

# ETERNAL CHOICES

They loved the darkness

By

Ronald A. Fahrenholz II

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"What is this place?" I whimpered as I looked around the dark, cold, and worn cave. I boasted of a wondrous vision, yet I could hardly see anything. The room was pitch black, and I quivered against the chill of the rails I had just grabbed. My hand touched a portion of iron, and its coldness jolted me back as I fell. My heart raced as I searched for something to hold onto in the dark room. Suddenly, bright lights flooded the room. Reflexively, I squinted and looked around to get my bearings.

The place was small, and I felt trapped. Letters jumbled together all over the walls of the room as if someone had scribbled the words repeatedly until they muddled together in an artistic mess. I whimpered again against the cold and held my hand over my shirt; the cold bristled my hair.

I moved my body faster and raised my voice a little louder. "Where am I?" But my words muddled off the walls, resonating throughout the cramped space. As I glanced at two words on the wall: **the fall**, sadness overwhelmed me as my last memory flooded my mind.

I've been committed to God and His ways for years. This book takes you through God's love and patience for humankind until physical death. It details how horrible it would be to fall into the hands of an angry God. After all, Scripture declares that God is love, yet He is a consuming fire. Judgment covers the doctrines of God's eternal kingdom and biblical prophecies that unravel in their course.

## TAKE REFUGE FROM THE COMING JUDGEMENT

"Go, my people, enter your rooms, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until His wrath has passed by. See, the Lord is coming out of His dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will also disclose the bloodshed on it; the earth will conceal its slain no longer."

— ISAIAH 26:20–21

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light..."

— MATTHEW 24:29

"And this is judgment: the light has come into the world, and the people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

— JOHN 3:19

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# PREFACE



*"And the sun became black as sackcloth of hair."*

— REV 6:12

The tribulation period will end with darkness. And not darkness like what you are used to.

Please, close your eyes and imagine this:

Imagine driving somewhere; it could be anywhere — the mall or even church. Imagine you are sitting in traffic, wondering why it's fairly heavy, and thinking of the many things that cross your mind daily when suddenly, the earth trembles as though it had just experienced a minor earthquake. This is followed by a loud sound that closely resembles a horn or a large trumpet. Deep down, you know this is no ordinary sound, and it appears everyone around you can hear it, but before you can investigate the source of the sound, the world turns black as though the sun — a ball of fire— has disappeared from the sky.

The darkness is suffocating; you cannot see two steps in front of you because everything that produces light has stopped functioning, from your phone to your car headlights. Even the street lights and the lights from houses and stores no longer come on. In the twinkle of an eye, all

things that produce light on earth have ceased to carry out that function.

Now, imagine that as you sit in your car, you can hear others around you running about, you hear the panic, and you understand their reactions because you feel the same blinding fear. You know you cannot simply do anything because one wrong move could cost you your life.

What would you do?

The rapture, tribulation, and Christ's second coming are well-documented events in the Bible, which is God's word. These events, as well as the order in which they will occur, are clearly anticipated. Many individuals, unfortunately, believe this to be a myth. They believe it's just a tale or concoction intended to scare people into submission. Surprisingly, this isn't unusual or unexpected. The Bible foretells the arrival of these realities with astounding accuracy.

*"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last day's scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"*

— 2 PETER 3:3-4

This book was written to show people that the end of time is real! The predictions are astonishingly identical to recent happenings, and the time is slowly but surely ticking toward doomsday for those who don't believe in the Lord.

Almost all the signs have already come to pass. Here's what the Bible says if you'd like to confirm:

*"For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."*

— MATT 24:5-14

Despite these confirmations, many people are still in denial concerning the imminence of the Lord's return and its accompanying events. Though mostly fictional, I hope the stories here will make them real to you. I hope they will drive you to a place of seeking the Lord and seeking him in true repentance.

