perches on the top of a rocky cliff. It's large talons crunching into the cliff as its seven heads sway about in the air.

"Nice for you to awaken, Hezekiah!" the dragon says in a smooth masculine voice.

The Spirit Warrior quickly jumps back and pulls out the Sword of the Spirit. "I don't know who or what you are, but I have God on my side, and we are more than enough to take you down!"

"You don't remember me, Hezekiah? We used to be best friends. In fact, you never used to make a move before consulting me," the dragon continues smoothly. The Spirit Warrior thinks for a quick moment. "No, no, it can't be. It can't be."

"Yes, Hezekiah. I've been watching you for a while. You have become quite formidable. Very powerful for a human. However, I no longer have any use for you. You will die tonight!"

"I don't think so, Satan!"

Satan fires a thousand fiery arrows out of his mouth. The Swordsman strikes with a blast of light. All the darts are destroyed, except one. The arrow plunges into Hezekiah's left shoulder. He screams. Hezekiah stumbles to one knee, but leaps backward to dodge a fireball.

The Swordsman soars high into the air. With his right arm, Hezekiah strikes with a blast of fire from his sword. Satan counters back with a gigantic fireball. The two blasts collide and explode. The explosion shoots Hezekiah upwards through the cave's opening and out into the sky.

Plummeting through the air, Hezekiah hears whistling in his ears. He blinks open his eyes. "Oh, shoot!"

He swiftly strikes with blasts of fire. His falling slows. But he slams into the ground and hits a roll several feet through hot flames. He rolls to his feet, but collapses. Losing blood, Hezekiah fights to stay awake.

Satan explodes through the top of the cave and soars through the air. He scans the ground with his thermo-red vision. The fire on the ground distorts his perception. Satan snarls. He drops and slams into

the ground. He roars and grits his teeth as his body reshapes. Scales turn into skin and black hair grows on him everywhere. A black bushy mane grows over his neck and head. He roars and it booms through the darkness. The black lion stalks across the ground peering through the darkness.

Hezekiah gazes at the black lion. He can feel dread moving towards him like a freight train. Satan gallops towards him! Hezekiah stiffens, he holds his breath. Satan leaps into the air and lands right on top of him!

Satan roars in his face! He growls as he breaths slowly as if in pain. Satan looks down at the Swordsman. Satan's eyes shift from left to right. *He can't see me.* Hezekiah thinks. The black lion scans the surrounding area further. He snarls and roars. The roar pounds into the ground and echoes for miles. Satan morphs into a dragon, leaps off the ground, and flies off.

"What just happened?" Hezekiah asks to himself. The sword fades from being invisible to visible a few times as he grips the sword. He looks at his hand and it does the same thing and his eyes widen. Hezekiah hand touches the ground and feels a puddle. He looks down and its red. "Oh no." He feels his shoulder and its numb. His eyes roll to the back of his head and he loses consciousness.



Chapter 2:

FACING THE PAST: PART 1

SUNLIGHT STREAMS OVER HEZEKIAH'S FACE AND his face fills with warmth. He blinks his eyes and sees the light from the sun. He moves his left hand. "Ah!" he shouts. His vision focuses and he is in someone's room. The tan color of the walls and floor adds to the warmth. He glances at his left shoulder and notices it is bound in bandages. As birds chirp in the background, the aroma of bacon and eggs fills his nostrils. His stomach rumbles. "Someone is cooking somewhere," he says. He moves his left shoulder. "Argh!"

In the kitchen, a young woman with caramel skin hears a scream. She cuts the stove off and rushes back to the room to check on the injured man. She stops in the doorway. "Are you okay?" she asks. Their eyes meet and lock. Her heart begins to flutter as she gazes into his eyes. Hezekiah's breath is caught in his throat and his eyes grow wide as he gets lost in her soft brown eyes. A smile creeps across his face.

“Uh, are you okay?” repeats the young lady, higher pitch and heart fluttering in her chest.

“Oh...um...yeah. My...my shoulder is in a lot of pain.” Hezekiah stomach flutters as his heart is banging against his chest. He opens his mouth to speak, but nothing comes out.

“I’ll call the doctor to come and check on you. Make sure you don’t move it,” says the young woman.

Is this real? He thinks. No. This cant be real. I was fighting Satan a few seconds ago. Besides, this woman looks way too beautiful to be real. You know what... Satan is playing a mind trick on me just like Deception did. I’m not about to let him beat me! Hezekiah tries to get up to get his bearing.

“Agh!” shouts Hezekiah as his left shoulder throbs with stabbing pain.

The young lady rushes to his side and touches his arm to steady him and an electric jolt passes through them both. They both inhale as their skin becomes sensitive to touch. They exhale softly as their gaze reconnects. They sit in silence as their hearts flutter in their chests.

“I see you’ve met my daughter,” says an older, tanned-skin man with salt and pepper hair standing at the door.

Faith sharply turns her head towards the doorway. “Dad, I didn’t know you were here. I’m going back to the kitchen,” she chuckles. She turns her gaze back to Hezekiah. “I’ll have your breakfast here in a moment.” The young woman quickly gets up and walks out the room covering her face with a hand.

“My name is Frank Parker. So who are you, and why did we find you half-dead on the road?” asks the father.

“My name is Hezekiah, and I was on my way...” Hezekiah squints his eyes and pauses for a second. “I was on my way to an assignment.”

“What kind of assignment? We found you bloody and bruised with a gigantic sword in your hand. Which, by the way, disappeared into thin air when we tried to touch it. I brought you into my home, banded you up, and left you here with my daughter. I kind of want to know whether or not I have done the right thing by bringing you here.”

Hezekiah smiles. “Well, since you put it that way, God sent me on assignment to be a witness and protector to a group of people who need my help. However, He didn’t give me the details of this task. It’s sort of a find-out-when-you-get-there kind of thing. The weapon that I have is called the Sword of the Spirit. It’s an extension of the Holy Spirit. I am able to summon this sword at will. If I’m not using the sword, it disappears.”

“But don’t worry, I can’t kill any human with it.”

“Oh, okay,” says Frank, eye brows raising.

Hezekiah continues. “Anyway, I walked for about forty days. I had no idea what to look for, but I knew I was walking in the right direction. It started to get dark, so I decided to spend the night in a cave I saw close by. I went in and fell asleep, but was soon awoken by water pouring onto my face. I suddenly was fighting for my life against the Devil. He struck me in the shoulder with an arrow. I tried to fight back, but he blew me out of the cave and into the sky. I slammed into the ground and could not stand back up. He almost found me, but couldn’t see me. So he left and I fell unconscious shortly after. Now, I find myself here a day later.”

“A day later? No, you were out cold for a few weeks.”

“What?”

“Yeah. My daughter and I found you on the side of the road just about dead. I thought you were dead, but my daughter insisted we rescue you. We stopped the bleeding, gave you a blood transfusion, bandaged you up, and brought you back here.”

“Thank you for saving my life,” Hezekiah says with a smile brightening his face.

“No problem.”

“By the way, do you know where the doctor is?”

“Why?”

“My shoulder is in intense pain.” Frank inspects Hezekiah’s shoulder. “Just take it easy and don’t try to get out of bed.” He then leaves the room, and, shortly after, the young lady arrives with Hezekiah’s breakfast.

Hezekiah sits up to feed himself, however, pain freshly surges through his shoulder.

“Hey, it’s okay. Don’t try to move. You have been through a lot of trauma. You don’t have to be independent yet,” she says as she begins to feed him. He slightly tries to resist, but lets her feed him. “So, what’s your name?”

“Hezekiah.”

“That’s a nice name. It sounds like royalty.”

“What’s your name?” asks Hezekiah with a bright smile.

“Faith.”

“Faith? That’s a nice name too. That name is as beautiful as you.”

Faith blushes. “Where are you originally from?” she quickly asks, voice slightly higher.

“If it’s okay, I’d rather not say, Hezekiah answers. “I have a not-so pleasant past, but God saved me from it. Before I came here, I lived in a city called ‘The City of Light.’ I was on my way to another assignment when I ran into trouble.”

“I know. I overheard your story from the hallway. Were you afraid of facing the devil like that?”

“I didn’t have time to be afraid. I have been in so many fights that I’ve learned that God is with me all the time. Even when I am scared, God gives me the strength to do what I need to do. His Word says in second Timothy, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.”

“I see.”

“Faith?” Hezekiah asks softly.

“Yeah?” she says softly.

“Do you know when the doctor will show up? I am in a lot of pain.”

She chuckles. “Don’t be silly. You don’t realize it by now?”

“What?”

“My dad is the doctor,” chuckles Faith.

Faith finishes feeding Hezekiah, then helps him to lay down. He closes his eyes and slips into sleep. Faith walks back into the kitchen, face beaming.

“Faith,” calls Frank.

“Yes, Dad?”

“I saw the way you were looking at that guy, Faith.”

“Looking like what?”

“You know what I am talking about. You don’t know this guy or where he comes from. For all we know, he could be a mercenary, a gangster, or some evil king from somewhere.”

“Dad!” she says frowning.

Frank moves closer and gently places his hands on her shoulders and makes eye contact. “Look, sweetheart, the point is we don’t know who this guy is or what he is about. I don’t want you falling in love with some guy you barely even know,” says Frank. He moves from her, waves and walk’s towards the door.

Frank leaves the house and a few minutes later arrives at the pharmacy to buy some supplies. As he goes in, he hears a traveler talking to the store owner.

“As I was leaving the city, I saw darkness,” the traveler’s story goes. The owner is clearly curious. “What do you mean, darkness?”

“There was a large army laying siege to a city in the plain. I just drove out of the back end of the city as they invaded through the front way, and they destroyed it!”

“I don’t believe you,” scoffs the owner. “I think you’ve been hit in the head too many times.”

“It’s true! It’s all true! You’ll see!” says the traveler as he walks away, face slightly pale.

“Hey, Doctor Parker, how are you doing today?” asks the store owner smiling.

“I’m doing good. How are you, John?”

“I was doing great until that traveler came in. He kept going on and on about how he saw some army invading a city. He was saying ‘repent,

or this could happen to you and this city.’ I was never one for all that Christian mumbo jumbo,” John answers back.

“Well, he does have a point,” says Frank.

“Uggh, here we go. Repent or perish. I knew I couldn’t tell you.”

“We should be all right,” says Frank smiling. “There are so many Christians in this city that there is no way we would see judgment like that on a grand scale. Such non-believers like you are safe for now,” he says with a wink of his eye.

“Well, lucky me!” says John, slightly frowning.

“Well, John, as much as I like talking to you about the Lord, I just came to buy supplies. And it’s the funniest thing. I’ve also been visited by a traveler too. In fact, he’s staying at my house.”

“Ever the good Samaritan, huh. How do you manage to attract such people to your home? Wait, I forgot, you’re a free doctor. You and your daughter are always picking up loose strays. Don’t you ever get tired of that good doctor routine? Have you ever regretted picking up anyone?” he says with a chuckle.

“Well, to be honest, the person we have now is unsettling me. He seems like a nice guy, but something about him doesn’t seem right,” says Frank crossing his arms.

John presses. “What do you mean? There is something fundamentally wrong with everyone you find. I have seen you take in some sketchy characters and somehow convert them to Christianity. I’m not really into the God thing, like I said, but if you had not intervened in their lives, they would be dead. So what do you mean when you say, ‘something about him doesn’t seem right?’”

Frank presses his lips together and shakes his head and glances back at John. “We found him on the side of the road with a giant sword in his hand. He was wearing a pair of prison pants. I’m not sure if he escaped from prison or what, but he looked like he was wandering around the desert for weeks. Anyway, he was bleeding out, and we patched him up. When we tried to pick up his weapon, it disappeared into thin air.”

John frowns as he puts both hands on the counter. “Wow. I’m actually kind of concerned, Doc.”

“Well, thank you. To make matters worse, my daughter likes him, and he seems to like her too.”

John smiles with a toothy grin. “Ha! There it is!” he exclaims loudly as he points at Frank.

“There’s what?”

“That’s why you don’t like him. It’s because she does!” John bursts into laughter as he claps his hands.

Frank grits his teeth. “Whatever, man. Just give me my supplies so I can go,” says Frank, throwing his hand slightly into the air.

John continues to laugh as he crouches and covers his cramping belly. An assistant comes and gives Frank his supplies. Tears stream down John’s eyes as laughter escapes his mouth. He inhales to catch his breath. “You bet. Good luck with lover boy!” he shouts and bursts into laughter as Frank walks out.

Frank leaves the pharmacy and heads back home with the medical supplies.

Back at the house, Faith gets dressed in her work attire. She packs some suit-cases and puts them in the hallway. She passes by Hezekiah’s door.

“Hey,” Hezekiah calls out to her. Faith stops. Her heart skips a beat. She closes her eyes and exhales. She heads to Hezekiah’s room and stands in the door way. Hezekiah jaw drops as his heart flutters. Her bright face shines in the light as he notices her curvy figure in her white tank shirt and tan shorts.

“You look beautiful,” he says and slaps his hand over his mouth.

Faith blushes and clears her throat.

“Why are you dressed like that?” asks Hezekiah. Faith smiles. “I’m about to go on an assignment in the desert.” Hezekiah raises an eyebrow. “I’m a reporter for central city news.”

“What?” He pauses for a moment as he stares at her. “I would have never have guessed. I thought you were a nurse.”

“I am, but that’s not my real passion. My real passion is finding the truth in the world around me.”

“That’s good to know,” he says with a smile. “What do you report?”

“Everything.”

“Everything?” asks Hezekiah.

“Everything exciting. I’ve reported news worthy events in the middle of deserts and oceans, gang riots in small cities, and even military exercises. I’ve investigated corrupt rulers, sleazy politicians, drug rings, and mobsters.”

“How are you able to do all of this?”

“God is with me and he protects me when I go on these crazy assignments. There have been a few close calls, but God has always been there to save me. My friends call me fearless; my rivals call me stupid, but I know that God is with me wherever I go,” says faith with a gleam in her eyes.

Hezekiah’s eyes gleam. *This woman is incredible. I wonder if she could be...* he smiles and his eye contact becomes stronger. “Where are you headed now?” asks Hezekiah.

“I’m headed to the city of Phoenicia to cover the city’s annual Festival of Abundance. The festival centers around freedom of expression. The event draws people from all around, but it has never been covered on live television—until now.”

“This sounds exciting. I hope everything goes well with you. I’ll be praying for you.”

“Thank you. I really appreciate it.”

“Hey, Hezekiah. You need anything before I go?”

“Can you check my shoulder before you leave?”

She goes and starts to check Hezekiah’s bandages. Her hands gently slides over his skin. Hezekiah’s skin tingles as she lightly checks the bandages. Her strawberry scent travels into his nostrils. He inhales and smiles. “It looks like you’re healing fast. Your arm is getting better and better. Just keep resting and try not to move it. Okay?”

“Okay. Stay safe.”

“Wait, let me get your food before I go.” She quickly slips into the kitchen for a few minutes and whips up something for Hezekiah. She makes his plate, returns, and gives him the food.

“Thanks. If no one ever tells you, you are gorgeous,” says Hezekiah.

“Thanks. You don’t look too bad yourself.” They stare into each other’s eyes for a moment and she softly smiles and walks out.

Faith leaves with a smile on her face as she prepares to load her jeep. *There is something about him*, She thinks as she smiles to herself. Faith wonders to herself as she plays with her curly brown hair. She gets in her yellow jeep and drives for work. At the same time, Frank comes back from the store with supplies and walks into Hezekiah’s room and stops at the door way. The Spirit

Warrior is asleep. A bird flies and lands on the window seal and its shadow casts over Hezekiah’s face. Frank gasps, drops his bags, as he puts his hand to his mouth. He takes two steps back and slowly lowers to a knee. His eyes bulge and glisten as he stares at Hezekiah’s face. Frank’s nostrils flare as he grinds his teeth. Tears stream from his eyes as he slowly stands to his feet. He balls his fists and rushes to set up his equipment.

A few minutes later, Hezekiah wakes up screaming. The doctor attaches medicine to the machine. Hezekiah cradles his shoulder as pain shoots through it.

Frank stills him. “Calm down. The pain meds are attached to this apparatus. All you have to do is press a button, and the drugs will be administered.”

Hezekiah quickly presses the switch, and the pain, little by little, begins to subside.

“Now that you’re awake, I need to ask you some questions,” says the doctor, sharply.

Hezekiah’s eyes sharpen. “What kind of questions?”

“I want to know who you are, why you are here, and where you came from.” Hezekiah is silent. Frank’s face reddens. “What are you trying to hide?” Frank asks, raising his voice.

Hezekiah exhales. "I told you who I am. I'm here on assignment."

"I don't..." He yells, as he raises his hands towards his head and tightly balls his fists, and drops them. "I don't believe you. I don't think you told me the truth, which is why..." Frank turns his head away, bites his lip, and turns it back with a glare. "...which is why I'm going to use good old pain compliance to get to the truth."

"What!?" shouts Hezekiah as he holds his shoulder, gritting his teeth.

Frank moves his finger towards Hezekiah's left shoulder.

"Wait, wait! If you want to know who I am, I'll tell you."

"Good," says the doctor. He stands over Hezekiah crossing his arms frowning.

"I'm a child of God," Hezekiah states. The doctor thrusts his hand towards Hezekiah shoulder and stabs it with his finger. "Agrh!" screams Hezekiah. He crumples over as he cradles his shoulder.

"Do you think this is a game?" shouts Frank. "I recognize the prison pants you have on. Only convicted felons wear pants like that. Who are you?" Frank commands.

Still aching, the Swordsman struggles to speak. "Okay, I'll tell you everything."

Meanwhile, after driving non-stop toward the edge of town, Faith arrives at a toll road. Thinking about Hezekiah and her father together doesn't sit well with her. She doesn't know why, but something draws her to Hezekiah. She's seen and dated other men before, but there is something different about this man. "Why am I thinking about him so much? I don't even know him that well. For all I know, he could be a mass murderer," she says to herself. She looks out of her rear-view mirror and looks in the back seat. Something about her bags doesn't seem right. "Oh, shoot, I forgot my equipment," says Faith to herself.

At the doctor's house, Doc Parker gasps at the sudden revelation from the Spirit Warrior. Frank stumbles back as he covers his mouth. He drops his hand and shakes his head. "I don't believe you," Frank says.

"What do you mean you don't believe me? It's all true," Hezekiah answers, frowning.

“I don’t believe that someone like you could change,” says the doctor, voice cracking.

“Wait, I don’t understand.”

“You are a cold-blooded murderer!”

Hezekiah goes speechless upon hearing Frank’s exclamation.

Frank’s face reddens. “I knew you looked familiar. Your name is a dead giveaway,” he wipes sweat from his brow and thrusts his hand away. “You are responsible for the death of my wife! You gave orders for my wife to be killed after one of your little conquests!” shouts Frank.

Hezekiah gasp and his eyes glisten. Hezekiah’s chin drops to his chest, trying to recall all of the people he had killed while he was a king. Tears stream from his eyes as his limbs become heavy. “How did it happen?” asks Hezekiah, voice cracking.

“My wife and I were on a medical team doing fieldwork near a city you had just decimated. We were working on a patient who had been critically wounded in the battle. Gangrene had taken hold of the soldier’s leg. As we were preparing to amputate, you showed up with your forces. You and your white horse were peering over the battlefield you just conquered. I remember it like it was yesterday. You were wearing a red robe with red boots to match. You had an evil look in your eye and a wicked smile on your face.

“You approached us on your horse and asked, ‘What are you doing?’ I said, ‘We are a medical team assisting people in the area.’ You then said, ‘Well, my soldiers need help with their injuries, you may work on them.’

I replied, ‘This man is in serious trouble. If we don’t do something, he will die.’

“Next, you pulled out a gun and shot him in the head, telling me, ‘If you don’t want to be dead like that man, then assist my men only.’ As we turned to look after your soldiers, I heard you say, ‘If anyone in that team starts to help another person beside us, have that person killed.’

“My wife, Maranda, then called for me from across the battlefield for me to come quick. When I hurried into the tent she was in, she was trying to save the life of a soldier.” Frank relates the whole event

to Hezekiah. He tells how he immediately went into action, helping his wife keep the young man alive.

“Maranda shouted for blood. I quickly looked into my bag for more plasma. Not knowing the man’s blood type, I grabbed the universal blood type and attached it to the transfusion machine while Maranda pulled the rest of the bullets out of the man and closed the wound. The man screamed in agony the whole time she did so.

“Maranda shouted to me that she needed the transfusion going immediately. The soldier’s vital signs were going out of control as I started the transfusion. As the blood started coursing through the man’s veins, the soldier began to calm down.

“Then, Maranda cried in relief, ‘Crisis averted.’ However, a gunshot rang loudly in our ears as we felt something whoosh by us. When we looked at the soldier, we were shocked. He’d been shot to death.

“Someone walked into the tent within moments proclaiming, ‘You were told what would happen if you assisted anyone else besides my comrades!’

“I had to tell my wife upon her confusion, ‘The king said that if we help anyone else besides one of his comrades, we will die.’

“The royal knight pointed the gun at us and motioned for us to follow him. We were taken out of the battlefield and made to walk up a hill into the woods. It was almost a mile. We were coming close to where our original base camp was, close to our jeep.

“I can still recall every word that was said. The man who’d forced us on the march saw another guard at the checkpoint. The checkpoint guard was about to question him, but the man with the gun said, ‘Don’t worry, I’m taking care of a problem. I’ll take them alone.’ When we came to a large clearing at the top of the hill, the guard shouted, ‘On your knees!’

“I begged, ‘Now wait a minute, sir, you could let us go!’ But before I could say anything more, the guard shot Maranda in her arm. I watched her collapse in pain, and I punched the guard in the face. I fought the soldier to the ground, then quickly helped my wife up. We ran off the

steep embankment, off the hill, into the thicket of trees just as the checkpoint officer came and started shooting.

“I sent Maranda on toward where we left the jeep and told her I’d distract the guards. But then, my Maranda was shot in the back and collapsed to the ground. I picked up a large rock and hurled it at the checkpoint officer, and down he went, tumbling down the hill uncontrollably. I picked up Maranda and hurried with her down the mountain to the car.

“The bullets started flying after us, and I got hit in the shoulder. We tumbled the rest of the way down the hill, and Maranda flew from my arms. When I got to her, she was bleeding significantly. I got her in my arms again amid the gunfire and wrestled her into the jeep.

“Bullets were plowing into the jeep though I had the pedal to the metal. My wife gasped, ‘I’m not going to make it, Frank.’ I hushed her, ‘Don’t say things like that. We are going to make it.’ I sped off to the hospital, but Maranda was losing a lot of blood. She was in serious condition when we arrived. I was treated for my injuries, but they couldn’t save my wife. Thank God Faith was able to rush to the hospital in time, but she watched her mother pass away before her eyes.”

Hezekiah is speechless, and tears gush down his eyes as he is held in unbelief as to what he caused.

“You are a murderer, King Hezekiah.” declares Frank.

Just then, Faith comes into the room looking for her equipment. Hezekiah gasps as his eyes widen.

“Tell her, Hezekiah! Tell her what you did!” Frank shouts, vigorously pointing at Hezekiah.

“No, NO, no! Please.” He says shaking his head at the thought.

Looking from one man to the other, Faith asks, “What? What? Tell me what?” she asks walking further into the room, frowning.

Frank shouts without hesitation, “This man is responsible for your mother’s death!”

Faith gasps hard. She trembles as she holds her breath. She stumbles back and her father rushes to her side. She holds her hand out to

stop him. Her chin drops to her chest as her eyes moisten. Her mouth drops open as she rapidly blinks her eyes. Coldness expands in her chest as her chest tightens. Tears streaming down her face, she gazes into Hezekiah's eyes. "Is this true? Is this true?" She asks softly, throat aching. Hezekiah forms his mouth to speak, but no words come out. Tears stream down his face as his mouth is open. Faith frowns and her eyes sharpen. "Is it true!" shouts Faith, taking a step closer.

Hezekiah's face flinches as his chest tightens. "Yes. I am responsible...for your mother's death," says Hezekiah, his voice cracking.

Faith's emotions bubble inside of her as the light fluttering in her stomach from the sight of Hezekiah burns away as her body temperature starts to rise. Her jaw stiffens. "How could you!" she shouts over and over again. She stumbles back as she closes her eyes. Faith runs out of the room crying as Frank rushes after her. He slams the door behind them.

"Ah, no!" shouts Hezekiah, as he leans forward holding his tight chest. "God, I'm so sorry," he says, crying, unable to hold back tears.



Chapter 3:

FACING THE PAST: PART 2

FAITH AWAKENS HAPPY, HOWEVER, UPON REMEMBERING what Hezekiah confessed to her the day before, her happiness turns to sorrow. Heavy with hatred toward the new patient, she cannot believe that she had grown fond of the person who killed her mother. Faith goes to the kitchen, and out of obligation, makes Hezekiah's breakfast. "This is the Christian thing to do, right?" Faith says to herself. She grabs a plate from the cabinet and smashes it on the ground. Frank is startled awake and calls out from his room, "Is everything okay in there?"

"Yeah, Dad, everything is fine. I just dropped a plate," says Faith, obviously lying.

"Okay, Faith, just be careful."

"Okay, Dad."

As Faith cooks Hezekiah's food, she fights every urge to spit in it. Thinking about what Hezekiah did distracts her, and she burns the

eggs. Faith quickly turns the stove off and removes the eggs from the scorched pot. She makes the rest of his breakfast and fixes his plate. Fighting her urge to throw the plate against the wall, she quickly walks to Hezekiah's room with the meal.

At the door, Faith pauses to look at Hezekiah. The sunlight cascades in from the window onto his athletic body. *He looks like an angel*, she thinks. She sneers and her body temperature rises and bubbles even more for having such a thought in her head. Hezekiah suddenly awakens, and their eyes connect. A half smile builds on his face as they stare into each other's eyes. Faith slightly gasps as her heart skips a beat. She grits her teeth and turns her head away. Heat flushing through her, she walks up to Hezekiah's breakfast table, dumps the plate there, and storms out of the room. Frank walks into the kitchen, and Faith bumps into him. He steadies them both.

"Faith, what's wrong?" says Frank.

"What do you think, Dad?" says Faith sharply.

"I know this is hard, Faith, but we just have to deal with this situation until he gets on his feet."

"How long will that take," says Faith raising her voice.

"A week or two at the most."

"What! No way! We are not waiting that long to get this murderer out of this house. We can transfer him to a hospital today," she says, nostrils flaring.

"Faith, we won't be able to do that," says Frank softly.

"I've checked into that before I found out he was a murderer. According to the local hospital, they don't want to risk moving him because of the condition we found him in. They think it best for us to care for him until he's fully recovered."

Faith gasps. "What? That's crazy!" she shouts. "I can't believe they gave you such a stupid answer," she says throwing her hands in the air and letting them fall. "They just don't want to deal with a vagrant. If there was a payout involved, they would have no problem taking him. You know what? We're going to transfer him anyway," she says. She

starts to walk briskly towards Hezekiah's room. "I'll get the equipment ready for transfer," she says.

"Faith, we can't do that!" says Frank. Faith stops in her tracks and balls her fists. "If we move him now, he could get worse and may die at the hospital we send him to," says Frank. He exhales.

"So," she answers stone-cold.

His eyes widen. "Faith! Don't be like that. I know this is hard, but we don't want to become like him. Besides that, you have to get ready for your big journalism assignment today. We don't have time to move this man."

"Your right, Dad. But if I had time, this man would be gone."

Faith walks briskly out of the room and towards the carport. She hops in the Jeep and backs it out. Then notices that a bag is still in the garage. She puts the Jeep in park, runs to the garage to get the bag, she gets it and throws it into the trunk. A hand softly lands on her shoulder and squeezes it hard. Faith gasps. Her body stiffens. "Dad, what are you doing?"

"You're already calling me daddy? I like that," says a smooth deep voice. Faith's eyes widen as cold sweat slides down her spine. Faith turns and pulls away. Faith sees four gangster-looking men approach her. She turns to run, but the man grabs her arm.

"Hey, what's the rush?" he asks.

Faith looks at his face. She gasps. "I thought you were in jail!"

"You would, wouldn't you. We got away from them you snitch! You put our business through the news. Now were on the run. And it's all because of you."

"It's not my fault you were busted for being a drug lord," shouts Faith.

"That's neither here nor their now. Now I'm going to do to you what I did to my girls."

Faith yanks away from him. She sprints and slams into another man and stumbles. "Hey! Where are you going so fast? We just want to have some fun with you before we go away," the man says.

"Stay away from me!" she screams.

Frank runs out of the house at the sound. “Hey! Leave my daughter alone!” He runs toward the men. One man shoves him, and another punches Frank in the face. He falls to the ground. One of the men who pushed Frank down pulls out a gun and points it at him.

“You move, I’ll kill you!” Frank quivers and his eyes widen. “First, my wife, now this!” he says.

The men push Faith to the ground. Faith’s pulse races as her legs become weak. Faith sees the lustful look in their eyes. “Now, we said that we were going to have some fun with you before we went away,” says one of the men.

“Stop!” booms a voice like a lion from inside the house, and everyone freezes. Hezekiah emerges from the shadows, fists clenched. His golden-brown skin shines in the sun light as his muscles tighten. The men look up and are frozen. “Is that...is that...Hezekiah, the demon slayer!?” one of them says, mouth gaping.

The men tremble as they step away from Faith. “Naw, man, no...we can’t contend with this!” says one of them. Cold sweat drops from their faces as they stare at the Spirit Warrior, chests tightening.

“Boo!” shouts Hezekiah. The men jump, run off into the street, stumbling and tripping over each other as they run. As Faith, Frank, and Hezekiah look on, they are caught by police who’ve arrived at the end of the street. Frank and Faith both gaze at Hezekiah for a moment, mouth gaping.

Faith quickly frowns and snarls as she hops off the ground. “Thank you, but this changes nothing between us.” Faith turns her back on him to load her car and leave. Hezekiah collapses to the floor after she drives away, and Frank quickly assists him into the house.



Chapter 4:

ESCAPE FROM PHOENICIA

FAITH IS ON THE ROAD, SPEEDING, UNCLEAR HOW to feel about the whole encounter with the four men. She is thankful for Hezekiah saving her, but, at the same time, she feels like she betrayed her mother by being grateful. She drives with such anger, she tops speeds of 90 mph. Flying down the highway confused, she hears police sirens behind her. “Great,” says Faith to herself.

Meanwhile, Frank has Hezekiah on the couch tending to his shoulder and notices that Hezekiah is healing a lot faster than expected. “Hezekiah, how are you healing so fast?”

“I don’t know, it must be the Lord’s doing.”

“You know it’s hard to believe that a man like you could be a follower of Christ. Things were so different back then. You were a lot darker in countenance than you are now. That’s why I didn’t recognize you. God must have really done a work in you because your entire countenance has changed,” says Frank.

Hezekiah pauses for a moment. “I am so sorry for what I did... You are right. I was a monster back then. I had everyone around me killed, including my own parents. I’m so sorry that I put you and your family in my crosshairs. If there is anything, anything, I can do to repay you, just name it. I know that I can’t bring life back from the dead, but if I can—”

Frank puts his hand up to stop Hezekiah from speaking. “Hezekiah, there is nothing you can do about the past. Just be glad that God has forgiven you,” he says upon leaving towards his bed room. He walks out of the room with a bittersweet taste in his mouth. He is glad that Hezekiah saved his daughter, but is also bitter about his wife being killed.



The cop not only gives Faith a ticket, but is now giving her a police escort all the way to Phoenicia. The officer was posted in his location to escort Faith and any central city news personal, arriving late, through the checkpoint roads leading to Phoenicia; her speeding was an unexpected mishap. As Faith cruises down the road, she wonders what kind of festival this is going to be. As they pass through the checkpoints with ease, she begins to see the grand city.

Phoenicia is a desert city situated in a valley. Sand dunes surround it. The road that leads into the city sits in the middle of a large dryland forest. Once a person gets past the forest and sees the first sand hill, they know they have reached the city. The buildings inside the city are stucco constructions that range in height and are the same color as the tan sand. However, the lights and decorations in the city center give the desert city a festive appearance.

Faith and her escort get to the final security checkpoint as the road turns to gravel. The guard at the checkpoint lets them through, and they make their way to the rally point where the news crew is meeting up. The officer and Faith both pull in and park. Faith steps out of the jeep.

“Well, well. I didn’t know you were this special to have your very own police escort,” says Ms. Collins, Faith’s boss, with a smirk. She straightens her black business suit as her olive skin glistens in the hot sun.

Faith walks up to her and tilts her head back to stare into her dark brown eyes. Faith smiles and Ms. Collins chuckles.

“Well, he did give me a ticket,” says Faith. She turns away from her and starts walking toward the news crew. The rest of the crew snicker and laugh at Faith’s story.

“He gave you a ticket and then led you here? He may have been doing his job by giving you the ticket, but I think he gave you the escort because you are kind of cute,” says Ms. Collins, waving her black, curly hair out of her eyes.

“Well, I’m not interested, that’s for sure.”

“Why not? He doesn’t look too bad.” her boss teases.

“He gave me a ticket, Ms. Collins. I’m not interested. Besides, I’m not in the mood for love right now.”

“Oh, is it because of the man that you told me about?”

Hoping to change the subject, Faith just says, “I’ll talk to you about it after we get situated.”

Ms. Collins motions to the rest of the crew and they gather around her. Ms. Collins clears her voice. “This is going to be the biggest news event this year so far. The Phoenician festival is the biggest secret party that everyone wants to know about. No one knows why the Phoenicians party so hard, nor have they let anyone know. It’s been a town secret until now. Rex, be sure you get the best camera angles of the city. Molly, record all the sounds and laughter. Jamal, capture every single word these people say as to why this festival is. And Faith, you’re going to be the lead reporter on this project.”

“Really?” asks Faith, smiling from ear to ear.

“Yes, really. I’ll ask a few questions here and there, but I want you to draw out as much information as possible from these people. The news piece you did about the drug dealers in the City of Light certainly has prepared you for this moment. Do you think you can handle it?”

“Of course!” shouts Faith with a smile on her face.

“Great. This news story will propel your career to new heights. This story may seem simple, but the reason behind this party has been kept secret for a reason. So draw these secrets out.”

“What happens if things get out of control?” asks Rex.

“We’ll have to cover that too, but we’ll have to get somewhere safe. So look for safe places to post up just in case things get too crazy. Any other questions, comments, or concerns? No? Okay, good. Let’s go.”

The news crew load up the camera carts and sound equipment and move closer toward the city. From the town gates, they can see the metropolis is full of glitz and glamour. The film crew starts rolling live, and the anchorman, John, sitting in the news studio, captures the news feed and broadcasts it on TV. Faith begins to speak.

“Good afternoon, News Central fans! We are here, live, outside the city of Phoenicia for their grand Festival of Abundance! We have lots of exciting things in store for you, so stay tuned. We are making our way into the city now. We will give you a full report about this mysterious festival.” The news feed goes back to the anchor desk.

“Faith, everyone is dying to see what actually happens at this festival. We’ve heard so much about it,” says John. “Bring us up to speed as to what’s going on.”

“Well, for starters, it’s phenomenal that we are allowed to broadcast here because this festival is normally for city dwellers only. No one is allowed to talk about what goes on or why this festival is held, that is, until now. In fact, getting into this city is difficult. We had to pass through a few security gates to get this far. We’re making history here.”

“When will you enter the city?” asks John, moving the story along.

