

Real Life Stories

Veteran's Edition

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Real People
in
Real Places
with
Real Problems
Looking for a
Real Answer

*People so Real that it could
be someone you know.*

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CHAPTER 1

Help me! Help me!

I have to become one of the toughest – a devil dog. A jarhead!

Life as a Marine didn't solve my problems.

I became an alcoholic, an adulterer, and an angry suicidal man.

I placed a loaded 45 caliber gun in my mouth.

I look back on my life now knowing it could have been so much different. I was born in 1968. Growing up in the 70s & 80s, I thought I had a pretty normal childhood. My dad worked, and my mom stayed home with my two younger sisters. There wasn't too much talk about God growing up or even going to church. Dad was a quiet man, and mom was pretty much the disciplinarian. The discipline was far more than just that. Unfortunately, there was a lot of verbal, mental, and physical abuse along the way. Staying to myself pretty much my whole childhood, I played sports as much as possible. It was an escape for a while for me. It was only a few years ago that I realized I was carrying a lot of those hurts with me like a backpack on a hiking trip.

At 18, I knew I wanted to leave home. I briefly researched the branches of the military. The Marine Corps was the one for me! I thought, "I'll show everyone, I'll make my parents proud!" I carried so much hurt and was seeking approval, thinking I must have made so many mistakes as a kid to get those beatings. I was taking the blame. The truth is, I wasn't a bad kid. No gangs. No drugs. No alcohol. I had a few bad grades maybe but that was it.

I went to the MEPS center in Chicago, already knowing it was the few the proud for me! After testing, even the recruiter asked, "Why the Marines? Your scores are pretty high. Why not the Navy? Air Force?"

My response was simple. "No, I have to become one of the toughest - a Devil Dog! A Jarhead!" This was June after graduating high school. I left for boot camp August 31st. As a vet, you tend to remember these dates. I become a Marine Nov 21, 1986. That is another date I won't forget. I worked very hard in boot camp. I wanted to be meritoriously

promoted upon graduation. I achieved this goal and was a proud PFC! Thinking, "Well, my parents will see that I was in the top 5 of my platoon of 100! They will be proud of me." I was still seeking approval because of something I thought I did wrong. It didn't get really any better. I was still hurt, still depressed, and still angry at myself. Little did I realize, that anger started to turn to everyone around me as well. I was chosen after Infantry Training School at Camp Pendleton Ca. I was an 0311 rifleman (my MOS) to go to Marine barracks 8th & I in Washington D.C. It was called the Yankee White duty. This is select duty this is an achievement that includes providing security for the President, the barracks, the Washington naval yard, etc. I was thinking this would change everything in my life. The hurts, the depression, and the anger would all go away now. Well, it never did.

I arrived in D.C early one morning around 5am. Driving from the airport in a taxicab, I remember passing the U.S. Capitol all lit up, thinking, "Man, this is it! Everyone will just be so proud of me. I'll be happy now." That moment never came to be, not until 2017! Life as a Marine didn't solve my problems. It just added drinking, fornication, and all the things that made my life worse. After my time in the USMC, I spent time with the sheriff's department. It was always something to do with a uniform. Was it respect? Attention? Even these years were the same.

Drinking, anger, and now suicidal thoughts entered the picture. I got married and had three children. During this time, I was an alcoholic, an adulterer, and an angry suicidal man. One night, those thoughts intensified big time It was maybe 2003. My now ex-wife and the kids were gone. I sat on the back porch, drinking heavily. I began to just say out loud, "I want to die. I don't want to live anymore."

I had a loaded 45 sitting next to me on the step. I heard the devil say, "Do it! Nobody loves you. Nobody cares about you. You are a worthless man. Just kill yourself now." I took the bait of the devil. At that moment, I placed that loaded 45 in my mouth. I was crying. I was shaking. Then, I did what the devil said to do. I pulled the trigger! I pulled that trigger with hands shaking, crying, and feeling alone. Nothing happened! The pistol jammed! Remember, I was a Marine now with the sheriff's department. I know how to use a gun.

I became so angry at that moment. I slammed the gun down on the step in total rage and anger. The gun fired! It fired a round into a tree in the back yard. My words at that moment were, "I can't even kill myself right!" This was the first attempt. The devil got me to try a couple more times. Those times were with prescription sleeping pills. I just wanted the pain to stop. I just wanted the anger to go away. I was tired of living, breathing, and wondering why. "Why am I still here?"

Even after taking bottles of pills, the doctors were always amazed. They would tell me, "Your kidneys are fine. Your liver is good." It was almost like they couldn't understand how I was still sitting there looking at them face to face. I know now how it was possible! Fast forward to 2017. It was 13 to 14 years later, and I was still facing the same struggles. I was so tired, a walking dead man. I was depressed and angry with the world. The devil began whispering those same words he did that night on the porch. I was now divorced and broken up with a girlfriend. This girlfriend and I had lived together for a while, and it was bad. I was a mess. The devil was trying to get me to be alone so he could really dig into me. I fell for that as well. I moved out, broke up with this woman, and wanted to sit alone. I rented a house close to my job and 30 minutes from my ex-girlfriend. She didn't give up on me or us. She would drive to the house, and I would sit on the floor in the dark and not answer the door. The devil told me to be alone, and I was just as worthless now as I was years ago. This was my life, hiding from the world, angry and depressed.

One night, on April 17, 2017 (another date I will never forget), I sat in the dark on the floor of an empty house. The thoughts of taking my life got louder and louder in my head. For the first time ever, I began to cry out to God. I said, "God, if You're real, I need your help. I'm not sure You can even love me for all the bad things I have done. I just know I can't do this anymore. I can't breathe, and I'm so tired." I was yelling, "Help me! Help me, God!" I was up all night that night, but it felt like it went so quickly. I remember the sunrise coming thru the window. I was in the same spot on the floor. It had to be six or seven hours later. I was soaking wet, as if I went swimming with my clothes on.

Looking at the sunrise, I noticed and felt something different. It was like I was breathing easier. I could hear better. I heard birds outside

like I never heard before. I felt the presence of God at that very moment! As I write this, I have tears coming down my cheek. I heard a voice. It was a calm, soft, loving voice, but I also heard an authority with this voice. I heard and felt His authority in these words, "Are you done? I know you are tired, but I have always been by your side. You were never alone. I was with you." At that moment, I felt something I never felt before in my life. I was still sitting on the floor. I was still feeling like I was broken into pieces. I was still broken up with that girlfriend. Yet at that moment, I felt a calmness I can't even explain. I felt relieved. Each breath I took was like the first breath you take in when your head comes up out of the water! Even the sunlight coming thru the window was the brightest light I had ever seen! It was like I was seeing my first sunrise!

I joyfully welcomed Jesus into my heart at that moment! Still sitting there with all these visions, answers started to come to me. All the times I was alone, all the times I was crying out and angry, I was not alone. I knew 100% He was there with me! When I thought back to the time I pulled that trigger, I saw Gods powerful yet loving hand over the top of mine. It was God that saved me that night. It has always been God. Each and every time, it was Him. Even the times I don't know about, it was Him. When you accept Jesus Christ into your heart, there's no magical moment, no turning on of a light switch. It's just the beginning of a walk where you submit and surrender each and every day. You give Him your worries, your troubles, and your burdens. Just give it all to Him! This doesn't mean the devil is through messing with you either. He's always going to try, and after you give your heart to Jesus, the devil is going to try even harder. But if we have an intimate relationship with God, through spending time with Him through prayer and worship, the devil doesn't have a chance. God wants us to spend time with Him. He is so good. As you love on God, God is always loving on you back. The girlfriend I broke up with that never gave up on me is now my wife. She is a beautiful woman of God. We minister together, we worship together, and we love Jesus together. Remember, whatever you go through, whatever struggles arrive, you are never ever alone! With God all things are possible! I praise, worship, and glorify You, King Jesus!

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CHAPTER 2

The Woman of My Dreams

During High School, I was in Reserve Officer Training Corps.

First Sgt said I was a Lifer in the Military. He was wrong.

It seemed that everything in life I had ever touched had fallen apart, until...

I enlisted in the delayed entry program for the U.S. Army in 1977. I was a Junior in high school at the time. During High School, I was in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps), a program that taught the basics of marching, ceremonies, and US code of military justice. After four years of ROTC, you are able to enlist as an E-3 in the regular military. I graduated High School in May of 1978. Shortly thereafter, I left for basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Once basic was over, I was stationed at Fort Devens, Massachusetts and began my AIT (Advanced Individual Training). My specialty at that point in time was an O5H-1K3, which is a Morse Code Interceptor. The classes were self-paced due to the difficulty of the training. It took me eleven months to graduate. Most of us who have been in the service discovered that the best way to pass time was to drink alcohol. So, as you can imagine, we did that a lot, as well as other extracurricular activities that were not appropriate.

I did get to see some beautiful states on the East Coast while I was stationed out there. However, school was difficult and very stressful. While studying and partying, I was also involved in the honor guard and participated in the parades. I finished out my AIT by taking extra training to become a signal jammer.

I remember one of my high school buddies had joined the service the same time I did. We trained together, had big dreams of completing this program together, and hoped to be given the same duty station. However, he failed, and was shipped to another post for teletype. I went home on leave and got married to my high school sweetheart. She was pregnant, and I knew it was another man's child. I was young and believed she loved me, so I married her. Our families were all for it.

After all, we had grown up together. We worked it out that I would go to my duty station and begin finding a home for my new family. It took a month or so to find a place. I was stationed at Ft. Hood, Texas. I was in the 522 Military Intelligence Battalion. I processed in there and settled into the unit. I was excited for our new life together and found an apartment for my family. I bought plane tickets for them to fly down and join me. The day came for her to fly out to meet me, and she wasn't on the plane. I began wondering what could have happened, so I called my parents to see if they had any ideas. They had no idea what was going on. Here I was, 2000 miles from home, trying to figure out what was going on. I called her mom, who informed me she had dropped our daughter off with her and left. After talking with my parents, I decided to get an emergency leave to come home. A couple days had passed, and she was still not around. I got my leave and headed to the airport. I called home to let them know I was leaving and found out she had picked up our daughter from her mom's. Shortly after picking up our daughter at her mom's, she turned around and dropped her off to my parents' house, which was just across the street from her mom's. I had accepted responsibility by signing the papers for our daughter when I was on leave, before I went to Fort Hood. As I was flying into the airport at Indianapolis, and making my way home, she showed up at my mom's and took our daughter from my parents' house.

At this point I was on the hunt to find her. It took me about three days to find her. When I did, she told me she has been with another man and doesn't want to be with me. I was still on emergency leave at this point, trying to take it all in. I thought, "Clearly she is not thinking!" I found out drugs were involved as well, so it got interesting very quickly. I had to talk to an attorney to see what my options were. Between the attorney, my parents, and me, we decided to try to get custody.

I contacted my company commander to let them know the situation. I received orders to be attached to Fort Benjamin Harrison. I began going for duty there, while trying to get custody. She ended up giving me sole custody of our daughter, and I also won custody through the courts. I filed for a sole parent discharge, which takes over a year to process. While I was still pulling duty at Fort Benjamin Harrison, I was granted the discharge and had to go to Fort Hood to process out of the active army.

Once I returned home, I got a job and things began to settle down. As time went on, I decided to remarry and join the Army Reserves. Around 1982, I went to Fort Lee Virginia to train to be a Parts and Records Specialist for the maintenance team. After training, I went to Fort Riley, Kansas for training to Load Military Equipment on the Railhead. Training for 36 hours is really ugly, and I was sleep deprived. We convoyed all the way back to Lafayette, Indiana. I later transferred to the Indiana Army National Guard after getting divorced again. We did have a son during that marriage. During this time, my mother had become very ill with Leukemia. She passed away within six months of her diagnosis. While in the Guards, I received a promotion to Sergeant. They asked me to take the Retention NCO position while also retaining squad leader in a TOW Weapons Platoon.

During my time in the Guards, I remarried again. I got to experience some cool stuff, like night flying in a helicopter. I flew in a chopper from Frankfort to Grayling, Michigan. I also began working at Frito Lay, and I went to NCO School in hopes of make E-6. Things had been going well, and we had two daughters together. Then suddenly, my grandmother died, and my wife told me I let her get bored and she wanted a divorce. I worked six days a week, twelve hours a day at Frito Lay. I had let her quit Frito Lay, so she could be a stay-at-home mom. I was devastated at the news she wanted a divorce. It was a very rough time in my life. I began using drugs and drinking more often, doing the same thing over and over, expecting a different result.

I was getting close to reenlistment time, but the First Sgt. wouldn't let me have a slot for the E-6 promotion. I had been the Retention NCO for about three years. I also had a 100% Retention rate during that time. So, needless to say, I was upset. I was also dealing with the fact that my ex-wife had taken the kids and moved several miles away. It seemed that everything in life I had ever touched had fallen apart. I knew it wasn't supposed to be this way, but I just didn't care anymore. The pot smoking continued, as well as doing other drugs, and drinking all the time. I had told the first Sgt. that if I wasn't promoted the following year before my time was up, I would not reenlist. I continued to fulfill my duties.

Then, I met Jesus! I was born again, and things started changing. God

took cigarettes away, after a thirty-year habit. The alcohol and drugs were gone too. Praise God! I did finish that year but did not reenlist. This surprised the First Sgt. He made the statement that, "I was a Lifer in the Military." He found out he was wrong!

I began going to church, reading my bible, and growing in the Lord. I met the woman of my dreams, the one who has stuck by me for 23 years. We both have become Ordained Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our Lord radically changed our Lives, and we have traveled to many states ministering the Gospel.

The Lord can change every part of your broken life. He changed mine. If He did it for me, He will do it for YOU as well! My wife and I are continually amazed at how the Lord uses our lives to change others. Feel free to reach out to me if you would like, I would be honored to talk to you and pray with you!

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The Truth

The people you have just read about had to come to a place of knowing, understanding, and accepting the truth before their lives could be changed.

As you read through these “Truths” in the pages ahead, take time to think about your life. These truths, when received, invite you into a loving relationship with God that will bring you peace, joy, and personal transformation to discover and fulfill your life’s purpose and destiny.

Throughout the rest of this book, in between the many more “Real Life Stories,” we will share some of these truths with you.

CHAPTER 3

I Was Drafted

The day before I arrived at my duty station, the office I was assigned to was hit by mortar fire.

I needed housing.

I went from 189th on the list to #1.

I was given a job when nobody was hiring.

I later found out that they were to hire 50 Vietnam Veterans that day.

I was only 12 years old when I accepted Jesus into my life. My parents took me to church most every Sunday, but it was only to me a ritual, something that we needed to do to be socially accepted in the community. In the fall when I turned 12, I attended a “Children’s Round-up,” where God spoke to my heart. I accepted what Jesus did for me by giving His life to cleanse me of my sins, when I acknowledged Him as the Son of God. I often stumble like a child, but God is always there to pick me up when I ask.

When I graduated from High School, I attended Bible College. I met a beautiful lady who became my wife. During my Senior year, I was drafted and wondered “Why?” since I was married, had a child, and was attending Bible College. God had His own plan.

I trained for military action in a clerical position and was delayed two weeks before being sent to Vietnam. The day before I arrived at my duty station, the office I was assigned to was hit by mortar fire and my first assignment was to rebuild my office. The summer before that, I worked for my wife’s cousin, who was a building contractor, and it gave me knowledgeable experience. God kept His protecting hand on me while I was there.

Six months later, when I found out one of my brothers was there, I was given a new assignment to Hawaii by Federal Government mandate. It states that no two brothers from the same family shall be in the same combat zone at the same time.

After being in Hawaii a few months, my wife called me and said she was coming over to be with me. I told her I had no place for her to stay. She said she would sleep on the beach if she had to, which authorities would not allow. That afternoon, the Sergeant Major came into the office and told me that they had sub-standard housing (old WWII officers' quarters) available to lower rank personnel who would normally not qualify for family housing. I immediately went to their office to sign up and found out I was 189th on the list. This was Friday. On Monday, when I opened the office, the phone rang right at 8:00am. When I answered, it was family housing, asking if I had gone back to Mainland-Stateside after leaving Vietnam. I told them that I came directly from Vietnam to Hawaii to my next duty station. With that being said, they told me that my eligibility date started the day I left Stateside before going to Vietnam. Therefore, I went from 189th on the list to #1. They told me I could pick up the key with my wife when she comes in.

A co-worker in my office was scheduled ETS (End Term of Service) that week. He was single. He had a car and didn't know what to do with it, so he signed it over to me. When my wife came in, I had a way to pick her up at the airport. We went directly down to family housing to get the key. While we were there, they asked if we needed bed linens, towels and washcloths, pots and pans, and kitchenware, such as plates, glasses, utensils, cups and saucers. Everything was completely furnished. They called it the "Aloha Kit." It cost us NOTHING. We could use it for six months until we could get settled in, and if we still needed it after that, we could go in and sign for it another six months. God was and is super good to me. When my ETS was complete, we returned to North Dakota in January. BRRR- We went from 86 degrees in Hawaii to 36 degrees below zero in North Dakota. We had a 5-month-old premie baby. I was concerned what the drastic change in temperature would do to her, but God took care of her. From 4 lbs. 11 oz. at birth, to how she grew, is a miracle. Only God could do that. A few years later, we moved to Indiana, where I grew up as a boy. I had no job lined up there, and no companies were hiring. I picked up applications from several places and was told to take them home, fill them out, and bring them back to drop them off. "Don't call us, we'll call you." The last place I went to said to just fill it out at that desk over there and bring it up to the window. So, I did. They looked it over and asked me to take a physical exam that

afternoon. When I passed my test, they told me to show up on Monday at 7:00am. I was provided protective equipment and started to work that day, even though nobody was hiring. I later found out that they were told to hire 50 Vietnam Veterans that day. God had this all planned out way ahead of my human thinking. I spent the next 33 years with that company. We also had bought our home with the VA loan. I am retired now, but during that time and later, my wife and family traveled the states and other countries. We did Evangelistic work in Word and song on weekends and also had vacation times.

God has a plan for my life, even if it has bumps along the way. He'll keep His hand upon me when I acknowledge Him. That doesn't mean I don't have problems, but He'll be with me every step of the way. He has a plan for your life also. Your problems may not be the same as mine, but God is still the same God from the beginning through eternity. He'll help you through your tough times. He'll never leave you nor forsake you. I love Him so much but never as much as He loves me. He loves you the same as He loves me. Trust Him today.

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CHAPTER 4

The Banker

At two years of age, I was badly burnt...

My next memories are of living in an orphanage...

I was almost drowned...

At age five, I was adopted...

I wondered why I was still alive...

At two years of age, while my mom was holding me at the stove, I was badly burnt. I can see her blonde hair brushing on my face. I imagine she was warming my bottle as I reached out, badly scalding my hand. I still carry the reminiscence of the scar to this day. I never met my dad, but that was around the time the war ended. I imagine he was involved during the war and was perhaps killed.

My next memories are of living in the orphanage. Some of the sisters could be very strict. One time when I would not eat my peas, I was made to spend the night alone, sitting in a wooden chair in the dining area until morning. The older sisters who took care of the garden were really nice, played with us, and gave us fruits and vegetables to eat from the garden. Those are good memories.

During this time, I was at the beach with a couple who were interested in possibly adopting me. I was caught in an undertow. From under the water, I saw a bright light and then a hand coming down to pull me up. I guess God decided He had plans for me and it wasn't my time.