*"Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."*

— 2 COR 5:11



This book is a persuasion; **men and women, be persuaded!**

This book is also for you if you're struggling in your personal life and feel like you can't continue with your Christian faith anymore. You will be able to identify with one or more of the characters and their struggles before, during, and after the tribulation. Why were they left behind? Because they enjoy their sinful lives. They loved the darkness and rejected the "Light" (Jesus) because the light exposes the darkness.

However, the book doesn't just point out sinful behavior (not meant to be judgmental) that could result in being left behind; there is also a section at the end of the book to offer you information (similar to DSM IV) with proactive steps to overcome adversity. After all, Jesus is the GREAT PHYSICIAN.

This book brings to life the occurrences throughout the book of Revelations and other prophecies of end-time events. The events are captured in story form mostly from the viewpoint of the characters (semi-apologetic viewpoint), of those who were left behind to experience tribulation, Judgment, God's wrath, and the Great White Throne Judgment.

The story of John Williams examines what it could be like for Judgment as he awaits in a solitary room for the Great White Throne. His unique Judgment involves learning what true suffering is and what true love is by

experiencing the suffering, faith, and love of different people in seven different seasons.

*"Who will be able to separate us from Christ's love? Will hardship, distress, persecution, starvation, nakedness, peril, or sword befall you?"*

— ROMANS 8:35

Hello. My name is Ron (Sonny), and this book is based on a frightening dream I had. There are relatable stories in each chapter. The impact of poor decisions can be gut-wrenching, but good decisions can be eternally blissful. Hey, everyone has their personal struggles; Jesus certainly does not promise that we won't experience struggles. He does, however, promise in his Word that He will be right there with us to overcome them.

# DARKNESS



And the Earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

Darkness can be pretty scary and alarming. As the Bible describes above in the first chapter of Genesis, darkness often comes with feelings of emptiness, disorientation, and the effect that sin has on the lives of humans. A person living in sin also lives in spiritual darkness, and this reflects on the life of such an individual, resulting in depression, confusion, and a general lack of purpose in life.

*And God said, "Let there be light."*

To remove the darkness, all you have to do is find a source of light; this is how God remedied the darkness at the beginning of existence. What's more, you know what? The answer to the problem of darkness hasn't changed. It's still light outside. Focusing on God (the source of light) and turning to him in repentance is the cure for sin (spiritual darkness).

*"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:*

*And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."*

— MATT 24:29-30

Many people think dreams are just psychological concoctions that occur from an accumulation of conscious thoughts and impulses. But in my experience, dreams can be a source through which God communicates and reveals our purpose. I found my purpose and direction in my dreams. My name is Ronald (Sonny) Fahrenholz II.

These stories are part of my dream...



## **Pre-rapture: inside the churches**

# THE LIFE OF JOB

## *Suffering loss*



John and Winifred Williams are a testament to true love. As they celebrate forty years of marriage, recalling the memories and moments of their relationship brings them joy. When they first met, John had been withdrawn most of his life, but Winifred saw past that and into the protective shell that covered his heart. She knew that there was something special between them, and what blossomed was a strong bond.

John and Winifred had been friends since high school. Even though John wasn't very interested in the idea of friendship, he still sat close to her in all the classes they had together and barely said a word to each other, until one day at the cafeteria.

"You don't have your card, do you?" Winifred said from behind John as he searched his pocket frantically. John felt a wave of anxiety wash over him as he frantically searched his pocket for his student card. His heart began to race, and he could feel the sweat forming on his forehead as he heard the rest of the students in line behind him growing

impatient. He was sure that he had brought his card with him today; it was something that he would never forget. But try as he might, John just couldn't seem to find it.

At that moment, Winifred stepped in from behind him and handed her own card to the attendant. "*You can put his bill on my card,*" she said softly with a kind smile. It was enough to calm John's nerves, despite feeling embarrassed at having held up the line.

Through all of their years together, the couple has remained faithful to each other by standing side-by-side through both the good and bad times. They even attended college together in Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Through laughter and tears, they have weathered every storm with trust in each other's love as an unshakable foundation. To this day, Winifred still feels deeply loved by John, who shows her his affection in countless ways throughout each day—a glance across the room or a gentle touch on her arm conveying more than words ever could.