“We have to go through our final security check, and then we’ll check back in with you.”

“Well, I look forward to hearing from you then.”

“Sure thing.” Faith closes.

The news show switches to other news while Frank and Hezekiah watch from the couch. Hezekiah's injuries are almost completely healed. Because Hezekiah saved his daughter, Frank allows him to stay and rest up before his departure.

"Thank you for saving my daughter from those four men." Hezekiah slightly gasps at Frank's statement.

"If you had not been here when you were, my daughter would be gone too," says Frank, tearing up.

"Sir, don't worry about thanking me. I'm not the one to thank. Just thank God. I shouldn't even be here," says Hezekiah.

"No, it's okay. I know that God put you here for a reason. Maybe it was to teach me how to—forgive."

Hezekiah eyes glisten. "I don't know what to say. What I was and what I did back then was horrible. I've put you and your family through a lot of pain. I'm sorry for what I've done."

"Hezekiah." Just saying his name still annoys Frank, but calmness from the Spirit of God settles in his soul as he continues to speak. "You don't have to keep apologizing to me. You can say you're sorry a thousand times, but it won't bring my wife back. I understand that you've repented before God and that you are sorry for what you've done, but the truth is, I'm just not ready to deal with this yet." Frank gets up to go into the kitchen and leaves Hezekiah by himself. Hezekiah's chest tightens.



Faith, Ms. Collins, and the rest of the news crew walk through the city. Mystified by the decorative lights that envelop the numerous tall tan buildings of the street, they are lost in the moment. Small palm trees, large red flowers and yellow banners decorate the sidewalks and lamp posts. Everything seems fantastic inside the city, but something presses inside of Faith's spirit. Something is off about how the city flourished so fast, rising from the ashes of complete ruin. Every kingdom in the

area knows that Phoenicia was in the process of being sold into slavery. Still, no one knows how they were saved. Something in the atmosphere is not right, and Faith's mind is now set on getting the truth.

"Hey, Faith!"

"Oh, Ms. Collins! You kind of startled me there," Faith says with a small, nervous laugh.

"I noticed that you were deep in thought, so I want to know what you were thinking."

"Oh, well, I was thinking about Phoenicia and the story."

"Yes, that's good, but we can talk about it later. Let's talk about something more important."

"Like what?"

"Like you and the guy who's staying in your father's house," says Ms. Collins with a smile.

"Ms. Collins, I don't want to talk about that," says Faith with a frown.

Her boss is too shrewd for that. "No, we're talking about it whether you like it or not. It's starting to bother you. I can see it in your eyes."

Faith sighs. "Okay, Ms. Collins," says Faith, neck stiffening.

"Before, when you were talking about this man, he seemed like he was the love of your life. You were so excited about him, and everything he did was good. But now you don't want anything to do with him."

"As you know, this man is responsible for my mother's death," says Faith, voice rising sharply.

"Okay, I didn't hear that part," says Ms. Collins with her face frowning.

"Oh, I didn't tell you? Well, it turns out that this man was the king of the Valley of Dragons.

"Wait, what?"

"Yes, he was the king of the Valley of Dragons."

Ms. Collins thinks before speaking. "King Hezekiah is responsible for the deaths of a lot of his people. That man was the definition of the word tyrant. Is there any way you could call the police?"

"For what? This man did all these things as a king in his own country, which is now destroyed. If I did call the police, what would I

say? Everyone who could testify against him is dead. Everyone in the kingdom died.”

“Except for him, obviously.” After a brief pause, Ms. Collins continues, “Well, how did he kill your mother?”

“He didn’t do it himself. He sent one of his flunkies to do it. In fact, he didn’t really target her per se. Still, apparently, he said that if a doctor worked on anyone other than his soldiers, then that person would die.”

“Wait, wait, back up for a second. What was your mother doing in the middle of a battlefield?” Ms. Collins says with confusion written clearly across her face.

“Okay, let me start from the beginning. Remember how I told you my mother died in the mission field? I guess I didn’t tell you that her and my dad made it a habit of helping people in war-torn areas.”

“Okay, your story kinda makes sense now.”

“Anyway, at the time, she was working to save a soldier’s life. However, a man from the king’s army found out, took my father and mother out back, and shot them both,” says Faith, her voice cracking.

Ms. Collins grits her teeth. “Geeze, that’s harsh! How did your father survive?” says Ms. Collins, putting her arm around Faith to comfort her.

“He was able to fight off the guards, and they both escaped. They were able to run away, but my mother bled out from her injuries,” says Faith, tears now falling from her eyes.

“Wow, that’s an amazingly awful story,” says Ms. Collins with tears in her eyes too.

“Ever since then, I’ve longed for my mom. To spend even a second more with her would be priceless. She was my hero. So, when I found out Hezekiah took her from me, it filled me with so much hatred...” Faith says sobbing. She grits her teeth as her face reddens. She balls her fists and they tremble.

Ms. Collins face and voice soften. “Faith, I can see how this is affecting you. Facing the man who is responsible for your mother’s death is not an easy thing. However, I’m going to tell you what a wise

young woman once said to me, when I was facing my son's killer in the courtroom. You told me that God calls us to forgive. If we can't forgive others, He won't forgive us."

Faith couldn't be mad at her boss because she led Ms. Collins to Christ through that incident.

"You also said forgiving people doesn't justify their sin, but it releases the bitterness from inside our own soul. It was because of you I excepted Christ into my life. You told me that 'God is here to help us through our sorrow.'

"I know what I said, and you are right. But it is just so painful," says Faith, moving away from Ms. Collins and crossing her arms.

"I know what you mean," says Ms. Collins. She puts her arms around Faith's shoulder and establishes eye contact.

"Well, this is a little different," says Faith.

"In what way?" counters Ms. Collins.

"Well, for love to turn into pure hate can really twist the inside of your soul."

Ms. Collins mouth drops open. "Wait, were you starting to fall in love with this guy?"

Faith lets out a sigh. "Yeah, I was. Or maybe it was just infatuation. But in any case, I could never feel that way again about him. I feel like I'll betray my mom in some way if I did." "I'm not telling you to date the guy. But you need to forgive him before it kills you."

"Your right, Ms. Collins, but I just can't do it yet," Faith says, neck muscles slightly loosening.

A few minutes later, the two women are near the broadcast sight. Faith puts out of her mind all thoughts of her mother and gets ready for the camera. To be healthy, happy, and carefree on the camera is going to take all of her mental concentration.

The team discusses a few last-minute details and the camera is set up.

"Alright, Faith. Are you ready?" asks Ms. Collins.

“Yep, let’s do this!” says Faith with a cheerful but forced smile in place. The camera crew turns on the camera and prepares to flip the switch for live broadcast.

“We are on air in 5,4,3,2...”

“Hello everyone, this is News Central back inside the city of Phoenicia for the Festival of Abundance. The festival is just starting now, and you can see people are flooding the streets.” Faith reports, smiling from ear to ear.

“Wow, Faith, the town looks like the people really went all out for this festival,” says the anchorman.

“Yeah, they say it is done this way to remind the community to live life to the fullest.”

“I see. What else do the locals have to say?” John asks, voice slightly raised. He grits his teeth as he frowns. He notices that the news feed is back on him and he quickly turns his frown into a smile. *If this goes right, she could take my place*, John thinks.

“Let’s see what the locals have to say about this wonderful festival.” Faith walks up to a young woman on the street. “Excuse me, miss? What are your thoughts on the festival, and why is it important to you?”

“The festival is important because it is a festival not just about tolerance, but a reminder to let go of inhibitions and really live life to the fullest. Before, this town was so stuck on being religious, but now we do what we want when we want to do it,” the young woman says with a smile on her face.

“I see, thank you, miss. Enjoy the festival.” Faith walks to someone else.

“Excuse me, sir, what are your thoughts about the festival, and why is it important to you?”

“This festival is about the evolution of human thought. We are evolving from what we call good and evil and changing into something more beautiful.”

“Which is?”

“The ability to be who we are without any consequence,” he answers without hesitation.

Faith starts to worry over what she is learning and begins to wonder what she has gotten herself into. However, she doesn't let her emotions show on camera. She sees another person and finds out they are from the local church. "This should be good," Faith says to herself. "Hello, sir, excuse me."

"Yes?"

"We are interviewing people about the Festival of Abundance. We'd like to know who you are and what you do."

"Sure. I am Pastor Murphy of the Phoenicia Community Church. I will gladly answer your questions."

"Thank you," Faith says with a smile. "Tell me, in your perspective as the head pastor, what is this festival about and why does it take place?"

"The festival is about how the church and the non-churched teamed up to save the city." Faith's eyebrows draw together. What do you mean? Asks Faith. "Well before, we use to preach about morality in Christ. And how we should live these perfect lives in order to get into heaven." "Okay. So, what changed, and what does that have to do with teaming up with 'non-churched' people to save the city?" "Thanks to a certain traveling prophet we know, we were able to abandon our legalism and truly live under the blood of Christ. The prophet showed us that Jesus put all sins under his blood and that we are free because of it." "Okay. So, what does that teaching have to do with what we are talking about?" "As you know, the city was in debt—A lot of it." Faith nods her head. "We had no choice but to find other ways to make money." "Yes. The debt that you had was so great that everyone and everything in the city was going to be sold to the highest bidder to pay off the debt or be invaded." "Yes. The city state, as a whole, was presented with a few choices to pay off the debt. Normally such activities that we decided to do would be against the law or be considered immoral. However, we found that if everyone participated, that we could quickly pay off the city's debt."

"Like prostitution?" she says jokingly with a chuckle.

"Why are you so judgmental?" the pastor shouts as his eyebrows draw together.

Faith flinches. Taken back, Faith blurts out, “I’m sorry?”
“Why are you so judgmental?”

Faith mentally backs up for a second. If she’s going to get any further with this guy, she has to rephrase the question. “I’m not judgmental at all. I’m sorry if I appear that way. I just want to know how the church partnered with the city. I don’t study the bible as much as I should, but I do know Jesus.”

The pastor studies the young woman’s face for a moment. When he notices that she’s sincere, he relaxes and says, “Well, in the Bible, it says that Jesus forgives us from all of our sins—past, present, and future. So, we as the church figured we could help save the city by supporting the city council’s resolution of making money off of vice.” Faith’s eyes open wide, but maintains her smile. “Based on the Bible, we were able to keep the town by putting everything under the blood of Jesus. Since our sins were going to be forgiven anyway, we publicly supported the council’s idea, and the city has flourished,” he says smiling. “Since then, church attendance has exploded. God has blessed us financially and has given us favor with the townspeople. God is good.” says the pastor grinning.

Faith’s eyes remain wide, but she continues to smile. “Great testimony. Thank you for your time, pastor. We can all see that you have made a great contribution to this city,” says Faith.

The pastor leaves, face beaming, however, Faith leaves scratching the back of her head. *I have always relied on pastors to tell me about Christ. And this is the same thing that the pastor of my church has been saying, but something about this doesn’t seem right*, she thinks. Her stomach churns.

“Faith, the king of the city, is about to speak,” says Ms. Collins from off-camera, motioning for Faith to focus.

Faith clears her head and returns to her professional duty. “It’s now time for the king to talk about the festival. Let’s turn our attention to the king of the city.”

Faith points towards a grand stage, set in the middle of town. As the camera man focuses, a man walks up to the microphone and begins to speak.

“Live from Grand Square in the city of Phoenicia, lets now honor, King Xavier Rodgers, King of the Phoenicians!” shouts the announcer as the crowd erupts into applause.

The king walks towards the microphone. His gold-colored attire and crown shimmers in the sunlight. He grins as he extends his arms out. He clears his voice to speak.

“Hello, fellow citizens of Phoenicia. I am glad to announce the fifteenth annual Festival of Abundance!” says King Rodgers.

The crowd cheer and applaud. Rodgers motions with his hands for them to quiet down.

“We are here to commemorate the restoration of this great city. Years ago, this city was on the brink of bankruptcy before the citizens teamed up with the church leaders of the city. We placed religious and non-religious differences aside to save this great city of ours. If not for this union, we would have all been sold into slavery and sent to different kingdoms as payment for the great debt we owed. However, thanks to our town leaders, we were able to pay off all of our debts. Not only that, but we are now in a surplus!” says the king as he pumps his fists in the air. The crowd roars with cheers. “So, without further delay, let the Festival of Abundance begin!”

The crowd erupts into thunderous applause as the king departs the stage and is quickly replaced by a red headed, tan skinned, pop singer named Alexia and her dancers. Their black leather outfits shine in the lights as they start to dance. The audience continues to cheer as the voice of the singer jumps into their hearts. The beat in everyone’s body pounds and their pulse races as the performer sings more loudly and with increased vocal agility. The crowd raise their hands in the air and sway to the music as their eyes glaze over.

In the middle of the performance, the king walks back on stage and announces, “Eat and be merry for tomorrow we die!” Delicacies are brought from the king’s palace onto the city streets.

“Are you getting all of this?” asks Ms. Collins, pulse racing. The camera gets a shot of people engorging themselves with food and

alcohol. As the people eat and get drunk, one of the servers offers the camera crew food. “No thanks, I can’t work and eat at the same time,” says Ms. Collins.

The server then offers some delicacies to Faith. *DON’T DO IT!*, flashes through her mind as her chest tightens. “No thanks, I’m working right now,” she says smiling.

“Are you sure? This stuff will make you work better,” says the server with a smile on his face.

Ms. Collins motions for the news crew to put Faith back on camera.

“What makes you say that?” she asks the man who is now in full frame.

“It’s laced with LSD,” says the server.

“What!?” shouts the entire news crew. They quickly scramble to keep themselves calm.

“It’s all laced with LSD,” says the server again.

Faith gasps and her jaw drops. The hairs on the back of her neck stand on edge. The singer hits a high note, cuing the dancers on stage to remove their clothes. The people then begin to engage in debauchery in broad daylight. The pastor of the local church, in a drunken stupor, jumps on stage and dances with the women.

The excess continues. People in the crowd begin to vomit. To Faith’s surprise, after vomiting, they start eating again. The news crew flinch and cringe as they turn their heads away. The team looks back to the stage and gasp; the city’s pastor begins to shed his clothing. They gaze around them as one to witness the entire town explode into a drunken sex craze. The news crew can feel the fevered energy of the crowd, and they start to tremble.

Moving through the crowd, the team bump into a man with a badge on his chest, proclaiming him an assistant pastor. “Come join us! Come join us! There’s plenty of food for everyone,” he says to the news crew.

“This is starting to get out of hand! We need to leave this city,” shouts Ms. Collins.

“No need to leave! Everything is okay!” says the assistant pastor. “Join us!”

“No, we are working right now. We’re just here to broadcast the news,” says Faith, trying to look calm for the camera.

The assistant pastor sneers and his face turns red. “So you think you are too good for us? Well, you can just leave! We don’t want you around here anymore,” he says in a drunken stupor. “You heard me. Get out!” he shouts.

The news crew is speechless and just stare at him. With the camera filming live, they stay composed. His face turns red and he snarls. He rushes the cameraman and fights to take his device away. The camera jostles and falls to the ground. Others in the crowd notice the commotion and murmur loudly as their faces redden. The mob picks up food and heaves it at the news crew. Caught off guard by the burst of energy around them, the news crew freezes. They struggle for breath as globs of food pelt them from all directions. People cackle as the news crew whimpers and moan.

The crew hyperventilates as they squeeze their eyes shut. “We’ve got to get out of here!” shouts Ms. Collins. The team begins to run as the crowd charges at them from all sides. In the meantime, the singer on stage continues to sing with incredible vocal theatrics. At the height of her performance, thunder cracks in the sky, and rain begins to fall. Too high on drugs to focus, the rain distracts the crazed mob as they are mystified by it. The rain stops as suddenly as it began, and everyone continues with the festival.

“Okay, that was strange,” says Ms. Collins, wiping food off her black blouse.

“God just saved us, but we still need to get out of here,” says Faith.

The ground starts to slightly but consistently tremble with a hum, and dust rises from the ground. “Everyone in the city must be partying hard if dust is moving like this!” says the cameraman.

“The speakers are thumping the music loud, but that does not explain why the ground is shuddering,” says Ms. Collins.

In an instant, the rumble becomes a quake. Everyone in the city, except for the performers on stage, look around, eyes wide.

“Is this an earthquake?” shouts the cameraman.

“I don’t know. It almost feels like a large vehicle is moving this way,” says Ms. Collins.

“What vehicle could be that big?” Shouts Faith over the growing noise.

The shaking stops. Everyone in the crowd continues to dart their gaze. The singer continues to sing and hits an incredibly full high note and sustains it. The feat captures everyone’s attention. The singer throws her head back and points upward. As their attention is thus directed, the tension leaves their bodies as they cheer, seeing lights appear like fireworks in the sky. “This must be part of the performance!” shouts a person from the crowd. Everyone cheers and starts dancing again. But the lights from the sky fall and strike members of the audience. The audience flinches and gasp. More fire falls from the sky and more people are hit. Everyone screams as a vast amount of people are struck down by fire-tipped arrows. People are instantly set ablaze as they are struck through with these bolts of fire.

“Move now!” shouts Collins. Ms. Collins and her teammates sprint to escape the bombardment of arrows. Unable to drop the camera, the cameraman continues to film the catastrophic scene unfolding before them as they run for their lives. The situation continues to broadcast on live television.

Though all of the news crew run, a few team members are struck with arrows. “We need to find shelter now!” shouts Collins as a few more of the crew are slammed to the ground by multiple fiery darts. Faith turns back to try and help her downed colleagues. They burst into flames and she jumps back screaming. “Don’t turn back! Keep moving!” shouts Collins.

Another sight quickly coming toward Faith causes her to tremble. She gasps. An army of black, samurai knights on black horses’ slices through the remaining Phoenicians. Her eyes widen as she realizes they are thunderously galloping toward the news crew.

The arrows continuously rain down from the sky and slam into the last few members of the team. Only the cameraman, Ms. Collins, and Faith are left now. They frantically run as an uncountable number of arrows continuously destroy people all around them. An arrow lands a foot behind the three of them and explodes. They soar through the air several yards and slam into the ground, separated from each other. Faith notices Ms. Collins and the cameraman are several yards away. Rex's knee is shattered. He cries in pain as he tries to move it. Ms. Collins tries to stand, but collapses under her own weight due to a broken ankle.

Wanting to save her friends, Faith sprints towards them amid the chaos. Buildings around her burst into flames, and the ground trembles under her feet as the horsemen gallop closer. Ms. Collins looks behind her and notices the horsemen gaining ground on them. Unable to move, Ms. Collins shouts, "Go! Get out of here, Faith! Save yourself!" Not listening, Faith continues to charge towards them.

More arrows slam into the ground in front of Faith and explode. She is knocked backward several feet and once more slams into the ground. Faith gets up only to see a line of flames standing like a wall blocking her from her boss and the cameraman. Tears stream from her eyes as her muscles tighten. She has no time to mourn them or any other members of the news team. She staggers to her feet and begins to run away.

Still conscious, and knowing their end is near, Ms. Collins and the cameraman say a quick prayer together and decide to keep broadcasting. The cameraman captures the footage of the dark army charging toward them. One rider reaches him and slices through the camera with his sword. The news feed is cut, leaving only airwaves of static.



On their feet, looking at the television, Hezekiah and Frank's eyes bulge as they stare, bodies frozen in place, at the screen. Trembling and

whimpering over his daughter, the doctor gazes at Hezekiah, eyes wet, he holds his breath. Both say nothing for a moment. Hezekiah knows precisely what Frank is asking without him saying a word.

“If you are who you say you are, save my daughter!” shouts Frank as his chest tightens. He stumbles and Hezekiah grabs him and helps him sit down. Hezekiah eye brows draw together as his pulse races. He sprints to the front door.

“How will you get there in time?” asks Frank.

“I don’t know,” says Hezekiah lowering his head, and clinching his teeth.

A forceful pounding on the door startles them both. Hezekiah opens the door, and no one is there. He looks around and then looks down. Hezekiah sees something strange on the doorstep with a note attached. Hezekiah slowly picks up the letter and starts to read.

“Well, what is it?” asks Frank.

“It’s a note from...God,” says Hezekiah.

“A note from God? What do you mean ‘note from God?’ We don’t have time for this. What does that stupid thing say that has you so captivated?” shouts an increasingly worried Frank.

“It says:

Dear Hezekiah, I AM with you. You have already been faithful in proclaiming the gospel of peace to people all around you. These boots are for you. You will need more than the Sword of the Spirit for the ultimate test that lies ahead. You will need the full Armor of God. However, you are not ready for the full armor until you have gone through a trial by fire. The boots will give you increased speed and stamina in your running and fighting capabilities. They work in sync with the Sword of the Spirit. The shoes are custom made just for you. As it is said in my Father’s Word, “You will run and not

grow weary and walk and not grow faint.” Now, go and save Faith!

Agape, Jesus

“Let me see that letter,” shouts Frank as he grabs for it. Hezekiah gives it to him as he looks at what lays on the doorstep. “Is this a joke?” Frank says as he looks at a pair of gold-colored shoes on the doorstep. “I’ll get the car! God, I hope we are not searching for my daughter’s remains,” moans Frank as Hezekiah quickly puts the shoes on.

Frank turns to walk away, but a bright light flashes behind him and calls him back. Frank sees Hezekiah glowing. Awestruck, Frank’s jaw drops open as his eyes widen. Another blinding light quickly flashes, and he sees Hezekiah’s running shoes transform into gold armor ankle boots. Their both quite for a moment as the glow slightly subsides. “Wow, how do they feel?” asks Frank.

“Light as a feather,” says Hezekiah.

Frank’s eyebrows draw together. “Well, what are you waiting for? Save Faith!”

Hezekiah turns towards the door and instantly zips outside. “Wow,” says Hezekiah as his slight motion places him yards from the house. Frank sprints to the front door and sees Hezekiah outside. “Well, go, man! Go! Go! GO!” shouts Frank as Hezekiah zooms down the street like a race car.

Faith turns back with tears in her eyes to see her friends one last time. She witnesses the dark figures on horseback jump through the flames. Faith runs at top speed frantically, trying to out race the shadowy characters on their horses. Desperate for an answer to save herself, Faith looks and sees a motorcycle a few feet in front of her. As fast as she knows how, Faith jumps on the motorbike and cranks it. Nothing happens. “Come on! Come on!” shouts Faith as she tries furiously to crank the motorcycle. The horsemen are only a few yards away. “Crank, stupid

bike, crank!” With certain death only a few seconds behind her, Faith prays, “Lord God, help!”

The horsemen move to strike Faith down just as the motorcycle roars to life. Faith rockets down the street uncontrollably, popping a wheelie on the cycle. The horsemen are in hot pursuit as they chase her down the city street. Faith makes her way past the stage toward the back end of the city.

More arrows plummet from the sky. The darts explode all around her, striking buildings and the road ahead. A few bolts strike suddenly into the street directly before her and explode in fire. Faith hurtles through the flames. The horsemen are hot on her trail as they pick up speed, moving faster than natural horses can run. Faith zips around a sharp curve leading further into the city. The horsemen bolt around the sharp bend, thundering closer to Faith.

Faith quickly looks at the side mirrors and now sees the horsemen in higher numbers. They keep charging toward her as if they were only after her. She focuses sharply on the road in front of her with renewed attention and notices she is quickly approaching a dead end with a narrow alleyway. Faith tries to slow down and looks backward, and one of the horsemen lashes out, narrowly missing her neck. Reacting to save her life, she picks up speed and rockets towards the alleyway. With only one shot to avoid certain death, Faith puts her full attention on making it through the narrow opening of the passage. The horsemen start shooting arrows at Faith as she makes her maneuver. She rockets through the alleyway as the fiery arrows slam into the walls around the opening.

“Yes!” shouts Faith as she clears the entrance. She looks back briefly and finds one horseman chasing her in hot pursuit. Faith zig-zags between large green dumpsters as she tries to lose him. The dark samurai showers the dumpsters with quick bursts of fire, blowing them to bits as he charges right through them.

Faith stares at a dead-end at the end of the alley and panics until she quickly notices a ramp that leads higher to the roofs of the city.

Focusing, Faith rockets up the ramp and soars through the open air. She lands hard and is thrown off the bike, rolling several feet away from it as it slides across the rooftop in the other direction. With only a few scrapes, she recovers and sprints back toward the bike, her only means of escape. In the distance, she sees more horsemen rampaging through the city.

As she gets back on the bike, she immediately notices the roof she's on overlooks a secret exit leading out of the town. She quickly revs up the engine and drives toward her hopeful path out of the burning city, cruising the roofs to reach her goal. She notices with relief a ramp leading off the roofs and onto the sand outside of the city wall. Faith rides down the slope, and slight hope glows in her brain. However, the relief it brings quickly slides back out of her mind because her particular motorcycle does not ride in sand.



Chapter 5:

FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

FAITH CHEST TIGHTENS AS A COLD BEAD OF SWEAT slides down the back of her neck as she speedily walks up the sand bar, the motorcycle left behind her. Faith makes the long trek up the hill, not looking back for what she may see, yet each step injects more pain into her churning stomach. As she makes it to the top of the hill, she forces her body to turn around. The city of Phoenicia is ablaze. Not only that, she sees a dark army advancing on the metropolis, laying siege to it with millions of fiery arrows. The thought of her friends being swept away by an unknown shadowy enemy brings her to tears.

Her vision remains locked on the city as she hears explosion after explosion booming from the cityscape. A powerful blast with greater intensity than the others pounds her into the sandy hill. She feels the heat from the detonation against her skin and teeth. With the taste of sand and ash in her mouth, Faith recovers her footing to leave. She

sees the dryland forest just at the top of the hill and prepares to make her escape.

She makes a quick turn of her head to the right, gasps and holds her breath. A dark-armored samurai knight stands across from her, overlooking the city. Faith slowly steps off the sand bar with the ball of her foot. Cold sweat runs down her neck as she slowly takes a step. *Oh God please don't let him see me.* Her body tremors as she moves her legs to take the next step. Her pulse thrashes through her ears as her legs weaken. She turns her head in front of her and sees the path through the woods away from the dark-samurai-knight. Thoughts of her being sliced to death run through her mind. She focuses her mind on the path to safety. *Put your foot down. Put it down!* She forces her legs to move and steps on a twig. The twig snaps. The Knight quickly twists his head towards Faith! His stark, red eyes pierce straight through Faith's soft brown ones. The stare jerks Faith's head back as the dark knight paralyzes her with body tremors. Faith wills herself to turn and run, but the knight creates an illusion of duplicates of himself all around her.

Body trembling, and the smell and salty taste of nervous sweat pouring out of her skin, Faith shrieks, "Who are you and why are you doing this? What did those people ever do to you?"

The figure intones, "My name is Warlord. That is the last name you will ever hear. I'm the rolling judgment that sweeps across this land. To answer your other question, I am attracted to the evil in people's hearts. And I'm currently attracted to the hatred in yours. It radiates from you like a bright, red, beacon. Hate looks so beautiful on you." He chuckles and Faith's chest tightens.

"You and the people in this land are ripe for judgment, and I will leave no survivors. No survivors!" roars the samurai knight as he slowly approaches Faith. He unsheathes a great black sword. Faith's frozen body shivers as the dark night unexpectedly hovers off the ground and zooms forward toward her.

And through the trees, a figure lunges at him with a gold buster sword! Hezekiah strikes down, up, and across Warlord's chest. Hezekiah

twirls his sword on the dark warrior. With loud, stark chimes of steel striking steel, Sparks fly, as Hezekiah's adrenaline rushes; fighting out of love, urgency, and the guilt of past sins, Hezekiah continues his assault.

The Swordsman uppercuts the evil knight with his sword repeatedly like a windmill. Warlord stumbles back to get out of the way. The man of God explodes forward with a burst of fire and again attacks with his sword. The Spirit Warrior's weapon becomes blurred as he strikes with a fiery assault. Hezekiah grits his teeth as his eyes bulge. His heart drums in his chest. He spins and back-hand strikes. Hezekiah hits Warlord with a blast of fire from his fierce sword. The flames explode and scorch the ground as Warlord launches backward.

The man of God zips towards Warlord and pounds him with his heavenly blade, forcing the evil being up into the air. The Swordsman leaps off the ground, and using his blade like a circular saw, he drills into Warlord. Using his spinning momentum, the Spirit Warrior wraps around Warlord, kicks off the back of him, and strikes straight through him before landing to the ground in a flash.

Hezekiah looks up at Faith with a sigh of relief until Faith points behind him terrified. The man of God quickly looks in that direction and sees Warlord reconstructing himself with thick, purple magic. Hezekiah and Warlord's eyes lock as Warlord continues to restore himself. The Swordsman's jaw drops at the site, his emotions give way to fear.

Without warning, Warlord strikes the ground with an explosive blast of white light. The hill rocks as the explosion causes a landslide. It sweeps Hezekiah and Faith through the sand downward. As Hezekiah and Faith are swept away, Warlord jumps off in a burst of purple flame and flies before them across the sand. He shoots by the man of God, clearly aiming to strike down Faith. Hezekiah bursts out the sand and rockets after Warlord. The Swordsman sprints across the current of sand and catches up to the samurai.

"HEY," shouts Hezekiah as he speedily advances. Warlord looks over, and the Spirit Warrior shoves Warlord into the sand. Like a spinning wheel, they both tumble rapidly down the dune fighting each

other as they somersault through the hot sand. Before they reach the bottom, they both leap up and continue fighting across the ground, locked in combat and moving away from Faith.

Faith slides to the bottom of the dune. She leaps to her feet, but before she can catch her breath, the sand slope wafts into the air and transforms into a giant, warlord-like, sand monster. It smiles. She gasps. Faith spins around and sprints toward Hezekiah, but columns of hot sand burst out of the ground blocking her escape.

In the distance, the Swordsman continues his assault against Warlord. His pulse is speeding. With hot sand whirling through the air between them, Hezekiah strikes him with a three-hit combo across the body. Warlord stumbles backward. The Swordsman jumps into the hot air and pounds Warlord in the face multiple times with back-handed sword strikes. He spin kicks him off his feet.

Meanwhile, Faith is being strangled by a hot sand storm created by the sand beast. With warm, gritty sand burning her scalp, skin, gums, and teeth, Faith screams as she is pulled under the sand. An explosion of light from Hezekiah's sword bursts through the sand monster. Faith is caught in mid-air as the sand beast is swept away by the blast. She falls down onto the shifting sand and, before she can regain her footing, the sand monster reforms a hand and grabs her, forcibly dragging her down. Faith screams at the top of her lungs as the sand beast draws her deeper and deeper under the sand.

Hearing Faith's cries of distress, Hezekiah quickly turns and strikes Warlord with an explosion of yellow lightning. The Swordsman stumbles from the impactful blow but rights himself to sprint frantically to Faith. Hezekiah grabs Faith's free hand and yanks her out of the sandpit and leaps into the air. A sand hand shoots out of the sand! The Spirit Warrior turns mid-air and strikes the beastly monster, blasting it with a burst of light.

Warlord quickly jumps and sails through the air after the pair. Hezekiah turns 360 degrees and blasts Warlord with a wave of lightning. The flash sends Warlord sailing backward once more. The dark

samurai cascades across the ground in a series of column-like explosions. The blasts send Hezekiah and Faith sailing through the air until they land on the top of the sand hill. As the ball of Hezekiah's foot touches the ground, the Swordsman takes off like a jet. He zooms from the sandy hill through the dry forest with Faith barely holding on to his hand.

They swiftly travel through the sun-streaked shade of the forest. As Faith flies through the air being led by Hezekiah, she studies him and her heart skips a beat. Tension leaves her body as her stomach flutters. As their wet hands hold each others, her skin tingles. Hezekiah briefly looks back at Faith, and their eyes link for a moment. He smiles and so does she.

Out of the corner of his eye, Hezekiah sees a black figure. His heart drums in his chest. He jerks his head to the left and sneers. Warlord is a short distance away, fast approaching them from their left through the trees. Now running beside them through the timbers, Warlord stares them down. Faith's palms are soaked. They struggle to hold on. Her heart beat thrashes in her ears. She tightly shuts her eyes. *No, No, NO*, he thinks. Faith slips out of his hands. She careens backward through the forest. Warlord swiftly attacks Hezekiah through the trees. The Swordsman barely counters each of Warlord's strikes with his own sword. Warlord knocks him through the air as they battle.

In the distance, Faith recovers and sees her jeep through the trees. She stumbles off the ground and sprints to her Jeep. She jumps in, and puts her peddle to the metal. Gravel flies and she speeds off. The Jeep rockets down the road sending gravel flying into the air.

Warlord blitzes toward Hezekiah, breaking through small trees, with his body, to get to him. Warlord slices up, down, left, right into Hezekiah's countering sword. He pulls his sword arm back and strikes. Hezekiah blocks. The pressure pounds into Hezekiah's body. Air is pushed out of his lungs as he launches twenty feet away. The Swordsman grits his teeth, flips backward, lands and slides across the dirt ground

and rockets at sonic speed to attack Warlord. Warlord's sword flares red, and he bursts at sonic speed to counter.

The Swordsman and the demonic conqueror clash swords with bursts of yellow and red lightning. Both are knocked back. At sensational speed, they fight and knock each other back five times. On the sixth attack, their clashing weapons lock together. Thunder booms from their blades. Each pushes to gain an advantage in the clanging combat. Warlord forces Hezekiah's blade down to the ground with tremendous strength. With his free, steel-gloved hand, Warlord uppercuts the man of God in the face, punches him in the chest, and then kicks him forty feet away. Hezekiah sees stars as his head throbs in pain.

After the hand-to-hand blows, Warlord rapidly strikes with one hundred sickle-like blasts of red light aimed at Hezekiah. He chuckles and his blood thirst rises. Warlord's arm blurs as he unleashes his ballistic attack. The Spirit Warrior recovers and strikes with an explosion of yellow lightning that swallows the red blasts. Warlord counters and strikes with an even bigger flash of red lightning. Both blasts collide and massively explode, sending Hezekiah flying high through the sky. The Spirit Warrior catapults through the smoke knocked out. Warlord's body shatters into pieces.

It takes less than a moment for Warlord to reform his body. As soon as he is whole, he explodes into the air in a red fireball pursuing Hezekiah. Warlord gathers an explosive amount of energy in his blade, preparing to eviscerate Hezekiah in a powerful lightning blast.

Vision blurred and seeing double, the man of God glimpses his foe rapidly approaching. Feeling numb, the Swordsman forces himself to attack despite his growing exhaustion. He clutches his sword and gathers a vast amount of energy in his sword to counter Warlord with a lightning blast of his own. Hezekiah moves to strike. Before the lightning launches fully out of Hezekiah's sword, both Warlord and Hezekiah's swords violently collide once more. Hezekiah and Warlord are caught in a massive explosion that flies them into the sky. Everything flashes white.

With the ongoing battle raging behind her, Faith steadily speeds 100 mph down the highway. Without warning, something big slams onto the hood of the car, causing Faith to violently swerve. She struggles but gets the vehicle back under control. Faith focuses on what's on the hood, and is visibly surprised to find it's Hezekiah. The Swordsman's shoes seal his feet to the jeep. With a second glance at the Spirit Warrior, Faith notices he is badly hurt. Exhaustion growing in his eyes, Hezekiah struggles to stay awake. Too scared to slow down, Faith keeps speeding all the way home. Meanwhile, Warlord looks on from a distance, reforming himself once more.