At age five, I was adopted by a couple who could not have children. My father had been trained in Ireland to be a priest as most large families always picked a child to go into the religious field. He decided that was not his calling and immigrated to the United States, finding work in the coal mines. Later he served in the United States Army. After that, he worked with the Core of Engineers and earned his merchant marine credentials as he loved being out on the sea.

My mom, also from Ireland, was a stay-at-home mom who encouraged all my interests and hobbies. Dad's work involved traveling. When he got home, if I had gotten into mischief, my mom would let him know. Dad had a clever way of punishing me. He would give me hard mathematical problems, and I had to sit at the table until complete. To this day, I excel in math and analytics. Later, in the military, the guys who played cards put me in charge of holding their money, calling me their "banker," since I did not like to play cards.

My parents brought me up to love and respect God. I have always enjoyed worshipping Him outside, taking in all of the beauty of nature He creates. I feel closest to Him then. In relationship with Him, I self-consciously pray for myself and others in all situations, at all times, wherever I am.

Growing up, I lived by the beach, swam, fished, hunted, and drove junk cars in the woods. I always knew I would follow in my dad's footsteps serving in the military. My mom helped me by driving me to jobs since I did not drive at that time. I was able to earn work money as a young teenager.

In the military, there were soldiers that professed to not believe in God, who I heard calling on Him when there was no one else to help us in life and death situations. It would happen in the heat of a battle, loud sirens, collisions, fires, out of control bedlam, screaming and shouting, or no words at all other than, "Oh God!" Later, these service men would inquire on how to say prayers. When a chaplain was around, they were able to talk to him. Later, when there were worship services, they would attend. He created us with freewill, so it is we that have to seek Him out.

From my experience, it does not make a difference if you are a man, woman, army, marine, navy, airfare, or coast guard. No matter what part of the service you are in, life and death situations arise. There is always someone who does not believe in the Lord. When they are afraid, they wind up seeking guidance to learn to pray and know the Lord. I got through situations by trusting in the Lord to get me through and back to my family and friends. There is always somebody who has a bible. In some cases, he gets the nickname "Preacher." Sometimes, those are the people you need to look for. Sometimes, a medic gets the

nickname “Doc” because he is the one you have to count on to get you bandaged up and taken care of to get back home.

After getting out of the service, I worked in the construction industry and then moved on to the automotive industry. I held interesting and challenging positions where I used the math and analytical skills fostered by my dad. I have had two divorces in my lifetime. I have had what doctor’s call a “widow maker.” This is when the heart has a severe blockage, stopping the blood flow, but miraculously new arteries grow around the blockage to enable the heart to function properly. I did not even know I had had a heart attack. Again, it was not my time.

I retired to fish. I met a nice widow from a fishing buddy, and we were married. We are alike in that we both encountered Jesus as young children and throughout our lives we have been in relationship with Him.

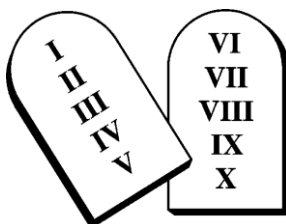
Often in my life, I wondered why I was still alive. I almost drowned, have been stabbed, was in a motorcycle accident, and have been in other life or death situations. Still, I am here living the life God has given me. I am a faithful son of God, adopted through the blood of Jesus, free from the curse of the adversary. God always has a plan for us that is better than we imagine. His love is everlasting and perfect. He wants that for you too.

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God's Law



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- 1 You shall have no other gods before me
- 2 You shall not make yourself any graven image
- 3 You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain
- 4 Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy
- 5 Honor your father and mother
- 6 You shall not kill
- 7 You shall not commit adultery
- 8 You shall not steal
- 9 You shall not lie
- 10 You shall not covet

Each of the people you have read about had to face God's Law.

Have You Obeyed God's Law?

Are You Sure?

You can go to the next page and read several more "Real Life Stories" or you can skip ahead to our next truth on page 28.

CHAPTER 5

Boot Camp Was a Major Culture Shock

Sitting still in a classroom all day was torture.

I loved turning wrenches and was pretty good at it.

I retrained as a CH-46E helicopter mechanic.

I was promoted to Gunnery Sergeant.

I was born in 1962, arriving 6 months early. The doctors told my mom they didn't think I would live. My parents divorced when I was two. I was raised by a single mother and on welfare. She worked two jobs for as long as I can remember, to provide for my sister and myself. My grandparents were very involved in our upbringing. I grew up in Western Massachusetts with the same group of friends, elementary through high school. We were always outside. In the warm months, it was bicycles, swimming, baseball, and street hockey. In the cold months, it was sledding, snow forts, snowball fights, ice skating, and pond hockey. We did the same stuff most young boys did. We said swear words, lied, stole playboys, tried smoking, and got our friends older brothers to buy us beer.

I was never a very good student. Sitting still all day in a classroom was like torture. By the time I was 10, I had already taken an interest in mechanical things, especially anything with a motor. I liked mini bikes, go-carts, and especially cars. My high school was vocational, so taking auto repair my freshman year was a no-brainer. I loved turning wrenches and was pretty good at it. At 16, I got my first job at 3 J's Tire and Automotive. College didn't interest me, so I enlisted in the Marine Corps delayed entry program in September of 1979. I had scored high enough on the ASVAB for Aircraft Mechanic but ended up having to settle for "Aviation Support" due to there not being enough school seats (the typical recruiter bait and switch).

I left for MCRD Paris Island June 27, 1980, along with four other friends from my school. Boot camp was a major culture shock and was very

challenging! I got screamed at like everyone else. I did my fair share of time in the rose garden doing push-ups, mountain climbers, and leg lifts. I managed to stay out of my D.I.'s sights and graduate.

After boot camp, I reported to aviation supply school then my first duty station at NAS Atlanta in Marietta, GA. Oddly enough, while I had casually experimented with pot in high school, my first real exposure to drugs occurred in the Marine Corps. Weed made me lethargic and paranoid, so I opted to drink heavily to fit in. After the Marine Corps instituted its zero tolerance for drug use policy and started urinalysis testing, many of my friends got booted out. Those remaining looked for alternative drugs that couldn't be detected. I started doing acid and cocaine with them as something to do in search of a high other than beer and whiskey.

I loved the Marine Corps, but my job was boring. I met my wife Julie in March of 1982. We got married in November. Both of us were 20. I was very immature and had a nasty mouth. Our daughter was born in April of 1984, just prior to my EAS (End of Active Service). I remember hearing myself talk and thinking, "Whoa! I can't be a father and speak like this." I tried to clean up my act but had little success.

We went back home to live with my parents. I was working in a factory and made new friends. I fell back into the pattern of drinking and drugs. One of my friends was dealing coke, and he would always hook me up, so it was easy to hide from my wife. I was always going out and partying with my friends. I knew I needed to do something, or I was going to lose my wife and daughter. I ran into a couple old friends, Danny and Steve. Almost immediately I sensed something was different about them. They talked differently. There were no F-bombs or any of the crude humor associated with our group. They began telling me about Jesus and the gospel. I always believed in God. My mom sent us to church, but we were not devout.

After talking to them, I knew in my heart, that this is what I needed and wanted. Steve led me in a prayer as I surrendered my life to the Lord in October of 1985. Almost immediately, God delivered me from drugs, drinking, and a filthy mouth!

After going back in the Corps in 1986, our first son was born. As a Corporal and granted an MOS change, I retrained as a CH-46E

helicopter mechanic. This happened even after being told by a Major that there was no way the Marine Corps was going to spend additional money to retrain me, just because I had faith! We were sent to MCAS New River in Jacksonville, NC, where I was serving with HMM-263. We found a church and were reading our Bibles regularly. Shortly thereafter, I picked up Sergeant.

I've always considered myself a people person and now wanted to tell everyone what the Lord had done for me. While I continued to make mistakes, I could tell that God was with me, giving me favor with those I came in contact with. I loved my job and was sharing the gospel with my squadron mates. My new boss took a special interest in me, helping me to surpass many of my peers who had been on the aircraft much longer. I wanted to become an aircrewman, but my eyesight exceeded max limits. I prayed for God's help. Our Flightline Chief and my C.O. got me a waiver allowing me to now fly! In addition to that, within 3 1/2 years of making E-5, I was promoted to Gunnery Sergeant (E-7)!

Our second son was born in February of 1992. In 1993, we were aboard the USS Wasp operating out of Mogadishu airport in Somalia. While flying grain replenishment missions, I was involved in a crash. God preserved the lives of our entire crew! Shortly after we left Mogadishu, the Blackhawk down incident occurred.

I loved being a Marine but left Somalia feeling like we hadn't made a difference. I prayed to God and asked if He needed to get me out of the Marine Corps to touch more lives. I was ready. In 1997, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. I was discharged in 1998. What the devil meant for my destruction, God used for good. I have had MS for 26 years, but His grace and strength continue to sustain me.

In 2020, God called my wife and I to minister to our city and the surrounding cities in the area. Using the Shofar and signage, we go out daily, sharing His message of repentance, hope, and love. I still have daily struggles, but without my faith in God, I would be sidelined by pain and depression. At 60 years old, I look forward to each new day and the work He sets before us.

Rob

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CHAPTER 6

I Was Planning to Kill Myself

I was severely depressed and began having social anxiety and PTSD symptoms.

I felt threatened everywhere I went. I couldn't hold a job, and I was moving from place to place.

I heard a voice speak to me...

I was born in Champaign, IL in 1985. Growing up I had to adjust to a moving lifestyle. My dad was in the air force when I was little. After he honorably discharged from the military, he worked for companies that moved us around a lot. My mom and dad would get into bad arguments fairly often. They would scream and yell at each other, and my mom would throw things at my dad. My brother, sister, and I would go to our rooms and cry because it scared us when they fought. They got a divorce when I was 12 years old. It was hard choosing who to live with. My brother and I stayed with my dad, and my sister moved with my mom. We weren't able to see them very often. By High School, I started to hang out with the popular kids. I started to smoke weed and go to parties to get drunk. After I graduated High school in 2004, all I did was party and live care free. I had no job and would just stay with friends that lived the same way. After a year of living that way, I started to get depressed. I realized I wasn't getting myself anywhere, so I thought about enlisting in the military. My dad took me to the recruiter's office in the beginning of 2005. I ended up choosing the Navy and signed a special forces contract to be an explosive ordinance disposalman for the Navy Seals.

In boot camp I passed my physical tests to continue in the Navy Seals program. Before I graduated, I was interviewed about going into the special forces. The recruiters that signed me into the special forces contract and MEPS overlooked my asvab scores, and I actually didn't meet the requirements for EOD special forces. The Senior Chief EOD doing my interview was very shocked that this was overlooked. They attempted to waive the points I needed, but they could not get it

approved so I was forced to pick another rate. I chose the undesignated program. Eventually, I got to my first duty station (USS Mcinerney FFG 8 out of Mayport, FL) and chose to become a Boatswains mate.

In 2006, I met a woman named Lelia, and we got married. Shortly after, I left for my first deployment to South America for counter narcotics. A couple months after returning from deployment I was on duty one day and had topside rover watch. My friend had the watch after me which was the 0000 to 0400 watch. I knew he was going through some problems, but I didn't realize how severe it was. I went down to the armory, turned my weapons in, and went to my rack to sleep. At 0300, I woke up to a gun shot. I ran to the quarterdeck to find out what was going on, thinking we were under attack. I was told we were at security alert and to go get armed up. I asked again what was going on. The officer of the deck was shaking and terrified. He said, "I think the topside rover shot himself." I was commanded to escort the Captain and the Master Chief up to the O2 level to investigate. After getting up to the O2 level it was immediately apparent that he had shot himself in the head with his assault rifle. This was a very tragic time for me.

In 2007, I became a Search and Rescue swimmer then became part of the Visit Board Search and Seizure Team Member. January 1, 2008 my daughter was born. Three months later, I left for my 2nd deployment. While on deployment, I received an email from Lelia saying she didn't love me anymore. She moved in with another guy. My friends on board would try to tell me about God and how he could help me in my marriage. I listened and started praying. Even though I was thousands of miles away from Lelia, I noticed that things were changing. She was telling me in emails how she was doing bible studies with her friends. This was the first time I really noticed Gods power at work. After I returned from deployment, I reconciled with my wife and forgave her. We started going to church together. We confessed Jesus as our Savior and got baptized. I started reading my bible often and desired to go to church and pray. Lelia told me that I was getting too religious and taking things too seriously with God, so in order to please her I backed away from God. Things began to fall apart in the marriage again. She left and moved to Georgia. While she was in Georgia, I went to a party and got drunk and high. I ended up sleeping with a woman at the party and after the party I felt so much pain in my heart for committing adultery. I finally told my wife in an email while I was on my 3rd deployment. She

was devastated and started to see another man. After my 3rd deployment, we reconciled again, but our marriage was struggling and falling apart.

My wife wanted to go somewhere new and get a fresh start, so I found orders in Camp Lejeune, NC. Two months before moving to Camp Lejeune, she decided she didn't want to move and stayed in Florida. It was too late for me to change orders so I was stuck going by myself. I missed my wife and daughter very much. A few months after getting to my new duty station, I found out Lelia was still seeing this man and she insisted we get divorced. I was depressed and ended up going to the bar with my friend. I drove us there in my truck. I handed him the keys and told him if he drinks too much to call a cab. I wasn't a big drinker, so I knew if I was going to drink, I shouldn't have my keys on me. I remember being at the bar, and I blacked out. When I woke up, I was in the hospital with a tube in my throat on life support. I found out I was in a motor vehicle accident, and I was reported as the driver by my friend. He had three different stories he told his attorney, the military, and the police. He was charged guilty as the driver and received a DUI. I was an E-5 eligible for E-6. He was an E-4 who already had a previous DUI charge, so I was held responsible for the accident. During NJP the commanding officer reduced my rank to E-4, gave me half months pay for 60 days, extra duty for 60 days, and restriction for 60 days. In August, 2011 the divorce with Lelia was finalized.

In 2013, I was coming up to the end of my second enlistment which would be my 8th year. I wasn't able to pick E-5 back up so I was forced out for not being high enough rank after two enlistments. I received an honorable discharge in June 2013. After the military I was severely depressed and began having social anxiety, PTSD symptoms, and suicidal thoughts. I felt threatened everywhere I went. I couldn't hold a job, and I was moving from place to place. After friends and family continually insisted I get help, I finally gave in and went to the VA. I spoke to a psychiatrist and was put on medicine. I tried several different prescriptions, and none of them seemed to help. I finally got prescribed some that seemed to be working for about four months, then I started getting horrible nightmares so I stopped taking the medication.

In the end of 2016, I was planning to kill myself. I was on my knees weeping uncontrollably. I kept asking God why my life was so helpless. In that moment, I felt like the entire room around me froze in place. I

had no sense of time or even anything in the world. All I felt was peace, but I was so awestruck by the presence and authority by me that I couldn't move or speak. I could feel someone in front of me, but I couldn't see them. Then I heard a voice speak to me, "Brandon, My son, your life is so helpless and so hopeless because you are doing everything in your own strength. You're living your life apart from Me, and My desire is for you to embrace My open arms of love and allow me to lead your life." In that moment I had a real tangible encounter with God. I truly surrendered my life over to Jesus this time, and I was radically transformed. I no longer desired shows like the walking dead or shows with murder and gore. I no longer desired to chew tobacco or smoke cigarettes even after being addicted for 10 years. I no longer desired pornography. I no longer desired to live a hopeless or helpless life. I no longer desired to kill myself.

In a matter of weeks, I went from being secluded and suicidal to radical and social, so I could share all the wonderful things Jesus did for me. I was no longer threatened by people. All my symptoms were completely gone. I was hungry for God's word and learning about Him. A few weeks after my encounter, I went into full time ministry and started traveling around the US with other ministers going from place to place sharing the gospel and praying for the sick. I witnessed and saw with my own eyes healings like those in the book of Acts. I realized how real and powerful Gods word really is. I started getting visions and dreams. I started learning about all the wonderful gifts God has for His children and learned to prophecy and hear Gods voice in many different ways. I met a woman named Britney while traveling and through many confirmations from God, we decided to get married. Now, we travel together living out the book of Acts. My son Titus was born December 26, 2019 and now he will be traveling with us as we live in close fellowship and relationship with our Heavenly Father and other believers. I give all honor, all praise, and all glory to My daddy in Heaven for He is so amazing! He is so awesome, wonderful, loving, and forgiving! I will follow Him all the days of my life and for all eternity!

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Sin

On page 20, we asked if you had obeyed God's Law. *Have You?* Most people will say, "Yes, I have. I am a good person." Let's focus now and take a close look at some of God's Laws:

Commandment No. 9 says: *You shall not lie.*

Have you ever lied? Told a fib? Maybe just a little white lie? Twisted a story to meet your need? Lied when you were a child? Lied at work? Lied on your tax return? Lied for your spouse or kids? If I lied, what would that make me? A Liar.

Now let's look at Commandment No. 8: *You shall not steal.*

Have you ever stolen? Taken something from work? Taken a piece of candy? Cheated on your taxes? Worked for cash and did not claim it as income? In your younger years, did you take anything that did not belong to you? What is a person called that has admitted to the above? A Thief.

Now let's look at Commandment No. 7: *You shall not commit adultery.*

Have you committed adultery? Jesus said, "Anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Have you ever looked at another person with lustful thoughts? What would a person be called that has done the above? An Adulterer.

At this point we have talked about three of God's Laws. How many have you broken?

Take a moment to go back to page 20. See if you have broken any more of God's Laws.

From here, you can go to the next page and read more "Real Life Stories," or you can skip to page 36 for the next truth.

CHAPTER 7

I Was a Walking Hand Grenade

I had uncontrollable anger and fits of rage...

Depression and anger were my constant companions...

I had PTSD to the max...

As I jumped off from the Slick, I heard my name called out by the desk clerk. "Thomas, you got 45 minutes to gather your gear, you're going home." With mud and blood caked on my non-descript uniform, unshaven, worn and tired face and body, I had just enough time to gather my stuff and ship out. As a 5th Special Forces team leader, I had just spent 35 days in the field with my Montenyard team, and now I'm suddenly on my way home. Go figure.

I spent my last year of service at Fort Devens, MA before adjusting to civilian life. I immediately became a police officer with the town of East Hartford, CT. In my third year as a LEO, I applied and was accepted to the Connecticut State Police Academy. I met a girl, got married, and was sitting on top of the world. Well, my world came crashing down in the 13th week at the academy. My wife cleaned out our savings account, slept with an old boyfriend, and served me papers for a divorce. We didn't even celebrate a one-year anniversary. Needless to say, I totally lost it at the academy and was let go. My old job at the EHPD was not offered back to me, as I had one too many episodes of excessive aggression. I was told I was a walking hand grenade, ready to pull the pin at the slightest offense. A deep depression set in as I was forced to move back in with my parents. It was an event that I resisted as much as I could. I had uncontrollable anger and fits of rage. I started doing light drugs and alcohol. I had no friends, no job, no prospects, and no future. It had been a couple of years now, and I was ready to cash in my chips. I wanted out.

That same night, while sleeping in my sister's old bedroom, I suddenly

woke up. I was blinded by a bright light shining in the bedroom. Maybe it was a dream, maybe a vision, but surely a visitation. There was Christ, standing at the foot of my bed, patiently waiting for me to fully sit up. "Jesus, is that You? Is that You, Jesus?"

With such love, He told me, "Bruce, everything will be set right. Be patient. Have courage." I just stared, crying, not knowing what to say. Soon, the vision vanished.