This is why Winifred believes so strongly in their relationship—it has been built on truthfulness and tenderness, with genuine care for one another's happiness at its core. Even after 40 years of life together, she appreciates how lucky she is to have found someone like John—someone who she can laugh with until it hurts, who will always be ready to listen, who will stay up late talking about whatever comes up, and most importantly, who loves her with unwavering devotion.

John often rejected Winifred's love because he was afraid she would want something from him that he couldn't provide. She saw that he was scared, and she wasn't afraid of that.

Winifred spent many years making John's heart soften. When they graduated, John knew he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. He had everything he never thought he would have with her. The pain from his life with his mother, the love he never felt, and the dark hole in his heart was filled up with Winifred's love. She was his world, and he was hers. He had everything he needed, and nothing else could make him feel more complete. Nothing.

John found a job as a salesman for a company that sells appliances. He got decent commissions from his job. On the other hand, Winifred found a job as a nurse at a big hospital in the city where they lived. They had more than enough money to spend, and they enjoyed many vacation trips. They had a slight delay with childbirth, but this did not worry them since they were still enjoying each other's company and were not exactly ready to start a family life yet. Life, for them, was one long, continuous honeymoon, and many of their neighbors longed to be like them.

The couple got accustomed to their neighborhood and decided to attend a Church close to their home. This was not because they needed anything from the big man in heaven; I mean, they knew they had it all already. They only did it to seem normal and accepted in the neighborhood since

every other family got dressed every Sunday to sing hymns in the big white house down the road.

They were not very serious or devoted Christians, but the ministers and deacons at the church were constantly trying their best to help them reach a good level of spiritual maturity.

*"Why would such a lovely couple have it all here on earth and lose it when Christ comes again?"* Winifred overheard one of the women saying to another woman one day as they stepped out of the church. She was more concerned than angry at the statement. It troubled her very much.

*"Honey, is everything okay?"* John asked his beautiful wife as they drove back home. Winifred was his joy, so he knew the moment something was wrong with her.

*"I think we are missing something, John,"* she replied with sadness in her voice. She stared out of the window.

*"What do you mean? Tell me what you want, and I will give it to you! You know I will."*

John stole occasional looks at his wife while trying to stay focused on the road.

*"Talk to me, honey."*

*"We don't have what other people at our church have. We should get it even if we think we don't need it."*

John burst out laughing but cautioned himself, so he does not hurt his wife's feelings.

*"Honey, we have everything we need. Trust me. Nothing should steal our joy ever."*

Winifred found it hard to get it off her mind. She eventually shook it off and started smiling again when John turned around and took her to her favorite restaurant to have dinner, but when she got home, the voice of the woman rang in her head again.

*When Christ comes again?*

### **Precious Little Anita**

John and Winifred's lives were truly blessed. They had each other, they had their health, they had a thriving career, they had a beautiful home, and now they even had their own baby on the way. Although it was unexpected and unplanned, the couple could not help but feel a deep sense of gratitude for all of the blessings that fate had handed them.

The days flew by as John and Winifred eagerly anticipated the arrival of their child. John often reflected on how much his life had changed over the years; it seemed like only yesterday he was wallowing in despair at his perceived misfortune and lack of luck in life. Now, instead of being mired in sadness and tragedy, he was enveloped in love, joy, peace, and contentment.

Cherishing every moment before the arrival of their little bundle of joy, John thanked God for all He had done for him and his family. With tear-filled eyes, he thanked

Him for his happy union with Winifred, their friendship that seemed to make all troubles around them disappear with one hug or caress— something money could never buy — and most importantly for this new life that God was bringing into their world; this blessing, which promised an eternity of blissful moments!