Chapter 6:

THE PAIN OF LETTING GO

HEZEKIAH AND FAITH ARRIVE HOME AT NIGHT-fall. Frank has been anxiously awaiting their arrival while pacing the living room. When Faith's jeep comes to a screeching halt outside of the house, she immediately jumps out just as Hezekiah lets go of the windshield. His boots demagnetize, and he nearly falls off the car. Dr. Frank quickly rushes outside to take hold of Faith. He hugs his daughter tight in a warm embrace.

"I thought I lost you for sure!" her father says with hoarseness in his voice and warm tears in his eyes.

"I thought I was going to die. The invasion...and the Warlord... Thank God I'm alive!" says Faith, voice cracking.

"What happened?" Frank asks.

"Hezekiah saved me."

They both turn to look at the Swordsman, now out cold on the ground. “Hezekiah!!!” they shout, shocked to see him passed out on the ground. They quickly grab the wounded man and rush him into the house. About an hour later, after they’ve bandage him up, placed a monitor on him, and set him up on fluids, they go to talk.

“So, what happened out there?” asks Frank.

“Well, a lot of things, Dad,” says Faith with a slight attitude. “Start from the beginning.”

“Well, at the height of the festival, an entire army invaded and destroyed the city,” says Faith, voice cracking. Dr. Frank’s eyes glisten as a thickness develops in his throat. *I’ve only seen my daughter cry a few times since...her mother’s death. Seeing her terrified like this...* he puts a hand over his mouth for a second and he moves to hold her again.

After they let go, her father continues trying to gather information. “What else happened?”

“All of my friends are dead,” says Faith with her voice shattering further and tears pouring from her eyes.

“What!?”

“When the invasion came, we tried to escape, but they were struck by fiery arrows from the sky. One by one, they were struck to the ground. I tried to go back for them, but we were separated by a wall of flames. I couldn’t save them!” says Faith, distraught. “Don’t blame yourself for their death, honey. There was nothing you could do. We saw the entire situation unfold on live television. Based on what I saw, you were courageous.”

“After I was separated from them, I found a motorcycle and managed to escape from the city. I hit a sand bar and had to run uphill. When I got up the hill, I ran into the one called Warlord. I tried to run, but I was paralyzed with fear. I finally shouted, ‘Why?’ and he kept saying, ‘No survivors.’ He moved to kill me, but Hezekiah came out of nowhere and fought against this demon samurai. I’ve never seen anyone fight with such speed and power.” Faith goes on and on about

how amazing Hezekiah was, filling in her father on the heroic and horrific events.

Frank looks at Faith puzzled because she is talking about her rescuer with warm admiration. After the deep disdain Frank saw from Faith before, he can hardly believe how she's talking about Hezekiah now. Then again, Frank himself is eternally grateful to Hezekiah for saving Faith. "Faith, it sounds like you're really grateful for what Hezekiah did," he says with a smile filling his face.

"Yeah, so what's your point?" asks Faith.

"This is the first time in a while that you have talked about Hezekiah without hatred in your voice."

Faith pauses for a moment. "Dad, I..."

"I get it, Faith. I'm also grateful for Hezekiah saving you—it's okay," says Frank.

"It's okay to do what?" asks Faith with a puzzled look on her face." "It's okay to forgive," he answers.

"Forgive? I'm not so sure how. You don't understand, Dad, how I feel about this situation."

"Well, enlighten me."

"Yes, I am grateful that Hezekiah saved me, but a part of me also wanted him to die in battle."

Frank frowns. "Why?"

"I thought that he was going to requite my mom's death by dying in battle."

"Hold on," says Frank, motioning with his hands for her to pause. "How can you say that when he just saved you?"

"I still think he should pay for what he has done," says Faith voice rising and nostrils flaring.

"Faith, I know that what he did was horrible, but you must forgive him."

"Why? Why should I forgive the man who killed my mother?" "Because God commands it. Look to Matthew 6:14-15: 'For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father

will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Faith sucks her teeth. “But that’s not fair! Why would God do that? Why would God not forgive me for not forgiving Hezekiah?”

“Because Jesus was able to forgive you of your sins. Jesus paid the penalty of your sin-debt in full. Without God’s help, you would be on your way to hell.”

“I know that, Dad. I have already accepted Christ into my heart.” “But is He Lord of your life?” her father poses.

Faith pauses for a second and contemplates his statement. She has never thought of Jesus being in charge of her life. She always glanced over the topic whenever she read the Bible. She and so many others in her city.

“Not only that, Faith, but I have never seen so much hatred in your countenance. You wanting Hezekiah to die a horrible death by the hands of Warlord is no different than the former Hezekiah wanting your mother, my wife, to die.” They’re both quiet for a moment.

“Why are you defending Hezekiah so much? What did he ever do for you?” asks Faith, snarling, her face red.

“He brought you back alive,” he snaps.

Faith storms off to her room, slamming the door behind her. She yells. “I cannot believe that my dad is defending Hezekiah after all he has done,” she says to no one. Faith jumps into bed, tired and frustrated, but wide awake. She closes her eyes to pray and feels a nudge from the Holy Spirit. “*Faith, am I Lord of your life?*”

“Yes, you are my Savior,” she responds dutifully.

“*Am I Lord of your life?*” asks God.

“Of course you are, I think,” she offers in honest response.

“*Faith, you have to let go of what happened. I know you miss your mother, but your mother is with Me. She is enjoying herself here in Heaven. The hatred you hold against Hezekiah is killing you.*” “Okay, Lord, I get it. But it’s not fair.” With that, Faith lays in bed, fighting mentally with God.



Chapter 7:

HEZEKIAH IS DEAD!?

THE NEXT DAY, FAITH AWAKENS NOT HAVING much sleep. She gets up and prepares to do a few errands. She quickly cooks Hezekiah's food almost to the point of it being burned, then takes the plate to his room. The light pours in through a window, making Hezekiah appear like an angel in the sunlight. Faith looks at Hezekiah with wonder, but then thoughts of her mother pour into her mind. Hatred once again consumes her soul. A bitter look twists her face as anger cascades from her pores. Faith storms fully into the bedroom, slams the plate of food down onto Hezekiah's table, and marches out of the room and out of the house. Hezekiah opens his eyes at the disturbance. Frank awakens and steps out into the hallway to see what's going on. He watches Faith's stormy exit and moves to follow her.

A few minutes later, Faith is across the street and walks towards the medical store. The young lady walks into the wholesale medical

supply store and starts looking for supplies. She stamps past the store attendant.

“What’s wrong with you, Faith?” asks the clerk.

Faith keeps walking as she searches for the supplies she wants. Conflicted in her heart as to whether or not to buy the goods, she pauses to think. “Why should I even buy this stuff. This guy is a vagrant who killed my mother. He saved my life, but he killed my mom.” As she struggles within her heart, she picks up a bottle of medicine Hezekiah needs. “Maybe I should just let him die,” she adds under her breath. Faith puts down the medicine and notices a mirror to her left. She gazes into it and notices something strange. The mirror’s image is distorted, and it is still changing shape.

Before she can make any sense of what is happening, an armored hand thrusts out of the mirror and grabs Faith by her shirt. Faith screams. She tears away and sprints down the aisle. The dark samurai emerges from the mirror and chases after her, destroying everything in his way. Glass shatters and shelves fly into the air strewing their contents all over.

“What the heck is going on!” shouts the store attendant.

Faith runs to the front door, smacks into someone hard, and falls to the ground. She looks up to see her father standing there. “Faith, what’s wrong!” he exclaims. Frank looks up, and the store attendant zooms past them, fear clearly motivating his mad rush. The black knight charges toward father and daughter.

Frank yanks Faith off the ground, and they get moving as fast as they can. The black knight explodes through the door after them, sending shards of glass flying in all directions. Frank and Faith stumble to the ground but still try to get away from the knight. The demon grabs Faith by the arm and yanks her to himself. She screams with terror. Pain shoots across Warlord’s chest and he stumbles back. The Spirit Warrior attacks with a slew of sword strikes, causing the samurai to drop Faith from his grasp. Hezekiah hammers the dark knight with multiple blows as they clash sword to sword in the middle of the street.

The knight spin kicks Hezekiah in the stomach, causing him to slide backward. The Swordsman motions for Frank and Faith to leave.

“That’s our cue, let’s go!” says Frank.

“No! Wait!” shouts Faith.

“Let’s go, honey. Let’s GO!”

Hezekiah refocuses on the dark warrior after seeing Faith and Frank leave.

“Is that all you got?” laughs the demon.

Hezekiah dashes towards the dark knight and determinedly attacks. Swords clang as they exchange blades. The Swordsman gets the upper hand the further the two fight. Hezekiah jumps and goes in for the kill, but he’s struck in the face and kicked in his stomach by three black knights that have materialized out of nowhere. The three knights triple-team Hezekiah, thrusting their killer swords from all directions. Hezekiah fights for his life as he struggles to counter each blow. Then the Spirit Warrior is struck like a freight train, and he’s knocked back through the air. He tumbles across the ground upon returning to the earth. Hezekiah gets up, but it’s hard for him to move. He feels his left wrist where blood now pours from. He’s been sliced in the course of the conflict. He quickly tears his clothing and ties some of it around his wrist but it does almost nothing.

Faith stops in shock as she sees blood pouring out of Hezekiah like a fountain. She remembers Ms. Collins and the rest of the news crew and how helpless they were before they died. Faith cries out for Hezekiah as guilt and condemnation fill her soul. She is getting her wish of Hezekiah’s death.

Faith runs towards Hezekiah. “Faith, no! Stop!” shouts Frank as he quickly yanks his daughter back and restrains her.

“He’s gonna die if we don’t do anything!”

“Faith, stop! There’s nothing we can do.”

Hezekiah struggles to stand but is only able to kneel. His body filling with prickly pain, he starts to pray. “Father God, I don’t know if

my time is up, but I do pray that you give me the strength to protect the ones I love in...in...Jesus's name!"

From the sky, a beam of light suddenly shoots down and engulfs the man of God. Still kneeling from the loss of blood, Hezekiah becomes filled with power. The Spirit Warrior explodes with energy and zooms toward the dark knights. He assaults them with supersonic attacks. The knights are overwhelmed as Hezekiah slices at them from every direction. The attacks from the Spirit Warrior carry bursts of lightning with every strike. Hezekiah obliterates two knights as he battles. Dense with power, Hezekiah strikes the third knight with a gigantic blast of fire mixed with lightning. As the blast surges, the knight powers his way through the flames to strike Hezekiah down with his sword.

"Hezekiah, look out!" shouts Faith.

The knight closes in to kill the Swordsman. The Spirit Warrior relaunches his attack with a more massive burst of blue fire. It rips free, and the knight is caught by the power of the explosion. The demon is frozen in midair as he disintegrates into the flames. The blast is replaced by a streak of fire running down the street, and Hezekiah collapses to the ground dying as he watches Warlord escape. Eyelids becoming heavy, he closes his eyes and dies.



Chapter 8:

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS PART ONE

FRANK AND FAITH RUSH HEZEKIAH BACK TO their house. He calls 911 for assistance and immediately attempt to, stop the bleeding, and a blood transfusion once they have him settled. The paramedics arrive and they manage to bring Hezekiah back to life, but he's in critical condition. As they continue to work on him, thoughts of guilt fill Faith's mind.

This is what you wanted, isn't it? she berates herself. *How could you let this happen? It's your fault that he is in this condition. You led that dark knight back home. It is your fault this man is dying,* she challenges further.

"Faith! Get your head in the game. We must save Hezekiah's life. I need you to focus," says Frank, frantic.

Faith tries to clear her mind, but the thoughts keep coming. *You are a murderer. You wanted him to die from the start. You aren't even halfway*

trying to save his life. After he went out of his way to save you, you kill him to return the favor? You are truly evil.

“Faith, why are you slowing down?” Frank questions and commands. He looks at his daughter and notices that something is not right. “Baby girl, are you okay?”

“No, Dad, I’m not,” she answers as she continues to work.

“Tell me what’s wrong?”

“It’s all my fault, Dad, it’s my fault.”

“Don’t think about that now, Faith. Clear your mind and focus on saving this man’s life.”

Together, they finally manage to stop the bleeding and perform an emergency blood transfusion. As they get Hezekiah stable, Faith breaks down and starts crying. The paramedics depart upon seeing the sad scene. “Faith, what’s going on?” her father asks.

“It’s my fault, Dad, that Hezekiah died,” Faith moans as she sits down with her hands covering her eyes.

“Faith, what are you talking about?” Frank questions as he sits down next to her and holds her.

“I led that evil knight back here.”

“What do you mean?”

“When Warlord attacked me, he said that he was attracted to the hatred in my heart. He said that it glowed bright like a beacon. He must have used that to track us here to kill us. If I had let go of the bitterness inside my soul, Hezekiah would not be in this state.”

“Faith, you cannot blame yourself for what that demon did. These monsters would have found us one way or another. So don’t blame yourself for what Warlord did. Hezekiah almost died twice, saving you from death. It would break his heart if he knew you were blaming yourself for what happened to him. Remember, he is still in sorrow for killing your mother, so the last thing Hezekiah wants is for you to blame yourself for what happens to him.” Faith blinks tears out of her eyes.

“I didn’t realize he felt guilt for my mother’s death.” A light clicks on in Faith’s mind and she realizes what she must do next.



Chapter 9:

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS: PART TWO

A WEEK LATER, AS EVENING FALLS, DARK AND stormy clouds gather, and rain begins to patter against the glass. Hezekiah awakes in pain. Looking at his surroundings, he is surprised by what he sees. Faith is in the doorway, just looking at him. The man of God looks at her and then looks down.

“Hezekiah,” says Faith softly.

He looks up without saying a word. Faith walks toward him and sits down on the bed with the man of God. Hezekiah tries to move over to make space.

“It’s okay.” Faith reaches for and holds his hand with both of hers. Thunder booms outside of the window as Faith gazes steadily into the Spirit Warrior’s eyes.

“I forgive you, Hezekiah.”

“Wait, what?” Completely in shock and not believing her statement, Hezekiah doesn’t understand what he hears.

“I forgive you, Hezekiah.”

“But why? No. I don’t deserve your forgiveness,” he says, shaking his head.

“Let me talk,” she says softly. “Last week when you saved me from Warlord, I secretly wanted you to die. I hated you on such a level that it consumed me with bitterness. I was having body pains and headaches because I would not forgive you. God told me to forgive you, and I chose not to, and I paid the price for it,” she says voice cracking. “Before I was attacked at the pharmacy, I thought that I should let you die here. So, I decided not to buy the medicine that I thought you needed. I had no idea that you would spring into action so soon to protect me again,” she says as she blinks away a few tears. When you faced off against the three armored knights outside that store, I got my previous wish granted. It didn’t feel good. It felt like a knife plunged into my heart. I was so consumed with guilt when I saw you die.”

Faith chokes up as she fails to hold back tears.

“When I saw you die, I kept having negative thoughts about me being a murderer. And how it was my fault that you died. That didn’t feel good, Hezekiah. I felt horrible. It was condemnation on a whole other level. I felt that your death was my fault, and that is something I felt I could never undo.

“Hezekiah, I know you were a different person back then when you gave the order to have my mom killed, but even if you remained the same, God calls His people to forgive. I was reading the Bible for the first time in a while—really reading it. It says in Ephesians 4:32, ‘Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.’ I understand now that we are all sinners saved by grace. God forgave us when we were at our worst. So it would be selfish not to forgive you when God has forgiven me. So I forgive you, Hezekiah. Not just for you, but for the Lord, and for me.”

Hezekiah eyes glisten as Faith's forgiveness washes over him. "I don't know what to say," he utters as he chokes up. He rubs his eyes, feeling water pour down his face.

"Will you forgive me?" Faith asks.

"Forgive you for what?" he asks voice slightly hoarse.

"For the way I have treated you."

"You don't have to apologize to me, Faith. I don't deserve an apology from you."

"Will you forgive me?" she insists, voice slightly cracking.

Hezekiah's face softens. "Of course, Faith, I forgive you."

Faith gets up and quietly leaves the room. Hezekiah falls into a soul calming sleep as the rain patters on the window.



Chapter 10:

SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH

WHEN HEZEKIAH WAKES UP THE NEXT MORNING, the sun is shining and birds are singing. A cool mist remains from the previous night's storm. Hezekiah cautiously moves his body and discovers he is fully healed for the first time in a while. Because of Hezekiah's supernatural abilities, he heals far faster than the average human. He sits up just as Frank enters the room.

"Hezekiah! How are you doing?" the doctor greets him.

"I'm doing great. In fact, I feel a whole lot better!"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm healed, Doc."

"Wait now, let's not jump to conclusions. Let me run a few tests first."

An hour later, the doctor's tests reveal that Hezekiah is wonderfully

recovered. “Okay. How is it that you healed so fast?” says Frank while he removes all of the electrodes and needles attached to Hezekiah.

The man of God simply says, “With God, all things are possible.”

“Okay,” says Frank, full of wonder. He leaves the room and notices Faith moving toward the kitchen. “Good morning, Faith.”

“Hey, Dad. How are you doing?”

“I’m doing great. How are you holding up?”

“I’m doing well.” She makes strong eye contact. “How is Hezekiah doing?” Frank is speechless. To hear his daughter’s mellow attitude towards Hezekiah is a transformation almost like night and day. A week ago, she wanted him dead. Now she is genuinely concerned about him.

“Hezekiah is doing great. What is this new concern about him I hear in your voice?”

“Well, he died not too long ago.”

“You almost died too. And you a week ago you wanted Hezekiah to—”

“Dad, stop!”

Frank is silent for a moment, and Faith tries her best to hold back tears. “Please, Dad. Don’t remind me. I thought about what you said. About how God calls us to forgive. I know I haven’t been the best person in the world. And I know that the desire for Hezekiah to die was in my heart. However, I want to be forgiven for praying for this man’s death. So please, let me be.”

In answer, Frank walks over and hugs his daughter.

“Dad, God has helped me forgive Hezekiah for what he did. It took a lot, but He finally got to me.”

“You’re not kidding. You nearly died twice.”

“I guess Ms. Collins was right. If I didn’t forgive, it would kill m...” With the thought of Ms. Collins, Faith chokes up. Frank embraces his daughter again. “I’ll be okay, Dad. I just need a moment.”

Hezekiah walks out of his room, standing tall. Both Faith and Frank look in his direction slightly surprised. “Wow, hey, Hezekiah,” says Faith, voice slightly rising. “I didn’t know you would be up and about this soon,” Faith remarks, smiling.

“My thoughts exactly,” says Frank.

“I thank you for everything you have done for me, but I must be going now,” Hezekiah announces.

“Why?” Frank says with a slight head shake.

“I’ve put you through so much already. Now that I’m fully healed, I don’t want to be a burden to you anymore.

“Where are you going?” asks Frank, putting his hands on his hips.

“I’ll be in town.”

“In town where?” asks Faith, squinting her eyes. “

In the City of Light, I lived in the environment around me.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Faith questions directly.

“That’s a funny way of saying that you’re going to live on the street,” says Frank.

“No, no, no. You’re not going to leave if your only alternative is the street,” Faith adds.

“I’ve lived on the street before. I’ll be able to survive.”

“How will you eat or drink?” asks Faith.

“I’ll hunt for food. And I will get water from the river.”

“My goodness. You really have come a long way from palace life,” says Faith. Hezekiah is speechless with the thought.

“Look, Hezekiah, you are welcome to stay here as long as you need to. You do not have to waste time looking for a place to stay when it is right here in front of you,” says Frank.

“I’ll have to pray about it,” replies the Spirit Warrior.

“You mean to tell me you have to pray about whether or not to stay here or stay on the street?” Frank asks. “First of all, I’m insulted. Second, there is nothing for you living on the street. Here, you have three meals a day and a place to sleep.”

“Hezekiah, I know that we have not been the best hosts. Especially when we found out about... Anyway, it would be a real honor if you stayed with us,” Faith reveals.

Hezekiah’s eyes glisten as warmth expands in his chest. *First, I’m forgiven, and now I’m an honored guest? I don’t deserve this.* Out loud he

says, “Okay, I’ll stay the night. However, it’s only to pray about whether or not I should stay here. I’ve put you two through enough. I don’t want to put you through any more pain.”

Frank chimes up. “Hezekiah, stop right there. You have to remember that you saved my daughter’s life twice. So don’t think you are a burden. You are a help and not a hindrance. For all we know, that evil knight may still be after Faith. We need you here with us. Speaking of that, do you think Warlord is still in the area?”

“I don’t know,” Hezekiah muses. “That armada didn’t follow us back. However, that brings up another question. Would Warlord be interested in this city? This place seems spiritually fine.”

“Hezekiah, we need your help. We need your help here in this town,” Faith urgently implores. “This city has just been attacked by a demonic foe. Who knows what may happen next? For all we know, God caused you to be found by us the way you were so that you could be here in our time of need.”

“How do you know that attack wasn’t just an isolated incident?” asks Hezekiah.

“Hezekiah, this city is not as good as you think it is. Did you forget how you saved me from the four men who tried to rape me at my dad’s front door? The same stuff that went on in the city of Phoenicia is the same stuff that happens in this city. Sin may not be on a grand scale here like in Phoenicia, but this city is headed in that direction.”

“I beg to differ. I don’t see open debauchery going on in broad daylight, like your dad and I saw on TV with the Festival of Abundance.”

“It’s not that, Hezekiah,” Frank says. “This city has long since abandoned following the truth of the Bible, and everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes,” he continues, adding further support to Faith’s statement.

Hezekiah is speechless for a moment, grateful that they even want him to stay in their home. However, it is something he needs to pray about.

“I’m not leaving the city, but I do need to see the conditions for myself. If I stay here, just know that I may be out at all hours of the day or night, depending on what God wants me to do. What I am doing may draw danger to this house. I don’t want to put you two in that type of danger.” Hezekiah frowns and shakes his head. “That’s it, I’m not staying here,” says Hezekiah.

Faith stands her ground. “What happened to praying overnight about it? Furthermore, you don’t have the right to decide whether or not we are going to be in danger. “If you’re doing something for the Lord, the danger is always going to follow. And if the Lord is moving in this town, I want to be a part of it. So how dare you try to deny us the right to be a part of what the Lord is doing because of a little danger.” She shakes her finger in his face. “Did you forget that I’m a reporter? I live in the face of danger by the nature of my job. I experienced danger long before I met you, Hezekiah.”

Frank chimes in. “Yes, Hezekiah. I’ve also been in countless life and death situations just from being a missionary doctor. The Lord’s work is dangerous. As soon as I became a child of God, I abandoned a life of safety for a life of adventure. I’ve been working for God for a long time. No peril is going to stop me now.”

“Okay. I’m sorry for trying to baby you. With that being said, we need to find out if this city is next on Warlord’s invasion list, learn why he’d be targeting this city, and figure out how to stop him,” says Hezekiah.

“What a better way to do that than to take a tour of our beloved city,” says Frank.

“That’s a great idea, Dad. We can tour the city today and go to church tomorrow.”

“Church? There is a church in this town? I haven’t been to church in a long time,” says Hezekiah.

“Really? Well, you’re in luck. Because there’s a church close by,” Faith states.

“Yeah, it’s fairly close by. It’s a megachurch. That church will give you a good idea of what this city is like,” says Frank.

“Do you attend?” Hezekiah asks Frank.

“No, but Faith does. I don’t know why my daughter goes there either because something about that place is not right. As a matter of fact, there is something wrong with a lot of the churches in the area.”

“Don’t mind him, Hezekiah. He hasn’t gone to church in a while, ever since...”

They all pause for a moment knowing the end of the sentence.

“Well, we’ll all go together tomorrow,” says Faith.

That church is not what you think it is. Frank thinks.



Chapter 11:

SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH PART TWO

FRANK, HEZEKIAH, AND FAITH GET READY TO TAKE a tour of the city. Hezekiah takes a long shower for the first time in a while. It was Frank who gave him sponge baths because he did not want his daughter to touch another man in that way. Standing under the hot stream of water, Hezekiah prays: “Lord, if this town is the place you want me to be, send me some confirmation that I should stay here, in Jesus’s name, Amen.”

Hezekiah gets out of the shower and notices that God had healed him of every single wound. “Thank you, God,” he says to himself as he looks and feels fully restored from all hurt, including emotional. When Faith forgave him, Hezekiah sensed that the relationship between them healed too. Although he thinks they can never be together romantically because of the death of her mother, they could, at the very least, be

associates or maybe even friends. At this point, Hezekiah is not hoping for anything more. The Spirit Warrior gets dressed in his orange prison pants and white shirt, and steps out into the guest room where Frank is waiting for him.

“Hey, Hezekiah,” says Frank to gain the man’s quick attention.

“Yeah?”

“Go into my room and look inside the closet and find some clothes for yourself. You have been wearing those same prison pants for the past few weeks. You look like an escaped convict.”

“How do you know that I’m not an escaped convict?” He says with a smirk.

“Because my daughter, the investigative reporter that she is, contacted the officials at the City of Light while you were in the shower. The receptionist on the phone spoke very highly of you and said that you saved their city from destruction.”

“Really? She said that?” Hezekiah says with a wide grin.

“Yeah. In fact, when Faith mentioned that you were here staying with us, not only did the receptionist want to speak with you, but the city council had her transfer the call to them. They wanted to speak with you too.” Hezekiah tears up a little as he hears about the love people his previous city are showering him with. “The city council praised you highly and said that you are truly a mighty man of God and capable of facing down any threat with God’s help. They also said that if you were here, that would mean that our current city must need your help in some way. You must have really done some work in that city for them to praise you so highly.”

“It was by God’s grace. What else did they say?” asks Hezekiah with a lightness in his chest.

“They also mentioned that Jason was doing well as the new Spirit Warrior of the city.”

Hezekiah feels as if his insides are vibrating hearing about Jason.

“Did they mention anyone else?” he inquires.

“Yeah, they mentioned that Immanuel was doing well, and so was Mr. Pan.”

Warmth radiates throughout his body as he closes his eyes and smiles. He blinks a tear away as his eyes glisten. “Did the conversation continue?”

“They prayed with Faith and me, and prayed for you. We told the town leaders about what was going on here in this city, and they said that you were the man that God would use to save us.”

This is the first confirmation the man of God receives about staying in this city. “Did they say anything else?” asks Hezekiah.

“Man, you were in the shower for a while. We were going to call for you, but they said to let you know that they are praying for you and this city. They said they love you and to make God proud,” answers Frank.

A prickle in his nose and behind Hezekiah’s eyes develops. The tears in his eyes grow a little bigger as he looks away for a second.

“What was I saying?” Frank corrects himself. “Oh yeah, go to my closet and find some clothes for yourself. I’m not taking you out with you looking like an ex-con.”

“Yes, sir.” Hezekiah goes to Frank’s room and does as instructed. He sees some white, loose-fitting pants. They look like a cross between workout gear and pajamas. He also finds a white tee shirt and a yellow, short sleeve collared shirt. Hezekiah steps out of the room, and both Frank and Faith look puzzled.

“You have a strange sense of style, Hezekiah,” says Faith. “You look like an upside-down banana.”

“What’s wrong with this?” asks Hezekiah.

“Nothing, but why did you pick out my dad’s martial art pants?”

“Wait, what? You do martial arts, Frank?”

“Yeah. I’m a first-degree black belt,” he answers, a hint of pride crossing his face.

“That’s amazing,” says Hezekiah.

“I’ve been doing martial arts for years. It’s the only hobby I have time for outside of the medical ministry. It’s a dangerous world out there. I want to be able to handle myself.”

“Well, that explains a lot,” Hezekiah says with a nod of his head.

“Oh, by the way, my daughter does it too. She is not as good as I am, but I show her a few moves from time to time.”

“That’s interesting to know too.”

When Hezekiah starts to walk out the door, Faith asks, “Hezekiah, aren’t you forgetting something?”

“Forgetting what?”

“Your shoes?”

Frank and Faith say, “Oh, yeah. I completely forgot.” Hezekiah goes to get his golden spirit shoes and puts them on.

“Are you going to wear those all the time?” asks Faith.

“Yes, I am. I have to be ready at all times for what God calls me to do.”



Chapter 12:

THE GRAND TOUR

FRANK, HEZEKIAH, AND FAITH SET OUT ON THEIR grand tour of the city. The plan is to travel by jeep so they can see the essential sites of the city faster. Before they get underway with the tour, they stop by the pharmacy for supplies.

“Well, hello, my good friend. How are you doing today?” asks the pharmacist.

“I’m doing fine, how are you? I haven’t seen you since the incident with that black knight,” says Frank.

“Yeah, don’t remind me. I still have nightmares about that,” he replies face turning slightly pale.

“Really?”

“Yeah, man. Is that friend of yours still around?” he asks, looking over the counter in an attempt to look out the door.

“Who?” asks Frank.

“You know. The one with the sword,” says the pharmacist.

“Yes. In fact, he’s coming through the doorway now.” Hezekiah and Faith walk into the pharmacy together to see if Frank needs any help with anything.

“Hey, you with the yellow shirt,” says the store owner. Hezekiah looks up. “Thanks for saving our lives the other day. Many people may not appreciate what you did, or even know what that commotion was about, but I want to say thank you for saving us. If you were not here, we all would have died.” That is the second confirmation Hezekiah needs to convince him to stay in the city. “Hey, young lady, your boyfriend here really saved the day. You got quite a man on your hands.”

“Oh, we’re not together,” says Faith and Hezekiah at the same time.

“You’re not? You could have fooled me. The way you two move around each other, just by walking through the door, I can tell that something is going on between you.” Neither one of them says a word in response to the pharmacist’s comment.

“I really appreciate what you did. I’m curious, though. Why did that monster attack you, miss? It seemed like that knight was determined to kill you and only you at first. It didn’t go after you, sir, until later.”

“I don’t know,” lies Faith. “It’s like that monster was drawn to me.”

“Whatever the case, lover boy here will fight for you to the death.” His words strike Hezekiah and Faith speechless again.

“Well, I got what I need. Let’s go,” says Frank. Hezekiah and Faith walk out of the shop now that the errand is finished.

“Frank, before you go, I’ve got to know something,” says the pharmacist.

“Yeah?”

“Is that the man you found on the side of the road?”

“Yeah, it is. Why?”

“It looks like lover boy is putting the moves on your daughter!” he laughs.

“Man, shut up,” Frank says as he walks out the store. He gets back into the jeep and finds Faith and Hezekiah having an in-depth conversation.

“So, what are you two talking about?” asks Frank raising an eyebrow.

“We are trying to figure out why that knight attacked Faith. Why was the evil knight drawn to her and not anyone else in the pharmacy,” Hezekiah poses.

“That’s a good question. Maybe it’s because you were the only one who survived the attack on Phoenicia,” says Frank trying to cover for his daughter. “We’ll have to find out later. But for now, let’s start our tour of the neighborhood.”

“No, wait, Dad. Hezekiah, I have to be honest with you.” Her cheeks start to burn. “The reason why the knight attacked me is that he was drawn to me.”

“We know that, but why?” asks Hezekiah.

“Because...my hatred for you was strong.”

Hezekiah is quiet for a moment, then begins to leave the jeep. Faith yanks him back down, and Hezekiah looks at her. “The truth is, when Warlord attacked me, he said that the hatred in my heart glowed like a beacon. He and his dark samurai used the hatred I had for you to follow me here. Hezekiah, I’m so sorry. My bitterness against you practically got you killed.”

“Faith, you don’t need to apologize to me. I’ve already forgiven you. After what I put you through, I don’t blame you.”

Faith lets the burden of guilt go, and she feels a weight lifting from her soul. They smile at each other for a moment.

“Now, with that settled, let’s take our tour of the neighborhood,” says Frank.



Chapter 13:

THE GRAND TOUR PART TWO

THE FIRST STOP ON TOUR IS THE CHURCH THEY plan to attend for services tomorrow. It is a famous megachurch in the area. Next, they tour other famous landmarks in the city. Then they briefly visit the entrance of a massive underground cave that Faith did a story on. Frank, Faith and Hezekiah take a picture in front of it. After that, they hit a nature trail in the mountains, near an old garrison. Frank notices that Faith and Hezekiah are talking a lot and seem to be enjoying each other's company, laughing and teasing each other while they talk. "What are you two talking about that has your attention so captivated?" asks Frank with curiosity shining in his eyes.

"We're just talking about the Bible, Dad," says Faith with a happy smile on her face.

“You two are giggling about the Bible?” says Frank, seeing what is obviously going on.

“Yeah, Dad. We’re just talking about how the Bible relates to our lives today.”

“Okay,” says Frank as he walks ahead.

Hezekiah and Faith lag behind as they continue laughing and talking about Jesus, the Bible, the world, and other subjects that come to mind. Hezekiah notices how beautiful she looks in the sunlight. To Faith, Hezekiah appears more and more appealing the more she gets to know him. Their eyes are locked on each other as they continue to talk about their likes, dislikes, and fears.

“So, what is one of your fears?” asks Hezekiah.

“It’s embarrassing to say.”

“Come on, what is it?”

“Well, I’m afraid of people in mascot costumes.”

Hezekiah pauses for a second. “What?” Hezekiah tries to hold a chuckle back, but then starts to laugh.

“I told you it was stupid. Don’t laugh at me,” says Faith with a smile. “Tell me one of your crazy fears.”

“I don’t have small fears like I use to have.”

“What do you mean?”

“Some time ago, God put me in a situation where every single fear I had, I had to face or die.”

“How did He do that?”

“Have you ever heard of the Cave of Shadows?”

“I’ve heard of it, but I didn’t know it was real.”

“Yeah, it is,” Hezekiah states surely, “It was a fight or die.”

“Okay, what did you have to deal with.”

“I had to deal with dogs.”

Faith bursts out laughing.

“Hey, that’s not funny,” says Hezekiah with a smile on his face.

“No, no. I’m laughing because if you had met us a few years ago, you would have been terrified to come into my house.”

“Why?”

“Because my dad had a cute little dog named Skipper. He would have chased you out of the house, snapping at your heels,” says Faith as she keeps laughing.

“Okay, you got me,” says Hezekiah with a smile.

“So, what’s your biggest fear?” asks Hezekiah.

Faith pauses for a moment. “I don’t know what to say about that.” She looks away because her biggest fear used to be losing her mother on one of her parent’s many missionary journeys. Even though the bitterness towards Hezekiah has left her soul, she still doesn’t like to talk about her mother’s passing. It is also the one thing that keeps her from advancing beyond just being friends with Hezekiah. She feels to go any further would be a way of betraying her mother. Not wanting to ruin the moment, she switches to her next greatest fear. “My greatest fear right now is losing my father. What’s your greatest fear, Hezekiah?”

They both stop walking for a second. Sensing the pain in her voice, Hezekiah looks straight into her eyes and says softly, “Losing the ones I love.”

Faith’s eyes brighten with surprise as a quiet moment passes between them.

“Hey!” Frank yells from across the path, making Faith and Hezekiah jump. “Come on you two. You’re lagging behind,” shouts Frank from a distance.

Faith and Hezekiah have been so wrapped up in their conversation that they were not aware that Frank is so far ahead. They catch up to him and finish the hike through the forest.

The trio moves on from there, heading back to town. Frank, Faith, and Hezekiah make their way to the city entrance. At the city gate, there is a tall statue of an armored king wearing a gold crown on a warhorse. The king has a sword in his hand raised high. The horse is also rearing with his front legs in the air. At the base of the statue is a plaque with an inscription. The writing reads: “When the sky gets

dark, and the enemy comes in like a flood, a champion will arise and lead the city to victory.”