Within a few months, I decided to enter a two-year program for electrical engineering at a local tech college. Other students, for the most part, avoided me. By now, I was age 27, much older than the kids just out of high school. I was not only a Vietnam Vet but a former Green Beret. They did not know what to make of me. My continued depression and anger were my constant companion. I had PTSD to the max. At that time, was not even aware of what PTSD was.

It was in college that I met my future wife. She was my chemistry professor. I was the wise guy sitting in the back, disrupting her class on too many occasions. Eventually, I asked her out. She laughed and stated, "I don't date students, and I surely wouldn't date you." Over time I persisted. She eventually offered me a challenge. If I actually graduated, which she highly doubted, she would go out with me. A year later, she kept her part of the bargain.

"Would you like to go to a dance club?" I asked. She replied that she didn't dance. "Would you like to go out for a few drinks and take in a movie?" I asked again. She replied that she didn't drink. Being Saturday, I did not want to lose this opportunity, so I asked, "Well, what would you like to do?"

She replied, "What are you doing Sunday morning?"

Wow, I hit pay dirt. "She doesn't waste any time," I thought. "I'm all in."

With a smile on my face, I replied, "No plans, what do you have in mind?"

I just stood there looking dumb when she said, “Great, you can pick me up at 9. We’re going to Church.”

Although I had doubts about this, I agreed to pick her up. Off to church we went. A small congregation was gathering at a rented space in the YWCA. Pastor Jack was the Pastor. It was Memorial Day weekend. I noticed an 82nd Airborne tattoo on his forearm. The sermon was about duty and mission. I could relate. I was all ears. It was an excellent sermon. I was ready to go home when suddenly the organ played “Just as I Am.”

The pastor spoke out, “With eyes closed and heads bowed...” He was giving an invitation to receive Jesus Christ, to know Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.

It was at that moment that a clear voice within my head and heart said, “Bruce, I am calling you. I am here. Ask Me to come in.” I immediately remembered the vision from three years ago. At that moment I was crying, as I am crying right now writing this story. I heard the Pastor say to stand up, come forward, have your sins washed clean, and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. That day, I received Christ as my Savior. I am so grateful that the Lord called me to salvation, as I am sure He is calling or has called you too. It’s been 43 years now. I definitely had and continue to have my challenges. Such is life.

I married my teacher. We have two wonderful daughters. Gerry and I eventually divorced. I am now remarried to a wonderful Christian woman. God does not promise a wonderful life with a happy ending. He does promise eternal life and to always be there whenever we call out to Him. Psalm 23 tells us to fear no evil as we walk through The Valley of the Shadow of Death, for He is with us. His rod and staff comfort us.

There will be many confusing days in this life. We will at times question, “WHY?” We will hurt, we will cry, and we will also find joy and comfort. 1 Corinthians 13: 12-13: “Now we see a reflection, as looking through a dark mirror, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

So, I say to my fellow Veteran, my brother, if you haven't been introduced to Jesus Christ, then wherever you are right now, call out to Him. Ask Him to cleanse and enter into your heart. Find a good Christ-centered Church. Fellowship with like-minded Christian men and women and know that, although a sinner, your salvation is secured by the blood of Jesus Christ. He loves you beyond anything you could ever imagine.

Today, I am retired, married to Ana, and receiving 100% VA disability. That, along with social security, allows us to be comfortable in our final chapters of this life. I look forward to shedding this body and returning to God at His calling. Until then, I continue to fall at times, but joyfully serve Jesus Christ, my Lord.

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CHAPTER 8

Vietnam Compounded My Anger Issues

I had a violent temper.

I became a police officer.

I became physically aggressive and had the reputation of being a loose cannon...

My dad returned home from fighting three years in the South Pacific. As a result of the war and the horrors of it, my dad came home with a very violent temper. If we stepped out of line, or sometimes for no apparent reason, he would suddenly become a monster! He would start yelling at us and abusing us kids. Kicks, body punches, and hard slaps across the face were his form of discipline. I became an angry kid and was in a fight almost every day.

After high school, I enlisted in the Army. My year in Vietnam 1971 - 1972 greatly compounded my anger issues. It was a living hell for me. When I came back to the states, I left the military. As a result of my upbringing and fighting in a war, I became very much like my dad. I had a very violent temper. In May 1973, I became a police officer. Over the first 11 years of my career, there were many times my temper would get out of control. I became physically aggressive and had the reputation of being a loose cannon. As a result, there was always somebody trying to sue the department and the town. One day, I got called into the Chief's office. He advised me, "One more incident with you, Carl, the town is going to terminate you. You are nothing but a liability risk!" After my visit to the Chief's office, I knew I was in trouble. I was married with two young daughters and was fearful of losing my job. What was I going to do?

Two months later, I was invited to a healing service. One of my closest friends, Carol, was there. Carol was blind. The healing service took place in a big auditorium. It was packed wall to wall with people who had every affliction you could think of. When the preacher finished

preaching, he started laying hands and praying over the lame. I saw people in wheelchairs suddenly standing and screaming out, "I can walk!" Others were throwing down their crutches and jumping around like a bunch of crazy people. I saw him lay hands on the deaf and the deaf crying out, "I can hear!" I saw people claiming they were healed right before my eyes. I was not buying it! I thought it was all a good act. Finally, he prayed for the blind. He had everyone who was blind close their eyes and place their hands over them. Carol was standing right next to me. He prayed that these people would see again and ended the prayer, "In Jesus name, see!" When Carol removed her hands from her eyes and opened her eyes she screamed out, "I can see!"

At that moment, everything around me went silent. It was like I was the only person standing in this big auditorium, packed with so many people. There was a presence I cannot put into words. I just knew in my heart it was Jesus standing before me. I couldn't audibly hear Him, but I heard Him in the depths of my heart say, "Carl, let me into your heart." I invited Jesus to come into my heart, and I immediately felt the anger, bitterness, and rage leave. I felt a peace, love, and joy that I had never experienced. It all came in like a flood. I was not the same Carl who woke up that morning. I couldn't wait to get home and tell everyone I knew what happened to me. However, I didn't get the response I was looking for. My wife thought I was bizarre. My friends and co-workers thought I lost it. I wasn't losing my temper or beating up on people anymore. They thought I was becoming soft and weak.

There was a guy named Jeff I arrested more times than anyone else. He hated me so much that he planned to ambush me with a crossbow and kill me. I hated him as well. After Jesus got a hold of my heart, I reached out to him. I told him Jesus loved him and died for him. It was soon after that divine encounter that Jeff became my brother in Christ and dearest friend.

February of 1985, a man named Billy had broken into a house. While he and his girlfriend were still in the house, the homeowner arrived home. Billy took him by surprise and drove a 12-inch butcher knife into the man's stomach. After stabbing the homeowner, the couple fled the scene. Billy and his girlfriend hid out in her home. I took my position in the back of the house, covering the back door with my shotgun. It was

loaded, with one round chambered. About an hour later, I saw Billy sneaking out the back door. It appeared to me that he was not intending to surrender but to escape somehow. I yelled to him to freeze or I would shoot! Billy froze for a moment then turned and ran back into the house. At this time the decision was made to go in with the police canine. Once we entered the house, Billy came out from hiding with his hands raised high in the air. I was the arresting officer. When it was just me and Billy at the police department, I heard in the depths of my heart, God saying to me, "Tell him that I love him and died for him." No sooner did the words leave my mouth, I saw his eyes well up with tears and tears streaming down his face.

"What's the matter, Billy? Why are you crying?"

"Nobody ever told me that they love me... not my father, not my mother. Now a cop is telling me that God loves me." It was a short time later, while visiting Billy in prison, that he surrendered his life to Jesus. I saw a new Billy come alive! He became a stellar inmate and a witness for Jesus. Two years later, while attending a chapel service in prison, Billy told a chapel volunteer about this cop who had a big impact on his life. The man called me and asked me if I would be willing to come into the prison and share my story. When I finally got there, I walked into a room filled with over a hundred inmates. They were all there, waiting for this cop to share his testimony. When I got up to speak, the words came flowing out, speaking of God's Love and His awesome Power to save and change lives. "If He can change me, He can change any one of you here!" To this day, I am still sharing and preaching of God's love and amazing grace. It's so true, that whatever the devil does to cause harm, God is right there, meaning it for good, Genesis 50:20.

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Penalty for Sin

One day, every man, woman, and child that ever lived will have to pay the price for their sins.

The Bible says:

“For the wages of sin is death.” -Romans 6:23

Death, meaning eternally (forever) separated from God. Every person will spend eternity somewhere. Heaven or Hell. (There is no in between.) You are either with God or the Devil.

At this point, you may be thinking this is hopeless. “I cannot obey God’s Law.” The truth is you cannot do it on your own. You need help. God does not want you to face the Fires of Hell and the curse of the Law, and He has provided for you one, and only one chance of escape.

At this point you can go to the next page to read more “Real Life Stories” or turn to page 47 for the next truth.

CHAPTER 9

A Soldier's Journey

My dad gave me my first shotgun.

My childhood dream was becoming reality.

I was beginning to “walk the wilder side” of life.

Vietnam was getting hotter, and I wanted to serve.

As far back as I can remember, I wanted to be a soldier. I was born in the deep south where hunting, fishing, and shooting sports were just about every weekend activities. Sunday morning was always church time. As a young kid, my heroes were the popular cowboys of the day: Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy, Lash LaRue, and other Saturday matinee movie idols. So the boys in our neighborhood were always out playing good guys and outlaws. We all had our hats and six-shooters ready! It was about that time, the Korean War was ending and our local National Guard unit had just returned home from active duty. I vividly remember the day they marched through town with their M-1 rifles at shoulder arms. It was about that time that a few of us boys decided to lay down our six-guns and establish our own JR. ARMY COMMAND. We had ranks, learned the Morse code, and shifted from cowboys to G.I.'s. We outgrew our six-shooters and at age twelve, my dad gave me my first shotgun! It was a single shot bolt-action 20ga. shotgun. WOW! I had my first long gun. Little did I know that was just the first of many guns I would carry over the next 20 plus years.

Korea was slipping from our minds, and a new word began to appear on the Saturday night news, VIETNAM. Nobody seemed to know much about the place, but there was some concern growing about our government sending American soldiers there to be Advisors to help train the Vietnamese Army. Many felt we had bailed out Europe and Korea and did not want the U.S. to get entangled in another foreign war. The Politicians assured the nation that we would not become involved in hostilities in Vietnam should war escalate. Boy, did they miss the call on that!

The war did escalate, and the U.S. did get involved. We were now

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sending thousands of combat troops into Vietnam. Our government activated the draft, and we knew we were heading into a hot war. I was starting my junior year of High School and was making plans for college. Boys my age were discussing what they would do; wait for the draft, enlist when they graduated, join the National Guard, Navy or Air Force reserves, or just refuse to go. It was a very tense time for the nation.

When I turned 17 and was completing the 11th grade of high school, I knew I wanted to complete college. I also felt very strongly about joining the military to do my part. I went to our local Army National Guard unit and asked what they could offer. The offer was a one-year deferment so I could complete High School. I could make drills during my senior year and go to Basic Training when I finished High School. After Basic, I could come home, finish college, and then decide what I wanted to do. I could stay in the Guard, go active duty, and I would have acquired some rank by then. I accepted his offer.

When I completed the eleventh grade, my parents signed the paperwork, and I was an official Soldier in the 223rd Engineers. The war escalated, as we all knew it would. I was making guard drills through my Senior year of High School and loving every minute of it. I loved the smell of the armory, the equipment, the camaraderie, and the weapons training. My childhood dream was becoming a reality.

My Senior year passed quickly. Within two weeks of graduation, I was off to Ft. Polk, La. for basic training with one of my classmates. I was one of those guys that actually enjoyed basic training. It was there that I started to think about making the Army a career. Basic training was over. I headed home and enrolled in college. I began to notice that some things were changing in my life. I was beginning to "walk on the wilder side" of life.

At the end of my freshman year, I found out that a young lady I had met two years earlier was enrolling at a Baptist college. I was so smitten by her that I transferred from the state university to the Baptist College. There was nothing academic about the transfer. It was strictly to be where she was! It was there that I also transferred to Co. D, 890th Engr. Bn. I was also still thinking about having a military career. I was now

an E-5 and had become the training NCO for the company, but I really wanted to finish college and go active duty. Vietnam was getting hotter, and I wanted to serve.

I made a big decision between my junior and senior year of college. I applied for Infantry OCS at Ft. Benning, Ga. and was accepted, but something else was happening in my life. I began to have a feeling that God had other plans. GOD??? I was a fairly active church member and had accepted Jesus as my Savior as an older child. I knew I was a sinner. I lied to my parents and had stolen a Zagnut candy bar from Higgins 5 & Dime. I wanted Jesus to forgive me, so I prayed and asked for forgiveness and asked Him to put His Holy Spirit in my heart. I had not really given much thought to what all that was about, but I knew I wanted to be saved and felt I was. The young lady that I was "chasing" was a devout Christian, and her influence was helping me to "fly straighter" than I had been. There was something about her life that began to challenge my thinking and life.

OCS was a go! Off to Ft. Benning, Ga. I went in May of 1967 to get my "2nd Lt. Butter Bar." I found OCS exciting and challenging. I loved it, but there was that unsettled feeling that God was working something else out for my life. I got my Commission as a 2nd. Lt. and was off to finish college and go on active duty. There was an increasing feeling that God had something else in mind. One stormy night, with lightning, thunder, and rain pouring, I went out behind the dorm. I stood in the storm and screamed at God, "What do You want from me?" NO ANSWER! As time drew nearer to graduation, I started to feel that God was calling me to preach the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus. No, that wasn't for me. I was going to be a soldier. I had forgotten the Bible passage that said share in the suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus... Share in the suffering???

I applied for active duty and was accepted. Although I had completed Infantry OCS, I was sent to Ft. Belvoir, Va., for Engineer Officers School. I got married a year earlier and my first duty station was Aviano, Italy for two years. My wife and I were excited about the assignment. There was one catch... I had to accept a short tour (one year) in Vietnam or Korea. Wanting to be a career soldier, I knew a combat tour would look good in my 201 file. Two years flew by, and it was time to ship

out to Vietnam. With my wife and newly arrived daughter settled in the States, I was off to Vietnam. That still small voice kept haunting me, "Be a good soldier for Jesus Christ."

My final duty assignment in "NAM" was as an Advisor with MACV. Our team was located near the Cambodian border on the Mekong River. Eight months into my tour, I got word that our little two year old daughter had to have some extensive abdominal surgery. My wife had contacted the Red Cross to see if they could get me home for the surgery. I got word to pack my gear and a "Huey" would be coming to get me the next day. That night, I dug out my duffel bag, which hadn't been touched in months. A little mold and mildew spotted the bag here and there. As I dug through the bag, in the very bottom was a catalog for New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary! It was well over a year old. I didn't even remember asking for one! My "chopper" arrived early the following day and picked me up from a rice patty landing pad. All the way home, I heard "You will be a good soldier for Jesus Christ."

Our daughter recovered well from her surgery. America was withdrawing all troops from Vietnam, and I reverted to the Army Reserve. I got a job in the corporate world and was quite successful, but I could not shake that still small voice, "Be a good soldier for Jesus Christ." After much prayer and discussion with my wife, I knew it was time to quit running from God. I applied for Army Chaplain School but was not accepted. After much prayer with my wife, I knew it time to quit running from God. I enrolled in New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, became a Pastor, and have served in God's army for more than 47 years.

God did not just call us to confession of sin, repentance, and belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior, He called us to SERVE, OBEY ORDERS, AND IF NECESSARY, ENDURE SUFFERING AS A GOOD SOLDIER OF JESUS CHRIST.

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CHAPTER 10

Why Am I Still Alive?

I was in a coma for three and a half weeks.

I had two brain operations and six ear operations.

I did eight years in prison.

My story begins in a small town in Southern Ohio. I was raised in a Christian home, and my grandfather was an Apostolic Pentecostal Preacher. I always believed in Jesus Christ, and I accepted Jesus to be my Lord and Savior at the young age of eight.

I enlisted in the Navy right after I graduated High School in 1984. I enlisted as a fireman. I always wanted to help people. I thought I could make a difference in my hometown after I left the Navy. I joined the Navy, and I was planning to retire from the Navy.

I did my bootcamp in San Diego July of 1984. After bootcamp, I did my Fireman Apprentice Training Class. I finished "Top of the Class." I was so excited being a #1 fireman. I chose to be stationed on the West Coast. There were so many beautiful women in California, and I couldn't let it go.

The USS Carl Vinson picked me to be on their ship. Wow! I was so excited and scared at the same time. "I am going to be on an aircraft carrier," I thought. I couldn't believe the USS Carl Vinson picked me. I got my first leave. I was coming home for thirty days before I had to report to my ship. I was given plane tickets to fly home and plane tickets to fly to Japan after the thirty-day leave. The USS Carl Vinson was stationed in Japan at that time.

Two of my Navy friends and I decided to go to downtown San Diego for the last time. Each of us were going to different places, and I was flying out the next morning. We got a hotel room for the night and walked across the street to catch the shuttle to take us downtown. We were standing on the sidewalk when a van hit a pickup truck from behind. This knocked the truck onto the sidewalk. I was hit by the truck

and landed on top of the hood. When the truck finally stopped back onto the street, I fell off the truck, hitting the back of my head. (This happened October 26, 1984. I'm hoping my two friends at the time might see this.)

I suffered a severe closed head injury, a fractured skull. Life flight was called. I was in a coma for three and a half weeks, then taken to Balboa Naval Hospital. I stayed in the hospital for nine months, learning how to walk again and talk again. I had two brain operations and six ear operations. I was medically discharged December of 1985.

I was never supposed to make it. Doctors told my mother that I wouldn't live. They said the brain injury was too severe, but I had a praying mother. I can remember being in hell when I was in this coma. It was like I was trapped inside a fire, not able to move. I could hear people screaming and crying. I couldn't see them, I could just hear them in torment. Then I started saying, "Please, Lord, give me a second chance, please give me a second chance, please give me a second chance."

You would think that would be good enough to make me live my life to follow Jesus, but once I started to get better, I started to party. My mother passed away when I was 21, and my hometown friends were partying. I started dabbling in different drugs. I enjoyed smoking pot, drinking beer, and doing cocaine. I told the Lord, "I don't want to serve you. I want to party." I loved the party life and sleeping around with different women.

I thought for sure I would be dead at 25. I was strung out. I quit everything when I was 26. I had my first child, a daughter, at the age of 29. Life was good. I worked out, my health was good, and I felt great. Two years later, I had another daughter. I had a home and a family. What else would I want?

I was married for seven years before getting a divorce. I was just a jealous freak. I remarried and was married another seven years before I started using again. A friend called me and said, "You need to try this cocaine I have."

I said, "I haven't done any cocaine since my 20's."

He said, "This is as good as what we used to do." One line got me hooked. I got divorced and learned how to make crack. That was going to be the end of me.

I was a crackhead, a pill popper, a drunkard, a deadbeat dad, a menace to society, a bum, a loser, and a disgrace to my family. I decided to commit suicide. Instead of going to a hospital after a drug overdose, I ended up going to a county jail. This would begin my prison stay. I couldn't do it anymore. I lived a very destructive life, and I was going to pay for it.

On July 5, 2009, I gave my life back to the Lord Jesus Christ. I told the Lord I couldn't do it. I told Him I needed Him and to please change me. I have been hit by a pickup truck standing on a sidewalk. I have been hit by a semi-truck hitchhiking on a highway and have been in over twenty car wrecks. I have overdosed on drugs six times, the last time trying to commit suicide. I have had two brain operations, six ear operations, four eye operations, neck surgery, hand surgery, elbow surgery, and hospital stay after hospital stay. I was comatose three times. Why am I still alive? Why has God allowed me to live after spitting in His face?