John and Winifred were truly blessed with the safe arrival of their little baby, Anita. She was a perfect bundle of joy, and with her birth, they felt they had been bestowed a divine gift. They showered her with love and affection, striving to give her all the best that life had to offer. John spent countless nights watching over Anita, ensuring she was safe and secure while Winifred got a much-needed rest. It was a labor of love for them both, as they wanted their daughter to live a peaceful and happy life— something John himself never experienced during his own childhood. Therefore, he hummed along with joy on his way from work every day in anticipation of seeing his two little angels again. His heart would swell at the sight of them both, and it made all the tough days at work worth it. Buying gifts at the store for his wife and daughter became routine, and little Anita became so used to it that when she was four years old, she would run to the door with her hands stretched out, excited to see what her father had for her that day.

He felt immensely grateful for being able to provide for his family, and he showered Anita with blessings every night before going to sleep.

The Williams family was dealt an unexpected blow when Anita became very ill. John felt his throat tighten with sorrow, his heart aching painfully in his chest as he looked around the room. The once happy and carefree family had been torn apart by Anita's illness, with every day seeming longer and harder than the last. He remembered her chubby cheeks, her bright eyes, and her infectious laughter that filled the house with love. It all feels so distant now. All of those memories were replaced by pain and sadness as she lay there struggling to breathe. Every glance at her brought another rush of tears to John's eyes, remembering how vibrant and full of life she was before. Even in the darkness of night, he could feel the oppressive weight of tragedy hanging over them—a palpable reminder of the cruel hand fate had dealt them when it struck down their beloved Anita.

It was moments like this that haunted John for days on end—thoughts that kept him up at night and made him question if he had done something wrong to deserve such sadness. He knew deep down that none of this was his fault, but still couldn't help but be plagued by doubt from an inner voice from his past that gnawed away at him relentlessly: 'I told you nothing good comes from you'.

John opened his eyes in a hurry and looked around. He knew that voice anywhere. He recognized that pale, harsh, and unkind voice, but he never expected to hear it again.

*Your life is a mess, and you cannot run from it. You can never be happy, John.*



His mother was long gone, but now, in the middle of the confusion that he was feeling, he heard her words, and his heart shattered. He held on to Anita's hands as tears rolled down his cheeks. Things had to get better fast.

But they did not. They got worse, and John and Winifred took Anita back to the hospital, ran all the necessary tests, and gave her medications, but the illness kept recurring. After spending more money, time, and energy on the entire procedure, Anita was eventually diagnosed with leukemia.

This was heartbreaking news for the entire family, but they did not even have the time to console one another. John was anxious about the diagnosis, wondering what could happen next. He was happy that they finally had closure on what the problem was, but he was sad that his little girl had to suffer this sickness for nothing.

*"She wronged no one, Winifred," John said. "Just like me, she did nothing wrong to get any of this. What is this life, and why has it decided to steal my peace away?"*

Winifred had no words to say to comfort her husband. She also searched for peace, but she did not find it. She did her best, but it was not enough. It took some effort to ensure they did not grow apart from each other. John spent his free time staring into space as thoughts filled his head, and Winifred tried to read books or tend the garden to free her mind a little bit.

The couple spent a small fortune on treatments and a lot of time by her bedside, trying to ensure that their beautiful baby girl got better one way or another, but despite everything, her condition remained the same, sometimes seeming to get worse.

One and a half years after Anita's diagnosis, an economic crash hit the country hard, and John's company had to lay off workers to stay afloat. As if life were not hard enough, John happened to be one of those who got a termination letter, and it could not have come at a worse time. Nearly every penny of his severance package paid for little Anita's treatments. The loving father would not mind becoming homeless or broke as long as his little princess was fine and healthy again. He hid his pain and confusion each time he was with Anita or Winifred, but they were growing in his heart, eating deep and making his soul bitter. He never thought he would experience pain ever again, but here it was.

Because John had more free time from unemployment, he spent most of his days by his baby's bedside, reading to her or just sitting by her and holding her hand, willing her to recover and get better. Not even Winifred, a trained nurse, could care for their daughter as much as John did. He also prayed for her fervently. He never saw the use of prayers before Anita's sickness, and even till now, he only did it because he had no other options. He was ready to do anything in the world, and now, Anita was his only prayer point.