“What did you want me to see out here, Frank? There is nothing here but a statue,” says Hezekiah.

“Hezekiah, this statue is an important city symbol. Many of the city leaders use this saying as an allegory to the stabilization of finances and strong leadership. When this city was first starting out, people used this statue and its inscription to motivate them to become dynamic leaders and push economic commerce to new heights,” the doctor explains.

“Alright, and I don’t mean to be frank, but what does the symbol for city commerce have to do with my mission?”

Frank stares the Spirit Warrior in the eyes. “Hezekiah, don’t you get it? I thought that someone with your spiritual prowess would see the significance of this saying.”

“No, I see what you are saying. When the enemy comes in like a flood, God will deliver His people to victory.”

“You don’t fully get what I’m saying. Hezekiah. According to the story, the city’s founders tell, the statue appeared here overnight. No one knows who built it,” says Frank.

Both Hezekiah and Faith are silent. “But that’s just supposed to be folklore. It may have just been delivered by someone,” says Faith.

“However, it got here, it was delivered for a reason,” says Frank.

“So, what are you saying?” asks Hezekiah.

“What I’m implying is that this statue is not just a symbol of hope, but a prophecy. Hezekiah, I believe strongly that you are the armored king!” Hezekiah stands speechless. “You were a king not too long ago who now wields the physical manifestation of the Sword of the Spirit. You also got boots from God not too long ago. And you just rescued my daughter from the invasion of Phoenicia and the attack at the pharmacy. Hezekiah, the ‘enemy,’ is the demonic army sweeping through cities like a flood. That flood is on its way here. You are the champion risen to save the town. You are the only one who can save the city from destruction.” Everyone is silent for a brief moment after Frank’s speech.

“Wait a minute. How is that the case? I barely defeated three of these armored soldiers and died in the process. I’m supposed to now fight a countless army of them? There is no way I can do that in my current state.”

“That’s just it, Hezekiah. In your current state, you can’t.” Seeing the confusion on Hezekiah’s face, Frank continues, “Remember the letter you got from God?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“Remember what that letter said?”

“Yeah. Oh!” Hezekiah places a hand over his mouth.

“We need to help you find the full armor of God for you to defeat the army that’s heading this way.”

“How do we do that?” asks Faith. “

According to the letter, Hezekiah received the boots because he already passed a test to get them. If we look to the Scriptures, we can find out what it takes for him to receive the full armor. With God’s help, I’m sure we will be able to get that armor for you,” he says confidently, looking Hezekiah head on.

Hezekiah thinks to himself, *Wow, God. You speak loud and clear without even speaking at all.* “Okay, that settles it,” he says to Frank and Faith. “This is the city of my assignment.” Hezekiah looks at the statue for a moment. There is something about it that draws his attention. The crown shines brightly in the afternoon sun. It seems to call to him, wanting him to come closer. Suddenly Hezekiah has a strong urge to take the crown from the king’s head.

“Hezekiah, are you coming?” asks Faith.

The Spirit Warrior snaps out of his reverie and notices that Faith and Frank have walked away. “Oh, okay, I’m coming,” Hezekiah says as he quickly catches up. He looks back one last time at the statue and then leaves with the group. They get into the jeep and leave the city’s outer gate.

The trio head back into the city. The sun is beginning to set as they explore the rest of the town. Frank notices that Faith sits with

Hezekiah in the back seat of the car. They talk and talk as Frank drives down the street. Even though Faith does not want to go any further with Hezekiah than just being a friend, she can't help but be drawn to him. Convincing herself that the feelings she has bubbling inside for Hezekiah are just strong feelings of friendship, she relaxes and allows herself to talk freely. Hezekiah is also drawn to her presence.

Frank decides it's time to stop and get some dinner, so they all agree on a nearby café. In the restaurant, they place their orders and start eating. "This is a really nice café," says Hezekiah as he eats his scone.

"Are you serious?" says Frank. "Surely, you have seen better."

"I have, but it's still very nice," says Hezekiah.

Ever the reporter, Faith gets to the heart of business. "So, what does the Bible say about acquiring the rest of the armor of God? Also, what other pieces do you need to complete it?"

Frank takes the lead in answering her question. "Well, Hezekiah already has the shoes for spreading the gospel of peace, and obviously he has the Sword of the Spirit. What he needs now is the Belt of Truth, the Body Armor of Righteousness, the Shield of Faith, and the Helmet of Salvation," he says.

"How does he find these things?" asks Faith.

"According to the letter, I have to go through a trial," answers Hezekiah.

"What does God mean by that?" asks Faith.

"I don't know, but the Bible says that each part of the armor has to do with a certain action," says Frank.

"I know that, but what I don't understand is if I have completed a lot of these actions already. What else do I need to do to acquire this armor?" asks Hezekiah.

"Well, God did say that you were going to go through a trial by fire to get this stuff. That must mean He will guide you through it," says Faith.

"Thanks, Faith," says Hezekiah.

“I just wonder what kind of trial this will be. Make sure that you do everything the Bible says about the different parts of the armor. Have faith when you need to have faith. Tell the truth when you need to tell the truth,” says Faith.

“But what about the other two? The Body Armor of Righteousness and the Helmet of Salvation? I know I’m already saved, and I am the righteousness of God thru Jesus. So how do I get those two pieces of the armor?” asks Hezekiah.

“God will make a way. Just trust Him,” Faith answers. Hezekiah smiles.

“You sure do live up to your name, Faith. I’m glad to have a friend like you.”

“Well, thank you,” she says, smiling brightly.

“I’m glad to have friends like both of you.”

“Thanks,” says Frank. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to go to the restroom. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

The doctor leaves the table while Hezekiah and Faith continue to talk about a wide range of topics from their favorite food to their favorite movies. As they talk, they can’t take their eyes off each other. During their conversation, without thinking, Hezekiah holds her hand. Faith’s heart jumps and her pulse starts to race. However, thoughts of her mom come to her mind and she frowns and stiffens. She slowly pulls her hand back.

“I’m sorry, Faith. I should not have done that.”

“No, it’s fine, it’s okay.”

“No, really, I should not have done that.” Hezekiah quickly gets up and goes to the restroom himself, passing Frank on his way out.

Frank sits down with his daughter. “What just happened?” he asks. “I go to the restroom and you two are happy campers and enjoying each other’s company, and I come back and both of you have glum faces. I just passed Hezekiah, and he didn’t look happy. What happened?”

“We were talking and having a good time, but then he tried to hold my hand.”

“Well, the way you two have been carrying on today, I’m not surprised he tried to hold your hand.”

“What do you mean?”

“You two have been talking, laughing, and looking into each other’s eyes all day. You look like the perfect couple without being one.”

“I didn’t know it was that obvious,” says Faith, as she starts to ponder what her dad said.

“Yeah. I was kind of bewildered by the thought of you two being a couple at first. However, the kind of man that he is now, the way he puts his life on the line to protect you, and the way you two seem to click, I decided not to worry about it. So, what happened?”

“All of that is well and good, but I still can’t get over the fact that he is responsible for my mother’s death. I’ve forgiven him, but I can’t be with him any more than being a friend,” Faith speaks.

Hezekiah is on his way back to the table when he hears Faith’s last statement. He gasps as his eyes glisten. Painful tightness grips his throat as his hands start to tremble. His eyes run water like a stream as sadness settles in his heart. He returns to the restroom to compose himself. “I should have known not to have gotten too close to Faith. I’ve already put her through too much pain. I should not have been so presumptuous.”

Hezekiah continues to think negatively about himself. Then a still, small voice speaks to his soul: *Don’t be so hard on yourself. I love you. And I will never stop loving you.* Hezekiah looks in the restroom mirror, wipes his face, and stops crying. He fixes himself up and goes back to the table. As he walks, he looks around and notices Faith and Frank are not there. His eyes widen as he gasps. *They left*, he thinks. A thickness settles in his throat as he stares at the empty table where Frank and Faith sat. He shuts his eyes and shakes his head. “No, I’m not alone even if all forsake me. God is with me.” Hezekiah sets his jaw and starts to walk away.

“Hezekiah, where are you going?” He turns around. It’s Faith coming back with some ice cream for him. Hezekiah breaks into a smile as tension leaves his body.

“We were waiting for you and decided to get some ice cream. Were you about to leave?” She asks, frowning, as she enters his personal space.

“I thought that you already left, so I was going...”

“Going where? Hezekiah, don’t leave. I know I hurt you and I’m sorry for that, but don’t leave, okay?” Faith softly grabs his hand and it sends tingles across it. “Besides, we would not just leave you here like that. Why would you think we would? I know we have not been that great to you, but let us make up for it. So please, don’t leave us for the streets,” says Faith. She lets his hand go.

Hezekiah’s soul is touched by Faith’s statement. *We may never be a couple, but at least we could be good friends*, he thinks. “Okay, I’ll stay,” he says to her.

The three of them leave the café with ice cream in hand and start their trip home. All laugh and joke on the way back as the sun sets and street lights switch on to illuminate the night sky.



Chapter 14:

LET'S GO TO CHURCH

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, THEY START GETTING ready for church. Frank puts on a suit, Faith puts on a white dress with a white hat and heels to match, and Hezekiah struggles to find clothes. Frank comes over to help Hezekiah.

“Hezekiah, you cannot wear the same clothes as yesterday today. You know, if I didn’t know any better, I wouldn’t think you were royalty,” Frank says while actively looking for clothes.

“Every time I put on nicer clothes, I become someone else. I don’t want that to happen again.”

“Man, the clothes don’t make the man, you do.”

Hezekiah goes back into Frank’s closet again and picks out a jogging suit. Faith knocks on the door. “What is taking so long in there? We’re going to be late,” she says.

“We’re trying to find clothes for Hezekiah.”

“Are you two decent?”

“Yes,” they answer in unison.

Faith walks in and goes straight to the closet. She picks out a grey suit with a black shirt. “That didn’t take long now, did it? We’re going to be late, so get dressed.”

Faith mumbles something under her breath as she walks away. Hezekiah turns his mind away from wondering what she said, and instead focuses on getting dressed. He puts on the suit and sees a pair of matching shoes. However, he puts on the armored boots and walks out of the bedroom.

Faith looks at Hezekiah for a second and notices how handsome he looks in the suit. “Okay. Now you look—” Faith looks down at Hezekiah’s feet. “Hezekiah! That does not match!” she chides.

“I’m only bringing these just in case something happens.”

“That’s like me wearing a bulletproof vest everywhere I go. Come on now.”

“But Faith, with everything going on I thought that—”

“You don’t need to go to church looking strange,” Faith says with a roll of her eyes.

Hezekiah and Faith continue to argue as Frank watches and laughs to himself. “For not being a couple, they sure do argue like one.”

As the two continue to argue, Frank walks into his closet and finds an all-white suit. He also finds a gold collar dress shirt, a white belt, and a gold watch. “Hezekiah, come in here for a second.” Hezekiah walks back into Frank’s room. “Put that on.” Hezekiah does as instructed. “Okay, now go back out there and see Faith.”

Hezekiah walks back out, and Faith’s mouth drops open. “Okay, now you look a lot better.” Hezekiah’s shoes match perfectly with the suit. Faith walks away satisfied as Frank whispers to Hezekiah and says, “Your welcome.”

The three of them get into the jeep and travel to church. The church is packed because there is a big event being held there today. The Governor is there along with most of the city’s officials. There is supposed to be a guest speaker as well. The rumor is it is a traveling prophet.

The trio walk into the building and notice the network cameras and correspondents getting ready to film live on TV. “

This church is jam-packed today,” says Faith.

“I know. Let’s find a seat,” her dad replies.

They move to find seats in the balcony. As they head that way, someone grabs Faith’s arm. Faith turns and sees a slender, golden-brown skin woman with scarlet red hair.

“Hey, Faith!” the woman says. Faith’s face lights up.

“Hey, Julie! How are you?”

“Oh my goodness, it’s so good to see you!” she says smiling while giving Faith a hug.

“It’s good to see you too! I like your red dress and heels they look nice on you.”

“No, you don’t understand. I’m glad to see you alive. We thought you were dead!” says Julie, slightly frowning.

“What?”

“My crew and I saw the news footage from Phoenicia. It was scary.” Faith’s mind travels to the sandy city of Phoenicia. She starts to see and hear people screaming. As she smells the scorching fire from the arrows, she can see the dark swordsman coming toward her. In her mind, the black knight zooms in to kill her.

“Faith!” calls Hezekiah from the crowd. She snaps out of her day-dream and looks at Julie.

“Are you okay, Faith?” asks her fellow journalist.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m okay. It’s just that moment was traumatic for me.”

“I bet. How is your news crew? Did they make it out too?”

Faith is silent for a moment and shakes her head.

“I’m so sorry to hear that, Faith. I don’t mean to ask this so bluntly, but how did you make it out.”

At that moment, Hezekiah walks up. “Hey, Faith, we found some seats further up.” Faith looks at Hezekiah for a moment and her eyes become soft and fill with an inner glow. A smile builds and lights up her face. Julie looks at them both for a moment. “Faith, I didn’t know you

were married,” she says with a smirk. “Huh?” Both Faith and Hezekiah’s head flinch back slightly as fluttering starts in their stomachs. “No, I’m not married.”

“Wait, what?” she asks raising her eye brows.

“Then who is that man standing right beside you?”

“Oh! Julie, this is Hezekiah. Hezekiah, this is Julie.”

“Nice to meet you,” Julie and Hezekiah say at the same time.

“So, Hezekiah, how did your girlfriend make it out of Phoenicia alive?”

“Wait. I’m sorry, miss, but we’re not together. We’re just friends.”

“Oh, okay,” says Julie with a smile on her face that Faith notices. “So how did she make it out?”

Hezekiah saved me,” Faith interrupts before Hezekiah even opens his mouth.

“What?” Julie says with disbelief.

“Yeah. Hezekiah saved me. He got to me at the last moment, and we rode off to safety.” Julie is silent for a moment because the story sounds unbelievable, yet she thinks about how else Faith could had gotten out of there safely. Julie’s smile grows more prominent as she looks at Hezekiah eyes gleaming.

“He did all that for you and you two are not together? What did you say your name was again? Hezekiah, right? Here is my card. If you ever need anything, let me know, okay? As a matter of fact, I think we should have a private interview because—”

“Actually, we need to get going now because my dad is waiting for us,” says Faith while simultaneously grabbing Hezekiah by the arm and escorting him up the stairs.

“But Faith, I—”

“I’ll talk to you later, Julie,” Faith interrupts as she escorts Hezekiah up the stairs. While she is doing so, Hezekiah feels clueless as to what just happened. Both Faith and Hezekiah sit down in the balcony next to Frank. Faith on one side, Hezekiah on the other. After a brief moment, Frank leans over to Faith and whispers in her ear, “I saw that.”

“Saw what?” asks Faith in a return whisper.

"I didn't know you would be so jealous over someone you have no intentions of being with."

"Shut up, Dad." Faith says under her breath.

"I'm just saying that—"

"Shush, Dad, the program is about to start."

The pastor of the church gets up on the stage and starts to speak. "We are so excited that we have a great prophet of God here today. He and I have been talking for the past few years about spiritual matters. In fact, he has been my chief advisor during that time. Any spiritual crossroads we have had to face, he has been there to guide me. So, without further delay, let me introduce you to Mr. Lloyd Warrington of Crusaders Church."

The crowd cheers and applaud as Warrington, a muscular, tanned skinned figure, walks onstage. His black suit, tie, and shoes, shine under the spot lights. He waves his brown hair out of his eyes, waves and bows to the crowd. His brown eyes sparkle as he smiles and blows kisses.

"Thank you. Thank you, everyone. Stand up and shake a few hands with the people around you and take your seats." Everyone starts to greet each other nearby.

This guy looks like a football player," Faith says to her father.

"You already got your eye on somebody else?"

"No, Dad, of course not."

"Ah, so you do have feelings for Hezekiah," says Frank with a playful smile.

"Dad, stop playing around. Besides, there is something about this guy I don't like. I'm not sure if it's the way he moves or the way he speaks, but somehow, he seems familiar," says Faith.

Everyone in the crowd sits down, pleasantries over.

"It is true. I have been advising your pastor for many years about spiritual matters. As a matter of fact, I have a word from God for you all. Would you like to hear it today?" The crowd cheers with approval. "Alright, well, let's get started. My lesson today is from the book of Romans, chapter ten, verse thirteen. The verse says, and I quote, 'For

anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” This Scripture means what it says. The Bible also says, ‘I have the right to do anything’ according to what is written in first Corinthians, chapter six, verses twelve.”

“This man is twisting the Bible,” says Hezekiah to Frank. “This town must not be in good shape if this is the main church in the city.”

“Let’s hear what else this ‘prophet’ has to say,” the doctor answers.

Warrington continues, as everyone in the audience stares at Warrington. “What I’m saying, people, is that we should stop condemning others for sins that God has already forgiven. Jesus paid it all, right? According to Galatians chapter three, verses thirteen and fourteen, Christ paid the price for our sins so we would not have to. So we don’t have to worry about following the Mosaic law or any law for that matter. Jesus paid for everything on the cross; for all of your sins, past, present, and future. So, eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.”

The crowd hoot and applauds which leaves Hezekiah speechless. Hezekiah knows that Jesus paid for the sins of everyone, however, something about how this man throwing out these statements is off. Hezekiah’s spirit senses that this man is up to no good, but he cannot put his finger on it.

“Let me be clearer so you can understand what I am saying,” Warrington goes on. “If you are driving and you give someone the finger, it’s okay because you are under the blood of Jesus. If you curse someone out, it’s okay because you are under the blood of Jesus.” People start to cheer as Warrington keeps speaking. “If you are on drugs, it’s okay to be on drugs because you are under the blood of Jesus. If you are an alcoholic, it’s okay to be one because you are under the blood. If you are in the middle of an affair, it’s okay to keep having one because God is covering you under the blood of Jesus. If you are practicing homosexuality, it’s okay to keep doing so because you are under the blood of Jesus.”

The blood of Jesus is the key to getting into heaven. It doesn’t matter what you do down here because God has you in the palm of His hand,

and no one can take you from His hand. You are His forever, no matter what you do!" The crowd applauds loudly again. Faith's eyes widen as she gasps.

"Oh, my...no," she says quietly.

"What is it, Faith?" asks Frank.

"This is what the people of Phoenicia were saying before they were destroyed," says Faith voice trembling.

"Are you serious?" Frank asks, leaning closer to her, eye brows drawing together.

"Yeah, Dad. The church leaders were saying this before the attack."

"I remember now! They were saying this on camera before... Oh, no. Hezekiah? What should we—Hezekiah? Where did Hezekiah go?" Both Frank and Faith look around but the Spirit Warrior had disappeared. They turn their attention back to the stage.

"Furthermore, I want to share with you that everyone who has not excepted Christ are under the blood too. God paid for the sins of not just you and me, but for the sins of all mankind." The crowd breaks into joyful applause again. "Let me demonstrate how much God has forgiven us. Excuse me, pastor?"

"Yes?"

"Can I invite you and one of my worship leaders on stage?"

"Sure." The pastor gets on stage.

"Come up here, Alexia." Alexia walks on stage from the audience.

"Dad, Dad! That is the same woman who was on stage when the invasion happened."

Frank takes a closer look. "It is! Do you think the invasion and this singer are connected?"

"I don't know, but this can't be a coincidence. Did Hezekiah go to the restroom or something? He's missing all of this."

Alexia and the pastor stand side by side on stage. The pastor stares at her long, flowing, red hair; green eyes; soft peach skin, partially covered with a tight-fitting black tank-top and jeans; and her shapely figure. A fluttery sensation starts in his chest and stomach as racy thoughts

enter his mind. The pastor and Alexia stand side by side, hands slightly touching. He glances at the front row and sees his wife, Lisa, staring at him. He starts to sweat and pull on his collar as he gulps.

“Now my good people, do you want to see God’s perfect love in action?” The crowd responded with cheers. “Okay, let’s get started, shall we? Alexia and Pastor Brian, turn and face each other.” The two do so. The pastor stares straight into Alexia’s green eyes. His heart thuds in his chest as thoughts of passion with Alexia dance through his head.

“Now, Pastor, I want you two to hold hands.” They hold hands. “Pastor, because everything is under the blood of Jesus, and you will be forgiven of your sins, I want you to kiss Alexia.” The crowd gasps then grows quiet as they sit on the edge of their seats. Lisa, the pastor’s wife, sharpens her eyes as she stares even harder at her husband.

“Don’t you do it!” Lisa says to herself. “If you do it, I’m divorcing you.”

“Pastor, go ahead and kiss her. I know you want to. It’s okay, you’re under the blood of Jesus,” says Warrington.

As the crowd starts to murmur and lean in, the pastor slowly exhales as he stares into Alexia’s eyes. She says in a soft voice: “It’s okay, Pastor Brian, I want you to kiss me.” Pastor Brian leans in and their lips lightly touch. The pastor kisses tentatively at first, then harder, and they embrace. The crowd gasps as they see their pastor commit adultery on stage. Lisa briskly walks to the nearest exit, tears streaming down her eyes as her husband continues to kiss this unknown lady.

“Okay, you two, stop for a moment,” says Warrington smiling. “Let’s do another experiment. Okay, stagehands, bring out a bed!”

“Hold it!” shouts someone on stage.

Warrington looks around. “Who said that?”

Hezekiah walks onstage with a microphone in his hand, ready to verbally spar. Warrington gazes at the Spirit Warrior and, redness flashes across his face. He grits his teeth and switches it to a wide grin. “And who might you be, kind sir?” asks Warrington.

“My name is not essential. However, what I’m about to say is. You are causing this church to go astray from God. What you are advocating is spitting in God’s face,” says Hezekiah.

“How? My dear, misguided brother, the Bible says in the book of Ephesians chapter one, verse seven that ‘In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.’ It also says in Colossians chapter one, verse twenty that ‘And through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.’ The Bible also clears our conscience of the sins we commit. For example, it says in Hebrews chapter nine, verse fourteen, ‘How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God!’

“The Bible is clear. All unrighteousness is covered under the blood of Jesus. We are free to do whatever we want without consequence. Do you argue with the Bible? Do you dare stand against God?” says Warrington, gaining the crowd’s support.

“Those are some very nice scripture verses that you’ve quoted Mr. Warrington,” says Hezekiah.

“And they are true, right?” asks Warrington sharply.

“The verses are true, but what you’re saying about having a license to sin is not,” says Hezekiah.

“Prove it!”

“Easily. The Bible says in the book of Jude, verses three and four that ‘God gave this unchanging truth once for all time to His holy people. I say this because some godless people have wormed their way in among you, saying that God’s forgiveness allows us to live immoral lives. The fate of such people was determined long ago, for they have turned against our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.’”

“Are you calling me a godless person?” Warrington challenges, voice rising.

Unmoved, Hezekiah says, “Also, Jude, verses five and six state: ‘I must remind you—and you know it well—that even though the Lord rescued the whole nation of Israel from Egypt, He later destroyed every one of those who did not remain faithful. And I remind you of the angels who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place where they belonged. God has kept them chained in prisons of darkness, waiting for the day of judgment.’”

“What you’re advocating, Mr. Warrington, is for the church to practice sexual immorality on a grand scale, and to forget its mission about witnessing to the lost. We are supposed to be the light of the world, not a pillar of darkness. If we forget our purpose of reaching sinners, many people will end up in hell. We cannot allow the world to corrupt us. If we do, we will be lost ourselves,” ends Hezekiah.

“I disagree, and so does the Bible.”

“In what way?” Hezekiah counters.

“Once you are saved, you are always saved, and there is nothing you can do about it. Don’t you agree?”

“Yes, but—”

“Then, I’m right. I’m right!” Warrington looks to the crowd to hype them up. “He can’t refute my argument because I’m right! You can live any way you want and go to Heaven!”

“No, you are wrong. You are dead wrong!” shouts Hezekiah.

“Prove it!” shouts Warrington.

“What you are neglecting to say is that in first John, chapter five, verse eighteen it says, ‘We know that those who have become part of God’s family do not make a practice of sinning, for God’s Son holds them securely and the evil one cannot get his hands on them.’ The Scripture is saying that because God keeps us from practicing evil, we are in His hands. When God sent us His Holy Spirit, He purified our spirit to be like His. So our true nature, our spirit nature, rejects all forms of sin.”

“Well, how do you explain the fact that we sin?” Warrington shouts.

“We still fall into sin sometimes because we are still dealing with our fleshly body. Romans chapter seven, verses twenty through twenty-three states, ‘Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.’”

“That just brings us back to what I said before,” says Warrington.

“Which is?”

“God knows that we are going to sin, so He made way for us to be guilt-free as we sin,” says Warrington.

“That’s exactly what I wanted you to say,” Hezekiah answers with a smile.

“What do you mean?”

“Revelation chapter two, verses twenty to twenty-three proclaims, ‘Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.’”

The church gasps and swallows hard as tightness grips their hearts. They squirm in their seats darting their gaze away from Hezekiah. People start pulling on their clothing and or staring at their feet. The entire auditorium is murmuring as Mr. Warrington’s blood begins to boil. He motions for the senior pastor and says, “Get this man off the stage or you are losing your funding.”

“But, sir, we need—”

“Get this man off the stage!” insists Warrington yelling through a whisper.

The pastor yanks the microphone from Lloyd Warrington and gestures for everyone to calm down. “Okay. Clearly, we were caught off guard by this commotion. However, what this gentleman has said is interesting. May I propose something to you, kind stranger?”

“What is it, pastor?” questions Hezekiah.

“If we end this today, would you be willing to come back and participate in a debate about this topic, say tomorrow evening? That will give us enough time to plan and have even more media in attendance. Because this spectacle has already become newsworthy.”

“Sure, I would love too, pastor,” says Hezekiah with a smile.

“Absolutely not!” shouts Warrington.

“What’s wrong, grand prophet? Afraid to lose?” points Hezekiah.

“OOOOH!” goes the crowd at the challenge.

“You know what, I accept your challenge. You will regret this.” Warrington cuts the pastor a look and whispers, “You will regret this too.”

Warrington storms off the stage and the pastor dismisses the crowd. The members murmur as they leave the church. Hezekiah is about to step off the stage when the pastor grabs his hand.

“Hold it. You’re not going anywhere until you give me what you have,” says the pastor.

“What do you mean?” asks Hezekiah, eye brows drawing together. Pastor Brian pauses for a moment.

“I sense within you something genuine. I have only been playing church for years. I treated this as some sort of religious duty.” He pauses as pain prickles the back of his throat. “When Warrington came into my life, I thought it was something fresh and new; the forgiveness of God on a degree I have never heard of. I was enticed at the thought of sin without consequence. Brian shakes his head. “Now I know that God is not as forgiving as I thought.” Hezekiah frowns.

“That’s only half true. God is a forgiving God. He truly did deal with our sin at the cross. So, once we accept Jesus, we are free from

trying to work our way into Heaven. However, He is not interested in His people being led astray.”

“I cheated on my wife in front of the entire congregation, and God only knows what else may have happened before you stepped on stage. Will God forgive me?”

“Of course, He will.”

Hezekiah takes the pastor off to the side, and they pray intently. The pastor receives Christ fully into his heart. They both leave the stage, and Hezekiah meets up with Frank and Faith.

“Wow, you are a show stopper!” Frank exclaims, mouth gaping.

“I had to. That Warrington fellow was about to lead the pastor into even greater sin.”

“Speaking of which, what were you and the pastor doing off to the side?” asks Faith. Hezekiah shakes his head.

“He never truly excepted Christ into his soul until just now,” says Hezekiah. Faith’s head slightly jerks back and her eyes widen.

“What? But he has been a pastor for years! How is that even possible?”

“I don’t know. I’m not familiar with this myself,” Hezekiah shares. “My parents were Christians, and they had questions about their faith, but they knew before they died that they were children of God. This pastor told me that he was just playing church the entire time. But he is for real now.”

“Wait, your parents were Christians?” asks Faith.

“Yeah, they were.”

“What happened to them?”

Hezekiah tears up and turns his head away. “I had them killed,” he relates, trying not to choke up.

During Faith’s prior hatred of Hezekiah, she wanted him to feel how she felt about her mother being killed. However, with Hezekiah admitting that he had his own parents murdered, she can see that Hezekiah knows how she feels and then some. “His pain has to be on a whole other level,” says Faith to herself.

“I’m sorry to pry, but why did you have them killed?” Frank interrupts.

“Because they were Christians, and they tried to stop me from following after the devil into conquest. Faith’s face softens.

“That must be a painful memory,” says Faith. “Yes, it is. Which is why I wish I never put you through the same.”

Faith reaches out and softly touches Hezekiah’s shoulder. “Hezekiah, it’s okay. The action was not, but we forgive you. Let’s just get out of here.”

The trio leave the theater as Warrington steps from behind a curtain. Having overheard their conversation, he begins to wonder and then comes to an epiphany. “I knew he looked familiar. I know exactly what I need to do,” says Warrington as he smiles from ear to ear.



Chapter 15:

HESITATION

THE THREE ARRIVE HOME AFTER HAVING SOMETHING to eat at a local buffet. Faith is in her room thinking as she changes into a white tank top, blue jeans, and sandals. She doesn't want to admit it to herself, but seeing Hezekiah defend the truth so confidently drew her to him even more. She realizes that the more she tries to fight her feelings, the more and more passion she feels. It is becoming a chore to keep her emotions under control because, despite what Hezekiah did in the past, the man she sees now is far from it. Not only that, Faith has always wanted a man who has a deep relationship with God and who is willing to stand up for what is right. She also wants a man who would defend her if anything happened. As her passion begins to ignite, thoughts of her mother's death reel into her imagination, and, once more her fiery passion for Hezekiah flames out.

However, she still wants to help him in his mission to save the city because helping him means she has his protection as well. She leaves

her room and steps out into the grassy backyard. Hezekiah is outside, sitting down on a rock, sharpening his sword. Faith tilts her head as she stares at him and her heart flutters. She exhales.

“What are you doing?” asks Faith.

“I’m sharpening my sword,” he says not looking up. He turns his head upward at Faith and his heart skips a beat.

“I can see that, but why?”

“Well, the more I use this sword, I receive scriptures from the Bible downloaded into my spirit.”

“Wow. That’s cool,” she says voice rising in pitch. She walks toward him and comes to a stop right next to him. She inhales and his fragrance travels through her nostrils and her stomach flutters. Her face lights up and she turns it away for a moment. She turns her gaze back on him. “You don’t even have to read the Bible. I wish I had something like that. Do you get to pick and choose which scriptures or is it just random?”

“It’s what I need at the current moment. However, for some reason, I’m having trouble trying to put everything together for the debate tomorrow.”

“You need any help?”

“Actually, yes that would be great.”

“Well, since the events of today, and finding out the pastor was not saved in the first place, I started rereading the Bible. I use to read it until I started to rely on the pastor to feed me the ‘truth’ he knew.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“I don’t mean to sound rude, but how come you didn’t read it that much before?” Hezekiah asks her.

“Well, it’s because I got saved just a few years ago. So technically I’m still a new Christian.”

“Really? I wouldn’t have guessed that.”

“Yeah, I am.”

“I had no idea. The way you behave, you seem very mature.”

“The same could be said for you, Hezekiah. You just became a Christian not even a year ago, and already you are a spiritual warrior.”

“That’s because of the battles I had to fight when I became one. Tell me, what was your salvation experience like and what made you mature so fast?”

Faith hesitates for a tiny moment. She swallows hard. “Well, when my mom died.”

Hezekiah drops his chin to his chest. “No, no, Hezekiah, it’s okay. Faith quickly reaches out her hand and touches his shoulder. The touch sends a soft tingle across their arms. “Don’t look away. Just let me finish.” Cheeks burning, Hezekiah slowly lifts his head and gazes into Faith’s soft brown eyes as she speaks.

“When my mom died, it forced me to look at my life and what I was doing. Of course, my dad was already a Christian, so I knew about the faith because he told me about it and took me to church. Both of my parents did, actually. However, like the pastor admitted to you today, I was just playing church. I didn’t really have a relationship with God because I depended on my parents’ faith to get by. Particularly my mother’s. She was my hero, and I looked up to her because she was a strong Christian woman who was very kind and performed great acts of mercy. I would cheer her on as we all went on these medical mission trips together.

“As I got older and independent, I chose to stay behind and work on whatever reporting job I was on because the medical missions were my parents’ passion, not mine. Then one day, as I was on my way home from an assignment, I received a call from my dad. His voice was very panicky. I’m not used to hearing my dad sound like that. When he told me that my mom was in the hospital, I freaked out and rushed there.”

Faith’s throat becomes scratchy as she continues, “I arrived at the hospital to see my mom in bad shape. Despite being in pain, she was awake enough to speak to me.”

“What...what did your mother say?” asks Hezekiah softly. Her eyes moisten.

“She said to me, ‘I love you, and God loves you too.’ She then passed away,” Faith says voice trailing off.

Hezekiah throat thickens as his eyes moisten.

“At that moment, I hated God for allowing my mom to die. Why didn’t He take care of her? I didn’t understand why He took her because she didn’t deserve it. She was a good person. I completely put God out of my life at that moment. I walked out of the room, screaming and crying, but then the strangest thing happened.”

“What?” he asks voice cracking.

“I went into the hallway, and for some reason no one was there. My dad couldn’t follow me because he was attached to his medical equipment. I say that to say this: I felt a warm embrace that I had never felt from anyone, not even my mom. I was so comforted that the pain of the moment went away. It was God who had His arms around me. I know it was God because He said to me in an audible voice, ‘She is with me now, and I have and will always take care of her, and take care of you.’ God left the hallway, and people started to flow into it like is typical in a hospital. At that instant, I gave my life to Christ. I knew He was real and that my mother was safe in His arms.”

Hezekiah wipes the tears from his eyes as his chest tightens. He turns to walk away.

“Hezekiah, wait.” Faith grabs his shoulder, and he turns around. Their eyes lock, light up, and refuse to let them both go. Faith’s passion ignites into a roaring flame. Her heart hammers into her chest as they both stare into each other’s eyes. Their faces draw into each other’s and—

“Faith! Hey!” The pair immediately move away from each other. “I got that Bible you wanted,” calls out Frank, with a toothy grin.

“Hey, Dad!” Faith walks over and grabs the Bible from him.

“I want to help you and Hezekiah with the debate tomorrow.”

It’s agreed and they all study until ten o’clock that evening before calling it a night.



Chapter 16:

THE STUDY DATE

THE NEXT MORNING, FAITH WAKE S UP TO SUN-light cascading into her room. The events of yesterday and the almost kiss fill her mind. However, she knows she cannot continue her relationship with the man. She has to make it perfectly clear that they are only going to be friends and nothing more. A knock at the door interrupts her thoughts.

“Come in,” says Faith.

The door opens and it’s Hezekiah. Faith nearly jumps out of her skin as her heart skips a beat.

“Good morning!” says Hezekiah.

“Good morning, yourself. I didn’t think you were a morning person.”

“Yeah. I try to be anyway. Are you ready to begin studying?”

“Sure. Would you mind giving me a few minutes? I really need a few more minutes of sleep.”

“Okay, no problem.”

Hezekiah closes the door, and Faith quickly rushes to her restroom and freshens up. Being caught off guard by the man she is trying to just stay friends with does not help her situation. Nor are the butterflies that seem to continuously swirl in her stomach.