I did eight years in prison, but praise be to the Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus gave me a new life. I am now an ordained chaplain, a license minister, a Kentucky Peer Supporter, a certified life experience expert, and a one-on-one personal navigator.

I had to go through a lot of pain and suffering before making it to the mountain top. I hope my life story will be a blessing to someone who reads this. May the grace of God and peace of God be with you all.

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CHAPTER 11

A Small Black Book

**The place was like the wild west, and I thought I was John Wayne!
I got in a serious jam under the UCMJ due to drinking when my
18-month Kodiak tour was almost up.**

I was looking at doing time in the Marine brig on Adak Island.

I grew up on the Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island. Dad was a jock. Mom was super smart, except where dad was concerned. Pregnant and socially forced to marry in 1960, they were divorced 8 years later. I came from a crazy, violent, broken home. I was prime ready for the wild drug culture of the 70's. Dad and I built an 18 foot work skiff, put it in the bay right in front of grandma's house, where I would show up early every summer morning to go out and dig clams about 20-40 feet deep. I could "rake" in about 40 to 100 bucks a day, but I split my haul between two buyers so I would have a smaller ticket to show the old man whenever he asked. The rest was my party cash, and I blew it all!

When I turned 17 in December of 1977, mom asked where I was going to live when I turned 18 because I sure as heck wasn't going to live there! Sure, she meant it because I was always coming home stoned, drunk, or in a cop car. 11 months later, I wandered in to a Coast Guard recruiters office because I liked their boats and needed a way out of the house very soon. We struck a deal. If they guaranteed me Kodiak, Alaska after boot camp, then I'd bring mom down to sign and be ready in January. Mom was understandably thrilled!

I breezed through boot camp, partied through school 40 miles north of San Francisco, then headed up to Kodiak with a quarter pound of pot to hold me over until I could ease into the party scene. As it turned out, I needed no introductions. The place was like the wild west, and I thought I was John Wayne! Crazy drinking parties every weekend, 25 cent beer machines in the barracks, and reefer was common place. One day I asked my buddy Jack why he stopped partying with us, and he stuttered out some lame answer that I didn't believe so I started watching him. I sure hoped he hadn't joined the law enforcement side, but it soon

became apparent that he was spending time with a bunch of harmless civilians. One day, I heard a joyous commotion outside the galley and saw all these folks around Jack, crying, saying goodbyes, promising to call or write...what in the world is going on? He was transferring out. So what? We all do. What's so special about Jack! I could feel the love. I didn't understand it but man oh man...it was real! I asked around and found out that Jack had become a Jesus freak, and those civilians were his church friends. Really? They probably only knew the guy for 5 or 6 months tops. How could they be so close? I didn't know it then, but I had witnessed & felt the love of God being shared among them and I never forgot it. So, when then the Lord began sending people across my path to share the gospel with me, He always brought back that memory.

I got in a serious jam under the UCMJ due to drinking when my 18-month Kodiak tour was almost up in December of 1980. I was looking at doing time out in the Marine brig on Adak island. Somebody must've been praying for me because the powers that be choose to give me a break and send me to Navy Rehab in Norfolk, VA instead. It was essentially a military Alcohol Anonymous with guards. While there, I heard folks talking about having a higher power. Almost everyone seemed to agree that Jesus Christ was their higher power. I was just interested in checking off the right boxes to get out of there and move on to my new duty station: The USCG Icebreaker Northwind berthed in Wilmington, NC. I reported on board clean and sober in April of 1981 but soon returned to my old habits. I had various troubles on and off ship and people trying to steer me toward a relationship with the Lord Jesus. God was still giving me chance after chance to choose Him, and I was oblivious to all of it. Somehow, I managed an honorable discharge in January of 1983 and chose to get a night job and enjoy my new civilian status on the Wilmington area beaches.

One night at work, I noticed a small black book hidden on a top shelf and decided I'd borrow it to read on my bathroom break. It was the bible. Night after night, I read it in the bathroom. I read about Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I read Proverbs and couldn't seem to solve their riddles. I read Psalms and decided I needed help in understanding all this stuff. I was an experienced, avid reader since early childhood, but I couldn't get a mental grasp of the bible. One night I asked the guy I worked with if he knew anything about the bible. "A

little bit. Why?" He wisely answered, so I began to ask away. Don seemed to have all the answers. He had never talked about God before, but I soon learned that he came from a whole family of Christians. He asked if I would like to go to church with him sometime. I refused but thanked him. "Aw c'mon Mike, after church we're havin' a big ol' feast, southern style. You should come." I thought about how nice it would be to have some home cooking, so I asked Don how much it would cost just to eat. "Not a thing, buddy! Just come to church with me and Brenda and you can eat all ya want for free!" This seemed reasonable to me, so I went. I had to admit I felt that same love that I'd witnessed in Kodiak with Jack and his church friends but didn't say much because I was there to eat. It was worth it too! They were nice folks all the way around.

One thing led to another, including long talks with Don and his family about their faith in God and how their lives had been changed. Don's father, Jim, was a WW2 Marine, Korea, & Vietnam vet with 18 purple hearts! He had some serious testimonies of how the Lord had preserved his life many times over, and I believed all of it. It caused me to reflect on the multiple times I could've been killed, maimed, or imprisoned as a result of my seriously mismanaged life. I began to think that maybe God had been merciful to me also. A few more dinners, a few more talks, and a few church services later...I felt the Lord asking me to make a choice. To choose Him and His ways. I started quietly crying as I felt that love, His love, wash over me. I told Jesus that I just couldn't give up the partying. He would have to take it from me. I had a little talk with Jesus that night in August, 1983. I went home and flushed my stash because He changed my life for good!

I'm married to a wonderful woman and have served the ministry in South America for 13 years now. God is so real! He lives and wants to give you a new life also!

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God's Love

“For God loved the world so much, that he gave his only Son, so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:16-17

God loved His creation (you) so much that He sent His Son to earth to pay the full price for all sin.

Jesus did not come to the earth to do away with God's law. He came to fulfill it.

Jesus came as a man in the flesh and did not sin. Not one time. He obeyed the commandments, God's Law. Fully. He did for you what you could never do.

Jesus was beaten, tortured, and hung on a cross. While on that cross, the sins of the world (your sins) were placed on His shoulders.

Jesus died for and with your sins, but death could not hold Him; the grave could not contain Him. He arose from that grave paying the full price for every person's sin. (That includes you.)

It is only through God's Love, God's Mercy, and God's Grace that we can escape the curse of the law.

From here, you can go to the next page for more “Real Life Stories,” or skip to page 58 for more truth.

CHAPTER 12

Anger and Hatred Imprisoned Me

I was a target of frustration and rage...

To get out of the house, I enlisted in the Army Reserves...

I was called to active duty during Desert Storm...

My mental and physical health were under attack...

I was finally set free when...

My childhood was filled with lies, hypocrisy, and mental and physical abuse. My early memories consisted of my biological parents frequently fighting, arguing, and cursing at each other. A day finally came when my mother, my little brother, and I, along with this new guy, drove away from the house. I watched through the window of the car as we sped away, wondering where we were headed and why we were leaving my house. My mother and new stepdad later married that same year in 1974. That was the beginning of my living nightmare.

My stepdad started off nice and friendly, but soon his demeanor would change into the horrible monster he had hidden inside. Often, I found myself as his target of frustration and rage. He openly encouraged my younger brother to punch me when I would unknowingly rock back and forth while traveling in the car. He was quick to strike me with whatever he had conveniently within reach, like the middle knuckle of his hand or the pool cue from one of our tabletop games. He even broke the pool cue in half over my thumb during one of his rages. His favorite tool of the trade was his belt! It wasn't just any ordinary belt. It earned the nickname "The Spiked Belt." This was a metal studded belt that would add weight and leverage to deliver power and pain. His personal bag of tricks wasn't limited to just pain. He also did acts towards me that could only be described as despicable, cruel, and downright criminal.

Our family was a church going family, thus the mention of hypocrisy. That trait had to be the worst part of dealing with the insanity. One day we went to church, and the pastor spoke about a father in heaven who would love me and would never hurt or leave me. I knew right then and there I wanted that father in my life! So, when the pastor gave the altar call to receive Jesus Christ as my Savior, I didn't hesitate for a minute and sprinted to the alter! That day in 1976, at the age of seven, I became a new person and a child of God. Unfortunately for me, the behaviors and painful treatment I received didn't stop. I grew to hate my stepdad with a every particle of my being, but I always heard the calming voice of Jesus in the back of my mind. That voice would comfort me and get me through the ongoing beatings and despicable acts.

When I was old enough to get out of the house, I enlisted in the Army Reserves. There, I felt like an equal and quickly gained the respect and self-confidence I needed. I loved this identity and newfound freedom! In 1990, I was called to active duty to serve my country during Desert Storm. I was stationed at Silas B. Hays Army Medical Center at Ft. Ord California as a 91P (Xray technologist). This was when the direction of my life changed forever. I met the most wonderful woman that would soon become my wife. We were discharged and got married in her little hometown in Illinois and quickly got settled in. She attended college for her RN degree on the GI bill, and I worked full time in a Cardiac Cath Lab in Urbana, Illinois. Life was good! Then one day out of nowhere my wife dropped the bomb, "How do you feel about being a dad?"

At first, I was happy and surprised. Soon though, like a tsunami, I was flooded with awful thoughts of fear of becoming the monster that fathered me! I recalled an old saying that we will grow up to be just like our parents, and that scared me to death! I saw myself committing horrible acts towards my kids, fighting with my wife over stupid things, and saying things that could never be unsaid. I saw myself committing damaging acts that couldn't be forgotten and believing that I would turn out to be just like him. Knowing what I know now regarding stress on abused children, I understand why I had a bed wetting issue and a lack of self-confidence. I couldn't help but wonder who knew about this

ongoing abuse and kept their mouths shut. My mom wasn't completely innocent either. This hurt me the most because I felt she was not only my mother but my friend.

Several years passed as I suffered from Ulcerative Colitis and was on maximum medications and aggressive treatments. My mental and physical health were under attack, and I needed help now! That was when Jesus moved in a mighty way and encouraged me to pray and seek His counsel. I recalled an 11-page letter I sent to my stepdad, asking him why he favored my brother and treated me the way he did. He responded over the phone about a week later stating, "I don't know why."

Time and distance allowed me to heal and the Lord to mold me into the husband and dad my family needed me to be. I was finally set free at the age of 45 when I decided to completely forgive him. I realized my anger and hatred towards him only imprisoned me and ate me up from the inside out. It was the equivalent of two life sentences!

Now through the lens of a free man I could see that Jesus, the SON OF GOD, freed me and cured me of my Ulcerative Colitis! He never left me, and looking back I can see His fingerprints all over my life!

We're all sinners and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). But God demonstrates His own love for us in this; While we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). God clearly revealed to me that my stepdad wasn't the devil as I saw him but was also a victim just like me who needed Jesus' healing touch!

Jesus can truly set us free, will you let the healing begin? (John 8:31-32) Trust Him now!

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CHAPTER 13

Latrine Duty “Hell at Sea”

In Vietnam, I was assigned to being a Prisoner of War Interrogator.

We came under sniper fire and occasional ambushes.

After coming back from Vietnam, I like to tell people: “Spending a year in Vietnam was a piece of cake. The three weeks of getting there was HELL!”

The unit I was assigned to – the 52nd Military Intelligence Detachment; Americal Division – left Hawaii in early December 1967 by ship transport and landed off the shores of Vietnam just before Christmas of that same year.

My detachment had been assigned “Latrine Duty” on the old previously mothballed WW2 transport ship we rode getting there. We slept at the very bottom of the ship, in the hull. The air was stagnant due to inferior ventilation technology. Sleeping was almost impossible because every wave that crashed into the hull of the ship made staying in your bunk a near impossibility without putting a death grip on both sides of the bed to stay in it.

The toilet facilities (the latrine) we were assigned to clean daily were also in the hull. The plumbing to the toilets was fully incapable of flushing adequately, which meant they were constantly backed up and overflowing with brown toilet paper, sea sickness vomit, and “yellow rain.”

To be graphic, with a toilet plunger in one hand and white crackers in the other to help your seasickness, you would unstably rock back and forth from the hull hitting waves while sloshing through several inches of the overflowing toilet debris around your ankles. It was very easy to lose your appetite come mealtime.

In Vietnam, I was assigned to being a Prisoner Of War Interrogator at field level. On a number of occasions, I interrogated people living in

Mi Lai villages, 1,2, and 3. It was in that locality, the March 16,1968 Mi Lai Massacre came to be. It was a staging stronghold for the Viet Cong to receive supplies – much of it hidden underground - provided by the North Vietnamese. None of the local village populace would admit to it for fear of their lives. You could liken it to “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.” What happened at night in Mi Lai stayed in Mi Lai. Come sunup, when U.S. troops showed up, the U.S. soldiers were picked off by sniper fire and booby traps. This was of much lessor concern to the locals, or so it seemed.

Many a time while out searching for secret tunnels with my Vietnamese interpreter, the prisoner leading us to the tunnels, and the soldiers ordered to be our security protectors; we came under sniper fire and occasional ambushes. For many a vet, reliving past memories of being at the tranquil fishing hole as a kid with their dog lying happily at their side were of great help from going off the deep end.

The 1968 Tet Offensive was launched all over Vietnam with a vengeance. Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers tried to overrun our compound for several nights. Our location was near Duc Pho, located several miles south of Chu Lai, our Americal Division headquarters.

The tactic the enemy used was to force the local populace at gunpoint to march in mass toward our compound through the night, making it appear as though hundreds and hundreds of the enemy were about to overrun us. Our artillery, mortars, .50 caliber machine guns, gunships and small arms fire, mines around our perimeter, and all of our weaponry was utilized to the maximum for the sake of survival. The following mornings, after each nightly attack, helicopters would bring in barely live wounded bodies of innocent local people used as guinea pigs. My job was to interrogate them, trying to obtain any and all intelligence we could obtain. Arms were missing, legs were blown off, and organs were protruding out of open abdomens. Blood ran like tipped over tomato trucks on the freeway. I went through three Vietnamese interpreters until there were no more to be had. They couldn't stand the horror of seeing their own people suffer such a fate.

The vets who made it back from Vietnam brought many scars with them.

It happens with every war. War vets may have medals to wear on the outside, but deep inside every war vet carries fragmented emotions too difficult and too painful to share if they even could be verbalized. So they get taken silently to the grave.

I came back from Vietnam celebrating my survival with way too many ounces of daily alcohol, far too many packs of cigarettes, and bottled-up anger that got triggered much too quickly. I had gone to Vietnam assuming there was a God and even assuming that Jesus paid the penalty for my sins on the cross. However, I don't recall ever having a meaningful conversation with God the whole time I was over there. I developed a growing dislike for any God who would allow such a conflict to happen in the first place. After coming back from Vietnam, by age 35, suicide was knocking loudly on my door. I had had enough of life to where I was tired of trying to live it anymore.

Yet God kept me from taking my life. When I least expected it to happen, the Spirit of Jesus Christ invaded my bedroom and revealed His reality that has sustained me every day of my life since. In time, I grew to understand it is the devil, not God, who delights in destroying innocent lives in war and every place else he's allowed to operate.

I've learned one thing about going to war that I want to pass along to others who may have to go fight in one. Don't leave God back home in the little country church when you've packed your gear to go off to war. Take Him with you and do everything you can to invite Him to be in the foxhole with you when you're taking on fire. He's got advanced weaponry right out of this world for those who will make Jesus their trust. If you would like to hear more about my spiritual conversion, please search on YouTube: Jesus Became Real and Personal to Me When I Least Expected He Would (Norm Rasmussen Testimony).

Norm

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CHAPTER 14

I Was Living the Dream

I attended college, where I was introduced to marijuana along with drinking alcohol.

I quit college in 1969 and decided to join the Navy.

I was high all the time.

I grew up in a small Western Pennsylvania town called Penn. I was raised a Catholic and attended twelve years of Catholic school. My mother, who was Catholic, never attended church. My father, who was Protestant, never attended church either. So, my initial religious upbringing was in the hands of Nuns and Priests, mainly Nuns.

I served as an altar boy from the 5th grade to the 8th grade with no real understanding of who God was, nor did I even care. Life in the 50's and 60's in Penn, Pennsylvania was far different than it is today. It was simple. I had no real need for God in my life. I was Catholic. I was okay.

Upon entering high school, a Catholic high school, I found myself not really believing in this Jesus that they were teaching us about. I saw no proof of anything that really convinced me that this Jesus was nothing more than a good man who died needlessly. So I drifted away from this religious ideology that was, as I perceived, shoved down my throat. I still believed in God, only not in the way that I should have.

After graduating from high school in 1967, I attended college, where I was introduced to marijuana along with drinking alcohol. Partying became the focus of my life instead of studying. As a result, I quit college in 1969 and decided to join the Navy.

In February of 1970, I left for boot camp at the Naval Training Center at Great Lakes, Michigan. It was quite a change for me, a whole different lifestyle to say the least. I remember saying to myself, "What did you do? God, if You're real get me out of this." I was where I was and had to do this. I didn't know it at the time, but the Lord had me

right where He wanted me. I only wish He had told me that then! The adjustment from civilian life to military life would have been a lot easier. I made it through boot camp. Then, I went to the Naval Communications Training Center in Pensacola, Florida to train to become a communications technician. This is also what I did in the Navy. After Pensacola, I was sent to Okinawa, Japan for duty. This is where I really began to drink heavily and use drugs, which were easily attainable and cheap. Getting in with the wrong people and being influenced by them was certainly the wrong direction to go. What I didn't know was the Lord had His hand on me all this time. Someone somewhere was praying for me!

After my tour in Okinawa was done, I was stationed in San Diego, California at the North Island Naval Air Station on board the USS Ticonderoga. There, I had my first encounter with a born-again Christian. Mind you, all this time, I was using drugs and drinking. While aboard the Ticonderoga, I worked in the Legal Office as a Legal Yeoman. I had access to the drugs that were confiscated from those that were busted for possession. All that was put in my hands. I had an endless supply of everything from pot to heroin. To me, I was living the dream. All my drugs were free, courtesy of the United States Navy!

While on duty one night, I went down to the ship's library to do some reading. I was about to find out the seaman librarian there was a born-again Christian, which I knew nothing about. He proceeded to tell me about Jesus. The more he talked, the more irritated I got until I finally said to him, "Listen, I believe Jesus was a good man, but you will never convince me that He is the Son of God." He simply said "I'll pray for you."

I responded, "You do that." Praise to my God, I believe he did. I thank God for people like this seaman in the ship's library who didn't condemn me to hell but showed me the love that God had for me through Jesus Christ His Son. That meeting with him stuck with me. I'll never forget this encounter. The Holy Spirit, without my knowledge, was drawing me to my Jesus.

After being discharged from the Navy in January of 1974, I stayed in the San Diego area and went to college on the GI Bill. Still doing drugs,

drinking, and living a carefree life, I was high all the time. While in San Diego, housesitting for some friends, I took a walk downtown. I hadn't been to the city for a while. It was payday night, and the streets were full of service men. I was in front of the YMCA, with people all around, when I noticed a young man walking with a book in his hand. He stopped, turned, and looked at me. He came over to me and said, "Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?"

I said, "No I don't."

He then said, "I know you don't. The Lord told me to come to you and tell you about Him. Listen, no matter how insignificant you may think of yourself, the Lord knows who we are and where we are." I think back on that night, and it makes me praise Him all the more. That's how much He loves us and how important we are to our God.