*"Lord, I do not care about my job and I do not care about nothing else in the world, just please give me back my baby."*

One afternoon, Winifred had gone to the grocery store to buy some of Anita's favorite cookies. They could not afford to buy them as regularly anymore, but they just had to, as she turned down many meals but accepted these sweet treats. He had been praying in tears before he fell on his knees and clung to his chest for breath. He wept loudly and looked at the sky through the window in his room.

*"Why don't you allow me to stay happy?! Why? I have suffered so much, and you choose to cut my joy short!"* John wept bitterly, shaking from head to toe and trying to catch his breath.

*"Give me my peace! If you are God, you will give me back my daughter and my joy once more!"*

That was all John asked for every day and night.

Unfortunately, life does not always cater to human wishes. One and a half years after losing his job, John lost his daughter too. John's sorrow was as deep and wide as the sky he stared at. He felt his chest tighten, and tears threatened to consume him every time he thought of his daughter and the life they once shared. All that was left for him now were memories, some of which brought a sweet smile to his lips, but those moments were fleeting and soon replaced by the deep tragedy that had befallen him.

He slowly began to assemble the shattered pieces of himself as he remembered his daughter's laughter, her

warm hugs, her bright eyes, and her kind spirit. But no matter how hard he tried to cling on to these precious memories, there was still an aching emptiness within him that could not be filled.

### *Searching for blame*

Time passed ever so slowly for John as he continued to be haunted by the memories of what once was. His heart filled with an unbearable sorrow as tears streamed down his face in agony-filled wave after wave, never ceasing until sleep finally enveloped him each night. He thought this cruel cycle would never end—that he'd be forever trapped in this cycle of grief and suffering with no hope of escape.

Every day, John would sit on their porch, rocking in his chair and staring longingly at the sky. The loneliness felt like a physical ache as family and friends tried to reach out to him; it seemed like nothing could ease the crippling despair that consumed him. In his moments of solitude, John thought about what could have been. He wondered if things would have been different had he not lost his job or if she could have fought harder against illness.

The church pastors and other members who had been supportive during the child's illness also came to try to console him, but John did not want to hear anything they had to say.

*"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."*

— JOHN 16:33

When he heard this scripture quoted, something seemed to spark off in John's head. He stared straight at the Pastor and said, "Tribulations, huh? That is what your Jesus promises. Tribulations? Well, fine! But he could have left my little baby out of it. He could have left my Anita out of his tribulations. She did not do anything, man."

The Pastor tried to calm him down by saying, "No, Brother John, it's not like that; I was only trying to..."

*"You need to take this garbage and get out of my house this instant! Leave my house with your Jesus and tribulations nonsense this moment!"*

John was in over his head already and did not let the Pastor finish before fuming angrily. He would not have any of it again, and he was tired of pretending to care.

There was nothing any of the church members could do. They got up and left, fearing that John would get violent.

Winifred was shocked by this, but she consoled him out of love. She was also heartbroken, but she tried to contain it. It was the exact opposite of Job. Unlike Job, he did not have a wife who told him to curse God and die. John did the cursing all by himself.

As soon as they left, John became very angry. He slammed the door shut and walked back to his chair. But when he got there, he fell to the ground in pain.

*"Why me?" John yelled. "My life was supposed to have a happy ending! But now it's all gone! I suffered as a child, and now I'm suffering again as an adult. And those people tell me to give up and accept the same man who takes my life away from me over and over again?!"*

John continued to wail in pain, breaking Winifred's heart even further. Then Winifred walked into the room, went down on her knees, and prayed.

*"Lord, if this is your will, please give us the strength to accept it. We need you more than ever right now."*

Winifred's pain was palpable. She was struggling to cope with the tragedies that had befallen her beloved husband, John, who had become increasingly depressed and taken up drinking as a form of self-medication. The sight of him in such anguish pained her deeply; she knew it was beyond her capacity to help him. It broke her heart to see how he had become so bitter and resentful, yet still, she tried to love him, hoping that eventually he might be pulled from his sorrows by the light of God's grace.