“This is sick. I can’t feel this way about this man, or at least I shouldn’t,” Faith says to herself. She brushes her teeth and prays, “Lord, help me to distance myself from this man because this is not right. I like him a lot, but Lord, I can’t do this.” She finishes getting ready and walks out of her room. Her father is in the kitchen making breakfast.

“Ah, Faith. How was your sleep?”

“It was good, Dad.” “What did you dream about,” says Frank, with a big grin on his face and winking one eye.

“Not that if that’s what you think. I’m embarrassed that you even saw what almost happened.”

“Well, it almost did. You know, for someone who does not want to have a relationship with Hezekiah, you two sure are acting like a couple.”

She sighs and looks away for a second. She gazes back at her father and makes eye contact.

“Dad, I can’t help it. It’s like I’m drawn to him for some reason. I want to help him for my own survival, of course, but the more I help him, the more I’m captivated by him.”

Frank pauses for a moment, furrows his eyebrows and releases them.

“Do you think that maybe you two are meant to be?” Frank asks with a smile. Faith’s head jerks back. She blinks a few times and shakes her head.

“No, Dad, no. That’s crazy. I know God does things, but I think this may be over the top.”

“How else do you explain that you two are in sync with each other on most things.”

“Things like what?”

“You both love God and have a relationship with Him.”

“Yeah, so? Many men have a relationship with God. That doesn’t mean every man out there is right for me.”

“You two are both athletic, strong, willing to run into danger when other people are trying to flee.”

“Okay.”

“You two seem to love a good fight when it’s for the right reasons. Hezekiah proved that yesterday when he confronted that man on stage. It reminded me of how you challenge people as a reporter. You are always seeking the truth, and he is obviously willing to defend the truth. You two would make a great couple.” She frowns.

“Yeah, if he hadn’t killed my mother. Even though I forgave him, it still seems crazy for me to be with him on that level. I know he’s a different person, but it just does not seem right to me.”

Frank thinks to himself for a moment. “Why would God put us through a scenario like this. Is He trying to test us? Something about this whole thing is off. It’s as if we are missing something about this situation,” Frank finishes his breakfast and starts to head out the door.

“Where are you going?” asks his daughter.

“I’m going to get some much needed medical supplies. You study with Hezekiah while I’m gone because he needs all the help he can get.”

Faith finishes her breakfast and then heads outside looking for Hezekiah. She finds him there sparring with an invisible foe. The more he jumps and twirls in the sunlight with his sword, the more her pulse races. She watches quietly as he swings his blade. Thoughts of him fighting Warlord flash through her mind. Her heart aches as she starts to daydream about her and Hezekiah walking through the forest together. “No!” she says. She vigorously shakes her head, but her day dream returns.

“Stop it. It’s going to be harder if I keep daydreaming about this man,” Faith says to herself. Then out loud she calls, “Are you ready to study?”

“Oh, yeah! I’m sorry,” Hezekiah says, stumbling over his words. “I didn’t realize you were there. Not that you’re easy to overlook. I just—”

“It’s okay. Let’s just get started.”



Chapter 17 :

THE STUDY DATE PART TWO

FAITH OPENS UP THE BIBLE, AND THEY BOTH SIT down side by side looking for Scriptures Hezekiah can use in the debate.

“So, what is his argument? What is Warrington trying to prove exactly? Because I noticed in your debate with him last time that he was talking about salvation in a weird way,” says Faith.

“Warrington is trying to prove that salvation is a license for sin. He is trying to say that once you accept Jesus, you can live any way you want without consequence,” Hezekiah clarifies.

“But isn’t salvation through Jesus the way to get your sins blotted out for the past, present, and future?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Then, where is the argument? It almost sounds like you agree with him.”

“Yes and no.”

“Explain,” Faith demands, slightly leaning forward.

“Well, once you accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, He does pay your sin debt in full.”

“That’s still going back to what Warrington is saying.”

“However, when you accept Jesus, He gives you, among other things, three things specifically: The Holy Spirit, a new spirit, and a new nature.”

“Okay, I’m following.”

“When God gives a person the Holy Spirit, He empowers that individual to do good things for God. Also, the Holy Spirit puts a seal on that person for eternity, and purifies that person through a process called sanctification.”

“How does sanctification work?” asks Faith.

“It works by the Holy Spirit renewing the mind of the individual so he or she can learn to think and act like God.”

“Isn’t this a form of mind control from God?”

“No,” Hezekiah patiently answers.

“How can you say that when this is all happening internally?”

“Because a person has to be willing to go through this process even after they receive Jesus.” Faith blinks a few times.

“What if he or she don’t choose to go through with ‘sanctification?’”

“That person remains a baby Christian. First Corinthians chapter three, verses one to three says, ‘Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit, but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly.’”

Faith’s eye brows furrow and she moves closer to Hezekiah, wanting to know more, and it causes his heart to drum in his chest. He exhales. “What if the person never goes through the process of sanctification and dies with only accepting Jesus?”

“The Bible says in the chapter of first Corinthians, this time in verses twelve through fifteen, ‘If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, their work will be shown for

what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.”

Faith looks through the Bible to locate the passage. She finds it and reads it for herself. “Okay, I believe you. Let me give you another example. What if someone accepts Christ with a full heart and they start doing something like practicing homosexuality? What happens to that person?”

“It depends on where their heart is with God.”

“What do you mean? Sin is sin, right?”

“Yeah, but not all sin is the same.”

“Then what would happen to that person?”

“There are a few possibilities.”

“Like what?” asks Faith.

“That person could repent and be back in right relationship with God. And what I mean by repent is turning away from the sin and no longer practicing it.”

“Okay. What if that person does but they fall back into it again?”

“Well, forgiveness is for past, present, and future,” Hezekiah repeats. “God is always willing to forgive no matter how many times someone fails. Sometimes it takes time to be delivered from a particular sin, especially if that sin is someone's biggest temptation. You never know why people choose to get tangled in sin. It could be a life choice, or being born with the temptation, or having been raped, or financial pressure; it could be for a million different reasons. However, God knows why and is patient with people to deliver them from sin. ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.’ That's in first John chapter one, verse nine.

“Okay. What if someone gets saved and they refuse to leave a lifestyle, like homosexuality? It doesn't have to be that in particular. What

if it's some other sin, like being an adulterer or being a thief, or any other sin?"

"That question has a twofold answer."

"Why?"

"Let me answer your first question. In first Corinthians chapter five, verses one through five, the apostle Paul is writing to the church about an incident he heard about—incest. He writes:

'It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. So, when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.'

"What Paul is saying is that even though that person is disciplined in this way, his spirit will be saved. God knows how to get His child's attention."

"Okay, what's the second part of your answer?" asks Faith.

"Well, there is a situation where the person was never saved in the first place. Like the pastor from yesterday. Jesus says in Matthew chapter thirteen, verse eighteen and verse twenty-two, 'Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:...The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.'

Someone may hear the Word, and it may never take residence inside their hearts, thus, causing him to be untransformed by the Holy Spirit.”

“Which means?”

“It means that person is in danger of going to hell unless they accept Christ into their heart. First John chapter three, verses eight to ten says when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them. They cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are. Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.”

“How can anyone tell the difference?” Faith continues.

“A tree is known by its fruit. However, in hard cases like these, God is the judge, and He knows who belongs to Him and who does not. He knows how to take care of His people and deal with the ones who are not.”

“Okay, one last question before we move on to having a new spirit. What do you mean when you say that not all sin is the same?” asks Faith.

“First John chapter five, verses sixteen and seventeen says, ‘If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray, and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.’”

“Okay. Let me ask you about your new spirit. What is the new spirit, and how does it work?” asks Faith.

“The new spirit that lives inside of you is your spirit. It’s your spirit reborn from the Holy Spirit of God,” Hezekiah explains.

“So, the term ‘children of God’ really is true.”

“Yes. We really are children of God. When the Holy Spirit gives us new birth, we also are given a new nature because of the new spirit living inside of us. This new spirit is perfect. Unlike our mind and body, our spirit does not have to struggle with sin. It’s already on its way to

heaven. However, the Holy Spirit of God works within us so that our mind and body can reflect our new spirit, which is a reflection of Him.”

“Which is what sanctification really is—the transformation of the mind,” says Faith with dawning understanding.

“Exactly. Colossians chapter three, verses nine and ten states: ‘Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.’ Not only are we saved, but we are renewed day by day by the Creator. So the whole notion that God gives us a license for sin is bogus and couldn’t be further from the truth. God is with us every day, working on every portion of our minds. So it would be ridiculous for us to commit great acts of sin with no consequence.”

“Okay, Hezekiah, I think we are ready for the debate.”

“Thanks, Faith. Reasoning with you has really helped me. I would still be struggling to gather the right scriptures if you hadn’t asked the right questions.”

“No problem. Glad to help.” Faith’s strawberry scent travels in his nose and his heart flutters in his chest. He looks into her chocolate brown eyes and smiles.

“Hey, after the debate, maybe we can go get a bite to eat?” asks Hezekiah with a soft smile.

“Yeah, I—” Faith catches herself because what Hezekiah is suggesting sounds too much like a date. Her eyebrows draw together. “Is it going to be the three of us?” she asks.

“No. Your dad said that he was going to run some errands after the debate. So I just thought that—”

“Hezekiah,” Faith quickly interrupts, “I’m sorry, but I don’t want to do that with just the two of us. I like you a lot as a friend. However, if we do this, it may take me further with you than I want to go.” Hezekiah eyes water. He blinks a few times and slowly shakes his head. He quickly stands to his feet.

“Okay, I understand,” says Hezekiah, smiling as tears stream from his eyes.

“I didn’t mean to upset you. I just—”

“No, no, it’s okay, he says waving his hand. “Thank you for helping me.” Hezekiah briskly walks back towards the house.

Faith’s stomach becomes upset as pain starts in the back of her throat. She sits still in the grass for a moment. Staring at where Hezekiah entered the house. She blinks a few tears away and sniffs. “It would have never worked out anyway,” she says to herself.

Frank walks in the front door as Hezekiah comes through the back door. “Hey, Hezekiah!” he says smiling. Frank notices Hezekiah’s long face and frowns.

“Is everything okay? You look a little upset. Is something wrong?” asks the doctor, eyebrows drawing together.

“Yeah, everything’s fine, he says, eyes slightly lower.

“I’m just getting ready for this debate.” Hezekiah looks around the room and picks up a Bible from the coffee table. “I was going to take Faith with me to run some more errands. Did you want to come with us?” He asks smiling.

“No, that’s okay. I’m going to study some more,” he says, Bible in hand.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.” Hezekiah then walks to his room and closes the door.

Faith walks into the house after Hezekiah sequesters himself only to greet a confused father.

“Faith, is everything okay?” he asks raising an eyebrow.

“No, Dad.”

“What’s wrong?”

“He tried to ask me out on a date.”

“And what happened?”

“I kindly said no. I didn’t think that he’d take it so hard, however.”

“Well, remember Faith, this isn’t really a normal situation.”

“I know, which is why I said no. But I feel so bad for saying no.”

“Don’t worry about it, Faith. He’ll be okay.”

“But that’s just it, Dad. I wanted to say yes.”



Chapter 18:

THE GREAT DEBATE

THE TIME FOR THE GREAT DISCUSSION BETWEEN Hezekiah and Warrington approaches. After Faith and Frank leave for the day, Hezekiah studies in his room until he feels satisfied. He then goes to sleep, but awakes to the sound of a knock at the door.

“Hezekiah! Hezekiah, are you ready? The debate is in thirty minutes. Are you ready?” asks Faith at the door.

“Oh, I almost overslept!” Hezekiah rushes to look for some clothing. “Faith, can you call your Dad for me? I need some clothes quickly.”

“Will do.”

“I got his suit right here, sweetie,” says Frank as he hands the white suit to Faith.

Hezekiah opens the door a crack, and Faith hands him the clothing. She exhales as her heart drums in her chest. Her pulse starts to pick up as she leans toward the door.

“Hezekiah, while I got you at the door, I want to apologize about earlier. I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings.” His stomach clenches as he sees Faith through the door. He smiles bitterly.

“It’s okay, I completely understand,” he says eyes slightly low. “You don’t have to apologize to me.”

“No hard feelings?”

“No.”

“Can we still be friends?”

“Of course,” Hezekiah says frantically as he rushes to get dressed. Once finished he announces, “Okay, I’m ready. Let’s go.”

They leave the house and drive to the church. Everyone in the car is silent. It’s not just from anticipation, though. Hezekiah is a little distant from Faith, not in a disrespectful or mean way, but only in an effort to give her space. Faith notices his distance but tries to focus herself on the debate.

Frank senses the discomfort between them. “Is everything okay?” he asks.

“Yeah, everything is fine. We’re just focused on the debate,” Faith replies to turn her father’s curiosity away.

Hezekiah continues to look out the window as the sun sets in the sky. They pull up to the church and enter together. The auditorium is full of people from all over town. Everyone from all walks of life is in attendance for this debate. The trio walk down the main hall, trying to figure out where to go.

“Hey, Hezekiah!” says Julie, interrupting their focus.

“Hey, Julie, how are you?” returns Hezekiah, smile building on his face.

“I’m doing great. So, are you ready for the debate?” she asks, voice bubbly.

“I studied hard, so I’m ready.”

“Great! Listen, I want to do a follow-up interview. How about getting some coffee or something after the event is over?” she asks making strong eye contact. His face brightens.

“Sure, we can do that.”

“Excellent! I’ll see you after the debate,” says Julie with a bright smile.

“Okay.”

Julie walks off as the three of them look on. Frank glances at Faith and she has a rigid posture and a forced smile on her face. As Faith looks at Julie, a burning sensation settles in her chest. Just then, an attendant meets them in the middle of the hall. “You must be Hezekiah.” The man extends his hand. “My name is Jerry. I’m the associate pastor here at the church. The pastor sent me to look for you.” “Nice to meet you,” Frank, Hezekiah, and Faith say in turn while each shakes hands with the associate pastor. “

The debate is about to begin, so you have to come with me.”

“Where do we sit?” asks Faith.

“Are you his family? We have seats for you reserved upfront. Jerry then turns to Hezekiah. “Sir, you must come with me quickly because the program is about to start.”

“Uh, okay.” A fluttery feeling enters his stomach as he and Jerry briskly walk through the crowd. As they walk, Hezekiah calls back to father and daughter. “I’ll see you after.” Frank and Faith are left standing there as they watch the attendant rush Hezekiah backstage. Frank looks back at his daughter. Her countenance is slightly low.

“Faith, are you okay? You seem kind of down.” She blinks a few times and exhales.

“I’m fine, Dad. Besides, why should I care who Hezekiah goes out with? That’s not my business.”

“You’re right. You did say that you wanted to keep him as a friend.”

“I did. So?”

“Then, why are you jealous?”

“I’m not jealous. I just want to focus on the debate,” says Faith bluntly.

“If that’s what you say.”

The two find their seats as Hezekiah exhales to fight the butterflies swirling in his stomach. He moves from side to side, sighs, and slaps his legs and stands still. He rubs his hands down his pants legs a few

times and exhales. The stage crew comes over and preps him. The crew sees Warrington and they go over and prep him for the camera as well. The pastor walks on stage to address the audience.

“Good evening, everyone. I hope all of you are doing well. Everyone take your seats because the debate is about to begin. I hope you brought your thinking caps because this debate will be a real eye-opener. It’s going to focus on salvation versus Christian liberty.

“We are more than anxious to see what our debaters have in store for us. So without further ado, let me introduce you to Mr. Warrington of Crusaders Church.” The crowd mildly applauds as Mr. Warrington walks on stage with a microphone in his hand.

“And next, I would like to introduce to you the man who inspired this debate, a man with a great grasp of the Bible, Mr. Hezekiah.” The crowd’s applause is noticeably louder. “Now this is how the debate will take—”

“Before we start this debate, I have some terrible news for everyone here,” Warrington cruelly interrupts. The crowd starts to nervously murmur. “I just found out through my attendant’s research that Hezekiah is a dangerous man and needs to be arrested.” The room gets quiet enough for a dropped pin to be heard.

“Wait!” shouts Hezekiah sweeping a hand through the air. “This is ridiculous. I’m not a dangerous criminal,” says Hezekiah, frowning and putting one hand on his hip as the other grips the microphone.

“Yes, actually, you are. How long did you think you could live in our community and not be found out?” challenges Warrington.

“I don’t know what you are talking about, sir, but you are way out of line,” Hezekiah returns.

“Am I?” Warrington says with a sneer.

“You’re just trying to distract from the debate because you know you will lose.”

“I’ll lose? Okay, let’s talk. Is it true that God is a judge and that He judges all?”

“Yes, but—”

“Is it true that God will send to hell those who don’t belong to Him?”

“Yes, however—”

“Do you believe that a person who has murder in his heart is a real Christian?”

“No.”

“So, you admit it then?”

“Admit what?”

“That you’re not a real Christian,” Warrington charges.

“What are you getting at?” says a wary Hezekiah.

Turning the audience, Warrington says, “This Hezekiah, the same man who talks about condemnation, is the same murderous King Hezekiah of the Valley of Dragons!” The crowd gasps so hard the air is almost sucked out of the room. “You are a murderer, are you not?”

“No, I—”

“Are you not King Hezekiah?”

“Yes, but—”

“So you are a liar too? Why should we believe a word you say since you are the most murderous king in our recent history?” Warrington smoothly questions. Hezekiah can’t speak as images of him being the evil king flash through his mind. His hands and body start to tremble as he pictures the crowd rushing the stage and beating him to death. His heart thuds in his chest and his hand trembles as he grips the microphone. The audience start to murmur. “BOO!” shouts people in the crowd. His eyes widen and his shaky hand drops the microphone. It hits the stage floor and statics. He takes a step back as coldness envelops his body.

“You’re a butcher!” shout a few people from the crowd.

“No. I’m...” Hezekiah is so struck by guilt he can’t even speak.

Faith turns to her father where he sits next to her. “Dad! We need to get Hezekiah out of here now before this crowd turns into a mob and tears him apart!”

“I’m way ahead of you, dear. Go get the car, and I’ll pull him off stage,” says Frank. As they both get up to take action, the spotlight shines on them.

“Ah, look at the poor family,” says Warrington. “They are so disturbed by the revelation they cannot even stay to support you anymore.”

Faith and Frank stand there, puzzled, while Warrington keeps going. “We all know of the pain that you put this family through. You’re Faith and Frank, right? My team did some research about how King Hezekiah affected this community. And we found an old story in the news about how the wicked king murdered your wife and mother,” says Warrington.

“How did he find this out?” Faith says to herself.

“So again, without further ado,” Warrington points at his opponent. “Officers, arrest Hezekiah for the murder of Maranda Parker.”

The crowd cheers as a police officer walks on stage and places Hezekiah in handcuffs. He trembles as his eyes stream with tears. His head drops to his chest. Both Faith and Frank gasp as the police escort Hezekiah off stage.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” says Frank, covering his mouth.

“We gotta do something about this because if he’s in jail, how will he protect the city?” asks Faith, heart thumping in her chest.



Chapter 19:

CAPTIVITY

HEZEKIAH SITS IN A PRISON CELL ONCE AGAIN. However, this time it's not about preaching the gospel; it's for a real crime—murder. Wondering what to do next, he sits on the bottom bunk, staring at the wall. Hezekiah is dressed in an all-white prisoner outfit. The cell is painted sky blue, has a stainless-steel bunk bed, and a sink and toilet. There is a large window on the door and a small window on the wall that overlooks the prison yard. However, it barely registers with Hezekiah. He feels a variety of emotions as he sits in silence, and the one most prominent is anger, anger for what he did in the past, and towards Warrington for putting him in jail.

As Hezekiah tries to calm himself, he hears someone coming down the hallway. Looking through the window in the door, he sees an officer coming to put a person in his cell. The door opens to reveal the guard and a tall, muscular, mahogany colored man, with a low fade haircut, standing together. Light from the lights in the hall reflects off the man's

glasses. As soon as the male prisoner looks in, he moans and jumps back, wide eyes, almost knocking down the guard. His body trembles.

“Wait, can I be moved into another cell? I want to be moved to another cell!” says the prisoner, who goes by the name Snake but whose real name is John Singleton.

“Get in there, or I will put you in there!” commands the officer.

Snake goes inside without any more fuss and the guard slams the door behind him.

“What’s this guy’s problem?” Hezekiah says to himself as he looks his new cellmate over.

Snake stares at Hezekiah as if he’s looking at a ghost. Snake’s jaw trembles as his mouth gapes open. Not knowing what to do next, he simply stands there in silence.

“Uh, are you okay?” asks Hezekiah.

“Ye...yeah, I’m okay,” comes the stuttering reply.

“Why do you keep staring at me like that?”

Snake is so dumbfounded that he doesn’t say a word.

“If you think for a moment that I’m going to do something with you that I don’t want to do, you got another thing coming, pal,” says Hezekiah, voice rising sharply.

“No! No! I wouldn’t dare!” says Snake as he flinches and vigorously shakes his hands in front of him. “Please don’t kill me, my king!” shouts Snake.

“Kill you?” He asks squinting his eyes.

“Why would I kill you? Look, I’m not a murderer. Or at least I’m not one anymore.” He exhales. “I used to be one until Jesus became the Lord of my life,” says Hezekiah.

The man’s face twitches an even more confused look on his face.

Hezekiah exhales. “I’m not perfect, but God did transform me to the point where I’m not the person I use to be. What He did for me, He can do for you,” says Hezekiah.

The man continues to stare at Hezekiah in silence, trying to comprehend his words. After a while, Hezekiah gets annoyed because it’s

been a long day, and it seems like he's getting nowhere with this man about Jesus. The man just keeps staring at him speechless.

"Okay, I'm going to bed. I got the bottom bunk. You can take the top. Good night," Hezekiah says as he lays down and wraps the cover around him.

Snake remains speechless as he continues to stare at Hezekiah.

"If you try to do something to me while I sleep, don't think that because I'm a Christian I won't defend myself."



Chapter 20:

CAGED LION

THE NEXT DAY, HEZEKIAH WAKES UP IN HIS JAIL cell, wondering what to do next. The guy who could only stare at him apparently went to bed because he can hear him snoring on the top bunk. Hezekiah gets up and notices light filtering in from the window.

Without warning, the guard thrusts open the door. “You’re coming with us!”

Hezekiah is yanked out of his cell by a few officers, and the door slams shut behind him.

Faith and Frank are on the phone, calling attorneys for Hezekiah and trying to figure out what to do next. Feeling guilty about the whole situation, Faith wonders how people even knew about her mother.

“Dad, how did Mr. Warrington find out about Mom’s murder?”

“I don’t know. But I guess it would not be that hard to figure it out if you know who you’re digging up dirt on is a former king. All he would

have to do is dig up old news reports to find out about Hezekiah. All this happened not too long ago.”

“I know,” she says eyebrows drawing together. She presses her lips together for a moment. “Dad?”

“Yes, sweetie?”

“What if this is divine retribution for what happened? I already forgave Hezekiah, but what if this is God’s way of vengeance by sending Hezekiah to jail for what he did?”

“I thought about that too, but it doesn’t seem right. Why would God send him here to save the city only to have him put away forever? Is he supposed to save the city from jail? I know what I said to you about your mother is true. However, something doesn’t seem right about this situation, but I can’t figure out what it is. Something has been gnawing at my spirit about this whole issue ever since I found out who Hezekiah was and after I forgave him.”

“What do you think God is trying to tell you?”

“I don’t know, but I intend to find out.”

Hezekiah is in a private room and sitting in a chair; just him and four guards. A single light fixture with a light bulb hangs above him in the dark room. The light shines on Hezekiah while everyone else is in shadow. His pulse starts to pick up. Everyone is still as no one says a word. The light above him starts to flicker. His muscles tighten. Hezekiah sees a figure lunge at him. Hezekiah gasps and a hand smacks into his face! His head jerks to the right with a sharp sting following it. Hezekiah jumps to his feet, ready to fight, but then remembers where he is and sits back down in the chair.

“What’s wrong, old king? Can’t fight without your army backing you? Ha, ha, ha!” says Felix, staring him in the face, smiling with a toothy grin. “You’re not so tough now. I bet if I light you up a little bit, no one would mind.” Hezekiah’s nostrils flare as he bares his teeth glaring at Felix.

“You think I’m going to sit here and let you beat me?” He asks. His muscles tense as his heart pounds in his chest. “If you want to fight,

come and get it! Be warned, though, I ordered my army to train me in the art of combat. So if you want to be laid down today, go ahead and fight me. You'll regret it!" shouts Hezekiah eyes widening.

One man sprints at him. Hezekiah jumps up and throws a right hook. The fist slams into the guard's cheek and his mouth forces open. His head jerks to the left and his body follows. He tailspins a few feet and drops to the floor. The rest of the men back up.

"You're going to regret this! You just assaulted an officer of the law!" shouts Felix.

"Really? That's funny. You pulled me into a room with no camera to beat me. Do you think I'm stupid? I used to be royalty. If you don't get me out of this room now, I will call my lawyer and sue this prison so fast, you'll be in prison with me tomorrow," says Hezekiah sharply.

Seeing the seriousness in his voice, the officers hesitate. One of them says, "Felix, I'm not trying to get sued. This is your stupid idea anyway. I'm walking out." That guard walks out and another with him. The one that was knocked to the floor also gets up and leaves the room. Now it's just Felix and Hezekiah.

"You won this round, detainee. Next time you won't be so lucky."

Felix exits the room and Hezekiah walks out in the opposite direction. Meanwhile, his bunkmate watches Hezekiah from a distance as the former king comes down the hallway.

"Wow. You're a lot tougher than I thought, old king. I'll have to keep my eye on you," says Snake.

Faith and Frank diligently continue to look for lawyers when they hear loud, sharp banging at the front door. "Who can that be?" asks Frank as he makes his way to find out. He opens the door to find an officer there.

"Sir, can I help you?" asks Frank, eye brows drawing together.

"Are you Frank, and is Faith here?"

"Yes, we are," says Faith as she walks to the door.

"You have been officially summoned to appear in court."

“What is this about? Are you sure you have the right people?” asks Frank.

“You are Doctor Frank Parker, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then you are summoned to appear in court. Good day, sir.” The officer walks off, leaving Frank and Faith mouths gaping.

“Why do you think they want us to appear in court?” asks Faith.

“Take a guess.” Frank opens the envelope the officer left them with, and they both read the contents to discover the case is regarding the murder of Maranda Parker.

“Oh no. Hezekiah’s in trouble,” says Frank, wrinkling his brow.

“Who is spearheading this effort?” asks Faith, frowning.

“Who else?” Frank reads further. “It says here that Mr. Warrington is the one responsible for bringing the charges.”

“What if we refuse to go?”

“We have to go. It’s an official court summons.”

“What about saving the city?”

“Let’s worry about saving Hezekiah first.”

“How do you intend to do that, Dad?”

“We’ll figure it out. Besides, I have an award-winning journalist as a daughter. I’m sure we can think of something.”

Hezekiah walks into the prison cafeteria for breakfast. Some of the inmates gaze at him from a distance. Hezekiah looks over and sees the ravenous stare in their eyes. He tries not to think about what may be going through their heads. He picks up a tray, gets his food, and sits down by himself, facing everyone.

“That guy is a real killer,” says Hezekiah’s bunkmate to another inmate as they stand a distance away. A dark-skinned man with a blue hat and jumpsuit walks up to Snake. A small group of other men, wearing the same, follow behind him.

“Who is he? He looks familiar,” ask the dark-skinned man named Sly Fox.

“That’s Hezekiah. King Hezekiah from the Valley of Dragons,” says Snake.

“That’s King Hezekiah? How you know?” asks Fox.

“That’s none of your business,” says Snake, waving his hand to dismiss the thought. “You got the stuff I ordered?”

“Yeah. I got that kilo right here.” Fox motions his hand and someone passes him a kilogram of meth. “You got that money?” asks Fox gruffly, glaring into Snake’s eyes.

“I don’t have it with me now, but I can get it to you later.” Fox sneers and shakes his head.

“Man, you owe me \$200 already! And you also owe a few other cats’ in this prison money too. I’ve got all this product, and you try’n to pay me with I.O.U.s? Naw, man. I’m outta here!” He turns to walk away.

Snake grabs Fox’s shirt to bring him back. “I need that kilo! I got to deliver this product or I’m dead tomorrow!”

“Get your hands off me!” Fox shoves Snake into a table. Snake gets up and grabs at the kilo of meth. Fox shoves Snake to the ground. Fox stands over Snake, fists balled and glaring at him.

“You made a big mistake trying to steal my stuff. Now you’re a dead man!” A few guards notice the commotion and rush towards that direction. Fox’s men jump in their way and block them.

“I’m sorry, man. I’m sorry!” Snake offers at Fox’s feet.

“Naw, man. Sorry ain’t good enough.” Fox looks at two of his cronies standing beside him. “Kill Snake.”

Snake stumbles off the ground and runs as the dealer’s thugs chase him through the cafeteria. He looks back to see his pursuers, then he receives a smack in the face with a food tray. Snake does a flip and hits the ground. Dazed from the strike, he struggles to get up, but the person who hit him with the tray punches him in the face. Snake collapses to the floor. The inmate mounts him and starts pounding him in the face. The others catch up with their prison shanks, ready to stab him to death. They are just waiting for Fox’s word.

“You know what to do,” says Fox, and the inmates thrust with their shanks.

“Stop!” shouts a voice with authority, booming from the other side of the cafeteria. It causes everyone to stop. Hezekiah appears in front of the crowd, ready to fight. Snake stares at Hezekiah with his jaw wide open. Fox takes a second look at Hezekiah. He gasps and covers his mouth.

“I know who you are now! You’re not just King Hezekiah, your Hezekiah from the City of Light. You got to be kidding me! First, you’re at the reporter’s house, and now this?”

Hezekiah doesn’t say a word, but he balls his fists in anticipation.

“You know what, it doesn’t matter. This is actually perfect ‘cuz I figure you ain’t got that sword here in prison. So I’m a get my revenge.” Fox turns to his cronies. “And yo, don’t worry ’bout Snake. Kill him instead.”

Hezekiah can’t use his sword, but he still has his shoes. An inmate runs and thrusts at Hezekiah with his knife. Hezekiah dodges and punches him twice in the face. The Spirit Warrior then jumps and front kicks him in the chest. The kick pounds into his torso and sends the man flying into the crowd. Another inmate comes in swinging, thrusting his shank at Hezekiah. The man of God dodges his strikes, jumps, and spin-kicks the man in the face with a loud smack. The inmate goes twirling to the other side of the room.

That prisoner is quickly replaced by an inmate who leaps through the air to tackle Hezekiah. Hezekiah jumps over the thug, and the criminal goes careening into the food tray window with a loud crash. Another thug starts throwing punches and shank thrusts. The Spirit Warrior dodges all attacks and zips backward with sonic speed. Hezekiah then zooms forward, jumps off the ground, and pounds him with a flying sidekick. The kick booms into the man’s chest, and the thug flies through the air and smacks into the wall.

Everyone but Fox runs away. Instead, Fox runs at him screaming. He picks up a tray and throws it at Hezekiah’s face. Hezekiah dodges

the platter, but then Fox shatters a cup into his face, and Hezekiah goes down to one knee. Hezekiah gets up, but Fox pounds him in the face and stabs him in the stomach. Hezekiah drops down to his knees. With his abdomen in searing pain, he says a silent prayer.

“Yeah, I got you now, holy ghost chump!” Fox says as he goes in for the kill.

Despite the pain, Hezekiah leaps and pounds Fox in the jaw with an uppercut. Both men soar straight up into the air with the force of the blow. Fox falls and slams into a table, bounces off, and hits the ground. Hezekiah lands and collapses to his knees.

Additional officers flood into the cafeteria and separate everyone. All the inmates are taken out of the cafeteria. Fox and his crew are locked in solitary confinement, and Hezekiah and Snake are taken to the infirmary. Afterward, Hezekiah and Snake are also placed in solitary confinement for their own protection.



Chapter 21:

THE VISITATION

A FEW WEEKS LATER, FRANK AND FAITH FINALLY find a lawyer for Hezekiah. They send the attorney to jail to get to know Hezekiah. Meanwhile, the community grows darker under the direction of Mr. Lloyd Warrington. Since the former pastor turned against Warrington, Warrington had him removed from the church by force. Lloyd sits as bishop over the megachurch now, spreading his gospel over the city. In a short time, the town is swept away by Warrington's persuasive words.

Hezekiah and his former bunkmate, Snake, are escorted to the visitation room. The place is a big open area with chairs and tables. Vending machines are in front of the room where the guests come in. The officer tells Hezekiah and Snake, "You are to remain seated until the visit is over. At no time are you to get up and do anything. You may embrace one time at the beginning of the visit and at the end. Besides that, there is to be no touching."

Both prisoners sit down and wait for their visitors to arrive. Faith, Frank, and a tall man with tanned skin, golden-brown hair and a gray-suit walks towards Hezekiah. Hezekiah glances back at Faith and his heart skips a beat.

“Hey, guys!” shouts Hezekiah with a warm and wide smile.

“Hey, Hezekiah! How are you doing?” asks Faith.

“As good as can be expected.”

“Yeah, I see,” says Frank.

“I’ve been in worse situations, so I’m okay. How is everything with you?”

“Were doing fine. However, the people in the city are starting to act strange,” Faith reports.

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know if you heard, but people are starting to do stuff like holding organized orgies throughout the city.”

“What?”

“Yeah. That’s only the tip of what’s going on out there,” Faith says, eyebrows drawing together.

“I didn’t know this city was susceptible to doing things like that so fast,” says Hezekiah frowning.

“Like I told you before, this city was not far from behaving like Phoenicia. Not everyone here is like that, but a lot of people were headed toward that lifestyle. They just needed a little push.”

“But everything seemed normal on the surface. It didn’t seem like anything like that was going on.”

“That’s because you were distracted,” says Frank.

“What do you mean?” asks Hezekiah.

“In your last city, did you have to recover from a severe injury that laid you out for weeks?”

“No.”

“Were you able to survey the city from the inside out?”

“Yes.”

“Did you have to deal with your own past sins on top of a love interest that went sour?”

Hezekiah and Faith squirm in their seats for a second. He feels a rush of different emotions through that one question and exhales. “No.”

“You were not able to see our city and its spiritual state because you didn’t have enough time to examine things thoroughly. Between dealing with us, yourself, and your injuries, you’ve had no time to actually see what is going on around you. I’m sorry, Hezekiah, but we were your distraction,” says Frank.

“No. I refuse to believe that,” says Hezekiah.

“Be that as it may, you could not see the darkness that saturates this city because you were dealing with the past. If we had known earlier, or rather just believed you when you said you were here on assignment, we would have helped you better. For that, I’m sorry,” says Frank.

“Frank, we were meant to find out about each other. Remember, God uses everything for His glory. Without meeting you two, I would not have had a chance to deal with my own past. For that, I’m grateful. Right now, we need to focus on what to do next. Speaking of which, what are our options?” Hezekiah says as he turns his attention to Mr. Jaxon.

“I have an excellent legal strategy that will set you up for success. I don’t mean to say this without being insensitive, however, no evidence against you has surfaced since everyone from the Valley of Dragons is dead. The other side doesn’t have a leg to stand on about what you did in the old kingdom, provided that no one here says anything about it.”

Hezekiah feels a significant prompting of the Holy Spirit. Something about what the lawyer said doesn’t sit with him well. He decides to yield to God.

“No,” says Hezekiah firmly.

“What?” asks the lawyer, hoping he’s misunderstood.

“No.”