Skipping ahead, I met Linda, the woman who became my wife during college. I met some interesting people during this time. There were a lot of hippies and hard-core bikers, who God used to bring Jesus into Linda's and my life. I met these bikers months before I met Linda. They had been taken in by Christians, and I told them that they needed to get away from them because they would make them crazy. They were Jesus-Freaks – stay away!! This was during the Jesus Movement in the 1970's. I hadn't seen them for months.

Meanwhile, Linda and I had gotten together. The Lord was pulling a fast one on both of us! Meanwhile, the bikers got saved and proceeded to bring the joy of Christ to us. The night they came to our house preaching Jesus was the turning point of our lives. We got down and prayed together. The Holy Ghost convicted us both, and we accepted Jesus into our lives. For 48 years, we've been saved and serving God. It hasn't been easy, but that's a whole other story. God moves by His Spirit in miraculous ways, and He leads us all along the way, even when we don't know it. His love for us is beyond all that we can imagine, and what He has for us is many times unbelievable.

We are now Pastors of a small church on Tilghman's Island in Maryland where Linda grew up. It is a church I prayed over in 1976 when we were first getting started on our journey with the Lord. I said, "Lord if I ever

have the privilege of preaching your Word, let me preach it in this Church.” In 2016, 40 years later after living and ministering in Pittsburgh, PA for many years, God opened the door for us to move to Tilghman. He is a God of the miraculous and impossible. When we put our trust in Him, He will never fail us!

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Judgement Day

The Bible promises us a final judgement:

“And I saw a great white throne and the one who sat upon it, from whose face the earth and sky fled away, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before God; and The Books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in The Books, each according to the deeds he had done. The oceans surrendered the bodies buried in them; and the earth and the underworld gave up the dead in them. Each was judged according to his deeds. And Death and Hell were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the Second Death—the Lake of Fire. And if anyone’s name was not found recorded in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.”

Revelation 20:11-5

At the judgement, books are opened. The Books contain every good or bad deed of every person. The book of Life contains the names of those who have put their trust in Christ to save them.

When God judges you, will you be found guilty or innocent? Will you spend eternity (forever) in Heaven or Hell?

To read more “Real Life Stories,” go to the next page. For the next truth; skip to page 70.

CHAPTER 15

I Lost My Way

I joined the military at the age of 21.

Basic training showed me my power and strength.

I was a special forces soldier.

I found myself in a bathroom, attempting to commit suicide.

Duty life was great. I was hungry for knowledge and wanted to learn how to master the personal computer. This made me valuable to my unit. My plan was to be a lifer and retire. However, I was a party girl, drowning my pain in drinking and men. I was abandoned by my mother and father. I was adopted and was a survivor of mental, physical, and sexual abuse. I joined the military to find myself, but my past made me not know my worth. That cost me everything!

Off-duty was isolation and sadness. My life revolved around my husband's family, and I ultimately had to leave my military life and try to find my place in the world. This was not easy. I had no degree, but I had valuable skills. I joined the reserves but wasn't successful. My ex-husband made me miss too many drills. I got demoted, and I dropped out.

Basic training showed me my power and strength. I never ran and never could do sit-ups and push-ups. I exceeded in all areas of my training. I went to advanced training and became Honor Graduate with easy duty in Washington. Then, I lost my way. I got pregnant out of wedlock and married the man I mentioned before. He was not the father of my baby. This lifestyle and these choices were meant to kill me.

I joined the military at the age of 21. It was a gift and a blessing for an orphan like me. My needs were taken care of. I was being trained in my purpose. I was counseling people and helping people. By the age of 33, I found myself in a bathroom, attempting to commit suicide. I was divorced, and my house was in foreclosure. I had two kids and no hope. After taking the first bottle of pills, a voice came in the room and

told me there was a purpose for my life. I yelled at the voice and asked why there was so much pain for me. "Why do you hate me so much?" I asked. The voice told me my trials were my training ground for my purpose. It said my pain had purpose and that I was a special forces soldier, who has been trained to go save others.

I died that day, not physically but spiritually. I rose up out of the bath that was to drown me, as a new person. I was born again during that suicide attempt, and I have been serving God ever since. I've never looked back. That weekend, I joined a church, and He birthed my destiny.

I am now 58 years young. To date, I have impacted the lives of 50,000 people, especially youth and women. I help train everyday heroes to serve others. We call our work "The Hero Project." I am a grant writer, community builder, national conference speaker, and certified family and life coach.

Every superhero goes through a trial. I had many, but God thank You that I have a new identity in You. Thank You for the Holy Spirit, my daily helper. Thank You for grace and mercy that my sins are covered by the blood. Thank you for choosing me to help Your people. May they all find peace and power through You!

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CHAPTER 16

Your Clock Is Ticking

My assignment was to fly the giant C-133.

The radio news hit me hard. A C-133 had just crashed at Travis.

Five years of my life passed like a blur.

Death often comes without warning...

I grew up as a typical innocent kid in the 1940s. My only exposure to the horrors of war was the Movietone News clips that were thrown in between the Gene Autry westerns and the Three Stooges at our local ten cent movie matinees. Military life was not unknown to my family. My great grandfather fought in the Civil War at Gettysburg. I learned that several close cousins were in WWII. Two never returned home. A favored nephew of my Mom disappeared in 1945 in China. His plane (a B-24) and body were never found to this day.

After high school, I went to Penn State University where ROTC was a requirement for male students. I enrolled in the Air Force ROTC but had no plans to continue. When I graduated in 1961, the draft was in full force. My student deferment ended, and I didn't want go in the Army. I visited the local Air Force Recruiter to check on my options. Without discussing anything with my parents, I returned home to tell them I was going to flight school in a few weeks. The news didn't go over so well.

From that time, everything in my life sped up. I flew to Texas, went to Officer Training School, then on to Flight School in Laredo for 18 months. I arrived in Laredo, Texas during the Cuban Missile Crisis. There were already rumblings on the news about a war in Viet Nam. From Texas, I headed to Travis AFB in California. My assignment was to fly the giant C-133. At this time, I had never even seen a picture of a C-133. My introduction to the C-133 came as a big surprise. I was driving down Interstate 80 from Reno towards Sacramento, when the radio news hit me hard. A C-133 had just crashed at Travis. Could that be the same plane I was assigned to fly?

The next five years of my life passed like a blur. I developed a whole new worldview. I traveled all over the Pacific Ocean to see places that

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were featured in the Movietone News when I was kid. This included Hawaii and Pearl Harbor, Wake Island, Midway Island, Guam, Okinawa, the Philippines, Japan, and then on to Viet Nam. This was less than 20 years after WWII, and there were still remnants of WWII visible on the beaches in the Pacific Theater.

Mixed into many memorable pleasurable experiences during my years in the Air Force, were also the fact that the C-133 had a history of crashes. It became so bad that the Air Force grounded the fleet of C-133s. They sent them all back to Douglas Aircraft, where they were totally dismantled to seek the possible causes of the crashes. The resulting report from Douglas Aircraft changed some of our operating procedures because Douglas found numerous faults that could have caused crashes. A dark cloud persisted over the flight crews until the fleet of C-133s was finally replaced by newer aircraft.

In 1966, God led me to the love of my life, Mary, in San Francisco. We were married in a military chapel on Travis AFB just six months later. The first time Mary ever saw me in uniform was at the wedding. It was also the first time we met each other's parents and the first time our parents met each other. It was a tense time for all involved, to put it mildly. In the spring of 1967, we left the military lifestyle and moved to my small Pennsylvania hometown. I grew up in a Protestant church, and Mary was Catholic. We were "married singles" for about ten years, and went to our own churches. We raised our two beautiful daughters in both churches. Despite being Catholic, Mary was the first to become born again and Spirit filled during the Charismatic movement of the 1970s.

The change in Mary's life got my attention. In 1979, I had a motorcycle accident and broke my left shoulder socket and clavicle. Mary said her friends would pray for me. The local bone specialist showed me x-rays of the damage. He told me there was no surgery that could repair it. He also told me I needed to understand that I probably would never regain full use of that shoulder and arm.

That night was the first time I ever really talked to God in earnest. My prayer was simply this: "God, I am 39 years old. I heard that You can heal our bodies, but I never witnessed a miracle. The doctor said he couldn't help me. If You can heal these bones, I will know it was from You, and I promise to serve You all my life."

Almost instantly, the pain left my arm and never came back. The doctor had put a strap around my arm to hold it in place. I tried removing the strap at home and slowly moving my arm. Wow, there was no pain! I went back to the specialist weekly. Each time, he would take x-rays. He could see how the bones fragments were moving back in place. Within three weeks I was using my left arm normally. Bones just don't heal that quickly. The doctor told me, "Well, I didn't do anything." I told him that God healed me. He shook his head and left the office. I never saw him again.

Since that time, I have seen numerous healing miracles in my family. God constantly shows His love for me, and I kept my promise to Him. Writing a testimony for this book is part of my promise.

As I age, I often look back on my life and remember instances when God intervened to protect me. I believe God has a plan for every one of us. We have a choice of accepting His plan. We sometimes need to stop and contemplate our past, so we can recognize that God was there subtly steering all our decisions and directions. How much easier life on this earth can be when we submit to God and seek His guidance. Many military veterans have witnessed the realities of evil in a war zone. We saw the results of unbelievable hatred, stirred up by spiritual evil entities. Man is not born on this earth with a naturally "good" nature. Man is too easily swayed to the evil sin nature of Adam. That is why each one needs to be "born again" with a God-given godly nature as a "new creation." No one comes to God the Father, except through Jesus Christ. There is no better time than the present to make that decision.

You must understand that if you do not choose to become "born again," you are making the choice to remain with the evil nature. There is no middle ground; no fence to sit on before you commit. If there is one thing that veterans understand; that is how fragile and temporary our life on earth is. Death often comes without warning.

Your clock is ticking. Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock...

Bob

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CHAPTER 17

I Got My Patch in a Motorcycle Outlaw Club

We learned how to kill people.

I became a professional troublemaker and drug addict.

My house burned down.

I wanted to be dead.

I heard a voice that said, “Charlie, this is the devil, and I’ve come to claim you tonight.”

I am the oldest of three boys and three girls, born on June 5, 1942. I was reared on a 200-acre farm with cows, oxen, sheep, chickens, dogs, and cats. We went to school in a one room schoolhouse with a wood stove and an old outhouse. There was one teacher, and the teacher knew how to keep law and order: an 18-inch hard wooden ruler, a strap, and the old ear-grab kept everyone in line.

My first teacher who really impressed me was an ex-Marine lieutenant. He taught me more about life in one year than anyone else. I was in the 7th grade at the time and really had a hard time learning. This particular teacher, Mr. Babb, would not let you move on until you had learned what he was teaching. Mr. Babb used to run us like we were Marines, and he loved P.T. (Physical Training). He taught the boys how to wrestle, and the end of the year I was Champ.

On a farm it’s a lot of work. My dad made a couple of homemade tractors, and we learned to drive at a young age. I don’t remember my father ever swearing. He never drank alcohol, but he did smoke a pipe and chew. Dad always told us kids to “own up to it” if we did something wrong. He always said people are quite forgiving but if they don’t forgive it’s better to have a little pain then start lying, as once you start lying, you never stop. Dad taught us that we must always keep our word and to be on time. If we couldn’t do it, the reason had better be good.

A person who lies and doesn't show up on time can't be trusted when the chips are down.

I made it through high school. The first year was really hard, the second year a little easier, and the last two years really fun. Dad wouldn't let me have a car until I was eighteen. The first day I had my license, he let me take his pickup and a cop picked me up for drag racing. The cop let me go after a real long talk. My senior year of high school, I got a car. When I got my car, I started going to church regularly. The first time I went, I saw this little beauty in the Church choir. The next Sunday, I got there a little early. I had the hood up on my car, checking the oil. This girl marched right over to my car, asked me to go to a "girl ask boy dance," and we have been together ever since.

On March 16, 1962, I signed up for the Army for three years. My first assignment was Fort Dix, New Jersey. The first nine weeks of Army life, basic training, was easy. We learned about military life, did a little running, got fitted for our uniforms, and learned how to salute officers. Life wasn't all that bad, and anyone who was decent had no trouble.

My next training and assignment came at Fort Gordon, Georgia. I had to take nine weeks of infantry airborne training. It was nine weeks of constant running, pushups, and just plain misery. If you took your eyes off your plate while eating, you were done. You couldn't be caught smiling or talking either. We were taught discipline and pull-together, one for all and all for one. We would get up at 4:30am and run at least five miles or until the Sargent got tired or got his mean look for the day. Some guys would pass out, and I was so glad I was a country boy and only weighed 120 lbs. Outside the mess hall, there was a chin-up bar. Everybody had to do as many chin-ups as possible. We had to walk all the training ranges, which was 20-25 miles. We learned how to kill people and also how to stay alive. We were taught about basic rifles, machine guns, flame throwers, hand grenades, hand to hand combat, and different infantry tactics.

My next assignment was South Korea. I turned 21 years old sitting on a hill in a far country and talked to Generals who were good people. I'm glad I went through it all. It made me a better American. The Koreans didn't have much, and we have everything.

The most important thing that happened to me in Korea was I accepted Jesus as the way to heaven. I was in Korea when the Cuban Crisis took place, and it was a very scary time. I decided I should go down to the Post Chapel one Sunday. The Chaplain gave an altar call, and no one went forward. He kept harping about how there was someone there who had to come forward and accept Jesus as the way to heaven. He said the person that needed to come forward had been talking to God for a long time and that God had talked and showed him many things. He talked about a lot of things, and I couldn't believe he knew so much about me and how I'd grown up. He had it right down pat. He said it had to be that day because it was all in God's plan and he would not let anyone leave until he came forward. It went kind of dry and I wasn't about to admit it was me. Finally, he said if there were any believers there, he wanted them to come forward and for me to come with them. A number of guys got up and went forward and I said to myself, "It's now or never." He talked to each one very low because I was watching. When he came to me, I told him I was the one he wanted, and I just wanted to be left alone. He asked again, and a couple more fellows came forward. He told us how God would always be with us from then on. I never went back to that church again. It was too embarrassing. I didn't want the other guys to know that I believe in God and the Bible, but I kept reading the Bible all the time.

My next assignment was Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Life here was different. We had nothing but classes on military tactics, war games, a lot of P.T., police calls, and kitchen patrol. I lived off Post with my wife now, so I came in and had to make sure that the guys cleaned their room. The good part about Army life was that it made me a man. The bad part was that it taught drinking, using foul language, and smoking cigars.

When I got out of the Army, I got a job in a factory making ceiling tiles. It was swing shift, hot, no air, and filled with slave drivers. I put up with that job for about six months and then went down and saw my old boss at his furniture company. He hired me right then. I worked there for two and a half years. After that, an old high school friend got me a job at a shipyard for twice the money. I worked there for three years, then there was a strike. I started doing odd jobs, but I couldn't make ends meet with a house payment, car payment, and two kids.

Another friend from the furniture place came to me and told me they were looking for a tractor trailer driver. Working on a farm, I used to have to back trailers. I got hired and worked there for a year and a half before I got fired. I went back to the shipyard again and was hired back at the same pay rate I had left at.

In May of 1971, I was cleaning my yard and a guy went by on a Harley Davidson. I used to love loud exhaust, hot oil, and burning rubber. I ran in the house and told my wife I was going to get a motorcycle. I decided with my birthday coming up, I would get myself my own present. I priced the Harley, but I had to settle for a little 1971 gold c.b. 350 Honda. I walked into a Honda shop and instantly fell in love. It was a good choice, as I didn't even know how to ride a bicycle because we could never afford that when I was a kid.

For three years, I rode that bike. My wife and I would go everywhere on it. Then I sold it to a friend and got a 1973 c.b. 750 Honda. I was disappointed in it until I put an 810 street and tract kit in it. Then, it was like I expected. I rode that bike 56,000 miles. In 1983, I got a V-45 750 Honda Magna, and I still have it with 36,000 miles. When I showed up at my dad's house on that bike, he said, "I'll give you three months for a dump. Six months, and you'll be dead." Dad always did criticize everything I did or wanted to do. In a way it was kind of painful growing up, but it put a drive in me to always do the best. Only there wasn't any pleasing him. I think that is why I was so wild and headstrong. Dad didn't understand the pleasure of squealing tires. Just to rub him a little, I used to give him a smoke and sound show every time I'd leave the yard.

My father died in July of 1975. It was a very slow death. He was a rugged man, and he just melted away. I couldn't stand to see him the last of it. I had to be drunk to go in to see him and passed it off as a joke.

My best buddy, who lived out of state, became vice president of a motorcycle outlaw club. He kept trying to get me to come to their parties, but I had a 350 Honda. They all had big bikes. I planned to only go down for one night, but each night got better, and I kept going back. I'd smoked drugs before, but it was so open here. It was a way

of life, and they actually dared the police to do anything about it. I got introduced to speed there. I stayed up four days and four nights and only ate one meal the whole time. I claimed at the time it was the most fun I ever had. It was a major turning point in my life. I became a professional troublemaker and drug addict, and I really didn't care what happened. I didn't have to prospect for our outlaw club. They can be hard to get into. They don't take just anybody, and you have to prove your worth. It was "an honor" to wear a patch, but I had my patch within a month. My wife almost left me. She would go with me to every party. She wouldn't drink or use drugs, but I would really put the pressure on her.

In February of 1975, my house burned down. It wasn't much, but it was paid for. My children got out with their pajamas, my wife had her house coat, and I had my pants and boots. The minister up the road from me said to me that night, "God saved you and your family. When are you coming back?" I just walked away.

August 9, 1977, I started thinking about my life. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to be dead. A deep chill came over me, and I could feel something there with me. I heard a voice that said, "Charlie, this is the devil, and I've come to claim you tonight." I really couldn't believe it. Then the voice said, "Charlie, your biggest wish has been that when you die, you'd be on your bike. Tomorrow morning, they are going to read in the newspaper how Charlie died in a motorcycle accident."

In my head I was thinking that no one believes in God or the devil, but I knew it was all true. I thought I would be buried in three days, no one would remember me, and I would be in Hell. I looked up at the sky and said, "God, please let me live."

Then I heard God's voice. I immediately knew it was Him. It was so calm and soft. You could feel the kindness in it. He said, "Charlie, is there any reason I shouldn't let the devil have you?" I couldn't think of any reason!

I said, "God, if you'll save me, I'll follow you." I was ready for a deal. I felt sorry for the bad life I'd lived and all the grudges I had against

people. I said, "God, would you please forgive me for my bad life and give me another chance to make it good?" The nicest warm feeling went all the way through me, and I suddenly felt ten years younger.

I went home and took my biker colors off. I sat on our old wood heater and just started thinking about how God was so very real. I told my wife everything, and she actually believed me. The next morning at work, a guy came over to me and gave me a New Testament Bible. He said, "Now, you are one of us." I read through the whole thing in just one week.

The very next club meeting, I ripped off the patch and rockers and told the boys why I was leaving. They were super nice. They all shook my hand, and one guy said he hoped he was still welcome in my house. I told him my house was open to anyone.

I travelled across the country, twenty-eight states in all. I talked to a lot of people about the Bible. The bikers were the easiest. The truckers were next. But the church people, just like in Jesus' day, they thought they knew everything. Many were wrapped up in their doctrine, but they didn't know what Jesus said. What an insult to Him!

I wanted to get into other clubs to tell them the love of Jesus and to make God real to them. The Lord gave me the opportunity, and the guys treated me with respect.