Her own faith had been greatly strengthened during this difficult time; she turned to Him for guidance and comfort. Winifred spent more and more time poring over the Bible, searching for answers, seeking strength and solace in its pages. And each night, on bended knee, she prayed

ferverently for John's redemption, never once giving up hope that one day he might find peace again.

The pain she felt was all-consuming—a deep-seated agony that pervaded every aspect of her life. She went through each day with a heavy heart, barely managing to put one foot in front of the other as she struggled with her inner struggle between despair and faith, between sorrow and hope. She wept often—tears of sorrow mixed with prayers for deliverance—knowing that only God could redeem them both from their current state of suffering.

Winifred became the family's breadwinner as John had no money, did not go to work, and could not contribute toward the household. This particular **Saturday night**, Winifred tried to gently convince her husband into going to church the next day. She brought up the idea over dinner, but before she could continue, he gently replied to her.

*"Baby, you know I love you and appreciate the things that you have done for me and us," John said. "But this Church thing, I really can't keep worshiping someone who allowed my daughter to suffer and die. I can deal with the job loss, but not Anita; he should not have taken my little Anita. She was so innocent, pure, and sweet, but he chose to put her through so much pain and then steal her away from me."*

John was close to tears again, but Winifred tried her best to console him.

Winifred said goodbye as she was on her way to the hospital for a double shift.

*"I love you, John, and I love seeing you happy. If you suffer here on earth and then suffer after death that would be a waste, and I want you to experience peace once more. Please, give what I have said a thought, and we would discuss it again when I come home after church, okay?"*

John was moved by her words, but his mind was made up. He kissed her goodbye and watched her drive away from the porch until he could see her no more. For a split second, he panicked and imagined how he would feel if he never saw her again. Then he relaxed again, knowing she was healthy and nothing could steal her away from him.

He waved again at her even though he knew she could not see him, buried deep in his thoughts.

How could they possibly know this might be their final goodbye?



# THE STUBBORN BROTHER

*Refusing to give up*



"I am not having this discussion with you tonight," Blake said, rolling his eyes.

It was **Saturday night**, and Bridgette, Blake's only sister, had shown up at his doorstep. As always, she looked as modest as ever and had the biggest smile on her face, a smile that hid the worry and confusion that she held in her heart towards her dear brother.

That she would take her time to be at his house the night before a glorious, special, and blessed Sunday was nothing unusual to either of them.

Blake looked back at Bridge as she stared at him with longing eyes. He knew that she loved him very much, and without a doubt, he loved her just as much. He could recognize that look anywhere and anytime because it made him do things for her that he would never do for anyone else.

A strong bond had been in place since they were young kids, and it grew even stronger as they went through high

school together. Every event that happened during their childhoods was filled with memories of them laughing and playing together, making jokes, or simply just being there for each other no matter what.

That same look made Blake get into a fight with a bully after school. They had been heading home, and Bridge told him what had happened. "I wish that I could stand up to them when they try to attack me, Blake," Bridgette had said. "I am not confident enough!"

Blake had been silent, looking back at the tears mixed with meekness on Bridge's face. He consoled her without saying another word, and at the close of school the next day, he got into a big fight with the bullies. That was the last time any of them came close to Bridge. Blake had busted his lips and gotten a scratch close to his eyes, but he smiled all the way back home and would not stop talking about how sorry the bullies were.

Their parents may not have approved of some of the things that Blake got up to, but none of this mattered to Bridgette—she was always willing to support him no matter what he did. She was extremely proud of her little brother, always encouraging him to follow his dreams and pushing him forward whenever he felt down or lacked motivation.

It wasn't until they both started living independently that their relationship changed, but the strong bond remained intact—it will never be broken. Even today, all these years later, every time one of them thinks back on their

childhood memories, they can't help but smile at how close they used to be and all the good times they shared together growing up.