Frank, Faith, and Jaxon glance at each other. “Even though I don’t remember what happened, I don’t want to get off for something I did

do. Maybe this is God's retribution. And if so, I'm done running from my past. It's time that I answered for it."

"What about saving the town? There is a dark army out there somewhere that is waiting to take over this city. We need to get you out of prison to save the city," Faith implores.

Hezekiah lowers his voice to a whisper. "Faith, when that day comes, I'll leave this prison, save the city, and come right back. Do you really think this place can hold me? God will let me out when the time is right. Right now, my place is here."

Faith and Frank's heart rate picks up slightly as their stomach begins to flutter. Faith's eyes become glossy and bright as a soft smile forms on her face.

Mr. Jaxon jumps in. "If this is what you want, then as your attorney, I'll get a plea bargain for you."

"I don't want a plea bargain. I'm guilty. I just want to do what God wants at this point."

"I would advise against it, but okay." The attorney gets up from the table.

"Hezekiah, you're making a big mistake," says Frank.

"No, I'm not."

"You're throwing away your own freedom," says Faith.

"My freedom is in Christ. Even though I'm bound, I'm forever free."

"If you're trying to do this as some ploy to impress me, it's not working," says Faith, eyes wet with tears.

"It's not about you, Faith. I'm responsible for your mother's death, along with the lives of an entire kingdom. This seems to be the lot that God has for me, so I'm going to live in it."

"I'll say it again. You're making a mistake, Hezekiah." Frank gets up from the table and motions for Faith to come with him.

"Dad, give me a minute."

"Okay, sweetie. I'll be over here at the snack machine if you need me."

"Okay."

Frank walks away to the machine, and Faith holds Hezekiah's hand. Tears stream down her face, escaping the irises of her chocolate brown eyes. Weirdly, Hezekiah gives something to Faith at this moment that he couldn't give her before—a closed-door to a painful chapter. They don't say a word to each other as they gaze into each other's hearts. Faith lets go of his hand and gets up from the table. Frank, Faith, and the attorney leave the visitation area, and Hezekiah is taken back to the inner recesses of the jail.



Chapter 22:

THE CALL TO ACTION

THE NEXT DAY, FRANK CALLS JAXON ON THE PHONE.

“Alexander Jaxon. How can I help you?”

When the lawyer answers the phone, Frank warmly greets him.

“Hey, Jaxon, how are you?”

“I’m doing well, Frank. How’s your daughter holding up?”

“She’s doing fine, but what makes you ask?”

“I don’t mean to pry, but I noticed her eyes were red when we left the jail yesterday.”

“Yeah. This whole experience has been painful in more ways than one.”

“Speaking of which, I’ve been meaning to ask, why did you hire me to defend Hezekiah knowing that he killed your wife? I hope I’m not rude, but if it weren’t for the money, I wouldn’t touch this case.”

“I know why, but humor me why you wouldn’t,” says Frank.

“Well, because first, he killed your wife; second, you have been summoned to testify against him; and third, he is a known tyrant. The odds do not look good in your favor. So again, why did you hire me?”

“I guess, weirdly, I want to help him. He did save my daughter’s life three times.”

“Oh, okay. So you want to return the favor.”

“Yeah,” says Frank.

“I understand, but this is not going to be easy. Especially with Hezekiah wanting to admit guilt. With him doing that, there is no other recourse I can take but to meet with the prosecutor and get this handled outside of court,” says Jaxon.

“No. I want you to take this to trial,” says Frank sternly.

“Why?”

“You need to defend Hezekiah.”

“What about what Hezekiah said?”

“I don’t care what Hezekiah said. He is being guided by guilt and shame. He thinks he’s doing the right thing, but he’s not. You need to defend him like your life depends on it. I don’t care what you have to do. Just do it. If you don’t...”

“Are you threatening me?” asks Mr. Jaxon, voice a little higher in pitch.

“No, of course not. What I’m saying is I want you to do your absolute best to draw out the complete truth of the events of that day.”

“Considering the situation, I don’t think that would be the best course of action.”

“What do you have to lose?”

“My license.”

“I hired you because you are the best defense attorney in the city. If you feel you can’t do this, I can find someone else.” Jaxon pauses for a second. A fluttering feeling expands in his chest.

“No, sir. You hired me for a reason, and because I’m your friend, I will do above and beyond what you ask for.” Jaxon hangs up the phone, and sits in silence in his office for a moment. Arguments, counter

arguments, and case notes flood his mind. Jaxon smirks. He leaps from his chair and starts to bark out orders to his legal team for resources to help him with this case.

Faith walks into the living room. “Hey, Dad. Who was that?” she asks, watching her dad hang up the phone.

“That was Mr. Jaxon.”

“What did he want?”

“Baby, remember when I told you that I felt that we should help Hezekiah?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you remember the story I told you about what happened to your mother?”

“Yes. So?”

“I can’t put my finger on it, but there is a lot more to the story than I even know. Your mother’s death was not as quick and dry as I made it sound before. When I told you what happened to your mother, I was just summarizing the event.” Faith frowns.

“What are you saying, Dad?”

“We’re going to have to wait and see.”



Chapter 23:

SETTING THE STAGE

A WEEK LATER, DELIBERATION IS SET TO BEGIN. THE jury selection has already finished, and Mr. Warrington, along with the prosecution, have put their final strategies into place. Mr. Warrington, with his connections, makes a phone call to the jail.

“Central Jail, Officer Felix speaking. How may I help you?”

“Felix, this is Warrington.”

“Mr. Warrington. I was expecting your call. How can I help you today?”

“Did you find out anything my team and I can use for this trial?”

“Actually, we did. You will be pleasantly surprised that Mr. Hezekiah wants to admit guilt.”

“Really? That’s great! So this trial should be quick. However, there is only one problem with that. Hezekiah’s attorney is one of the best in this city, and I doubt he’ll let that happen.”

“I have some more good news,” Felix crows.

“Which is?”

“I have my hands on a detainee who use to work for the old king as a member of his security detail. What makes it better, he was there that day when the king gave the order for Maranda Parker to be killed.”

“This is perfect! How do you know this is true, though?”

“I have a few connections of my own. They did some research and found out that my detainee is telling the truth.”

“That’s great. So when can you arrange for me to meet your contact?”

“Well, he’s not going to meet you unless he gets something out of it.”

“Like what?”

“He wants to get out of the prison system.”

“Well, we’ll see what we can do. Just set up the meeting and we’ll take care of the rest.”

“Okay. I’ll tell him that you agree to getting him out of jail because that is the only way he is willing to testify.”

“What is his name?”

“John Singleton. He transferred here a few weeks ago.”

“I’ll have my lawyer research this man’s case. In the meantime, just have him ready to testify.”

“Yes, sir,” Felix says obediently.

As Warrington gets off the phone with Felix, more good news arrives from his secretary. Church growth has quadrupled, and his sermons are now available in every format and platform that people have access to. Not only that, but his digital sales have shot through the roof. Also, his books now saturate the city. People are fully buying into his gospel by the busloads.

“This is excellent. This is truly excellent! Schedule Alexia to do a performance after the trial is over. This will mark a new beginning for the people of this city. The beginning of an abundant future!”

Faith, Frank, and Mr. Jaxon try desperately to find character witnesses for Hezekiah’s defense. Still, it seems that everyone he knows from the City of Light is either far too busy or dealing with some sort of crisis.

“Is there anyone we know who could serve as a character witness?” asks Jaxon.

“Well, he can use us,” says Frank.

“This trial is a true challenge, but I have been known to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.”

“Does it help that we were summoned to testify against him?” asks Frank.

“Yes and no. If my strategy was to deflect from the truth, then it wouldn’t help at all. However, since it is my intention to highlight the truth to the exact detail, it’s perfect.”

“What do you mean?” asks Faith.

“How much does Hezekiah remember about the incident?” Jaxon asks.

“Nothing at all,” says Frank.

“How sure are you about the timeline of the events?”

“One hundred percent sure,” Frank returns, not knowing where the lawyer is going.



Chapter 24:

TRIAL BY FIRE

THE COURTROOM PREPARES FOR THE DELIBERATION. The jury sits in its place as the trial is ready to start. Hezekiah is brought out in an orange jumpsuit as Frank, Faith, Jaxon, and the rest of the people in the room look on. Mr. Warrington also is in attendance with the prosecution. He is anxious to see his enemy fall.

The bailiff appears. “All rise for the honorable Judge Daniel.”

Judge Daniel enters the room. “You may be seated,” he addresses the full courtroom. “The case of Hezekiah vs. the People.” Daniel looks towards Hezekiah and his lawyer. Mr. Jaxon and Hezekiah stand to their feet. “How does the defendant wish to plea?”

“Not guilty, your Honor,” says Mr. Jaxon.

“You may be seated. The prosecutor and the defense attorney may approach the bench.” Jaxon and the lead prosecutor, whose name is Lexington, approach. “Okay. I want a clean fight, no hitting below the belt.” Both Jaxon and the prosecutor look at him, raising eye brows.

“Just a little courtside humor. Seriously, I will not have this case turn into a circus, so don’t try anything stupid. Do you understand?”

“Yes, your Honor,” both men say. However, the prosecutor has every intention of making Hezekiah look like the devil by any means necessary. Both men go to their respective places.

“The prosecution may now proceed with their opening statement,” intones Judge Daniel.”

“Thank you, your Honor,” says Lexington as he stands to speak. “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury and people of our beloved city, today is a day of justice for countless millions. Hezekiah is not the well-mannered man you see before you today; he is actually the wicked king of the Valley of Dragons. Although he is responsible for the deaths of millions of people, we are here today to try him for the murder of one of our own, Mrs. Maranda Parker.

“Mrs. Parker was a Christian missionary who saved the lives of many people through her medical missions. She and her husband would go out into poverty-stricken areas, war-torn nations, and battlefields. Such was the case when Mrs. Parker and her team entered a battlefield where King Hezekiah had just slaughtered thousands of people. She was there to render aid to any soldier who survived the battle. On such a day, Hezekiah had Mrs. Parker killed for assisting an enemy soldier.

“Mrs. Parker is survived by her husband, Frank Parker, and her daughter, Faith Parker, both of whom will be testifying during this trial. Hezekiah is guilty of taking the life of a devoted wife and mother of our community.” Lexington sits down, and Jaxon stands to speak.

“Our beloved citizens, we are here to reveal the truth. Hezekiah was indeed the king of the Valley of Dragons. However, I’m here to tell you today that he is not responsible for the death of Mrs. Maranda Parker.”

Hezekiah, Faith, and Frank twitch on the inside. They hide their surprise as they hear for the first time that Hezekiah didn’t kill Maranda. Frank nor Faith fully believe that Hezekiah is innocent.

Jaxon continues. “We are not here today to judge what actions he chose to take while governing a kingdom. We are here today to decide

whether or not Hezekiah killed Maranda Parker. Hezekiah is not the person who pulled any trigger, nor can it be proven that he gave any order to do so. Indeed, Mrs. Parker was a great woman in our community, however, Hezekiah is not responsible for her death,” Jaxon concludes as he takes his seat.

“The prosecution may present their first witness,” Judge Daniel states.

“The prosecution calls Mr. Parker to the stand.”

Caught off guard by being the first called to the stand, Frank is unprepared for what he might say. He walks to the witness stand and sits down, noticing everyone watching his every breath.

“Mr. Parker, are you Mrs. Parker’s husband?”

“Yes.”

“Are you Faith Parker’s Father?”

“Yes.”

“Are you Hezekiah’s roommate?”

“Objection, your Honor,” counters Jaxon. “Relevance.”

“Sustained. Do you want to rephrase your question, councilor,” says the judge.

“Okay. Did you care for Hezekiah’s injuries as a medical doctor?” Lexington revises.

“Yes, I did.”

“When you found out that Hezekiah was King Hezekiah, the one who had your wife murdered, how did you feel.”

“Objection,” says Mr. Jaxon.

“On what grounds?” asks the judge.

“It calls for a response that is prejudicial and inflammatory.”

“Overruled. Continue, prosecutor.”

“I felt angry,” Frank honestly answers.

“Why did you feel angry?”

“Because he had my wife killed.”

“And how did he have your wife killed?” asks Lexington, continuing his line of questioning.

“He didn’t do it directly himself. He said that if anyone from our missionary team helped another enemy soldier, to have that person killed.”

“How did he get his point across?”

“He shot the enemy soldier we were working on at the time.”

“No further questions, your Honor.” The prosecutor returns to his seat.

Hezekiah’s defense attorney approaches the witness stand with determination in his eyes for his cross-examination. Something about what Frank said earlier about finding the truth comes to mind. The statement puzzled him back then, but now he has an idea of what the doctor was referring to.

“Mr. Parker, during the day of the battle when your wife was killed, who shot the enemy soldier your team treated before Hezekiah gave the warning.”

“Hezekiah did.”

“Are you sure?”

Frank thinks for a second. His own hesitation makes him question the events of that day. “Well, the soldier was shot, and then we turned around to see who did it.”

“Did you actually see a gun in Hezekiah’s hand?”

“No.”

“Did Hezekiah give an order for your wife, in particular, to be killed?” Jaxon asks as he works the cross-examination.

“No, but he did say that we were not to treat any of the enemy soldiers, or we would suffer the same fate as the soldier just killed.”

“Why did he say it?”

“I don’t know why he said it. He just did.”

“Did he say specifically to one of his soldiers ‘If they work on anyone else, kill them?’”

“Yes.”

“Did you see him say this?”

“Well, no, but I heard him say it.”

“What do you mean by ‘you heard him’?”

“I had my back turned when he said it.”

“When Mrs. Parker and the rest of the medical team were working on the next patient, did she hear the warning?”

Frank recounts, “No. Maranda didn’t have time to hear it because she was already working on that patient.”

“When your wife was shot, did you directly witness Hezekiah pulling the trigger?”

“No.”

“Did you directly see Hezekiah give an order to kill your wife?”

“No.”

“What happened after you, your wife, and the medical team, treated the enemy soldier?”

“A shot rang out from outside the tent and killed the wounded man.”

“And what happened next?” Jaxon keeps questioning.

“A guard came into the tent and reminded us of what would happen if we treated another enemy soldier,” said Frank.

“Are you sure the guard was a soldier in King Hezekiah’s army?”

“No, I’m not sure. I just assumed he was.”

“Did he or she shoot your wife right then?”

“No. The man escorted us out into the woods away from everyone.”

“Why did he escort you out into the woods instead of killing you and the entire medical team right there?”

“I don’t know,” Frank states.

Mr. Jaxon continues his line of questioning. “Is anyone on that medical team still alive?”

“I don’t know,” the doctor says again.

“When the guard escorted you, did he report to his superiors what he was doing?”

“No.”

“No further questions, your Honor,” Jaxon says in conclusion.

Frank walks back to his designated place in the courtroom, trying to wrap his mind fully around the events of that day. He always believed that when he told the story to Faith, it was rock-solid. However, Jaxon’s

questions place new questions in his mind about what happened that day.

The judge motions for the prosecution to call his next witness. Lexington takes center stage and begins, “I would like to call Faith Parker to the stand.”

Faith rises up from her place and walks to the witness stand, repeating to herself to tell the truth in an effort to calm her nerves.

The bailiff places a Bible before Faith, who places her hand on it. “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”

“I do,” says Faith confidently.

Lexington walks up with confidence on his face as he prepares for his assault. “Ms. Parker, are you in love with Hezekiah?”

“Objection!” Jaxon immediately says.

“On what grounds?” asks the judge.

“Relevance. This has nothing to do with the trial,” Jaxon replies.

“Approach the bench, councilors,” Judge Daniel directs. They both swiftly do so.

“What’s the purpose of this line of questioning? Where are you going with this?”

“I’m trying to draw a narrative for the jury, your Honor,” answers Lexington.

“Okay, I’ll allow it. Just watch yourself and don’t get carried away,” says the judge.

Both attorneys go back to their previous positions. Faith’s hands tremble, not wanting the lawyer to ask that question again. Her feelings for Hezekiah are very complicated, to say the least. She definitely does not want her inner turmoil displayed for the entire world to see. However, the lawyer comes at her with the same question.

“Do you love Hezekiah?”

“Like a friend,” she says voice high in pitch.

“Okay. What did you feel about Hezekiah when you first met him?”

“Objection. He’s badgering the witness,” says Jaxon.

“Sustained,” rules the judge. “Ask your next question, councilor.”

“How did you feel when you found out that Hezekiah killed your mother?” asks Lexington.

“I felt extremely betrayed,” she says voice cracking and eyes tearing up.

“Why?”

“Because of what I felt for him.”

“How did you feel about him?” “I liked him. I liked him a lot,” Faith responds truthfully.

“Why?”

“Objection, relevance,” Jaxon calls again.

“Councilor, I warned you not to continue with this line of questioning. If you don’t move on, this court will.”

“Yes, your Honor. When your father told you that your mother died, how did you feel?”

“I felt like my life was destroyed,” says Faith choking up. “She was my mom.”

“No further questions,” says Lexington before he returns to his seat.

Mr. Jaxon walks up to the stand for his turn to question Faith. “Ms. Parker, did you see Hezekiah kill your mother.”

“No. I was not there.”

“How do you know that he is responsible for your mother’s death?”

“My father told me.”

“Did you hear this story from anyone else?”

“No.”

Continuing, Mr. Jaxon asks, “Did anyone else tell you how or why this happened?”

“No.”

“So the only story you know is what your father told you?”

“Yes.”

“Since you were not there when your mother was shot, how do you know that Hezekiah killed your mother?”

“Objection,” Lexington says. “Leading the witness.”

Jaxon chooses to end his cross-examination. “No further questions, your Honor.” He then returns to his seat, and Faith is also excused from the stand.

“Councilor for the prosecution, do you have any more witnesses?”

“I do, your Honor, but it will take an hour for them to get here,” answers Lexington.

“Okay. This court will take a brief recess for an hour,” decides the judge. Everyone departs the courtroom for lunch, looking to refuel for the next part of the trial.



Chapter 25:

TRIAL BY FIRE PART TWO

THE COURT RETURNS TO SESSION, AND EVERYONE takes a seat. Hezekiah wonders what to expect next. He is hurt, but understanding Faith's testimony, he knows it was what had to be done. The judge takes his seat and motions for the trial to resume.

"Councilor for the defense, you may call a witness."

"The defense calls Hezekiah to the stand."

Hezekiah takes his place in the witness stand not knowing what to expect. He goes to the stand not just from his lawyer's directive, but because God presses upon his heart to do so.

Jaxon does his best to keep with the strategy of finding the truth by any means necessary and begins to question Hezekiah. "Hezekiah. King Hezekiah. Do you remember the events that are being discussed in the courtroom today?"

"Vaguely, but yes."

"Why vaguely?"

“Because I’ve been through countless battles and wars.”

“As a king, did you ever have anyone executed?” He exhales.

“Painfully, yes.”

“What do you remember about them?”

“I remember names, faces, how they died, why they died, the person who carried out the executions.”

“How and why do you remember those things?” Jaxon asks.

“I have nightmares about these people sometimes,” Hezekiah admits.

“Why? You were a king. Why do you have nightmares about executing these people?”

“Because I carry guilt for what I did.”

“Please elaborate, if you will.”

Hezekiah explains, “Because I feel remorse for what I did, especially when I became a Christian.”

“How did someone like you become a Christian?”

“Satan brought me to the end of my rule by causing dragons to rain fire from the sky. I ran to escape only to be caught by a monster. Jesus saved me before it was too late.”

“He saved you? What do you mean ‘He saved you’? Is this some sort of metaphor about inner demons and Jesus saving you from them?”

“No. A beast chased me through the forest leading out of my kingdom and tried to kill me. I had an encounter with the Son of God, and He slew the beast for me.”

“That sounds pretty dramatic. Why should I believe a story like that? It sounds fantastical,” Jaxon practically scoffs.

“If you don’t believe me, just watch a certain old news recording from the City of Light. It will show you the truth that God is real and what He can do. Or you can ask a few people in this city about what happened not too long ago with the black knight that attacked Faith and her father. Or look at what just happened to Phoenicia and the chaos that transpired there. If you don’t believe that the supernatural exists, you only have to turn on the local news to see it.”

“I see your reasoning. You mentioned before that you saved Faith? What did you save Faith from?”

“I saved her from the black knight who attacked her at the pharmacy, and I rescued her from Phoenicia.”

“Just to confirm,” Jaxon says, “you saved reporter Faith Parker from the invasion on Phoenicia?”

“Objection, your Honor,” says Lexington. “Relevance.”

“Councilor, what is the purpose of asking Hezekiah these questions?”

“I’m just creating a narrative, your Honor.”

“Make it quick.”

“Yes, your Honor,” Mr. Jaxon agrees. “Hezekiah, why can’t you remember the order you gave about the execution of Mrs. Maranda Parker?”

“I don’t know why.”

“Could you have done it on a whim? Because of the way Mr. Parker testified, it sounds like you did.”

“I don’t do things on a whim. As a king, everything I did, everything I was told to do, was intentional. I didn’t want to be a violent king. Everyone that I killed was for a political reason or to satisfy Satan. I was a devil worshiper back then, and every person I killed or had killed was for political gain or to satisfy the devil’s blood lust.”

“So, everyone you killed was for a reason?” asks Jaxon.

“Yes.”

“Then why don’t you remember having Ms. Parker killed?”

“I don’t know.”

“No further questions, your Honor,” Jaxon concludes.

The councilor for prosecution wastes no time approaching the stand. He goes in immediately for the kill. “On the day of the events in question, did you order for Mrs. Parker to be killed?”

“I don’t know,” Hezekiah tells the room again.

“Did you or did you not tell a member of the guard to kill anyone?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why don’t you know?” Lexington counters, raising his voice. “You’ve had countless people killed. Why don’t you remember the fact that you killed Maranda Parker?”

Hezekiah gives the same truthful answer. “I don’t know.”

“Objection,” his defense attorney calls.

“Sustained. Councilor, calm your tone!” warns the judge.

“Why don’t you know? Answer the question!” Lexington rails. “This good family has suffered for years over their wife and mother’s death! Why don’t you know? Why don’t you remember?” he says with heated vigor.

“Because I didn’t do it!” Hezekiah suddenly answers with a revelation. A bright light then whips through the room, and the audience shrieks from the sound. Everyone has their eyes trained on Hezekiah as something shiny drops on his lap. He takes a second look at the object, and he can hardly believe his eyes. It’s the Belt of Truth.



Chapter 26:

TRIAL BY FIRE PART THREE

THE ENTIRE COURT IS IN AN UPROAR WITH THE confusion of the light and Hezekiah's statement. The prosecuting attorney and his team are flustered because they didn't expect for Hezekiah to say he didn't commit the murder. The one thing they did not want looming over the trial was doubt.

Faith also is surprised by what Hezekiah said. She is entirely awestruck, but in disbelief. She's not sure what to believe since she's held on to her dad's story for so long. "Dad, is he really telling the truth?"

"I don't know. It's something we're going to have to discover." "Order! Order! Order in the court!" shouts the judge. The room settles the more the judge calls for the restoration of order. The bailiff walks up to the judge and recommends a recess. "No. No. I want to get through this," says Judge Daniel. "Prosecution, do you have any more questions?"

“Yes.” The prosecutor walks up and prepares for his assault but with less enthusiasm than before.

Hezekiah braces himself as he puts the belt around his waist.

“What are you doing?” asks the judge.

“I’m just putting this belt on.”

“No, you are not. Bailiff, take this...gold belt from Hezekiah and place it somewhere.”

The bailiff takes the belt from Hezekiah and walks away with it. However, the belt turns into smoke and transports itself back to Hezekiah’s lap. The court gasps at the sight.

The judge pounds his gavel into the bench. Everyone calms down once more. He then turns to Hezekiah. “Before we continue, is this belt a weapon of any kind?” he asks.

“No.”

“What is it?”

“It’s the Belt of Truth, your Honor.”

“The Belt of Truth?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Prosecution, you may continue with your questioning,” says the judge.

“Yes, your Honor. Hezekiah, what kind of object is that?” asks Lexington.

“It’s called the Belt of Truth,” the Spirit Warrior answers.

“And why did this belt come to you?”

“Because I just told the truth.”

“Your Honor, this may be some sort of ploy to add validity to the defense. I ask that this episode be stricken from the record,” says the prosecuting attorney.

“This event is too big to strike from the record. But I will add that we will continue to seek the truth no matter where it leads us. The previous event could very well be a stunt and could benefit either side. However, it must not deter us. So, request denied, councilor,” declares Judge Daniel.

“Then, I have no further questions.”

Judge Daniel takes control of his courtroom. “In light of what just happened, I order for the bailiff to take Hezekiah back into custody for the safety of everyone here.” The bailiff escorts Hezekiah out of court as the prosecution makes its next move. “Councilor, do you have any more witnesses?” asks the judge.

“The person will arrive momentarily.”



Chapter 27:

TRIAL BY
FIRE PART FOUR

“YES. IN LIGHT OF TODAY’S EVENTS, WE NEED TO bring a little more clarity to the situation. The prosecution calls John Singleton to the stand.”

John Singleton, Hezekiah’s recent cellmate, walks to the stand, and Frank gasps loudly and he freezes. He slightly covers his mouth. “Oh my...”

“What, Dad. What is it?”

“That’s the guy who shot us. That’s the guy who shot your mom and me!” Frank says, hardly believing what he sees.

Faith gasps and covers her mouth. The mysterious trigger man finally sits across the room from her. It was easy to blame Hezekiah because he was a physical person. She frowns and grits her teeth as she

gazes at John Singleton. Having the soldier who killed her mother in front of her allows the blame to be easily shifted.

“Mr. Singleton, who are you, and why are you relevant in this trial?”

“I used to work for Hezekiah as a soldier in his army.”

“Did he often tell you to carry out executions?” queries Lexington.

“Yes.”

“How many people did Hezekiah murder in your recollection?”

“Great amounts of people. Too many to count.”

“Do you believe that any of these crimes can be tried in a court of law?”

“Yeah, if there were any survivors,” Singleton answers. “Remember, that entire nation was wiped out by fire from the sky. Good luck finding any survivors.” Lexington clarifies Singleton’s answer. “Okay. So, what your saying is that no one survived that apocalyptic event?”

“No.”

“Objection. Relevance,” Jaxon claims again.

“Councilor, what is the meaning of this line of questioning?”

“I just want to establish the past history of Hezekiah’s reign in the Valley of Dragons.”

“You may proceed,” says the judge.

“So, Mr. Singleton, is Hezekiah a murderous tyrant?”

“Objection. Leading the witness,” says Jaxon.

“Sustained. Councilor restate your question,” instructs the Judge.

“Mr. Singleton, how would you describe Hezekiah as a king?”

“He was a murderous tyrant bent on conquest and looking good for the camera.” “So when he ordered you to kill Mrs. Maranda Parker, was that to look good on camera?”

“Yes.”

Lexington finishes, “Your Honor, I rest my case.”

Faith’s hopes are dashed as she listens to the guard admit that Hezekiah ordered him to kill her mother. But questions still loom in her mind about the situation.

“Faith, pay attention. Mr. Jaxon is about to go,” says Frank.

The defense attorney walks steadily to the witness stand, determined to find the truth because something is not right about what just transpired between the prosecution and the witness.

“Mr. Singleton, what did Hezekiah tell you directly about Mrs. Parker?”

“He told me to kill Ms. Parker,” answers the former soldier.

“Did he?”

“Objection. Badgering the witness.”

“Okay,” says Jaxon backing off, pausing for a moment.

“Do you have any more questions, councilor?” asks the judge. Jaxon is silent and the court room with him. The entire court could hear a pen drop. Jaxon struggles to form a question in his mind for the first time ever. He starts to sweat. He inhales and holds his breath.

“Well, he didn’t tell me to kill her directly,” come the words from the stand.

Lexington does a double-take, and gasps, eyes wide.

“What is he doing?” says the prosecuting attorney to Warrington.

Warrington’s face reddens. “He’s jeopardizing his own freedom,” says Warrington, voice deepening. “Remember, if we lose, you lose more than this case.”

“Objection, your Honor!” immediately cries Lexington.

“On what grounds?”

“Badgering the witness!”

“He did no such thing. Sit down, councilor.” retorts the judge. “Defense, you may proceed.”

Jaxon lightly tugs on his suit jacket. “So what exactly happened the day we are discussing in this court? Start from the beginning,” he says. “Hezekiah did make the announcement to the medical team, but it was not for the wrath of himself,” says Singleton.

“What do you mean?” asks Jaxon, raising an eyebrow. “There was a problem within King Hezekiah’s army.”

“What kind of problem was that?”

“We were all blood thirsty. You see, what Hezekiah didn’t know is that devil worship started in the army first before it got to him.”

“Which means?”

“Which means, unless Hezekiah followed a certain guideline of what to do, we would not listen to him,” says Singleton.

“Really? How so?” continues Jaxon.

“Our first allegiance was to the devil and then to Hezekiah. So if he was not following along with what was in line with the cult, we disregarded it and did what we thought was right in pleasing to Satan.”

Jaxon blinks a few times and frowns. He softens his face. “Okay, so back to the story. What happened?”

“This is what really happened. The medical team arrived on the scene and helped the first soldier mentioned earlier. However, Hezekiah did not order anyone to shoot him. Someone from the ranks shot him.”

“So, what did Hezekiah do?” asks Jaxon.

“He recognized what was about to happen. He knew that if he didn’t get a handle on the situation, we soldiers would turn on him. So he made the announcement in front of us to warn the medical team not to treat anyone else,” says Singleton.

“So why did he not try and stop you from killing anyone from the medical team anyway?”

“But he did.”

Jaxon’s eyes widen. “Really? How?”

Singleton keeps talking. “After the medical crew went away, he pulled us aside and told us, ‘These people are Christian medical missionaries. They are not to be touched.’”

“I thought you said King Hezekiah was not in control of his army. Why would you listen to what he said then?”

“Because of what he said next. He said, ‘If you all so much as to lay a hand on these people, not only will it be bad publicity for us, but it will cause an international incident. These people belong to another nation.’”

“Why was he worried about that?”

“Because we had just finished a large-scale war. We didn’t have the finances to enter into another one so soon. It would have bankrupted our nation.”

“So why was Frank and his wife shot anyway?”

“Because of what King Hezekiah said right afterward to me. He had everyone else leave and told me that the medical team reminded him of his parents because they were Christians. He didn’t want to kill any more Christians because they reminded him of his parents. When he said that, it made me so mad,” he says crossing his arms over his stomach. He inhales and sighs heavily.

“Why did it make you mad?” Singleton bites his lip.

“Because anything concerning Jesus, at the time, was an abomination to me and everyone in the army.

“Then...” Jaxon pauses, cradles his chin, looks away, and gazes back into Singelton’s eyes.

“...then what happened?”

“I stormed away from his presence to kill that group of people. But I needed to do it secretly. So after I shot the enemy soldier, I escorted the Parker doctors far away from the battlefield in an attempt to hide what I was about to do.”

“How did you get past the other guards?”

“They just assumed that I was taking them as prisoners.”

“And can you tell the court what happened next?”

“The rest is history,” states Singleton. He slightly throws his hands up and lets them fall. He blinks a few tears away. “I tried to kill Mr. and Mrs. Parker, but they struggled and got away,” he says, voice trailing off.

“So, Hezekiah is not responsible for Mrs. Parker’s death?”

“No.”

“No further questions, your Honor.”

“Thank you. Does the prosecution have any more witnesses?” asks Judge Daniel.

“We do not,” says Lexington.

The Judge motions for the bailiff to escort Singleton out of the court room. Frank and Faith stare, eyes wide, as the bailiff escorts him out the court room. “Let’s proceed with closing arguments.”

The prosecution gets up and addresses the courtroom. He clears his throat. “Ladies and gentleman of the jury. Even though Mr. Singleton acted outside of Hezekiah’s will, the old king is still responsible for the death of Maranda Parker. It was his poor leadership that caused his soldiers to rebel, resulting in Mrs. Parker’s death. Hezekiah is responsible for countless lives lost as is a matter of record. Don’t let him get away on a technicality. He is responsible solely for her death. Mr. Singleton said it himself; King Hezekiah’s army was out of control. If he had better control over his army, Mrs. Parker would be here today. I say again, do not let this murderer getaway!” With those concluding words, the prosecution sits down.

Jaxon gets up for his turn. He walks briskly with a strong posture and stands in front of the jury. “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, Hezekiah is not on trial for his past service record, he is on trial for the murder of Maranda Parker. Let the evidence or lack thereof speak for itself. Hezekiah did not commit the crime in question. The star witness for the prosecution admitted that he acted on his own to kill Mrs. Parker. Hezekiah did not give the order for her to be murdered. In fact, he gave precise orders for her and her team not to be touched. Based on the evidence, Hezekiah is not guilty.” Jaxon’s closing rests in the courtroom.

After reading the jury instruction, Judge Daniel calls out, “We’ll be in recess while the jury deliberates.” He hammers his gavel, and the bailiff escorts the jury to the jury room. The courtroom audience disperses.

Faith, Frank, and Jaxon walk outside into the open city air.

“I can’t believe that Hezekiah didn’t do it,” says Faith, with a smile that cannot be contained.

“Yeah, I can’t believe it either,” says Frank, eyes wet.

“Is what Mr. Singleton said true?” asks Faith, eyes wide and glowing.

“It must be. However, there is no way I could have known that Hezekiah ordered for us not to be harmed. I’m sorry, dear,” says Frank. He puts his head down.

“It’s okay. I’m just glad Hezekiah is not responsible for Mom.”

“What difference does it make? My wife still died,” says Frank, bluntly. Tears stream from his eyes. He exhales. “I’m sorry, Faith. Maranda was special to you too. I guess this trial is bringing up more pain that I thought I dealt with already,” says Frank. She blinks a few tears away and puts a hand on his shoulder.

“It’s okay, Dad. I understand.”

“I’m sorry to interrupt your conversation,” Jaxon interjects, “but Hezekiah is still not out of the woods yet. Sometimes public opinion can be a killer. Hezekiah may be innocent of what happened, but that does not mean the jury won’t try to punish him for other things he did in the past.”



Chapter 28:

THE TRUTH REVEALED

THIRTY MINUTES LATER, THE COURTROOM IS BACK in session. Hezekiah is returned to the room and takes the seat beside his attorney.

The judge looks over to the jury. “Has the jury reached a verdict?”
“We, the jury, find King Hezekiah innocent of all charges.”

Hezekiah’s eyes grow wide. “What?” Hezekiah says to himself under his breath. “I can’t believe it. What just happened?”

Jaxon gets his client’s attention. “There was a witness the prosecution planned on burying you with who testified that he worked as a soldier for you. That very witness said that he was responsible for the murder and acted alone. He said that you told your soldiers not to harm the ministry team. That they were not to be touched,” he says.

Hezekiah draws down his brows as he searches his memory. An image of Frank and his wife come into focus. Hezekiah gasps. “I remember now. I did say that. I didn’t want the ministry team to be

harmful because I didn't want to look bad on the news. I wanted the war to look like it was a just war. Killing the missionary team would have brought discredit to me, and possibly another war which I was not prepared for. I also remember not wanting more Christian blood on my hands because of my parents. I couldn't remember because I was trying to remember a lie."

"Well, in any case, I'm glad you are now clear," the attorney says.

"Thank you for searching out the truth when it seemed stupid."

"No problem, Hezekiah," Jaxon says with a smile. Faith and Frank walk up to where Hezekiah and Jaxon are conversing.