Forgiveness is greater than revenge. Oh Lord, be my help and shield. Let your mercy, Oh Lord, be upon us as we hope in you.

Know what you believe and why you believe it!

Charlie

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Standing on the Fence

I was standing on a fence, and there was an incredibly large group of people assembled around it.

On one side of the group stood a man, Jesus. On the other side of the group stood another man, Satan. Separating them, running through the group, was the fence I was standing on.

Both Jesus and Satan began calling to the people in the group and, one by one, each having made up his or her mind, each went to either Jesus or Satan.

This kept going on, and eventually Jesus had gathered around him a group of people from the larger crowds, as did Satan. But I joined neither group. I stood on the fence. Then Jesus and his people left and disappeared. So too did Satan and his people.

And I was left alone, standing on the fence.

As I stood there, Satan came back. He appeared to be looking for something that he'd lost. I said, "Have you lost something?"

Satan looked straight at me and replied, "No, there you are. Come with me."

"But," I said, "I stood on the fence. I chose neither you nor Him."
"That's okay," said Satan. "I own the fence. You belong to me."

You may go to the next page for more "Real Life Stories," or skip to page 76 for more truth.

CHAPTER 18

I Am Not a Doormat

I felt rejected by my parents. I felt rejected by the kids at school.

I became violent. I had angry voices in my head.

When I was three years old, my parents divorced. They both remarried. My stepdad didn't want children, so he abused my sister and me and forced us to stay in our rooms. My stepmother put her children first in everything, so I didn't get the affirmation I needed. I felt rejected by my parents as well as the kids at school.

My dad took us to church when we went to visit, but I never had a relationship with Jesus Christ. At fifteen, my sister brought me to a different church, where I heard a gospel message for the first time. They talked me through a prayer. They told me I needed to get baptized and read my bible, so I complied. The scripture scared me, so I put God on hold.

When I reached sixteen, I stood up to my stepfather and decided I wasn't going to be intimidated or beaten anymore. I was sent to live with my dad after I became violent with my mother. I joined the Navy when I was still seventeen and spent Sundays during basic training attending chapel. Eight years later, I graduated the Naval Academy, married my girlfriend Victoria, and became a pilot. It was a horrible, violent, chaotic situation from the very start. This resulted in our divorce and my separation from the Navy for domestic violence. I was a wife beater.

Thankfully, the Kentucky Army National Guard hired me and allowed me to continue flying. After my third career deployment, I ended up in Arlington as a military analyst. I met Jennifer there, who would become my current wife, and she moved in with me. I finished my master's degree and realized that as intelligent as I was, I couldn't solve the most persistent problems in my life. I had a weak relationship with my two children, a house in Kentucky I couldn't get rid of, and a radically expensive motorcycle that wouldn't go ten miles down the road without breaking.

Jennifer had a relationship with Jesus, and she said some things that provoked me to start taking Christ seriously at age 43. I started reading my bible again and endeavoring to make the right choices. I married her the next year during a 40-day fast, and I had a real encounter with God that I felt all over my body. After that, Jennifer and I couldn't stop fighting or blaming each other for why we fought.

I started writing a book about the bible. This helped me not only to study it but also to hold myself accountable for the ways in which I was falling short. In 2019, I retired from the Army at age 47 because my service was incompatible with my faith. Jennifer and I decided to live in an RV trailer and travel around the country. We were still fighting all of the time.

In 2020, we met an organization that showed us Jesus still does the same things through us that He did in the bible. They taught me an understanding of baptism as not just a symbol but a supernatural part of the process to become born into the family of Jesus Christ. They dunked my wife and I into the Atlantic Ocean, and our life changed. We started seeing miracles in the form of healings, expelling demons from people, and many coming to a relationship with Jesus Christ. We even laid hands on my sister, and her brain tumor was healed. The most expensive neurosurgeons in the country couldn't help her, but she's now driving again and back to work without a single symptom since. Jennifer and I were still fighting.

At the end of 2020, we attended a two-month school and gave our camper to another family. God gave us two cars, one to give someone else. There was no exchange of money. No one ever gave me a car that way before. People came to us for help because of our spiritual experience, but we were still fighting. Finally, I dropped Jennifer off at her sister's house and went my way.

After about a month, she was staying with friends in Idaho and I was at my mother's in Illinois. Over the course of a week and some more fighting, I drove 75+ hours from Illinois to Idaho to Illinois and finally to Utah through a blizzard. About three hours away from my destination, I realized that no matter what I did, I couldn't drown out the angry voices in my head. I had dealt with this in so many others that I

came to realize I was under demonic oppression.

When I reached Utah, I told my friend Jason that I needed deliverance from demons. He confided in me that he found himself overwhelmed when I asked to come out because of my experience and understanding of scripture. He said that God gave him a vision for me, nothing I hadn't heard or understood before. However, after spending a week in my car driving back and forth, I was finally ready to listen. I came to terms with the fact that I was terrified of being treated like a doormat. Many people had prayed for me previous to this, and nothing would ever happen. This time, they prayed, and I felt surges in my body as though I was vomiting. It happened seven times with a release each time. Then, the angry voices in my head disappeared.

Since my anniversary was in a few days, I decided to get back with my wife in Idaho. Over the course of the next week, I felt a deeply immense sorrow for the ways in which I had carried the name of Jesus Christ openly while disgracing Him with the way I treated Jennifer. As I cried, I realized I needed to be baptized, this time for real. We headed back to Utah, and a week after my deliverance I had my sins washed away. This time I felt different, as if all my life's garbage was gone along with the deep sorrow I felt. Jennifer will tell you herself that she got a new husband.

There have been other deliverances for me over the course of 2021, with each one preceded by a big, fat chunk of humble pie. With more humility, I have been able to love more deeply. The best thing I was set free from was the need to prove myself to people. I am beautifully inadequate, because that gives room for God to be strong where I am weak. If you feel like you're in a prison of pride, anger, or your own obligation to be competent, please contact me. If you've been struggling and considering hurting yourself, please let me be your friend. Don't waste another day.

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CHAPTER 19

If I Died Tonight?

Mom was an alcoholic, and I lived on the streets of Chicago.

I joined the US Air Force, and they sent me to Thailand.

**The Vietnamese would shoot rockets at us from Monkey Mountain.
During a rocket attack...**

As a child growing up, my mother used to take me to bars. She was an alcoholic, and I lived on the streets of Chicago. My dad was a dishwasher, and my mother was a waitress. We didn't have much money. I decided at an early age that I wanted to live on my own. In high school, an Air Force recruiter talked to me and said that I could stay in the military for 20 years and get my own pension.

Once I joined the US Air Force, and they sent me to Thailand. After that I was sent TDY (Temporary Duty assignment) to the Philippines. Two other guys and I worked inside the post office. They wanted us there at 5AM. We went out and got drunk all night long and came to work drunk in the morning, with all the letters to be sorted into the pigeon boxes. After the Philippines, I was sent back to Thailand again. I got orders to Danang, Vietnam to the 20th TASS Force as a radio operator. The Vietnamese would shoot rockets at us from Monkey Mountain. During a rocket attack, a soldier hiding in the bunker with me asked me if I died tonight did I know where I would be going. I said, "No." The fellow soldier told me about Jesus. He said Jesus loved me and died for me. He led me in what is called the sinner's prayer. I turned to God for help in my life. I told Jesus I was sorry for my sins and that I believed Jesus died for me. I felt peace come over me. I wasn't afraid anymore. The attack stopped soon after, and we all went to bed. I didn't see that soldier from my unit again. I realized that God is real and is watching over me. I was 19 years old.

The next day was Sunday. The local church asked for volunteers to go to the orphanage. I volunteered, something I would never have done before. I spent my time with them on Sundays. While at the orphanage, there were two little children who got close to me. When I showed up

each week, they would come running to me and we would play together.

My time in Danang was short-lived. Once someone was killed, the next one in line would take his place. My number came up to go to the front lines. It was at this time the war shut down!

I came back from Vietnam and married my first wife, who also liked to drink and get high on marijuana. She kept a stash for us. That's what we did together our first year of marriage. She also cheated on me. I was not happy with myself and felt empty inside. I had told my wife I was born again, and she called me a Jesus freak. I got depressed. I started going back to church and asked her to come with me, hoping to put our lives together. She continued to cheat on me. We got orders to Italy. She continued to sleep around with other men I worked with. Some of my old habits continued. The marriage fell apart.

When she left me, I couldn't eat or sleep. I lost 40 lbs. I read Scriptures and slept with my Bible. When reading the Scriptures, God showed me truth in His Word that set me free. I slept for 12 hours straight and woke up hungry. I divorced my wife. During this time, two different groups, some Mormons, and some evangelical Christians came knocking on my door. The Christians called the Mormons some bad names, so for a short time I was a Mormon. God was with me again during this time. He showed me that I was saved by grace, and not by works. I learned to trust the Bible, not other man-made books. I was excommunicated from the Mormons when I stood up for my faith.

I married my second wife in my mid 20's. The Lord has given me a wonderful woman for 43 years. The Lord has taught me to forgive. The Lord has help me overcome drugs and alcohol and set my life straight. After I came home from Vietnam, I had PTSD. It made it very difficult to talk to people. I like talking to people now and I am building relationships with people at church.

Duane

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Day of Redemption

Jesus gave His Blood, His Life, so all your sins could be forgiven. Jesus paid your penalty for sin; in full.

Now it's up to you to accept or reject what Jesus has done for you.

God is inviting you into a personal relationship with Him as your Heavenly Father and Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Jesus came to show you the way because you are passionately loved and wanted. Jesus, before He was resurrected, said to His disciples, "...*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*" *John 14:9*

If you repent for breaking God's Law and put your trust in Jesus, when God looks at you, He will not see a liar, a thief, an adulterer, or a law breaker but he will see a person that Jesus has redeemed from the curse of the Law, one that Jesus paid the full penalty for their sin. God will see the Blood of Jesus that has washed you as white as snow. Only through Jesus can you be right with God.

You may go to the next page for more "Real Life Stories," or skip to page 87 for more truth.

CHAPTER 20

Tsunami

Flashing red lights slowly pulled me out my sleep to find that, at age five, I would never see my dad again.

We murdered our child.

I was living a destructive lifestyle that had blossomed from losing my father and the deep spiritual and mental repercussions of partaking in the killing of my child.

I looked in front of me and saw a massive wall of water. It was as if the wave reached as high as the clouds and ran the length of the coast. It was terrifying, as I stood with my ankles in the water. As fear crippled me, I looked frantically for my dad. Out of nowhere, he scooped me up and threw me over his shoulder. As my stomach bounced up and down on his shoulder, it was like getting punched and the wind being knocked out. As we ran, the wall of water followed. Then he lowered me down and looked me in the eyes. "Everything is going to be ok," he said repeatedly. Then flashing red lights slowly pulled me out my sleep to find that, at age five, I would never see my dad again.

This crushed me. Over time, I spiraled into a lifestyle and mindset of "YOLO" (You Only Live Once), thinking I would not live past the age of 33. At the age of 16, I found out that my first love was pregnant. Feelings of the unknown began to sweep me away, just as the tsunami as a little boy. My response to my girlfriend was one that at first glance would've been viewed as supportive, but it was a way of me deferring responsibility. We were persuaded in multiple ways to pursue abortion. Ultimately, we murdered our child. From that point on, I went off the rails. I was astronomically FUBAR (Messed Up Beyond All Repair). Between the ages of 17 to 27, I spent most of my time sleeping with as many girls as I could, drinking every chance I got, smoking weed, and chewing tobacco. I was hell bent on making everyone around me live the lifestyle I was and was willing to go and do anything anywhere. An epic night was my goal... every night.

This type of lifestyle persisted throughout most of my military career. Yes, even as an NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer). I would constantly tell my joes, "We are going to war! Tonight's our last night!" I can't tell you how many piss tests I was terrified to take because I smoked weed or was around someone who did. Even if I didn't have a pass, I would jump in my car on Fridays, drive God knows how many miles outside of the limit to go to the extreme, and still make it back by 0530 to form up for PT.

I was living a destructive lifestyle that had blossomed from losing my father and the deep spiritual and mental repercussions of partaking in the killing of my child. Since the day we had the abortion, I have never stopped thinking about that little boy. While stationed somewhere in Kandahar Province on my second deployment, I can remember laying in my cot and speaking via skype with my ex-girlfriend about who that little boy would've been. I remember telling her he would've been up to my waist by now and both of us expressing deep remorse of what we had done. It is hard to explain how deeply rooted the impacts of that decision affected both of us.

Right before my last deployment to Afghanistan, I moved in with an Airforce dude and was sleeping in his basement. This move affected my life more than I would have ever imagined. It helped me pay child support for my oldest daughter by saving some of my BAH (housing allowance), and I was introduced to the Airforce guy's old lady. While on my last deployment somewhere in Oruzgan Province on Christmas Eve, I get a Facebook message from the most beautiful girl I had ever met. Yep, she the Airforce dude's girl. We started to Skype every time there wasn't a stinking black out, and she would send me the best care packages ever.

Over the course of that year, we built a digital relationship that ended up in her moving to Georgia before we ever even re-deployed back to the States. At our welcome home ceremony from Afghanistan is the first time I had seen her in probably two years. The last time had been at a bar in Baltimore while her boyfriend was outside throwing up like an Airforce guy would. Our marriage came quickly, and so did two wonderful children. Not long after, I ETS'd and moved back to Myrtle Beach with my new little family.

I spent the next five years running my own landscaping company and wasting money like I was a stinking Private fresh out basic. Over the next few years of my life, I struggled with my identity and felt like I had no purpose. My wife completely lost interest in me, and my kids saw me as a lump of lard on the couch. After three deployments to Afghanistan and all the seemingly horrible things I had done throughout my life, a tsunami of anger seemed to be stewing inside of me. It was like a rage was building inside of me that I would soon unleash on everyone around me. My furniture typically paid the most extreme price of what was internally begging to be unleashed. My wife tried to get me to go to church often, but I would rather be alone than go. I talked to people at the combat Vet Center and just found it more revealing than healing. I would take a step forward and then back.

Then, I got a call. "Michael, your Granddaddy is in the hospital." Shortly thereafter, he passed away. The night before his funeral, the Pastor and Chaplain came by the house. A discussion of faith and the gentle bombardment of my belief systems started to piss me off. I shared how I believed in a higher power but couldn't believe in something that would allow an ANA commander to have so much faith that he would not listen to us "Americans" when we told him to follow the file formation and mine sweepers. I remember him saying inshallah as he ran across the field. As I looked through my binos from our overwatch, I saw him step on a pressure plate IED and get himself and three Americans blown to shreds. I can't believe that God would allow that to happen. So, I told them to stop trying to convince me of my grandfather's faith.

During his funeral, the Pastor called my cousin, brother, and myself to come up and stand in a circle right next to the flag draped coffin. Pastor K looked at us and said, "I want to pray over you boys." Laughing and mocking him internally, I recall him saying, "It is time for you boys to pick up the torches of your father and grandfather and become the men of God they were." I laughed and went about my day, not even sheading a tear. That's because I was a selfish asshole trained to be a killer with no remorse.

That Sunday, I found myself in church and then again the following Sunday. A month or two went by, and I started to hear about this forgiveness thing. I sat by myself in the very back row, in the seat closest to the door every Sunday. Then one Sunday the Pastor said, "Do you

want to be forgiven of all you have ever done? Do you want freedom? Do you want true freedom? If so, right now I want you to say this prayer and make Jesus Lord of your life.” So, I said the prayer, and inside I meant it. I had been to church enough to know they always made you come to the front. I was begging God to not make me go up. Then, the Pastor said, “With every eye closed and your head down, please raise your hand if you said that prayer.”

I never thought raising your hand could be so hard, but it was. I raised my hand, and I knew he was about to call us up. I begged God again, “Don’t make me go up.”

“If you said that prayer and truly meant it, walk out the back door right now,” the Pastor said. I was blown away. I couldn’t believe it. I was right next to the door and walked out. At that moment, a fellow Veteran was waiting and walked me through what salvation was all about.

On the way home, I completely lost it. I was crying, no I was bawling my eyes out. Every bad thing I had ever done was flashing in front of my eyes. Each thing that came up, I asked for forgiveness, and a weight was lifted. I was overwhelmed with freedom and peace. In that moment, I believe Jesus was carrying me away from the tsunami of my sin. He was telling me over and over that I am forgiven, and everything is going to be ok. Jesus has forever changed my life and has truly made my wildest dreams come true. It has been the hardest and best times of my life. It’s like being a Soldier. At times, it sucks but the reward is for ours and others freedom... in Christ. I write my story today in honor of my father, Tommy Snuggs.

Michael

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CHAPTER 21

Life Isn't a Walk in the Park!

The DI's were running around yelling.

It scared the hell out of everyone.

I tried to quit smoking and failed every time, until...

I enlisted into the United States Air Force in 1984. My ASVAB scores were high, and I decided to become a Nuclear Weapons Specialist. Basic Training was at Lackland Airforce Base in San Antonio, Texas. Tech School was at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado. Then I went to Plattsburgh, New York to work on Nukes for the rest of my enlistment.

I got to basic training, and right off the bus we lined up. We were standing there at attention. The DI's were running around yelling at guys, saying they got long hair, they are dressed wrong, they this, they that. One DI went to an Airmen and said, "Where are you from, boy?" The guy said, "Missouri." The DI shouted, "Missouri Sir!" "Yes sir, Missouri Sir!" shouted the Airmen. Then the DI said, "Only two things come from Missouri." It was the infamous line right out of the movie *An Officer and a Gentlemen*. I fell for it hook, line, and sinker. I couldn't help myself and just let out a nice chuckle. He came over and got into my face. "What is so darn funny, boy? You think that's funny?" He spit his wadded up chew spray on me as he yelled. "Sir, no Sir!" I yelled at the top of my lungs. He then went on to an Airmen near me who eyeballed him while he was yelling at me. It was the shock and awe campaign they wanted. It scared the hell out of everyone. There were a couple guys who said they wanted out of this right off the bat!

I started smoking in Basic Training and continued for the next 22 years. When the first Sunday rolled around, they announced that anyone who wanted to go to church can go now, and everyone else is cleaning the dorm. I went for all three services and signed up for the choir. It was for the wrong reasons, but I figured I could kill a half a day by doing that.

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It was nice and peaceful there. I don't remember one sermon, one lesson taught about God, or one song we sang, but I remember the peace there. The music was not hymns. It was upbeat happy clapping music. People were standing and waving hands in the air. It was very different from what I had ever seen at church.

Growing up, I would think, "Why do all these people come to church every Sunday, week in week out?" I had seen people who attended churches and said they were believers, but what did that actually mean? They weren't acting like saints, they rarely if ever talked about God and my main thought was, hmmm, must not be real, this seems like a waste of time. I don't see any change in these people and they surely aren't any different than other people. My thinking was, you had to be some perfect kind of person to be going to church, and no one that I knew ever even acted close to that.

When in Basic Training I got caught using the phone. They made me stay in Lackland four more days. I thought that was going to be the worst thing that could happen to me, but it set in motion a set of circumstances that was quite the blessing. My job changed to the best job in Basic Training, painting murals and sayings on walls. The commander wanted The Air Force Seal on his wall, Training wanted one, it was great! The squad I got put into was an honor flight and they earned many extra privileges like Base Liberty! My old squad never got anything. My last 2 1/2 weeks in Basic went very well compared to my first 4. Basic was hard, but you learned a lot of rules and how to follow orders. You grew up and became a man. It toughened you up physically and mentally.