Bridgette had always been the more sensible one, while Blake was a wild child, willing to take any risk just to see what would happen. She was hardly surprised when he brought up the idea of trying marijuana or crack. He jokingly said that he wanted to know what it felt like, and Bridge could only shake her head in disapproval. What kind of craziness was this?

Little did she know, it wasn't long before he actually did try them out — not once, but twice — for marijuana and once for crack. He'd come back late at night with bloodshot eyes and tell her about his experiences. She found it hilarious that someone as reckless as her brother often came back unscathed from such dangerous activities.

Blake seemed oblivious to the fact that Bridgette knew every single thing that he had done — after all, what else were sisters for? But even so, Bridgette never told anyone else about Blake's little experiments because she knew there would have been serious consequences if their parents ever found out. Not only would there be a lot of shouting and scolding, but they might even consider sending him away to a boarding school so he could learn some discipline (which neither of them wanted).

In hindsight, looking back on those days always made Bridgette smile, even though she always pretended to be

mad at him whenever he'd bring up his shenanigans again. That's what siblings do best — they can get into trouble together while also covering each other's backs when needed.

"Blake, you should not be doing any of these things. It doesn't do your soul any good."

"Easy for you to say from the top of the pulpit, sis!" Blake said, laughing at his own joke. "When you are high on prayers, I will be high on this!"

"Come on, Blake," Bridgette was exasperated. She was scared and wondered if she had been too gentle with him for the sake of love. Her breathing increased, and she feared him trying out dangerous substances and, even worse, getting addicted to them.

"Your teeth will become black, your breath will stink, and your lungs will deteriorate from all that smoke!"

Blake rolled his eyes and walked over to his sister. She was older, but the difference in their height and body size would give her off as the much younger sibling. He put his two hands on her shoulders and looked her straight in the eye.

"Are you worried about my health or about my soul, Bridge? Tell me."

She heaved a deep sigh and responded with the same answer Blake had in his head. It was the same response he got when she feared him contacting a sexually transmitted disease with the increasing number of women he slept with;

it was the same answer he got when he got home drunk every other night; and it was the same answer he got when he got into big fights with dangerous people.

"I care about your health because I want you alive and well on earth, so you can keep up your record-breaking streak of being late to work on Mondays, which is becoming a real problem! And I care about your soul because I want you alive and well in heaven so you won't have to suffer through eternity wearing that awful shirt you always insist on wearing out."

On the other hand, Bridgette was a quiet woman with a servant's heart who loved to be alone on Fridays; usually, this involved sitting alone in her living room watching *The Bachelor* reruns while eating an entire family-sized bag of chips. She also liked to sing along to show tunes, particularly songs from *Chicago* or *Grease*, but only when she thought no one else was around though, as she quickly realized that her neighbors could hear her whenever she cranked up the volume too loud. When asked why she wasn't out partying like some of her friends were on weekends, Bridgette would laugh and say something along the lines of 'meh, I'm more than happy being indoors'.

Bridgette and Blake had vastly different college experiences. Bridgette seemed to be constantly on the go, getting involved in all sorts of activities, joining clubs and attending church regularly—so much so that her friends lovingly teased her for being overeager. Meanwhile, Blake

was quite content with his steady routine of class, eating junk food and going to parties with his buddies.

Little did they know how their lives would soon take a drastic turn? When Bridgette was just about to complete her final year at college, their parents were tragically killed in a car crash, an event that left them both completely devastated. It was during this period of grief that the siblings' paths began to diverge even more drastically than before.

Blake quickly turned to alcohol and partying as a way of coping with his pain, while Bridgette held fast onto her faith and found comfort in daily scripture readings and visits from her church friends, who had become like family to her since she started attending college. Even while struggling through this traumatic time in her life, she was never too busy or distracted to make time for praying or studying the Bible.

This episode of sorrow further accentuated the differences between them; while one sibling was wallowing in self-pity by drowning himself in bottles of beer and loud music, the other was practicing sacred rituals as a way of finding inner peace. Because of how Blake felt, he completely stopped going to church and started seeking answers from other secular materials. He read many documents, trying to see if he could find some sort of meaning to life.