Faith and Hezekiah just stare at each other for a moment. With no stigma of murder hanging over Hezekiah's head, they both feel free.

"I'm glad it wasn't you, Hezekiah," says Frank, he puts a hand on Hezekiah's shoulder. "because you are a true friend."

Warrington and his team are unnaturally silent. With his pupils turning blood red, Warrington face turns red and his nostrils start to flare. "How could you let this happen!" he shouts to Lexington.

"Sir, I did everything I could to—" Warrington gives him a resounding slap across the face. Everyone looks over.

"Bailiff, restrain that man," Judge Daniel orders. The bailiff quickly walks over to get ahold of Warrington. "If I let Hezekiah leave this courtroom, it will ruin my plans. Everything is already in place, it's too late to turn around now," says Warrington out loud. Warrington punches the bailiff in the face, grabs his gun, and shoots at Hezekiah. But Jaxon pushes Hezekiah out of the way and is shot instead. The courthouse erupts in turmoil as everyone scatters. The film crew captures the entire situation as it unfolds.

Hezekiah rushes towards Warrington as the man pulls the trigger again. The gun unexpectedly jams, preventing Warrington from getting off the shot. Hezekiah zips with blazing speed and punches him in the face. Warrington drops the gun and stumbles back. Hezekiah frowns. Warrington counters with a strike of his own. The Swordsman stumbles back and blinks a few times. Warrington chuckles deeply.

“I guess there is no real point in pretending any longer. You die today, Hezekiah.”

“You are wrong about that,” shouts Hezekiah.

“Hezekiah, what is he saying?” Faith calls out, frantic.

Mr. Warrington balls his fists, curls his forearms chest level, and shakes violently as he starts to scream. Sweat begins to pour down his face as his pupils go completely white. The bailiff gets up and lunges to tackle Warrington, however he hits an invisible wall of pressure and is shot backwards. The bailiff careens into a wall and is out cold. Warrington glows bright red as everyone left in the court room looks on at the strange sight. Bright fire bursts out of Warrington and his voice booms as he changes, his body twisting, turning, and growing. Warrington morphs into Warlord in front of their very eyes.

“What the heck!” shouts Frank.

Hezekiah doesn't waste a moment. “Get everyone out of here now and—” His words are cut off mid-sentence as Warlord strikes him in the face, sending him careening into the judge's podium. Hezekiah struggles to get up.

“You think you can just waltz into this town and change it with a few words? I don't think so. This town is mine to destroy.”

“You haven't won yet!” shouts Hezekiah.

“Ah, but I have. You are too weak to stop me, and the citizens of this city are already ripe for judgment. Their hearts are too far gone for them to turn back now. It's too late for them. And it's too late for you!”

Warlord pulls his sword from its sheath and zips forward to strike Hezekiah. Hezekiah quickly summons the Sword of the Spirit and counters the strike. They clash swords as Hezekiah stands and begins to push Warlord back.

“It seems your little belt is making you stronger,” demonic Warlord says. “No matter, I will still kill you.”

“Let's let our swords do the talking,” says Hezekiah. He pushes Warlord back and strikes him with a powerful blast of light. Warlord

flies out of the courthouse from the hit and Hezekiah quickly leaps to pursue.

“Is everyone okay!” shouts Frank.

“No. Remember, I’ve been shot in the back!” says Jaxon in pain.

“Somebody call an ambulance now. I’ll stop the bleeding until help arrives,” Doctor Frank says as he takes over the emergency.

Hezekiah and Warlord fight across the rooftops of the city with Hezekiah pursuing Warlord. The news cameras capture the fighting via helicopter.

“We’re live from the news copter,” says a reporter from the helicopter. “Mr. Warrington has morphed into an armored creature as he tries to kill the just acquitted King Hezekiah. Their fighting has gone from the courtroom to the rooftops of Central City. We’ll continue to record as the situation unfolds.”

Hezekiah and Warlord are locked in sword-to-sword combat when Warrington notices the news chopper. As they fight, Warrington grabs Hezekiah and throws him into the helicopter. The Swordsman just misses the twirling blades, but slams into the body of the aircraft. The chopper goes down sideways. Hezekiah struggles to hang on as the pilot and the news crew scramble to get the helicopter under control.

“Mayday! Mayday! We’re going down!” shouts the pilot. As buzzers in the chopper sound loudly, the Swordsman shoots a powerful lightning blast into the air. The helicopter stabilizes enough for Hezekiah to see a car, with a man inside of it, now careening straight at the aircraft. Reacting quickly, Hezekiah jumps out of the chopper and strikes the car with a blast of light, causing the vehicle to explode.

The man of God zooms through the expanding flames to save the person inside the vehicle. As they both fall toward the earth, the man screams in fear. The Swordsman strikes the ground with a blast of wind, slowing their fall and letting them land safely. Hezekiah looks around, but Warrington has disappeared. Cameras flash as they capture images of the Spirit Warrior. Now miles away from the courthouse, Hezekiah zips away to look for Warlord.



Chapter 29:

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS PART THREE

FAITH AND FRANK ARRIVE HOME AFTER THE extremely tumultuous events of the day. Hezekiah has not returned, and they begin to worry about him.

“I would have never guessed that Warrington was Warlord,” says Faith. “This was his plan the whole time, to destroy the city from the inside before conquering it.”

“It may be what happened to every single city he has conquered so far,” says Frank.

“I hope Hezekiah is okay,” says Faith, eye brows drawing together.

“I’m sure he is. He has taken care of himself since long before we met him. I’m pretty sure he knows how to survive.”

“But still, I wish he had not gone off alone like he has,” adds Faith.

With a sigh, Frank says, “Let’s take our minds off of this battle right now.”

The telephone rings, interrupting Frank and Faith’s discussion.

Faith answers, “Hezekiah?”

“No.”

“Who is this?” asks Faith.

“This is John Singleton.”

Faith gasps and puts the phone on speaker. “How did you get this number?”

“I watched Hezekiah dial it while he was in jail.”

“Did you and Hezekiah speak before the trial?”

“Yes and no,” Singleton answers evasively.

“What do you mean?”

“Hezekiah doesn’t remember who I am. It’s probably best that it stays that way. He doesn’t need me to show up in his life again.”

“So why did you do what you did in the courtroom? You could have gone free, but you confessed to my mom’s murder instead.”

“Well, before we got to court, Hezekiah was my cellmate. He tried to preach to me about opening my heart to Jesus, but I wasn’t buying it. I knew what type of man he was, or so I thought. Anyway, one day in the cafeteria, I was involved in a drug deal that went bad. He stepped in and saved my life. The old Hezekiah would not have done that. That’s how I knew he was changed.”

“So, did you kill my mom or did you just confess to it for him as a favor?”

“No, I did do it.” He pauses for a moment and sighs. “After Hezekiah saved my life, sometime later, we had a visitation session at the same time. I sat next to your table and overheard that Hezekiah was willing to sacrifice his life for you by staying in jail. After seeing that, I knew it would be wrong for me to allow him to suffer for no reason. That’s why I confessed at the trial.”

“I see. I know you’re not calling me just to tell me all of this. This is great, don’t get me wrong, but why did you call us out of the blue?”

“After that visitation, I gave my life to Christ. I knew I was guilty of sin, so I surrendered to him. In my studies about forgiveness, I learned that I should apologize and make things right with the people I have hurt. I know this may be the wrong moment for me to call you, but I want to say I am deeply sorry for what I have done. If I could take it back, I would. I want to ask for your forgiveness. Will you forgive me?”

Frank and Faith both having forgiven Hezekiah when they thought he killed Maranda, makes them prepared for this moment.

“We forgive you, John,” they say in unison.

“Just like that?”

“Just like that,” Frank tells him.

John breaks down and cries on the phone, halting the conversation for a minute. Then Singleton picks back up. “I’m so grateful to you. Thank you so much for showing me the love and forgiveness of God. Now I know that God truly does forgive. Thank you so much! Thank you! If there is ever anything I can do for you, I’ll do it. Thank you, again.”

“Just thank God for His forgiveness,” Frank returns.

“Thank you. I will. Farewell.”

Faith hangs up the phone, and father and daughter are silent for a moment. “Wow. What a phone call,” says Faith.

“That phone call may have ended quite differently if we had not forgiven Hezekiah beforehand,” says Frank.

“Yeah,” she admits.

Frank and Faith feel new healing for a painful memory that has lingered over their lives for the past few years. Freedom from hurt and the unnecessary need for revenge prevails in them both once more.



Chapter 30:

WHEN FOOLS RUSH IN

HEZEKIAH ENTERS THE WILDERNESS AS HE CONTINUES to track Warlord. He is hot on the trail following a path of destruction through the forest. Each step Hezekiah takes adds another degree of anxiety, though. As he hunts this dangerous foe, the Spirit is telling him to go back. The Spirit Warrior unusually ignores God and keeps going relying on his own efforts. The hairs on the back of Hezekiah's neck stand on edge the further he goes into the craggy forest. Dark laughter is heard through the woods.

"Hezekiah! You must go back. You are not strong enough yet!" says the Holy Spirit.

"I can do this, Lord. I'm ready. Just you watch!" Hezekiah speaks to the Spirit in return.

The Spirit Warrior dashes through the forest and reaches a clearing. He sees Warrington standing there waiting for him. Hezekiah rushes in to attack.

“Hezekiah, stop,” says the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit Warrior doesn't break stride as he chooses to attack Warlord. They clash swords as they fight, soon leaving the craggy forest and entering the open wilderness. Warlord punches Hezekiah in the face hard. The Spirit Warrior is launched into the air and slams into a rock wall. Heart drumming in his chest, Hezekiah recovers and sees another Warlord rush in with a sword strike. Warlord is replicating himself. Hezekiah grits his teeth and strikes back with a blast of light.

Hezekiah evades, but then another Warlord appears and kicks Hezekiah into the air. Hezekiah grits his teeth and strikes back with a blast of light. Yet another Warlord shows up and backhands him in the face, causing Hezekiah to twirl through the air. The Swordsman recovers and lands on his feet. Before he can launch into action again, another Warlord shows up. And then another. And then another! Soon Hezekiah is surrounded by thirty different versions of Warlord.

One after another attack Hezekiah. The Spirit Warrior counters, fending off each one, but just barely. The hairs on Hezekiah's arms stand on edge as the duplicate Warlords' assault continues unrelentingly. Hezekiah fights back but, his arms tremble. The real Warlord snaps his fingers and the number of Warlords increase exponentially by three hundred. Hezekiah starts to run, but they block his escape. Every time Hezekiah uses supersonic speed to move, Warlord produces more versions of himself to thwart the Swordsman.

The number of Warlords jumps from three hundred to three thousand. Hezekiah, at sonic speed, zigzags through the wilderness to out run his foe, but more and more enemies appear at every turn. His heart races in his chest as the sun starts to set. The number unbelievably leaps from three thousand to thirty thousand. Hezekiah slides to a hard stop. His face turns ashen as he finds himself in the middle of an army of Warlords, all staring at him, laughing sharply. The number jumps from thirty thousand to three hundred thousand and continues to rise right before Hezekiah's eyes.

His eyes dart everywhere and all he sees is a massive army. He gasps heavily. He hyperventilates as his body tremors. Eyes wide, thoughts of Warlord's army impaling him to death saturates his thoughts. He grips his tight chest as his pulse races. His body sweats copiously as he says to himself, voice straining, "Lord, what have I done?"

The original Warlord sees his prey trapped with no way of escape. With only an order away from executing his enemy, Warlord finally gives it. "Kill him."

The army rushes in as Hezekiah screams. He fights off the swarm of demonic copies for a few seconds before disappearing into a shroud of Warlord's dark soldiers. Warlord laughs in a dark way as the soldiers overwhelm the Spirit Warrior.

The air suddenly is filled with a scream. "Gwrahhhaa!"

"Hezekiah, when did you get back?" asks Faith.

The Spirit Warrior looks around, eyes bulging. He is in Frank's backyard.

"What...what just happened?" asks Hezekiah, gaze darting everywhere. His heart palpitates in his chest.

"I don't know, you tell me," says Faith. "And why were you screaming like that?"

Hezekiah grasps the sides of his head and grits his teeth as he shakes his head. "No, no, no, this isn't real! I'm still fighting Warlord!" he shouts.

"Hezekiah, calm down! Everything is going to be okay!" says Faith, moving closer, reaching out a trembling hand. He jerks away from her, eyes wide.

"No, you're trying to trick me!" She flinches.

"Dad, come help, quick!"

Frank rushes outside and sees Hezekiah in his crazed state. "Hezekiah, calm down. We are not the enemy! Calm down," he instructs.

Hezekiah takes a deep breath, but he starts hyperventilating. He crosses his arms over his stomach as his body trembles. Images of Warlord slicing him to death dances through his mind like a party.

He closes his eyes and prepares to scream. A warm hand rests on his shoulder and his heart stops racing.

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord, your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9 NIV).

Hezekiah turns around and his face lights up as he gasps and smiles with a toothy smile.

“Jesus!”



Chapter 31:

THE ENCOUNTER

“HEZEKIAH, I TOLD YOU TO STOP. WHY DID YOU not?” asks Jesus.

“I...I thought that I could do it, Lord. I’m sorry.”

“Oh my...God!” shouts Faith.

“Hezekiah, you need to find the other pieces of armor to defeat Warlord. Only then will you be able to fight against him and his many forces,” says Jesus.

“Are you...?” stammers Faith.

“Yes,” He says with a simple smile as he reveals his nail scarred hands.

Faith falls to the ground, prostrate, not knowing what to do. Her heart beat quickens in her chest as all of her nerve endings tingle. Jesus walks up to her and lifts her up to her feet. She stares into Jesus bright warm eyes and feels endless warmth. She smiles, face bright. “Faith, I want you to help him find the Shield of Faith,” He tells her.

“Yes, Lord,” she says, as warmth infuses with her body.

“I have so much to tell you that you must find out. Keep following me, and I’ll tell you everything,” says Jesus.

“Yes, Lord,” Faith says again.

Jesus turns back to Hezekiah, who is now bowing to one knee, chin to his chest. He gazes into Jesus eyes.

“Lord, why is this town being attacked? I didn’t see any huge acts of sin until just recently. There is even a church in the city.”

“The people in this city are very lukewarm. This means almost everyone in town knows about Me but does not have a real relationship with Me. It’s leaving them vulnerable to demons like Warlord who exploit the freedoms of salvation to cause people to fall into sin. The enemy then uses their sins as a justification to invade.”

“Who is Alexia and what does she have to do with any of this? I noticed that she was there in Phoenicia when it was attacked. Is she also a demonic spirit?” asks Faith.

“No, she is a misguided soul who volunteered to become an instrument of evil. She and her crew of dancers go from town to town, seducing people into evil and causing their cities to be invaded. For her services to the gates of hell, she is rewarded with fame and money. But don’t get distracted by her. Find the full armor so you will be able to stand against the evil about to invade this city,” says Jesus.

With that, Jesus departs in a flash of light. Hezekiah, Frank, and Faith are left with minds blown and full of questions. Father and daughter stare at him, smiles on their faces.

“I didn’t know you were on speaking terms with God,” says Faith.

“I am, but so are you. You’re a child of God, right?”

“Oh,” she says. She chuckles a little, “I guess so.”

“We need to find the Shield of Faith immediately. Because if we don’t, we’re dead,” says Hezekiah.

“What happened to you before Jesus brought you back?” asks Frank.

“I found Warlord, and we started fighting. But he multiplied himself so many times that He became an army impossible to stop. Warlord

is a force to be reckoned with by himself, but his having the power to multiply himself without limit is unnerving.”

“Do you have any clues as to where the Shield of Faith is?” asks Frank.

“No. I have no idea.”

“I may have an idea,” Faith offers.

“Really?” asks Hezekiah.

“Yeah. Remember when we had our tour of the forest?”

“I do, so?” “Well, there is an old, abandoned garrison there. The reason why that was not a part of the tour is that it’s too dangerous to go into. There are old stories about flashes of light coming from the area at night. Many people say that it’s haunted. But I believe that is where the Shield of Faith might be.”

“Okay, I’ll search there.”

“What do you mean by ‘I’?” Both Frank and Hezekiah raise an eyebrow. “I’m coming with you,” says Faith.

“What?” Hezekiah shakes his head and waves his hand. “No, it’s too dangerous if what you say is true.”

“I’ve been through worse, Hezekiah. Besides, God wants me to help you find it. So you don’t have a choice.”

Hezekiah thinks for a moment. “Okay, let’s go,” says Hezekiah.

“I’m coming with you too,” Frank chimes in. “I’m not going to sit and wait up worried to death about the two of you.”

“Okay, let’s get ready to go,” says Hezekiah.

“No, Dad. You can’t come.”

“What?” her father questions.

“Dad, God wants me to help Hezekiah to find the Shield of Faith. We’ll be okay.”

“But sweetie, I—”

Faith holds up her hand and cuts him off. “Dad, let us do this.”

“Alright. I’ll be praying for you. I’ll be praying for both of you.” Frank looks at Hezekiah. “Bring her back safely.”

He nods. “I will,” says Hezekiah. “No, God will,” Faith states with surety.

Frank helps the two pack camping gear, survival rations, and emergency signal flares. Since they are going into the woods after dark, he insists that Faith dress in protective gear from head to toe. He even gives Hezekiah a protective shirt and jacket for the cold. Together they pack up the jeep, and Frank watches his daughter and their friend leave for the forest.



Chapter 32:

FAITH TEST

FAITH AND HEZEKIAH HEAD INTO THE DARK forest well after sunset. Faith takes out her phone to use the GPS to identify the location of the garrison. However, the map the phone displays leads them toward a cliff. Together they make the decision to chart a new path around the obstacle. The further the jeep goes down the wooded trail, the more treacherous the terrain turns.

“Where is this garrison you were talking about?” asks Hezekiah.

“It should be close to where we were before when we went hiking,” answers Faith. “It should be just beyond this turn.”

“Yes, I can see it now. The garrison is just up ahead,” says Hezekiah.

“Good,” Faith sighs.

The pair get out of the jeep and walk up the stairs into the tan stone lobby of the garrison.

“Faith, do you have any idea where the shield would be in here?” asks Hezekiah.

“Well, there was an armory in here at one point in time. Maybe it’s in there,” she answers.

“Where would we even look for that?”

“Let’s look for a map. Since this is a government site, let’s see if there is a map here.” Faith makes a scan of their surroundings. “Ah, like I thought. I see the site map on the wall over there.” They look at the map and discover the armory is deep inside the garrison. “We are here, and the armory is right over there,” Faith points out.

“Okay. You know, the place we need is never upfront. It’s always deep in the back, filled with danger,” chuckles Hezekiah.

Faith’s heart skips a beat and she smiles. Just then, they hear clicking footsteps. They jerk their heads towards the sound, but no one’s there.

“We had better grab that shield and get out of here. I’m not in the mood for another fight today,” says Hezekiah.

They walk through the garrison, hands swaying close together, but not touching, as they walk down multiple tunnels. It becomes darker the further they go but they keep walking. Faith stumbles and lightly cups Hezekiah’s arm. A spark’s shoots through them both. She gasps and shoots her hand back. “I’m sorry,” she says softly. “It’s okay. It’s dark in here,” he says with a chuckle. They keep walking and the tunnel becomes pitch black. Hezekiah’s sword lights up acting as a beacon. After five minutes, the two of them notice that there is light at the end of this particular tunnel. They walk toward it. After two minutes, they see figures in the light, and the hairs on the back of their neck stand on edge.

“I wonder what that light is back there?” wonders Faith out loud.

“I don’t know, but it doesn’t look like a lamp or like the other spotlights in the garrison. This light almost looks like a fire,” says Hezekiah.

“What do you mean?”

“You know, like a campfire.”

“Oh, okay. But why would there be a campfire inside the garrison?”

They look further and see Alexia and her dancers are dancing in a circle with her in the middle.

“Are they filming a music video or something?” asks Faith.

“Maybe. This would be a good place for an exotic music video,” says Hezekiah.

“But I don’t see any video cameras.” She moves to walk.

“Faith, stop,” Hezekiah says, throwing an arm across her path. Her heart skips a beat.

“What?” His eyes sharpen and his stomach quivers.

“Her dancers. They are armed to the teeth with knives.”

Her eyes sharpen as she leans forward to see.

“How can you tell?”

“Look at their hands. The knives in their hands are flickering in the firelight,” says Hezekiah.

“Wow,” she says, now lowering her voice. “Why are they cutting themselves?”

“This must be some sort of demonic ritual.”

“So that’s why this place is well lit after dark like this, so they can get in,” says Faith.

“That makes sense. But why is Alexia glowing like that?”

As they watch, a scarlet, dusty, red cloud appears above Alexia. Hezekiah and Faith’s pulse picks up. The scarlet cloud swarms around Alexia and shoots into her. Faith and Hezekiah gasps. The cloud invades and seeps into her mouth and skin. Alexia flops like a fish, and levitates off the ground.

“What the heck! Oh, my...” She covers her mouth for a second. “What kind of voodoo place did we wander off into!” says Faith.

He frowns. “I don’t know, but we might want to avoid these people,” says Hezekiah.

“Why can’t you just beat them up with your sword?”

He turns his gaze toward hers and their eyes lock. “With the Sword of the Spirit, sword fighting becomes complicated when I’m fighting people.”

She raises an eye brow.

“How complicated?” He frowns.

“Like it’s hard to use complicated.” Her head quickly draws back. “Oh. Let’s turn back then.”

“What about the armory?” asks Hezekiah.

“I’m sure it’s in another part of the garrison. Hold on,” she breaks her gaze with Hezekiah and focuses on Alexia and squints her eyes.

“Alexia seems to be pointing in our direction. What is she pointing at? And why are they running?” asks Faith.

He gasps and flinches. “She’s pointing at us! Move, move, move!” He shouts.

Alexia and her dancers sprint toward them. Blades scratch and scrape the walls the faster the crazed men and women come.

“We gotta get out of here!” she says huffing and puffing. Adrenaline woosh through her veins as her pulse thrashes through her ears. “Oh, how the heck did I get myself into this?” Faith says, still running.

“God, remember?” he huffs out, smiling at her, while running. “Less talking, more running!”

Faith and Hezekiah make it to a clearing and see multiple tunnel entrances. “Which way do we go?” shouts Faith.

“I don’t know. Let’s just pick one,” Hezekiah calls back.

They pick one, but her fevered people come from that tunnel chasing them. They are soon trapped. Alexia comes out from the shaft, walking with her hips seductively swaying.

“What are you doing here?” asks Alexia in a smooth provocative voice.

Hezekiah frowns. “We could be asking you the same question,” he answers back.

“Why are you chasing us?” Faith challenges.

Alexia flicks her hand in the air and smirks. “You know what? It doesn’t matter. I could try and trick you into believing that I’m here just rehearsing for a music video, but you two know that I’m connected to Warrington and I don’t care anymore. My master will have great joy knowing that you’re both dead.” She turns to her following of dancers. “Kill them! And bring their dead bodies to me,” she says with a chuckle.

Alexia walks away while the first wave of her people rush to attack Faith. Hezekiah zips in front of her and attacks the onslaught of dancers with a gust of wind from his sword that knocks them against the wall. The pair are not safe yet as others from Alexia's crew rush in from behind. Hezekiah flips over Faith and hammers this group back with another blast of wind. Still three more come in for the kill. Hezekiah zips and punches each of them in the face, sending them flying.

"Let's go, Faith, let's go!"

They start to run down a tunnel and additional henchmen jump out to attack them. Hezekiah gasps. He blocks a dagger strike and thrusts the man's head into the wall. He and Faith run past him, but more people are waiting for them on the other side.

Hezekiah strikes with a blast of wind, sending his opponents backward through the air. He and Faith see another tunnel and quickly run through it as the henchmen continue their pursuit. The duo run through the opening of the tunnel only to be hit by a surge of heat. Hezekiah and Faith slide to the ground, ducking a seemingly random burst of flame. Alexia's band run into the flame and retreat out of the room on fire. The tunnel closes, trapping Faith and Hezekiah in the chamber.

"Great! We've seemed to have stepped into an ancient trap," Hezekiah speaks.

"No! We're in the armory!" she shouts, grinning. His face brightens.

"Oh, that is good news! But where's the Shield of Faith?"

The pair explore the room, and they find old swords and muskets everywhere. They glance around the room and see a looped metal handle in the corner. They run to it and dust it off. "It's a shield!" shouts Faith. Faith moves the shield, and a lever under it is pulled. A burst of fire shoots at them! They duck, and the burst of heat woosh over their heads and stops. They look for the source, and it was from a nearby statue of a dragon. Faith tugs the shield, and a fire burst shoots again. They hit the floor, dodging the heat.

"Is this really the only shield in the room?" asks Hezekiah.

“Yes.”

“Is there any inscription on it or anywhere else in this room for that matter?”

“I don’t see any.” She further examines the shield. “No, wait, I found some! It’s on the arm band, but it’s in another language.”

Hezekiah shines his sword on the inscription. It reads: “The only way to pick up this shield and use it is to have faith.”

Faith pulls on the shield. Fire bursts forth from the statue. Hezekiah grabs Faith, and her heart races in her chest, as both tumble to the floor. The fire burns the shield to a crisp. Only the armbands for holding the shield are left. As she lays there in his arms, her insides feel as if they are vibrating. She exhales and they both sit up, letting each other go.

“What just happened? Why was the shield destroyed?” asks Faith frowning. Hezekiah blinks a few times and shakes his head.

“I don’t know.” His eyes sharpen. “It has to be a riddle,” says Hezekiah. Faith turns her head away for a second and glances at the statue.

“I got it! Hezekiah, quickly, what does the Bible say about faith in the book of Hebrews?”

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Hezekiah thinks for a moment and smiles. “You’re a genius!”

Hezekiah leaps off the ground and Faith follows. He quickly puts on the shield’s arm sleeve and lifts it. Fire bursts from the statue as a result. Both flinch as the flame shoots out, but an invisible barrier blocks the fire as the heat continues to burst from the icon.

“This is incredible! We don’t even feel the heat.” says Faith.

The statue shoots out fire with a higher intensity as Hezekiah continues to hold up the shield. Then the statue explodes and flying shrapnel shoots everywhere. They both flinch from the sound. Smoke fills the room in the aftermath. Coughing from the smoke and searching for each other, Hezekiah finds and holds Faith’s hand softly and his pulse races.

“Faith, are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I guess we know now that the shield works in explosions too,” says Faith smiling.

“Yeah, I guess so,” says Hezekiah softly.

Faith grips Hezekiah’s hand more firmly.

His face brightens and he smiles. “You know, I’m happy that you came with me,” says Hezekiah.

“Well, I did recommend this place and knew where it was, so you kinda had no choice,” Faith teases, heart fluttering in her chest.

“Yeah, but I’m glad that you’re here. Since I met you, you have always helped me, even when you didn’t want to. You are so kind and compassionate, and are always willing to help others in need, even when it hurts. You are also so forgiving. I really saw the love of God through you that day when you forgave me for what happened to your mother. You have such a strong relationship with God to the point where you can really mirror His love through you, even when you don’t feel like it. I really admire that about you.” Faith blushes and turns her head away for a second. “I’m grateful to have you in my life,” Hezekiah says as he looks into her eyes.

They gaze at each other while they stand holding hands, hearts hammering in their chests. Then, a dagger zips by Hezekiah’s face, breaking the spell. Faith and Hezekiah snap to attention, remembering where they are again. More henchmen run into the room as Hezekiah and Faith make their escape. They run through a tunnel that leads to the main hall of the garrison. Being in a clear, open space, Hezekiah grabs Faith’s hand and, with sonic speed, sprints with her to the jeep. They both jump in and speed away into the moonlit night.



Chapter 33:

UNEXPECTED VISIT

THE TWO MAKE IT HOME, AND FRANK MEETS THEM the second the back door opens.

“Did you find the Shield of Faith?”

“Yes, we did!” says Faith grinning widely as she jumps up and down.

“I’m glad, because we’ve got a big problem,” says Frank frowning. “What?” asks Hezekiah, eyebrows drawing together. “There is a massive gathering of soldiers about three hundred miles away from the city!”

“What? How do you know this?” asks Faith.

“It’s all over the news. A helicopter followed you as you chased after Warlord. Apparently, they broadcasted the fight between you two and noticed that he kept multiplying,” says Frank.

Hezekiah is silent. He closes his eyes and see’s Warlord multiplying himself. His hands start to tremble as he starts to sweat. A hand softly touches his shoulder. He opens his eyes and it’s Faith. They smile at

each other for a second. He turns his gaze towards Frank. I didn't know he was still multiplying himself.

"Yes, he did. After you disappeared from the battle, Warlord continued to multiply himself into a massive army. The broadcaster said he never saw anything like it."

"How many soldiers are they estimating?" asks Hezekiah. "One million," Frank tells him.

"Oh my...how are we...?" asks Faith as she mentally calculates the odds.

"With God, all things are possible. We've got to find the rest of the armor," says Hezekiah.

The doorbell rings, interrupting.

"Who can it be at this hour?" asks Frank, eyes widening. The trio walk through the house to the front door and open it. Standing there is a man dressed in a black suit, tie, and white wired ear piece in his ear. "Can I help you?" Frank asks.

"We need to talk," says the agent. Through his ear piece, he gets the word that the rest of the house is secure. He then motions for his team to bring in the person they are protecting. A tanned-skin, slightly overweight man in his late fifties, of regal appearance, steps out from behind a group of security personnel.

"Governor Roxbury. What are you doing here?" exclaims Frank.

"May I come in?" says the governor politely.

"Of course!"

The governor and his security detail are let inside, and both groups exchange greetings as they walk to where they can sit down together.

"I want to jump straight to the point," says the governor. He moves his hands through his white hair, exhales, and makes strong eye contact with Hezekiah. "There is a massive army gathering approximately three hundred miles away from the city gate. And it all originates from the trial you were a part of. What is your connection to Mr. Warrington, and why does he want you dead?"

“He doesn’t just want me dead, sir, but he wants this entire town to be laid waste,” says Hezekiah.

“Why? Did your squabble influence that decision? Because if so, you can leave this town out of it.”

“No, sir. The fight that you saw, happened because he wants me dead. He wants me dead because if I’m out of the picture, he can destroy this city with little to no interference.”

“Why does he want to destroy this city? What did we ever do to him?” The governor looks directly at Hezekiah.

“You’re human.” Roxbury slightly jerks his head back.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Warrington is not human.”

“Well, obviously.”

“He’s a fallen angel.”

“Okay, you lost me,” Governor Roxbury states. “I don’t believe in God or angels or all the heavenly mumbo jumbo you Christians talk about. All I know is that there is a massive army gathering outside the city gate, and I want to know why. If you don’t tell me, then—”

“You’ll force me to tell you?” Hezekiah asks.

The governor sits speechless for a second as he dusts his pants off. “Okay, let’s not get off on the wrong foot here. I didn’t mean to get carried away. I’m just a little emotional because I don’t know what to do about a million-man army gathering outside the city,” he says, exhaling.

“Governor, open your mind with me a little. Can you do that?” Hezekiah asks.

“Yes.”

“Let’s say that there is a God. And let’s say that He is a ruler like yourself. Let’s also say that there are agents under Him, like you have agents under you.” The governor nods in agreement. “Okay, now let’s say that a third of those agents rebel and attempt to take God’s kingdom away from Him for themselves.”

“How dare they!” says the governor. “They should be tarred and feathered for trying to betray me!”

Faith holds in her laughter as Hezekiah continues the story. “These agents fail and are kicked out of Heaven and sentenced to prison. But they’re not sent there just yet. These fallen agents are angels, and they want to set up their own kingdom on earth. However, to do that, they must trick the people that God made into sinning against Him. Mankind is tricked, the agents gain their kingdom, and humans are now under a death sentence.”

“A great story, but what does this have to do with anything?” the governor says pointedly to the Spirit Warrior.

“Let me continue. God sends His Son, Jesus, many millennia later to die for the sins of man. Jesus dies, and mankind is set free from the prison sentence. Jesus is then raised from the dead and commands His followers to spread the gospel of salvation that only through the name of Jesus, mankind may be saved.”

“Okay, I’ll bite. What would someone have to do to be saved? Would they have to live this perfect life, not do anything bad, and live in a bubble?”

“No, governor. The Bible instructs ‘If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe with your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.’”

“So you’re saying that believing in Jesus is how you get to heaven? I don’t believe you. It can’t be that easy. Do you know how much evil people do in the world? It’s a lot. How is it that believing in Jesus can forgive you for your sins?”

“Because He paid for them in full at the cross.”

“Okay, if that is the case, then hypothetically, what would I have to do, right this moment, to receive salvation?”

“You would have to ask God to forgive you of your sins and ask Jesus into your heart to be the Lord of your life.”

“So with that being said, does this give me a license to sin as much as I want? Because that is what Warrington was preaching.”

“No, it does not. God sends us His Holy Spirit so that our nature changes from the inside out.”

“This is making sense now. So God helps us to live right by sending us His Spirit to live through us.”

Hezekiah grins and says, “Yes.”

“Okay. What does that have to do with the current situation?”

“Warrington wants everyone to live in open sin so that he can have the right to destroy this city.”

“What do you mean? I thought that God saved people from judgment. How can Warrington even have permission to do what he is doing?”

“If people don’t except the free gift of salvation, then they are still under judgment. Warrington plans to sweep this city away like he did to Phoenicia. But God has already sent me to save it.”

“That is why you two were fighting, then?”

“Yes.”

“I understand, but how are you going to save the city? The entire town saw on TV that you were defeated by Warrington. How do you intend to stop him now?”

“I need to find every piece of the full armor of God.”

“Like the Belt of Truth you received in the courtroom?”

“Yes. How did you know?”

“Remember, the trial was televised. What have you found so far?”

“I’ve got the sword, the boots, the belt, and the shield. I just need the Breastplate of Righteousness and the Helmet of Salvation.”

“Where did you get the shield?”

“In the old garrison in the forest. It was attached to a statue.”

“Well, in the forest, opposite the entrance of the main city gate, there is another mysterious statue of a breastplate. No one knows what it means, so we didn’t bother to preserve it.” Hezekiah gasps.

“That could be it,” Hezekiah says, grinning. “Where in the forest?”

“The trail is actually not hard to find. The main road leading out of that part of the city leads to that trail. The trail runs right into the statue. The statue is in front of a deep pond of water.”

“So, the statue is in front of a pond of water?”

“Yes. A deep pond.”

“I’ll look for it first thing tomorrow morning. Right now, I must rest. I’ve had a long day,” Hezekiah finishes.

The governor rises to leave but then looks at Hezekiah and requests to be led in prayer. Governor Roxbury receives salvation in Frank Parker’s house. He gives Frank his business card, signs it, and then goes for the night.



Chapter 34:

PRE-INVASION ANXIETY

THE NEXT DAY, WARLORD FINISHES MULTIPLYING himself. He opens a dark portal and summons horses for every single member of his clone army. He sends an order through his multitude to advance toward the city. Additionally, he orders for every other demon in a one-hundred-mile radius of the city to not only attack the city, but to be on the lookout for Hezekiah, and to kill him on site. Warlord and his army advance by horseback toward the metropolis.

Governor Roxbury holds a press conference, in his conference room at 9:00 a.m. As he stands behind the podium, his chest tightens. Behind him is a 50-inch flatscreen television. He rests his hands in between the microphone and the television remote and starts to tap his fingers against the wood. He looks out into the audience and a drop of sweat rolls down his face. He frowns and gazes out of the window and into the sky for a brief moment.