When I got to Tech School, there was no room in my dorm and I had to go live temporarily in another dorm. It was at that Co-Ed Dorm Building that I met my wife! My wife was in the Air Force, and she ended up doing 4 years active duty and 16 years in the USAF Reserves. We dated for 6 weeks and I proposed to her. We got our orders and found out that I was going to get stationed at Cheyenne, Wyoming to work on the MX missiles and she was going to go to Mountain Home AFB Idaho to work on FB111's. They were not that far away from each other, but if we went down to the Justice of the Peace and got married right away, we had a chance of getting a Joint Spouse assignment. We took the plunge and got married. I submitted our paperwork for the Joint Spouse

assignment and waited and hoped for approval. My orders finally came in for Plattsburgh, AFB New York, and hers did too! 34 years later, we are still happily married!

My military service helped me a lot in life. Every job I got after I got out was because of my military service. I ended up going to work at the State Maximum Security prison in Minnesota. I later transferred to a Medium security prison and quickly became a Sgt. I was a Sgt. all my life, School patrols, Air Force, and Now Corrections. I served as a Corrections Officer for 26 years.

While working at this Prison, another Corrections Officer would sit across from me at work and read his bible throughout the day. He'd read a few scriptures, do a round, read some more, a little here, a little there. This finally brought me to ask him some questions. He would make comments every now and then about what he was reading. The process of him and I talking, debating, and discussing things in the bible went on for 7 months. He had people praying for me the whole time, but I had no idea. Eventually, I started getting curious about things in the bible and started reading it at home online to get material to debate him on. It was during that time of reading the Bible online that something hit me like a brick. I was like, this all makes sense. You can't make this up! I saw the actual way in which it was written. I had thoughts pop into my head and the writing was in such a way that was so real there was no way it could it have been made up. The book came alive and was just so real. I then had this thought, "If this is indeed real, then this whole God thing is real, I mean He, God is real." I had to have a "Come to Jesus Meeting." I walked outside, broke down, cried, and repented to God for everything. I tried listing off thing by thing and realized there was no way I could count the number of things I had done. I told Him that, and that I was now going to be His servant. I was going to learn to do what I could to help with this new truth I had found.

I was almost fired at work for sharing the Gospel with inmates. I kept sharing the Gospel anyway, and they left me alone. The other Christian Officer, Rob, was also threatened to stop talking to inmates about Jesus. He ended up leaving the prison and is now my Pastor at a Church in Duluth. My old friends really didn't talk to me anymore. They told me to stop talking to them about God, so God gave me many new friends.

God cleaned me up. I tried to quit smoking and failed every time. I cried out to God for help, and that night, I felt the presence of God come into me like a power that was unbelievable! Although I got rid of my pride and received the Holy Spirit, I still smoked again. Another year later, I cried out to God again. While tears were coming down my face, the phone rings. "This is Blue Cross/Blue Shield. We would like to know if you would like to try one of our Quit Smoking programs free of charge?" I pulled the phone away from my cheek, looked up and thought, WOW, God, You are AMAZING! "YES!" I responded in the phone. They sent me Nicotine patches, and after wearing the patches for only 8 days, I was delivered! I have been smoke free ever since!

I prayed to God and asked Him to catch me up. I was 36 years old and needed to learn 30 years of Jesus quickly. He did just that. I listened to CD sermons and studied online. I couldn't get enough of the Word of God. I soaked it in like a sponge, and Jesus showed me many things. After 3 and a half years of going to a local small church near our house, my wife finally became a believer too. That was a very hard 3.5 years, but now she is a believer in Christ.

I used to swear more than anyone I knew. When God changed me from the inside out, I stopped swearing. People would come and talk to me because they heard that I didn't swear anymore, and they could not believe it.

It isn't a walk in the park. God's Word says that we will be persecuted because we believe and follow Him, but I have trusted Him through all of the difficult times, and He has never let me down.

May God Bless You. Thank you for your service to our country!

Michael

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CHAPTER 22

I Joined the US Army

I grew up Catholic and went to mass every Sunday...

I went to college...

The only relief I had from this new life in basic training was...

I grew up Catholic and went to mass every Sunday. During the summer of 1974, before 1st grade, there were a couple of people going door to door, asking our neighborhood to come to a church event. My dad brought my older sister and I to the front door and asked us if we were willing to go to this weeklong daily event. My sister and I both agreed. It was cool. It was a Church of the Nazarene in Guam, and I remembered doing artwork. About the third day, I got a fever and wasn't able to go the rest of the week.

When my sister finished the week at the church, I remembered that the teachers from my class came to the house and gave my parents two children's books for me. My parents opened the door to my room and gave me the books. I don't remember one of the books, but the other was the story about David and Goliath. I thought it was so cool to have my own books, so I read them both. This was my introduction to Bible stories.

Fast forward to 1979, my dad started watching televangelists like Jim Baker and Jimmy Swaggart. He realized that the church we went to was not teaching biblical principles. It was about two years later when he got saved. Wanting to share this with his family, he told us to say a prayer at the end of the television show with Jimmy Swaggart. I said the prayer but only because my dad requested that I do. I was 13 years old then.

In 1985, we moved to California and at 16 years old I actually said the prayer for myself. Later that year, I was able to be baptized with my two sisters and my mother. Going to church Wednesday night and Sunday morning and evenings was the norm until I went to college. Then, I just went Sunday mornings. In 1988, I joined the US army and

became friends with a Christian from Mississippi. The only relief I had from this new life in basic training was Sunday morning church service. During my four years, I found that I didn't read the word nor find a church home. I was blessed with brothers in my life to remind me that I still have a faith in a God who loves me. Jamal and Nick stand out as two friends who really blessed me.

Fast forward to my End of Term Service in the Military, my wife was invited to go to church by a coworker, and we loved it! By no coincidence, it was the same denomination that I was given those two books in 1974. In 2000, I ended up buying a house closer to work, and we wanted to find a church closer to home. We saw signs that pointed towards another church plant in the area. Our family decided to check it out, and we knew this was the church home for us. It was a Church of the Nazarene. As a matter of fact, the senior pastor was trained by the senior pastor of our previous church in Fairfield, CA. I feel so blessed to be able to see how God pursued me during my life. He truly sought me to have a relationship with the likes of me. It is because of His faithfulness, I find myself trying to reach those who don't know Him to seek Him out because He is doing the same to them. I have had my ups and downs in my faith walk, but when I look back I am blessed to be able to see His presence during those times. My faith grows when I actively pray, read His word, and spend time with likeminded people. I have a passion for those who don't know Him and look forward to opportunities to share His word and my faith with them. It takes time and investment, but that is a small thing compared to what Jesus did from birth to resurrection.

Russell

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Day of Salvation

How do I get saved from the curse of the law? How do I get saved from being forever separated from God? How do I get saved from the Fires of Hell?

1. Admit that you have broken God's Law.
2. Ask God to forgive you.
3. Confess Jesus as the Son of God.
4. Confess that Jesus died on the cross for your sins.
5. Confess that Jesus arose from the dead.

The Bible says:

“For salvation that comes from trusting Christ — which is what we preach --- is already within easy reach of each of us; in fact, it is as near as our own hearts and mouths. For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord, and believe in your own heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in his heart that a man becomes right with God; and with his mouth he tells others of his faith, confirming his salvation. For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect; they all have the same Lord who generously gives his riches to all those who ask him for them. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”
Romans 10:8-13

This is GOOD NEWS!

For more “Real Life Stories,” turn to next page. To get saved, go to page 97.

CHAPTER 23

Fourth-Generation Combat Veteran

I was a complete mess and disappointment.

I was a heavy drinker and filled my eyes with pornography.

I was off to Germany, the land of beer...

I grew up an only child. I was molested by my male cousin when I was seven. Still today, I play with GI-Joes and read comics. Even though I was always in the principal's office getting corrected, I enjoyed school greatly. I was happy there whether it be doing worksheets, book reports, presenting a project, or building things in shop class. Throughout school, I ran track and cross country and was part of the chess club. I was very active in my church youth group and accepted Jesus as my savior when I was nine years old. My father was in the Army, deployed to Operation Desert Storm when I was in the 6th grade. Later, he obtained the rank of First Sergeant. He spent 24.5 years active and then after retirement went to work overseas in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. This left my mom to raise me. It allowed me to stay engulfed in studies because my parents' marriage was on route to divorce.

My senior year in high school, the Army recruiter called me and asked me what my plans were after school. I replied, "I don't know."

He then said, "What do you think about the Army?"

I said, "Well, I guess so. You called me and are offering me a job. Sure." I would eventually become a fourth-generation combat veteran. It took me three times to pass the ASVAB. I tried to be an MP with my friend but was only offered Infantry (11B) or Truck Driver (88M). I chose Truck Driver. I would rather drive than walk. I had another friend that would follow me as a truck driver a year later. The church I attended gave me a mini pocket size bible that had a metal plate on the cover. It was meant to protect my heart if in combat. It was two-

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fold, spiritual and physical. One month after graduation, I was off for basic.

In basic, I failed the first PT test (push-ups). I never failed the PT test again. After basic was AIT, truck driving school. I failed the air brakes test. I was recycled to the next class. I can remember calling home worried and my mom asking my father to do something. He couldn't. It was on me. That made me think, "Dad, did I let you down?" I did not fail another test after that. After AIT graduation, I got sent to Fort Campbell Kentucky, home of the 101st Airborne - Screaming Eagles. I was pretty excited because that was my dad's first duty station too. During my time at Fort Campbell, I got told to go to Air Assault school (Repel out of Helicopters / sling load). Sent twice, I dropped out both times. I received negative performance counselings due to it. I even went to the promotion board for Sergeant and was so scared I broke down crying in front of the Sgt Major and fellow 1st Sgts. They told me to leave. I was a complete mess and disappointment. I was in trouble every time I turned around but never received an Article-15. I was a heavy drinker and filled my eyes with pornography. I was caught up in the world. There would be times when I would read God's word, the Bible, or stay away from trouble but eventually still gave in. It came time for me to reenlist. I raised my hand for six more years. I had to go overseas just to let my driver's license rest. I had four speeding tickets in less than a year all twenty plus miles over. I even spent a day in jail for a \$25 returned check. I came so close to DUI's but never got one. I was off to Germany, the land of beer.

I reported to Germany and as my 1st Sgt interviewed me, he looked me in my eyes and asked me if I drink. I proudly said, "Yes!"

I could just see his mind saying, "Why, another one that does not get it?" I knew he was wanting someone to be a leader and not just another follower. I always told myself I would quit when I got into trouble. Needless to say, I finally got what I asked for. I was drunk in public and kicked in a German lawyer's BMW car. The German police picked me up. Then, the MP's (Military Police) came. I was in AA for over a year. I had to give a public apology to the mayor, the German city, and the lawyer; plus pay for damages. I was made a pure example of what not to be.

Part of corrective training was I would get paired up with soldiers that needed a mentor to help them quit or recover. Throughout this time, the senior E4's (specialists) were being promoted to Corporal. My name was off and on the list. I did get it after complaining. After being sober for three months, in April of 2002, there was a new female soldier in the unit. I always volunteered for any driving mission or support mission, so I was hardly in the barracks. I was set to go to Kosovo for a six-month rotation. I had just started talking with the new female. She would be my first girlfriend at age 23. She prayed for me to stay. I had no way of getting out of going to Kosovo. Ironically, we were doing PT in the motor pool a few days before leaving. Rule one in the motor pool is no running! Well, we were doing wind sprints and running backwards. I lost my balance and landed on my wrist. It broke. I was no longer on the list to go. Rachel and I continued to date, then got engaged, then eventually married in 2003. We were both virgins when we got married.

Again, I got sent to another base to help out since I was a Corporal. I finally had enough and got into it verbally with my 1st Sgt. I basically told him to take my rank, and He did. Rachel got promoted to Specialist, and I got demoted to Specialist the same day. Again, the paperwork never got turned in for the demotion so everything followed me as a Corporal. 9/11 happened, and we got sent to Iraq for our combat tour. We engaged in firefights and experienced the results of war – trauma. After our first tour in Iraq together, Rachel got pregnant. I got stop-lossed and go to the next unit deploying right back to Iraq. Rachel got chaptered out due to a child. I was sent back to Fort Campbell KY to an Infantry unit. Be careful what you wish/pray for because I said to myself, "It would be cooler if I had the 101st combat patch instead of 1st ID." Remember 11B or 88M. See it's what God wants you to do for Him. There, I would experience the meaning of the Footprints Poem, Jesus carrying me. For some reason, I came up for Sgt. I can only explain it as God's timing. I didn't even go to the promotion board. All my correspondence courses, awards, PT scores, and weapons scores added up to the cut off. In the Infantry unit, I would be completely set apart from the other leaders. Christ would be with me, and the soldiers would see that. Well, on my second tour in Iraq, I lost a good friend from combat. It really tore at me. For ten years I held it in and finally reached out to the Oregon VFW to connect me to his parents. I was able

to talk with his father and express our friendship. The worldly pain was lifted. I still want to make it up there to visit his gravesite and monument.

I was honorably discharged from the Army December of 2006. It took me eleven months to find a job. I enrolled in college and took it by the reins. I excelled in all my classes, setting the standard for other students. Even though the VA paid for the school, I still won scholarships which helped with raising a family. There was a miscarriage in 2007 that really took a toll on Rachel and I. A few years later, our second son was born. We have two very handsome boys. They are very smart and love Jesus.

I worked at a seed corn plant (Remington Seeds) for ten years from 2007 to 2017. I excelled in all positions I was put in. Seeing others get promoted before me and others with bad attitudes about life would wear me down, but I stayed faithful in Jesus. I even had three different multi-million dollar mess ups at work, but they wanted me to stay. God kept me safe. Even though I went inpatient twice for mental health, it still wasn't enough. I reached out to other veteran organizations for help and received the help I needed. I finally get it. God uses me now as a veteran outreach for spiritual care for other veterans and military families. He blessed me and my wife with being able to retire early. He taught me not to worry about finances. He will provide! He allowed me to start Cease-Fire Ministries. Now, I am an Independent minister for veteran outreach.

I thank Jesus for never giving up on me and am pleased to do His work and share His Word with others. All He asks is, "Follow Me. Put your Faith in Me, and you will do great things for God's glory and His Kingdom."

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CHAPTER 24

That's Why They Call It Dope

I did not like people telling me what to do!

I ended up facing a Special Court Martial with a Bad Conduct Discharge and facing up to ten years in prison.

Before long, I was back to my old tricks and strung out on Bacardi 151 and drugs.

I thought about the friend who died of an overdose and had never used drugs until I introduced him to them...

My military experience trained me for real life with honor. My alcohol and drug addiction drained me of real life, and it led to dishonor. Military prison began the wake-up call.

At age nineteen, I had no purpose or direction in life and did not like people telling me what to do! Somehow, I got the bright idea I would join the Army like some of my friends were doing. That's when I learned that everyone was supposed to sign up for the draft or selective service within thirty days of their eighteenth birthday. I guess that's one reason why they call drugs dope. What was I thinking? All the military does is tell you what to do. Off I went to the Induction Center in Chicago. I raised my hand and swore my oath of allegiance.

My scores were high enough to choose the MOS school I wanted for training. I selected the Chemical Corps because I thought it would be cool to learn about biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons. To my disappointment, the next rotation to enter the Chemical Corps training was closed. I'd have to wait another year. I was told I could go on "delayed entry" or select a different MOS. I was told there was a slot open for the Pharmacy Specialist training at the US Army Academy of Health Sciences at Fort Sam Houston. I said to myself, "There is a god! I can now learn more about drugs!" Right!

My basic training was at Fort Dix, New Jersey. It was the typical rude awakening that most young men and women experience in basics. After basics, I went to Fort Sam Houston and graduated with ease. I thought, "Now I'll be dressed up in nice hospital whites and work a 9 to 5 job." Not so.

I was stationed with the 326 Medical Battalion with the 101st Airborne Division. We spent most of our time loading and unloading a Deuce and a half, erecting GP Medium tents, cleaning Herman Nelson diesel stoves, and setting up Aid Stations in the "back forty" of Fort Campbell and Germany. The comradery was second to none. We had the best Platoon Sargent in Sargent David! We just called him Sgt. Rich. He was hard but fair, and he took care of us. This was the best time of my life. That is until I started dealing drugs again. Everything went downhill fast, and I ended up facing a Special Court Martial with a Bad Conduct Discharge and facing up to ten years in prison.

I remember sitting in the courtroom looking at Sgt. Rich as he spoke on my behalf. I was afraid to make eye contact with him because I knew I had disappointed him. Yet, he never turned his back on me. While I was in the stockade, he visited me several times. He told me I could use this as a "stepping stone for greater days."

After three weeks in the stockade, it was time to serve my sentence. Fortunately, I did not receive ten years but was incarcerated at "The Retraining Brigade" at Fort Riley Kansas. It was a place for court-martialed soldiers with shorter sentences to do their time in lieu of the world-renowned bed and breakfast also located in Kansas called Leavenworth Prison.

The transport team of Military Police arrived to take ten of us to prison. We boarded the bus quietly. The reality of incarceration was sinking in. Leaning forward, with hands and feet both shackled, I quickly learned how to navigate leg irons one short footstep at a time up the steps into the bus. Fog hung heavy all around us. I shuffled to the back of the bus. As I slide over to the window seat, I watched other units doing their morning exercises. I could hear the cadence being called across the field. "Two old ladies lying in bed. One rolled over to the other and said, I want to be an Airborne Ranger . . ." I longed for the freedom to run with

my unit, but I knew that would never happen again. As the whirling sounds of the diesel engine moved us forward, my sense of shame overwhelmed me.

As we rounded the corner of my old unit, I saw someone standing on the corner. To my surprise it was Sgt. Rich! As we pulled up to the corner, I shamefully peered through the window to make eye contact with Sgt. Rich. I started to lift my hands to wave but quickly dropped as I heard the rattling of the chains. I dropped my hands to my lap. As I made eye contact with Sgt. Rich, I snapped to attention, smiled, and said in a loud voice, "You can do this standing on your head. It don't mean a thing."

Through an unusual course of events, good things started to happen during my incarceration. I went with a few of the other inmates to church on Sundays. It was a welcomed break from the routine of prison life. A man came in to give his testimony of being saved from a life of crime and drugs. I do not recall his name, but I always wanted to thank him because seeds of hope and thoughts of God were planted as a seed.

I guess I needed ole school military drills and incarceration. I was given the opportunity to return to active duty and make up for my "bad time." Oh, but not as a Pharmacy Specialist in the pretty white hospital uniform! After prison, it was off to Fort Benning Georgia for Infantry Training. Then, I transferred to Fort Hood Texas as a loader on the new Abrams tanks for the 2nd Armor Division. On November 28, 1978, I was honorably discharged to my new life. Before long, I was back to my old tricks and strung out on Bacardi 151 and drugs.

When I came back to my old neighborhood, some of my friends from high school had become Jesus freaks. They invited me to a home Bible study. Naturally, I went because there were pretty women there. But I continued to go because they treated me with respect, even when I went high and was somewhat embarrassing. They tried, but "no Jesus Freak stuff for me."

One of the ladies from the Bible study introduced me to this hillbilly pastor from Missouri. He had come to Gary, Indiana to be the pastor of an inner-city church. I went on Sunday mornings a few times, but the

music sounded like funeral music to me.

The pastor of the church, Rev. Artie, made a call on me one day when I was in my garage drinking and smoking joints with my friends. The door was open, so he just came in. He sat down with us and started talking about regular, everyday things. We tried to hide the pot and beer, but we all knew he saw it. But he said nothing. Then he looked at me and said, "I'd like you and your friends to come to the service this Wednesday." I told him it was my birthday and Halloween, so I probably wouldn't be able to come. He jokingly said, "If you and all your friends come Wednesday night, I'll sing happy birthday to you."

I went that Halloween night to the Wednesday service on October 31, 1979. It was strange. This service was different from the Sunday morning gig or the "drag the sinners to the altar" service on Sunday nights. People just sang a song. Then, someone would stand and talk about how God had helped them that week. Someone else might read a special verse that meant something to them, and then they would break out in song again. I just couldn't figure out how each person knew when it was their time to stand or say something.

At the close of the service, he "opened the altar" for anyone who wanted to pray. I really didn't understand the church language, but my heart was pounding hard. I fought it and remained in my seat. After the service, I met the pastor at the door. Once again, he was kind, but it was as if he could see right through me. "Do you have any questions about tonight?" I said I had a few. He offered to meet with me in his office. Long story short, I ended up kneeling down at a metal folded chair, repeating his prayer. I told him I did not know how to pray. He told me, "Just say the words I say. But if you don't mean, them don't say them. God will do the work in your heart if you are honest."

I wish I could remember what the words of the prayer were. I do not. When I got up from kneeling, I said, "Is that all there is to it?"

He said, "As long as you were honest with God and repented of those sins then you are a New Creature in Christ."
"Are you sure?" I asked. I did not cry. I did not snuffle. I really didn't feel any emotions. So, I left and went on my way.

Later that night, as I lay awake in bed thinking about what I'd done that night, my memory was flooded with all the bad things I'd done in my life. I thought about all the people I'd hurt and sold drugs to. I thought about the friend who died of an overdose and had never used drugs until I introduced him to them. Each time a thought would come up, a wave of guilt would come over me. I didn't see anything, no vision or anything like that, but it was like my sins came up written on the sand of the beach. Then, a wave would come and wash away what had been written. I started to cry and could not stop. For the first time in my life, I felt clean. Honor slowly started to return. I've been sober ever since that Halloween night, forty-three years ago.

I can't even describe all He has done for me and how He repaired many of the relationships I destroyed. He made the way for me to enter college and even go on to graduate school and complete a doctorate in counseling. All of it was paid for. Old things have truly become obsolete in my life. I really am that "New Creature" the pastor told me I'd become on Halloween night. I recently retired from my work as a Prison Chaplain. The place I said I'd never come back to if God ever let me out of prison is where He called me to go and minister. My misery became my ministry.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:11-13 NIV

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It's Time to Pray

If you have already confessed your sins and cried out to God, you are saved. If you have not, it's time that you do. Pray this right now:

Dear God,

I acknowledge You as the Creator of all things. I admit that I am a sinner, and I deserve the Fires of Hell. I kneel at Your feet and ask for Your mercy and forgiveness of my sins. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your son. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, and I believe that You raised Him from the dead. Jesus, please come into my heart and fill that place in my heart that belongs only to You. Jesus, I declare You Lord of my whole life today. I ask you to show me my life purpose, plan, and destiny for which I was born. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and with all the gifts you have for me. I will confirm my salvation by telling others what You have done for me. Thank You for saving me and giving me abundant life!

Now that you are a child of God, pray this prayer to your Father Daily!

My Father in Heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done.

On earth as *it is* in heaven.

Give me this day my daily bread.

And forgive me my trespasses,

As I forgive those who trespass against me.

And lead me not into temptation,

But deliver me from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

(Matthew 6:9-13)

For more "Real Life Stories," go to the next page. To find out what to do now that you're saved, go to page 104.

CHAPTER 25

Mom Tried to Warn Me

I thought I knew better.

I was stubborn and bullheaded.

Born in 1938, my early childhood was spent mostly around family - aunts and uncles who lived next to us and down the street. It seemed like the whole neighborhood was my relatives. Even the school I went to was right across the street from my house. I grew up thinking I was a good boy, until I heard from my sister later on what I had done to my cousin. It seems that I clobbered her with a baseball bat! I remember every Sunday we would dress up and go to church. Afterward, the whole family would have dinner at home with Grandma and Grandpa.

On November 12, 1950, I asked Jesus to be my Lord and Savior. In 1957, I graduated from High School. I spent two years in the Navy from 1960-1962 and another two years in electronic school. Finally, my dad got me a job at U.S. Steel in Gary, Indiana and I worked there until it was shut down.

As a child, I loved roller skating and enjoyed going to different rinks in the area. I joined a hockey team and thought I was pretty good. That idea lasted until some older guys who had played ice hockey up near Chicago joined in the team!

When I was 28, I met a girl who was 10 years younger than me. We wanted to get married. My mom was opposed to it, warning me against marrying her, because she was not a believer and because she was too young. I was stubborn and bull headed. I did not listen, and we married anyway. We had two beautiful children, a boy and a girl. I took them to Sunday school, but my wife stayed home. The marriage lasted ten years. In 1975, she filed for a divorce. This sent me on a downhill spiral. I became a sex maniac. I started living the single life, drinking, moving in with my brother, and buying a Corvette. I decided to join the Playboy Club, even going up to Geneva, Illinois a couple times. I joined a ski club, played volleyball, and hit all the bars. I wanted to go all out. I

decided women were “my thing” and that I was a type of “Hugh Hefner.” I started to hang around a couple of guys in the ski club who gambled, smoked pot, and drank. They were the guys always having a good time. Party, party! You could always find us in the bar.

In 1989, one day while playing volleyball at my club, one of the players started to swear at me. I said to myself, “I don’t have to stand here and take this.” So I left. I just turned my back and walked away from it all. I asked myself what I was doing there, and it was like a light came on. I suddenly saw myself as The Prodigal. Like him, I finally came to my senses. I realized what I had done and decided to go home. I had a feeling someone knew I would become a rebellious backslide and had prayed that I would return. That day their prayers were answered.

“...And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.” 2 Timothy 2:24-26

But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Ephesians 5:13-14

I started attending church again, committing my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. I asked the Lord to forgive my rebellion and disobedience. I turned from my sins, confessing them publicly and surrendered my life, my will, and my all to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I said, “Lord Jesus, I need you in my life, I need to hear you.” In the midst of the crowd of other people’s voices, I heard Him call my name, showing me His Holy Spirit, that beautiful Dove from heaven. He filled me with His love, setting me free from alcohol, drugs, pornography, and all the addictions I had indulged myself in. I thank my God and Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, for His mercy and love. I’m so grateful and thankful to Him for not giving up on me, a rebellious and backsliding child.

If you're addicted to sex, alcohol, pornography, or anything else, just as Jesus helped me, He wants to help you. If you made mistakes at a young age like I did, it's not too late to change. If you're tired of the party life, the playboy life, ski clubs, and the bar scene, you can choose to change today.

In Him is forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Jesus wants you to have eternal life too. Only He can save you from the wrath of God that will come upon the world. Jesus died for you so that you may live. Jesus took your sin upon Himself so you can receive His righteousness. You have to surrender to Jesus as Lord and King. Trust Jesus to help you, guide you, teach you, and keep you. He promises to be with you and will never leave you nor forsake you. Even when life seems most difficult, Jesus will be there for you. He is the Eternal One, your Refuge, and underneath all the circumstances are His everlasting arms. Jesus is peace, pure perfect peace. For there is only one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified to in due time.

The Bible says: "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in your heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart, one goes on trusting and thus continues toward righteousness, while with the mouth one keeps on making public acknowledgement and thus continues toward deliverance."

Call out to Jesus today. May the Lord of all the earth, hear your prayer in your time of need, and bless you exceedingly with His presence.

Edward

CHAPTER 26

I Became a United States Marine

I had aspirations of starting my own business!

Nothing I did worked.

I was a failure and didn't know what to do about it...

When I was a kid growing up in the 50's and 60's, it was a normal and expected thing for the whole family to be in church on Sundays. I was baptized and confirmed and even went to the church school and became an altar boy. I found out later that there was a problem. Even though I believed in God, nobody had ever taught me that I could relate to Him personally. I thought my only connection could be through the priest or pastor. So, when I went off to college, I quickly found myself all alone and in trouble, with nowhere to turn. So, like every other college student in that predicament, I started smoking and drinking. It just seemed like everyone's answer to life!

Fortunately for me, I stumbled on a wonderful girl who was four years younger than I was but seemed to have a lot more common sense than I did. We wound up getting married on the same day I graduated from college and became a United States Marine.

Life was okay for the next few years. We were stationed in Hawaii. I spent two years on deployment aboard ships floating around the Pacific. I saw the world, which was great, but I didn't get married to do it alone. I was drinking a six pack or two a day and smoking two packs a day. Life just wasn't very gratifying, even after our first son was born. As the end of my five year service obligation drew near, I began looking forward to resigning and becoming a civilian again. I had aspirations of starting my own business and making my fortune.

The problem was, I thought I was smart but really didn't know the first thing about business. Some friends tried to help and advise me, but

nothing I did worked. I soon reached the lowest point in my life. I was a failure and didn't know what to do about it.

Somewhere along the way a good friend, who was far more successful in business than I, and whom I had a lot of respect for, gave me a book that he said would help me. I enthusiastically took the book home and began devouring it. But what a disappointment! The book had a lot more to say about God than business, and I couldn't have been less interested. In fact, I was pretty angry with my friend!

In spite of my decided lack of interest in what the book had to say, something must have struck a chord in the back of my mind. I distinctly remember thinking, "What if...?" Then I did something I hadn't done since I was a child. I said a prayer. Now, this prayer will really impress you, so listen closely... "God, I really don't believe that You're up there, but if You are, and You're anything like it says in this book, I'd really appreciate knowing about it!" How's that for a prayer of faith? I wonder if you've ever wondered the same thing?

Well, I guess God just can't let a request like that pass unanswered. From that moment on, it was like He was really trying to get the point across to me. I started noticing things in everyday life that could only have happened with supernatural help. At some point, I heard a TV preacher talk about God healing people. I had a mole on the back of my neck for a couple of months that had really been bothering me. So, I did something that I now know you shouldn't do. I tested God. I asked Him to deal with the mole, just to see if He could. It dried up and fell off three days later!

Now, what was I supposed to do? After five years, I'd only been a closet Christian, watching God stuff on television. This was a real problem. I had not been in a church since I was a child, and I avoided real live Christians like the plague. I thought they acted very strange and said some of the dumbest things! After all, I was a logical, thinking human being!

Finally, after months of soul-searching, my wife and I decided that if we ever hoped to see our faith grow and become real, we had to see if all this God stuff worked in real life, and not just on television. So, one

Sunday we mustered up the courage to visit a nearby church that sounded like one we might fit in. It had the added benefit of having a Bible College affiliated with it.

Well, the rest is history. It turns out that God is way more genuine and effective in person than on TV! That was over 30 years ago in Virginia. My wife and I both graduated from that Bible College, served as deacons and elders in that church, taught at that Bible College, were ordained as pastors, and were sent out to plant a new church in Bethlehem, New Hampshire in 1991. In 1997, we also started a Christian school in Bethlehem, which has served children in Grades K-12 ever since. All of our graduates have been accepted to the colleges of their choice all across the United States.

Since inviting Jesus into my life, He's helped me to find the answers to many of life's questions.

Steve

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You Are a New Person

The Bible says:

“When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun!” 2 Corinthians 5:17

Say this:

I am a new person. I have a new life, a God centered life.

The Bible says:

“All these new things are from God, who brought us back to Himself through what Christ Jesus did. And God has given us the privilege of urging everyone to come into His favor and be reconciled to Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:18

God bridged the gap of sin between you and Him by Jesus dying on the cross. He now has given you the honor and privilege of telling people how to find that same favor with God through what Jesus has done for them.

The Bible says:

“He died for all so that all who live — having received eternal life from Him --- might live no longer for themselves, to please themselves, but to spend their lives pleasing Christ who died and rose again for them.” 2 Corinthians 5:15

Jesus died so you could have eternal life with Him in Heaven. Jesus is calling you to now live for Him, doing only those things with your life that would please Him.

To learn more about what you should now do, go to page 108.

CHAPTER 27

I Was Shot

Times were hard, and we were always moving.

I felt lost and alone, with no purpose.

A grenade exploded by us.

I knelt down on a gravel mine. It exploded and wounded my knee.

The enemy ambushed our company and killed everybody.

I was born in Puerto Rico in 1947. I lived in a small home with my mom and dad until I was around 4 years old. It was volatile between them, and my father was an alcoholic. I ended up being sent to live in another home with my uncles, aunt, and grandfather for about a year to escape my dysfunctional household. I spent a lot of time outside playing with the chickens, climbing trees, and eating the fruits from them. I kept myself busy while everyone was at work.

At around the age of 5, my mother relocated to Brooklyn, New York. She sent for me to come and live with her. When I arrived, I recall my mom taking me to the hospital but never mentioning why. What sticks out to me about that trip was seeing my sick father in the hospital bed. It was the last time I ever saw or heard from him again.

A year later, I was living with my mom, and she was involved in an abusive relationship. Thankfully, that relationship was short-lived and only lasted several months. After she left that relationship, she found someone else who eventually became my stepfather. Together, they had four children, plus the three from her previous marriage including me. We grew up in many different places in New York, my parents doing the best they could with what they had. Times were hard, and we were always moving. We moved at least ten times.

Growing up, I was the one taking care of my younger siblings. On the weekends, my parents, friends, and relatives would come over to drink and play dominoes. I was responsible for making sure the children behaved and were ok, being a child myself.

At age 19, I finished high school. I was young and didn't have direction in my life. I felt lost and alone, with no purpose. I would walk miles, even in the rain, to visit friends and try to escape the loneliness.

In 1967, I was drafted into the army. I ended up enlisting in the Marines instead. I spend two months of boot camp in Paris Island, South Carolina. From there I was sent to Okinawa, Japan for about three months. I would be tasked to police the entrance gate. During a policing shift, I decided to go across the street to a barbershop to get a haircut. My sergeant caught me and gave me a good old-fashioned yelling. He told me to get back to base immediately. I didn't get written up for that one or have any other severe consequences, though it could've ended differently. I was learning to become a disciplined soldier.

I would send all of my money to my mom. So on my off days, I would go out with my friends and they would treat me. After my time in Okinawa, I was sent to Vietnam, where I ended up being wounded twice. I remember getting to Vietnam with two other soldiers. This was my first introduction to death. It was all around me. I recall asking God, "Please get me out of this alive. Give me a home and a family, and I will serve You all the days of my life." It wasn't long before I was shot. God did save me that day, but I continued to live in a worldly way until after the birth of my first son. That is when I got serious about God and committed my life to Jesus.

From there, we were sent out to the Unit. We started patrolling the south side of Vietnam, which was heavily occupied territory. Going through Camp Carroll, a soldier was in front as we made our way through the brush, clearing the thick and heavy foliage with a machete. Clearing the way, we got about 50 yards close to the enemy line, and they opened fire. The soldier in front ended up taking the majority of the enemy fire. At the same time, a grenade exploded by us. He ended up flying back on me. My hand was holding my rifle over my chest, over my heart. A bullet hit my hand and ricocheted off. I was shot. The impact of the grenade caused gravel and rocks to forcefully hit my face. I thought it did some serious damage to my face, so I rushed to find us some cover. I was unable to locate any cover, and my fellow soldier I was with was getting shot at. I yelled for the medics, and two arrived. I told the medic helping me to assist my fellow soldier instead, as he was more severely

wounded from the grenade hit and fire. The medic continued to bandage me up. I later found out the other soldier had not made it. After being bandaged, the medic asked me if I wanted to see a fellow soldier who I would often hang out with during leisure time as well as fighting battles together. In fact, I recall one night before patrolling, a chaplain approached us when we were hanging together and invited us to a get together. I asked my friend if he wanted to go to a service that night. He replied by saying that if he didn't have any faith in his parents, how could he have faith in God? He told me to go without him, so I went. The very next day, I was sitting here, getting bandaged by this medic. "Would you like to see him? He's dead." I felt bad knowing he died without believing in God. That same night, I departed on a chopper with the wounded soldiers to Guam. I was sent to the hospital until I recovered from my injuries. Then I was sent back to the war zone.

After recovering, I was sent back to Okinawa to prepare for another mission in Vietnam. After being in Vietnam awhile, I was sent on another patrol. During this patrol, we were in an open field with wheat and grass everywhere. I remember hearing about one of our soldiers in an open field similar to where we were getting shot and killed. I told my squad to get down and kneel during our patrol in the open field. I then knelt down on a gravel mine. It exploded and wounded my knee. I ended up going to the hospital with a fractured kneecap. While lying in the hospital, I spotted a fellow soldier that was in my unit the day I was taken out. I asked him why he was in the hospital and how the unit was. He replied that the day I was taken to the hospital, that evening the enemy ambushed our company and killed everybody. He was the only one who made it out.

Fifty-five years later, I live in a wonderful home with my beautiful wife. I have four children and ten grandchildren. Every day, I thank God He answered my requests and continues to show me His love and faithfulness.

Frank

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What Do I Do Now?

1. Get a Bible, and read it every day. (Start in the New Testament.)
2. Find a church, and attend every time the doors are open.
3. Attend Bible studies and other Christ-centered meetings.
4. Pray every day – morning, noon, and night.
5. Tell people what Jesus has done for you.
6. Write out your Real Life Story, your testimony, and give it to people.
7. Make a public profession of your faith by being baptized in water.
8. Shout. Yes, Shout! Friend, you have something to shout about. You've been set free. Death cannot hold you, and Hell can't have you. You belong to God. No matter what happens in this life, as long as you continue to walk with Him, you will be with Him in Heaven.

Church Outreach

Every member in every local church has a real life story (a testimony). One of the most effective ways to teach Christians how to share their faith is to get them to write out their testimony (real life story) and share it as part of their everyday lifestyle. Step By Step Ministries worldwide award winning evangelism teachings are available on DVD and cover the topic of sharing your testimony plus many, many more effective ways to witness. For more information and resources about witnessing call, text, write, or email:

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Published By

Step by Step Ministries
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Discipleship

Do Real Life Stories Testimony Books help in the making of a disciple?

It is very hard to disciple people in this day and age because it takes time and commitment. Jesus disciplined people for 2 or 3 years. There is no way we can get people to make that kind of commitment today.

To be able to disciple someone, you must get some kind of a commitment from them. We have found that if you can get a Christian to commit to write out their testimony and share it daily, this commitment sets the stage for the Holy Spirit to disciple them!

The first thing we challenge people to do in our 12-part discipleship teaching series is to commit to writing their testimony and being a part of a Real Life Stories Christian Testimony Book.

The second thing we do is challenge people to carry two copies of the Real Life Stories Christian Testimony in their hand every time they leave their home and every time they get out of their car.

The third thing we do is challenge them to ask the Holy Spirit to help them in the giving away of the books!

The commitment to carry the books, joined with the commitment to ask the Holy Spirit to help them, sets the stage for the Holy Spirit to be active in their life!

If a person is always carrying the Gospel message with them in the form of a Real Life Stories Christian Testimony Book, they are always trusting in the Holy Spirit to help them! This gives the Holy Spirit total access to all their Time and Daily Life!

What we accomplish during our 12 Discipleship Sessions is getting a strong commitment from the person being disciplined to allow the Holy Spirit to led them into Living a Witnessing Lifestyle!

Want more information on how you can start a Discipleship Gathering in Your City? Send an email to jimbarbarossa7@gmail.com with the words “Discipleship Gathering” in the subject line.

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