“People of Central City. Today, it is with great distress, but with great hope, that I have to inform you of the invasion set to lay siege to this great city,” he begins. “The same invading force that invaded Phoenicia is coming here.”

“Why are they coming after us? What did we do to them?” asks a reporter named Johnson, sharply.

“That’s a loaded question that I don’t think you’re ready for the answer, but nonetheless I will explain. A popular church group, spear-headed by Lloyd Warrington, was actually here not to help us gain spiritual enlightenment but to distract us and draw us away from God.”

“God? What does that have to do with the invasion force headed towards the city?” says Johnson frowning.

“Well, to put it in layman’s terms, Mr. Warrington is a cult leader, and his main goal was to distract us by getting us to follow his evil way of life so that he can invade us.”

“Sir, what you’re saying is a fairy tale. You’re talking about gods and demons. No one in their right mind believes stuff like that. No one in your profession should believe something like that. You need to tell us what is going on without preaching to us.”

“Are you not a reporter?” questions Governor Roxbury. “Are you not supposed to report the news?”

“Yes, I am, and yes, I do,” puffs Johnson.

“Are you a preacher?”

“No.”

“Then why are you preaching to me?” says the governor.

The reporter is quiet for a moment and then sits down.

“If you want evidence that this is all true, just look at what happened during King Hezekiah’s trial. Also, look at Mr. Warrington’s activities before and during the trial. He was heavily involved in debauchery and activities as such. His teachings soaked into this city like water into a sponge.” Johnson smirks.

“Again, sir, you’re preaching. If you’re not preaching, then you’re judging. This won’t look good for your reelection.”

The governor snatches the remote off the podium and turns on the television in the press room.

“What is this?” the newsman cries, “Another way to manipulate people to believe in God?”

“No. This is the live feed of the enemy army headed this way.”

“Oh my God!” shouts the heckling reporter. “That’s the army headed this way?”

“What news company do you work for if you are surprised at this footage? It was all over Central City news last night.” Johnson is silent and puts his head down.

“That was my exact expression when my team first brought this to my attention,” says the governor with a smirk. “But this is no game, and this is no fairy tale. This invasion force is estimated to be here tonight,” he says.

“What is the city doing about this?” asks Julie, Faith’s friend, and a reporter from Central City News.

“We have a perfectly capable fighting force that will defend this city,” says the governor, chest puffed out.

“So did the Phoenicians. In fact, their military was stronger than ours,” counters Julie.

“Ah, but we have a secret weapon in our city. We have God.”

Everyone in the room laughs nervously.

“You don’t understand. Who was the man that Warrington fought against?” asks the governor. “

King Hezekiah,” says Julie.

“Yes, ladies and gentlemen. That King Hezekiah is now on God’s side, and according to him, he has been sent here to defend us.”

“Even if what you say is true, we saw Hezekiah fight and get massacred by Warlord on live TV. How can he protect us now? Isn’t he dead?”

“No, he’s not. My team and I spoke with him last night.” Julie blinks a few tears away and smiles. She thinks about Warlord and frowns. “How is one man going to protect the entire city from a million-man

army?” asks Julie. “He won’t be alone. With God on our side, nothing is impossible.”

The governor ends the press conference amid flash photography and heckling reporters. The news anchor talks to his camera. “The press conference has just ended, and it appears that the governor has cracked under pressure and is seeking God for help.”

Frank turns to Faith, worry clearly showing across both their faces.

“Is Hezekiah awake yet?” asks Frank.

“No. I haven’t checked on him, though. After yesterday, he went right to sleep,” Faith says as she looks towards Hezekiah’s room.

“Yesterday was a long day. First the trial, then Warrington, then that garrison? By the way, what happened between you two there. You seem to be a lot closer since you came back.”

Faith looks back at her father and answers. “We ran into Alexia and her dance crew, and we found out that they are trained killers.” Frank’s eyes widen as his mouth gapes open.

“Oh,” he says, crossing his arms.

“We ran for our lives, trying to fight them off. It was terrifying but exciting at the same time,” Faith says with a smile.

“Are you saying that you two had a good time?”

“Yeah, I guess so. I didn’t really think of it like that then, but now I’m glad I went.”

“You guys are something else. How can you have a good time going through something that nearly cost you your life?”

“I don’t know. Maybe it’s the same way you and Mom were medical missionaries. I use to wonder why you two did what you did, but I get it now.”

“Get what?”

“That you were having fun doing what God told you to do.”

“Alright, you got me there. I did have fun with your mom when we went on our missionary assignments. It was fulfilling. What made it more fun is that we were doing it together.” Frank pauses for a moment.

And a smile slowly builds on his face. “Is that how you feel when you’re with Hezekiah?”

Faith stills for a moment, caught by a revelation. A flush of red moves across her cheeks and neck. “Yeah, Dad, I guess so. I didn’t really think about it until now. I liked him before but hated myself for it. But since the trial, when I found out that he did not kill Mom and actually tried to protect you two, it really moved me,” she says with a soft smile that builds. “I’ve actually developed a very strong liking for him, one that I can’t really describe. I think about him all the time, and I can’t wait to be around him. Every time we talk now, my heart skips a beat and begins to flutter.”

“You’re in love with Hezekiah,” says Frank with a smile.

“Yeah, I guess so. Wait, how do you know it’s love and not infatuation?”

“Because you two are almost exactly alike. You enjoy each other’s conversations. You both talk about putting God first, and that influences everything you two do. You laugh and joke while talking about the Bible of all things. You’re both obviously thrill-seekers, you with your investigative reporting and him fighting. If you could have, I wouldn’t doubt that you would have followed him when he went off to fight against Warlord in the wilderness.”

“Yeah, I would have.”

“There is so much I could say that would prove how you feel is genuine. But what do you say about it?”

“I think me and Hezekiah have to talk.” Faith gets up and goes to Hezekiah’s door, knocking almost before she gets there.

“Hezekiah, do you have a second? Hezekiah. Hezekiah?” Faith knocks on the door some more and then decides to open it. Her heart flutters in her chest as she looks inside. “Hezekiah’s gone!” she shouts.

“What?” Frank enters the room to search it. “When did he leave?”

“I didn’t hear anything this morning,” says Faith, frantically looking through the room.

They find a note on the bed:

Dear Family,

It's weird saying that, but you're the only family I've had in a long time. Anyway, I didn't want to wake you because we had a long night. I awoke with urgency to find the Breastplate of Righteousness. I left without you because I didn't want any of you to get hurt. I'll be back, Lord willing.

Love,

Hezekiah.

"He left without us," says Frank.

"He left without me," says Faith. She sits on the bed and exhales. Frank sits on the bed next to her and smiles.

"Faith, sometimes we do have things that we have to do by ourselves." She gives her dad a weak smile. "Rather than just sitting here, though, we have to speak to the governor," says Frank.

"Why?"

"We need to see what he plans to do for the people in light of the invasion."



Chapter 35:

CALM BEFORE THE STORM

HEZEKIAH MAKES HIS WAY TO THE WEST SAGE Forest to search for the Breastplate of Righteousness. He left before anyone in the house awakened because he felt this foray would be too dangerous for them. “Okay,” he admits to himself, “not just for them, but for me too.”

He feels in his spirit an overwhelming movement of demons as if they are placed on high alert, and senses many are in this forest. As Hezekiah dashes toward the woodland, he sees an abundance of red eyes. He also notices a dead silence as he moves closer to the woods.

At this point, the forest stands so thick with trees that he must slow down to enter. “So much for getting in and getting out,” he says under his breath. Hezekiah comes to a complete standstill because the path the governor said the statue would be on is blocked by dense growth.

“Great. I guess I’ll have to blast my way through this forest.” He lifts his sword to strike, and a club knocks him on the back of the head and he collapses to the ground.

It’s now 11:00 a.m. in Central City. Frank and Faith make their way to the governor’s house via jeep. Faith calls the governor over the phone to schedule a meeting, but no one answers. Father and daughter pull up to the mansion, and the guard lets them in. They walk inside, Marble covers the floor and walls everywhere. They stop at the attendant’s desk.

“Can I help you?” asks the attendant.

“We are Frank and Faith Parker. We want to see the governor.”

“Do you have an appointment?”

“No.”

“You’ll have to set up an appointment to see the governor,” she promptly returns.

“You don’t understand. We are friends with King Hezekiah. He will want to speak with us.” Frank then gives the attendant the card the governor gave him the night before. The attendant looks at it.

“I see. Come this way. He is in the middle of a scheduled break, so this will be perfect.”

The three walk a short ways and enter an indoor garden. The governor is sitting there, praying in the sunlight.

The governor looks up, eyes bulging. Sweat drenches his body as he squints his eyes. His face brightens with a smile as he recognizes his guests.

“Ah, the Parkers. How do you do?”

“We are doing well, sir,” says Frank.

“This is a beautiful garden,” Faith comments, taking it in.

“Thank you. I come here to relax. Or try to anyway.” He looks away, bites his lip, frowns, and gazes back. “Did Hezekiah find the rest of the armor?” Frank and Faith slightly flinch. Roxbury exhales. “I’m sorry to be so direct, but I am apprehensive about this approaching army. We have a powerful military here, but it will do no good against a force that large. I’ve done my research and called the last city that Hezekiah

was living in. They, too, were in demonic trouble, and Hezekiah was the only one who could save them.”

“With God’s help,” says Faith.

“Of course.” He looks away. His brow wrinkles and he rubs it. “However, what I’m getting at is that the council of that city told me that natural weapons will not work against any of the demons.” Frank frowns.

“What about what you said at the press conference?” asks Frank, voice a little sharp.

“I know what I said!” He blinks a few times, shakes his head and exhales. “We could evacuate, but with an army this size, there may be nowhere to run.”

“So, what do you have planned?” asks Frank, voice softening.

“I...I don’t know.” Thoughts of Warlord slashing through people floods his mind and his mouth gapes open. Roxbury’s body trembles as he rings sweat from his shirt. His insides quiver and he stares into Frank’s eyes. “If Hezekiah does not find the full armor of God, this entire city-state will be massacred,” he says, frowning. Faith walks over and firmly puts a hand on Roxbury’s trembling shoulder.

“Sir, with all due respect, we can’t just sit here and wait to die,” says Faith.

“I know that, but...” the governor hangs his head and closes his eyes as his chest tightens. “...there is nothing that we can do,” says the governor.

Faith does not let his words deter her. “There is something we can do.” “What?” asks the governor. Faith thinks, and an image of her, Hezekiah, and her father taking a picture in front of a cave pops into her mind. “Oh!” she says with a smile. “We can use the caves under the city as a survival shelter. If we can move everyone there—”

“—we can buy time,” says the governor face brightening. “I can’t believe that I didn’t think of that before! I’ve been here praying for a way to save the people, and you seem to be the answer to my prayers.” His heart lightens in his chest. “We may not be able to defeat these

monsters on our own, but we can make sure that no one dies.” The governor turns to his assistant. “Susan, call the military director and let him know of our plans. Also, call another press conference so that I can let everyone know what we must do,” he says.



Chapter 36:

DREADFUL SURPRISE

EIGHT HOURS LATER, HEZEKIAH FEELS HEAT CRACKLING across his skin. Nose hairs burning from the heat, he wakes to find himself on a rotisserie. It turns out a strange forest tribe tried to kill him by striking him with a stone club on the back of his neck. Now, they intend to cook him.

Hezekiah moves, and the tribespeople beat him with sticks, trying to knock him out once more. Hezekiah breaks free and falls into the fire. He shields himself and is untouched by the flames. The Swordsman jumps up and away as the locals shoot arrows at him. He runs through the forest to get away as they pursue. Flurries of arrows fly through the trees seeking to pierce Hezekiah. The day having gone, the sun begins setting and the jungle gets darker.

Hezekiah discovers a trail and dashes faster to get away from the tribe members close on his tail. However, the people start running at an incredible speed and morph into grey, hairless wolves. As

Hezekiah runs faster, they burst full-speed and attack him on all sides. He counters with fire blasts but quickly learns he's severely outnumbered. Hezekiah fights to keep moving.

Inside Central City, the governor has organized a campaign to move people underground. Makeshift Iron gates line the entrance of the cave ready to shut at a moment's notice. As the evacuation begins, the governor elects an elite group of soldiers to stay behind to make sure everyone makes it underground safely. Some people refuse to go below for fear of tight spaces, so a small few remain in their homes. As the mass exodus of people prepare to move underground, the governor, Frank, and Faith start talking.

"It's already sunset and your friend Hezekiah has not shown up yet. This is bad, and I'm getting anxious," he says frowning.

"He'll be here," says Frank, softly deepening his voice.

"When? When we're all dead? There is a demonic army on its way with no way to stop it but him. I hope your friend finds the armor he's looking for or this bunker may very well become a crypt."

"You just got to have faith," says Faith, softly.

"Well, the army is going to do what little it can to hold off the invasion," he sighs. "but it will do no good unless Hezekiah shows up." He pauses, exhales, and looks toward the sunset. "Even if he shows up, what is one versus so many?"

"He's not alone. The Lord God is with him," says Faith, voice rising.

A loud trumpet sounds, and a large swarm of demons, surge and attack the city. People scatter in various directions, the evacuation now in chaos.

"They're here early! Everyone, move into the caves now!" shouts the governor.



Chapter 37:

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

HEZEKIAH CONTINUES TO RUN THROUGH THE forest as different types of demons randomly attack. Under the direction of Warlord, they are hot on Hezekiah's trail, doing all they can to kill him. A wolf-like demon clotheslines Hezekiah. The Swordsman flips and counterattacks with a blast of fire, incinerating the demon. The Spirit Warrior turns and continues to run down the path. Determined to not be distracted from his objective, Hezekiah does his best not to engage in any big fights as he searches for the breastplate.

"Ah-ha! I see the sculpture!" Hezekiah shouts as he sights the breastplate statue. The figure is tan in color, and it stands in front of a murky pool of black water. Not thinking, he rushes to the icon. The area surrounding it is incredibly quiet. No birds or animals make any noises, almost as if everything around the pond is dead. Hezekiah reads the

inscription on the statue: “Only true righteousness can save mankind from the painful grip of sin.”

“This seems simple enough.” The man of God takes the armor off the statue and puts it on, guiding his head and arms through the openings of the breastplate. “Is it supposed to do anything?” he says, standing there.

With amazing strength, octopus tentacles shoot out of the pond. Hezekiah gasps. They yank the Swordsman off his feet and drag him toward the dark pool. Sliding through the wet mud, Hezekiah turns to use his sword, but it disappears from his side. His heart thumps hard in his chest as he is yanked into the water. White bubbles from his entry block his vision and are replaced by blue water. Cold and bitter water fills his mouth and lungs as Hezekiah struggles to breathe.

“*Oh, God, help!*” shouts Hezekiah in his mind. The blue water is replaced by darkness as he feels himself drowning. The strong tentacles maintain their grip, pulling him further and further into the dark. “*I don’t think I can make it!*”

“*You will die in your sins, HUMAN!*” says the creature through his thoughts.

Hezekiah’s vision blurs. Scripture from 2nd Corinthians 5:21 flashes into his mind. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.”

“*God took my sin and gave me his righteousness when he went to the cross. His body bore my sin, and now I’m God’s righteousness. I am the righteousness of God!*” With Hezekiah’s realization, the breastplate glows bright yellow and explodes with power.

The Spirit Warrior bursts out of the water like a firebird. The tentacles surge after him in pursuit, and the man of God strikes with a blast of white-hot fire. The blast booms into the water. The murky pond glows bright yellow and explodes with light. The blast thrusts Hezekiah through the air, now fully armored from neck to toe with the armor of God.

Hezekiah lands on the other side of the now crystal-clear pond and swiftly moves through the forest. As he moves, more creatures emerge to attack him. He fights his way through each demonic beast. Hezekiah now moves into a clearing and sees a wave of green, ghoulish creatures running toward him. Without hesitation, he strikes with a blast of yellow lightning. The monsters are obliterated in the violent light. Hezekiah twirls his sword and slides it into the new sheath on his back, his shoes letting him leave the forest in a flash.



Chapter 38:

DARKNESS REIGNS

DEMONS OF ALL KINDS RANSACK THE CITY AS THEY roam through it, searching for people to destroy. They rip through homes, cars, and other buildings as they seek individuals to eat. They rumble through the metropolis, destroying it in their wake. People run from their homes to seek shelter, but to no avail. Crowds of folks flee from creatures of all kinds. The elite guard is overwhelmed. Their weapons don't work, and they are doing their best to fight each demon hand-to-hand with disastrous results. As everyone flees in terror, the demons laugh, attacking each victim ruthlessly, removing them from the face of the earth.

Warlord continues his advance on the city. He laughs aloud as he sees the smoke rising from the town and continues charging toward his destination. Satisfied with what his pre-invasion force is doing, his blood lust spikes as he moves even faster towards the city.

“Where is Hezekiah?” shouts an elite soldier as he sees half of his command taken out by a giant, red demon with bull horns. Terror cascades down the guardsman’s body as his chest and arms tighten. The soldier sees a red creature with large, yellow teeth and big, white eyes chase after a woman. The guardsman rushes towards them. The monster roars and the guardsman slides to a stop. He gasps as his heart drums in his chest. He trembles to his hands and knees. The monster roars, the woman screams, and the monster tears into the woman with its claws as she screams. The man trembles on the ground with tears in his eyes. He grits his teeth and frowns as adrenaline pumps through his body. His muscles tighten. He picks up a rock with his trembling hand and stands up and cocks his arm back. The monster roars and the man flinches and gasps. His chest caves inward and he drops the rock. The beast completely slashes into her and consumes her. The beast sharply twists its head in his direction. He gasps.

“Oh, shoot!” The soldier sprints away, toward a house, as the creature gallops after him. The guardsman bursts through the front door and enters the dark structure. He runs and jumps into a room and slams the door. The creature bursts through the front door after him. The red beast looks around in the darkness, searching for its prey.

As the guardsman hides in the corner of the room, he hears a woman praying urgently. He looks and sees that she’s under a pile of rubble.

“Shhhh! Lady, shut up!” the soldier insists in a sharp whisper.

The lady continues to pray, ignoring him as she pleads to God for help.

“Lady, please be quiet.”

The woman ignores him again and keeps praying on her knees, blubbering. His chest tightens as the sound of his heart beat thrashes through his ears.

“Lady, please be quiet. A monster followed me in here and is trying to kill me. So please be quiet,” begs the soldier, whimpering.

Hearing that, the young woman moans and prays to God louder. He grits his teeth. His muscles tighten as he balls his fists. “Lady, shut

up!” she flinches. “If God was going to help you, He would have done it already!” he shouts.

Claws bursts through the walls and yanks the soldier out of the room, kicking and screaming. The man screams as the creature slashes into him and eats him alive. When the beast finishes, he looks around the room for anyone else but sees nothing. He jumps off and leaves the dark house. The woman remains in the dark, praying for further protection.

As the rest of the town is horrifically overtaken by violence, smoke rises freely into the night sky. The city falls into an eerie silence as the screaming stops under the emerging stars. Nightmarish creatures continue to look for survivors as people are becoming better at hiding.



Chapter 39:

ENTER THE SAINT

HEZEKIAH SPRINTS TOWARDS THE CITY. THE IMAGE of the statue of the king at the city's entrance, enters his mind. He thinks for a second. His face brightens. *"The statue of the King! I knew that icon was calling to me."* Adrenaline pumps through his body as he sprints towards the city. *Since I have every piece but one, it must be that the crown is the Helmet of Salvation!* Wind whooshes into his face as he starts to see signs leading to the city. *I have to get to that crown before the invasion!"*

Hezekiah draws close to the city. His eyes widen. He gasps hard, grits his teeth, and slides to a hard stop. Smoke fills the sky as part of the city looks to be on fire. Thoughts of Faith and Frank being sliced to shreds fill his mind and his body rattles. He stumbles two steps back and internal chest pressure from forgetting to breathe causes him to collapse to his knees. He exhales. "This is my fault!" he says, eyes watering. "If I had been more careful and hadn't gotten knocked out..."

his tears drop to the dusty ground as he thinks about Faith and Frank. The Spirit of God shines in his soul and whispers: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* His tightened chest loosens and energy jolts through his body. He jumps up and powers up. His armor shines as lightning sparks everywhere. He drops to one knee as he grits his teeth, adrenaline spiking through his body. Hezekiah jets off the ground, running at top speed towards the city. He sees the destroyed city gates and crazed monsters everywhere.

“They just have to be safe. There is no way that God would send me on a mission like this only to fail!” Heat flushes through his body as he braces himself to fight. He grits his teeth. “Father God, I pray that you make this sword a homing device so every demon will come after me, in Jesus’s name!” screams Hezekiah.

On the other side of the town, Warlord and his vast army quickly approach the city, riding over one million strong on horseback. Warlord lifts his sword in the air, signaling his army to prepare to attack.

Hezekiah sprints through the city gates into the metropolis. Demons come from everywhere in vicious attack. The Swordsman’s heart pounds in his chest as he slices through massive swarms of them. Thoughts of Faith enter his mind and his pulse elevates. He slams through every demon with his sword. Their skins explode with fire as they are burned to a crisp. Hezekiah spiral strikes, blasting the swarm of monsters away. The Swordsman Sprints forward. He picks up speed as more demons burst out of buildings. Homing in on Hezekiah, they turn into a flood. The Swordsman leaps forward, body-kissing the sides of buildings as he soars through the air. Now running across the walls, he leaps again. He front flips through the air and lands safely on the roof of a building, but keeps sprinting. Streaking across the rooftops of the city, the demons follow him.

Running through the hot wind of the night, more creatures swarm Hezekiah, kicking up dirt from the sandy rooftops. Blinded momentarily by sand flying into his eyes, Hezekiah takes a powerful slam to his face. The blow flips him through the hot air, but he lands on his feet and

keeps running. Still unable to see, swarms of demons batter him around. One creature sweeps the Spirit Warrior off his feet. The Swordsman hits and tumbles across the rocky gravel of the rooftop, rolling as the demons strike at him with their claws. Hezekiah jumps into the air and unleashes a blast of lava. The monsters nearest are destroyed, but more run after him ready to strike. Hezekiah lands hard and rolls as he comes to his feet. Pain still lances his eyes as he struggles to open them. When he clears them, he sees four beasts jumping at him. The man of God filets them with a blaze of slices. With a spiderweb of pain over his eyes, the Swordsman continues to move.

A woman bursts out of her home, running from an evil being down an alleyway, heart drumming in her chest. A large shadow grows in front of her and materializes into a black devil. The woman screams, and the demon strikes in the same second. With lightning speed, Hezekiah slams the demon through the ground. He leaves the alley and runs towards the street. The Spirit Warrior sprints forward as he sees soldiers fighting against a giant, red devil. Blazing heat shoots out of the creature's mouth at them. The Swordsman leaps high into the air and slams his sword through the beast, roughly dividing it. He then bursts through the monster and heads toward the town's entrance. He must keep moving, he must keep fighting, he must stay on mission.

As he continues to sprint toward the city gate, a throng of monsters rampage towards him. The Spirit Warrior leaps and flips toward them like a flaming circular saw. The demons scream as he slices through them like a hot knife through butter. He lands and continues to move. More creatures attack in a tumult. Hezekiah, with sonic speed, plows through each monster, striking them down one by one. He makes it to the town gate only to be greeted by a fight.

A swarm of monsters guarding the important city statue blitz towards him. They exhale intense bursts of hot fire at Hezekiah. The Swordsman twirls his sword through the flames and strikes with a hot blast of fire of his own. The blast slams through the demons and the statue, and the crown is launched into the air. He gasps. Hezekiah

zooms and leaps after the crown. More monsters zoom out of the city and leap into the air after him. The horde of demons covers his body as he stretches toward the crown. His fingers touch the regal rim, but the headpiece escapes his grasp. The demons continue trying to claw out his eyes. Each scratch and tear of skin shoots pain through Hezekiah's body. The horrific hoard of evil creatures pull him down from the sky. As the creatures draw in to finish him off, the crown lands on Hezekiah's head.

With a whoosh of fire, The Spirit Warrior explodes with power. The demons are eviscerated in the explosion as Hezekiah transforms into a golden knight blazing in stellar flames. Angular, fiery-gold armor completely covers him from head to toe. Warmth radiates throughout his body as his heart beat drums in his chest, making him feel Ultra-awake. The Helmet of Salvation opens at the eyes so he can see, but in appearance, his eyes burn with jagged, white flames. The Sword of the Spirit explodes and turns into a flaming blue sword. The Shield of Faith wraps itself entirely around the Spirit Warrior like a fiery, blue bubble.

The Spirit Warrior slams into the ground amid holy fire and stands straight up, looking into the distance toward his enemy. A strange whistling sound causes him to look up, and he sees one million arrows flying through the air. His eyes widen. They slam into Hezekiah with such force that the ground quakes. He stumbles and falls to the ground as the arrows continue to fall like rain and explode like rockets.

The city entrance is covered in the fire as Warlord's army stampedes closer. He smiles within himself. Satisfied that his foe is vanquished, Warlord prepares to burst into the city like a flood and destroy it. As he rejoices, he witnesses the flames moving strangely.

Hezekiah gets up, adrenaline pumping through his veins. "My turn!" shouts the Spirit Warrior in a deep, booming voice. The Sword of the Spirit flairs like a jet engine into a bright, orange fire.

The army is footsteps away from bursting into the city. Hezekiah strikes the ground before him with an formidable explosion, and the sword forcibly opens an abyss. The Spirit Warrior and the front line of the army fall into a vast canyon. The earth separates as more and

more of Warlord's army falls into the pit. Warlord flinches and yanks his steed to a stop which causes his clones to do the same. When the division of the ground ends, a massive canyon stands between the city and Warlord.

Falling, the Spirit Warrior awakens. He gasps and starts jumping from one dark samurai to another to escape the pit. One evil soldier yanks his leg. "You're coming with us!" shouts Warlord's clone.

"Not now, not ever!" shouts Hezekiah.

The Swordsman strikes with a force of light that crushes the clone and propels Hezekiah upward. Flying above the cascading sea of enemy soldiers, he hears the cries of demonic men at the bottom trying to get out.

"Almost there! Just need to get past this last gap of air!" shouts the Spirit Warrior.

Hezekiah clears the last soldier's grasping hand and soars toward the mouth of the abyss. He reaches out his fingers, ready to grasp the edge, but sees Warlord with his sword cocked. Hezekiah's eyes grow wide. Warlord swipes his sword. A blast of dark light follows. The blast slams into Hezekiah's chest. He screams as he falls. He plummets further and further into the deep crevice. He hears the manic laughter of dark angels in the background. The more he falls, the more he smells rotting flesh. He tastes the hint of brimstone in the air. The laughter gets louder and louder the further he plummets.

As his faith starts to wane, the Holy Spirit whispers: "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles."

From within, power bursts fresh from the Spirit Warrior like a surging flame. Wings of white fire explode from his back. He rockets toward the top of the chasm in a massive blaze of light. His internal temperature increases and his muscles tighten as he ascends. From the bottom, a massive hand of demons emerges, trying to grab him back down. Hezekiah turns in mid-flight and shouts, "And the angels which

kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” He then strikes with a blast of dark fire downward that crushes the giant hand under its weight.

As the abyss starts to close from the top, Hezekiah rockets faster and faster towards the opening. With rocks falling around him and pounding into the shield, he soars with sonic speed, but the divided ground completely shuts at the top as Hezekiah continues to rush toward it.

It turns out to be no obstacle. Hezekiah bursts out of the ground, soaring high into the sky. He strikes Warlord’s army with a blast of fire. The explosion tears through the first group of dark knights. He then rockets to the ground and starts fighting his way toward Warlord. Battling ferociously through the wicked army, power from the Holy Spirit pumps into his soul as he moves toward Warlord. A dark soldier knocks him back, and Hezekiah counters with a massive blast of fire. The explosion slams through a third of the army.

Gasping and then smiling, the Spirit Warrior strikes down more and more of Warlord’s army with booming blasts of fire. Warlord tries to multiply himself, but his copies are destroyed faster than he can create them. Hezekiah strikes with a massive burst of blue lightning that crushes more dark warriors with the impact of the explosion.

It is too much for Warlord. Warlord evades the giant blast and grows wings, flying forth to attack the Spirit Warrior. Warlord’s chest tightens as he zooms towards Hezekiah. He powers up his sword, intending to take him out in one, powerful strike. Hezekiah sees the charge coming and bursts towards Warlord like a missile. He launches himself into the air on white angel wings and strikes down Warlord with a blast of white fire. The burst slams through Warlord, and his utter destruction begins. The blast of white fire lifts him into the air, and he screams, vaporizing him in a flash of blinding light.

The intense light fades, and Hezekiah lands, twirls his sword, and puts it back in its fiery sheath.



Chapter 40:

FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

NO LONGER ENGULFED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE armor of the Spirit turns back into standard-looking armor. Hezekiah collapses. His heart drums in his chest as he struggles to move. He looks to the sky and squints his eyes and gasps. He sees winged creatures, wearing armor of their own, flying in from the heavens. He rolls over on to his back, watching the strange beings of light coming toward him. Not knowing if they're friend or foe, he falls unconscious.

"This guy is a tough one," says Michael the archangel.

"I have never seen anything like what God is doing through this person," says Gabriel.

"This man is as strong, if not stronger than we are. If this is the state of Hezekiah now, what will he be like when he is made immortal?" Says Michael, hinting at the future resurrection of mankind.

"I don't know, we'll just have to wait and see," says Gabriel with a smile.

Hezekiah wakes and gasps. His eyes dart throughout his surroundings. Vision blurry, He focuses and it clears. He finds himself in the hospital bed of Frank's house. Dizzy, he slowly gets up, then walks through the house, and sees it is put in order.

"Hezekiah! You're awake!" Hezekiah sharply turns his head. He sees Faith running towards him. His Face brightens and his mouth gapes open as his heart flutters in his chest.

"Faith! Oh, my... I thought you died!" says Hezekiah, eyes tearing up. Faith plows into Hezekiah and they tightly hug. Their eyes close as their hearts flutter from the warm embrace. "No, of course, not silly!" she says.

"How did you escape?" the Spirit Warrior asks.

"The Governor had us all hide in the cave under the city," she answers.

"I didn't know what to think when I saw the city overrun with demons. I thought you all had died."

"No way. We're okay." As his skin tingles from her soft touch,

Hezekiah notices that Faith hasn't moved away from him like she usually does. "Faith, I really like the fact that you're holding me, but what are you doing?" he asks softly.

Faith pulls back just a little, and their eyes meet and hold. Faith's brown eyes open wide and practically sparkle in the sunlight.

"Hezekiah, I've meant to tell you. I've been infatuated with you since the first time I saw you." His eyes widen as his lips part.

"Really?" he asks softly.

"Yes. There was something about you that I couldn't put my finger on. You captivated my mind from the start, and I could not stop thinking about you," she slightly giggles. And his heart skips a beat. "Even though I thought you killed my mom at first," she slightly frowns. "I couldn't fight how I felt about you. You have been there for me like no other man has."

"What are you saying?"

"I love you. And I'm in love with you." Their quiet for a moment.

"I love you too," says Hezekiah with a big smile.

They hesitate for a second, gazing at each other. Their eyes both sparkle in the sunlight as it cascades into the house through the windows. Hezekiah moves his hand through Faith's soft, dark brown hair, and he smells the sweet, strawberry scent of her perfume. Then, her soft lips touch his, and they embrace. A flurry of butterflies flutter across their nerves as they kiss. Their skin tingles all over their bodies as their lips continue to touch. He firmly brings her closer and her knees get weak as the tingling sensation spark across their nerves. Their hearts warm and hammer into their chests as they connect. They release their embrace and smile into each other's faces.

"Faith. Hezekiah." says Frank as he clears his throat.

The new couple is knocked out of the moment as they look around. "Oh, Dad! Hey!" The pair quickly let go of each other. Red flushes across her cheeks as Hezekiah's arms tuck down to his sides.

"I hope I'm interrupting something," says Frank with a smirk. Faith rolls her eyes.

"I know, Dad. 'Save it for marriage.'"

"You got that right." Frank walks up to Hezekiah and gives him a stern look. "Thank you." His face warms. "It's because of you, I can say to my daughter 'save it for marriage.' It's because of you..." Frank chokes up a little. "...that I get to see my daughter alive." He wipes a tear from his eye. "It's because of you that we are all alive and well. You saved us from being annihilated by the devil."

"Thank God. He is the one who did all of this. He could have easily done this through someone else. I'm just thankful that He chose me to do it," Hezekiah says eyes glistening.

"Well," Frank says, wiping tears from his eyes, "That's enough emotion for me right now. We had better get going because we have to be at the Governors Mansion."

"Umm, why," asks Hezekiah.

"The governor has some sort of reward for you," Frank tells him.

"I hope it's not to help him rule the city," Hezekiah says. "I can't go down that road again."

Faith and Frank look at him, eye-brows drawing together.

“It’s a long story. I’ll tell you another time.”

The trio walk toward the door, and Frank opens it. To their surprise, they are greeted by a crowd that bursts into applause. Hezekiah had been unconscious for a week. Every day, people gathered outside of the doctor’s home to see if the great hero had awakened.

“Everyone give it up for the town hero!” says someone from the crowd. More people show up and the applause grows greater.

Hezekiah gazes at the crowd with a lightness in his chest over a job well done. As he sees the smiling faces of the city people, the Spirit of God speaks to his spirit:

Hezekiah, your assignment is not finished yet. This town is still in great danger.

“What?” asks Hezekiah.

The angel of Death is coming against this city soon. He wants everyone in the city, Christian and non-Christian alike, to die. Are you ready to face the Shadow of Death?

Hezekiah gazes at the people in the crowd and his eyes sharpen as thoughts of destruction enter his mind. He then looks at Frank, whom is smiling, and his eyes loosen and a lightheartedness settles into his chest. Hezekiah then gazes at Faith, who is now holding his hand, his heart pounding, fluttering like a fire, in his soul. The Spirit Warrior gazes toward Heaven, sets his jaw, cracks a smile, and says: “Lord God, with you on my side, all things are possible.”



SCRIPTURE REFERENCE PAGE

MANYTIMES IN THE BOOK , THE CHARACTERS share specific Scripture or reference them. Gathered here is the exact wording of these passages. I hope you will use them for your own research and spiritual growth. I have the scripture passages organized in order as they appear in the book.

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:13 NKJV).

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isa. 40:31NIV)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not

against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:10-17 NIV

“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matt. 6:14-15 NIV).

That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ Romans 10:9-13 NKJV

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

“So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isa. 59:19 KJV).

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:12-17 NIV

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” (Gal. 3:13-14 NIV).

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach

their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. Ephesians 1:7-10 NIV

“And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col. 1:20 NIV).

“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (Jude v. 3-4 NIV).

“Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day” (Jude v. 5-6 NIV).

“We know that God’s children do not make a practice of sinning, for God’s Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot touch them” (1 John 5:18 NIV).

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. Romans 7:20-23 NIV

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Revelation 2:20-23 NIV

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 NIV

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 NIV

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not

tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 NIV

Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Matthew 13:18-22 NIV

The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the

devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. 1 John 3:8-10 NIV

“If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death” (1 John 5:16-17 NIV).

“Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col. 3:9-10 NIV).

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9 NIV).

“God made him who had no sin to be sin[b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21 NIV).

“And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day” (Jude v. 6 NIV).

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our

heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 NIV