*"Let them alone: they are blind leaders of the blind."*

*And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."*

*MATT 15:14*

Bridgette was devastated by the news of her brother's sinful lifestyle. She had always been so proud of his academic achievements, and she had genuinely hoped that he would make something wonderful out of himself, yet now all that seemed to be slipping away from him. Tears welled up in her eyes as she thought about how a life of pleasure-seeking was such a waste when compared to the joys of serving God through purposeful living.

Her heart broke further as she remembered all the times she had called him, thinking he was still on his righteous path, only to have him quote scriptures back at her that weren't even true. How could she have missed all this for so long? It felt as if time was running out for Blake as if he were already damned for eternity, and there was nothing she could do about it.

Desperate for answers, Bridgette turned to prayer. She pleaded with God to save her brother from himself so that He would shine His light upon him and show him the beauty and joy found in a life devoted to Him. But no matter how fervently she prayed or how deeply she grieved, the answer never seemed to come—only silence. Her brother's soul felt so far away, more distant than ever before, and yet still somehow close enough that it rent her heart in two with its presence.

Bridgette was determined to help her brother turn his life around, but she found it extremely difficult to make him heed her advice. She had tried different strategies in the past three months, such as gently coaxing him and appealing to his better judgment. But each time, Blake would brush away her words with a smile and find a way out of the conversation. This pattern repeated itself every Saturday night; Bridgette would go over to Blake's apartment, try talking some sense into him, and eventually have to leave with nothing achieved besides the shared nostalgia that they experienced while reminiscing about their childhood memories.

On one particularly frustrating night, Bridgette found herself overwhelmed by the futility of her efforts. She was trying so hard yet getting nowhere—was it wrong for her to even try? It seemed like no matter what she said or did, Blake refused to budge from his current lifestyle. She knew that if he didn't make any changes soon, he might be stuck in a rut for the rest of his life with no hope of ever achieving his dreams. And while she wanted to respect his choices and not be too intrusive, seeing how he refused all attempts at intervention only made Bridgette worry more about him and filled her heart with sadness.

At times like this, Bridgette could only pray for God's guidance and mercy. She hoped that he could reach out in ways that she couldn't and make a breakthrough where none had existed before. With faith in her heart, she



continued visiting Blake every week despite knowing fully well that the situation may never change.

Now, here she was, back at it again, trying so hard like she had never tried before, with new energy, more enthusiasm, and so much love in her eyes. But Blake's heart had grown even harder.

"I am not having this discussion with you tonight, Bridge. Can you please drop it already?"

Blake stubbornly refused to attend church with his sister, shaking his head and muttering under his breath. "No," he said firmly, folding his arms over his chest in a gesture of finality. Bridgette looked at him with a sad smile and pleaded silently with her eyes, but Blake was unmoved. "I'm not budging on this one," he insisted, shaking his head once more for emphasis.

No matter how much she cajoled or how many arguments she made in favor of it, Blake wouldn't budge from his stance. He jokingly suggested that perhaps the preacher should come to him instead and maybe even set up an altar in the living room. Despite her disappointment, Bridgette couldn't help but chuckle at her brother's stubbornness and wit.

After giving in to her frustration and relenting from any further discussion on the topic, Bridgette resigned herself to the fact that she may never be able to convince Blake to come to church with her—at least not today. But she was determined not to give up on him just yet. She thought

about all of the times they had shared together growing up: stories they had told each other around the campfire late at night; nights spent stargazing out on their back porch, wishing upon shooting stars; Sunday mornings waking up early so they could sneak out of the house before anyone else noticed—all of these memories flooded her mind as she stood there looking into Blake's eyes with a renewed sense of hope and determination.

"Oh, come on, Blake," Bridgette said with a cheeky grin. "You know there's nothing better than meeting a good-looking woman at church. We all know you can't resist them." She gave him an exaggerated wink and then continued on her mission to persuade him to take a chance and try his luck.

"You know how many potential dates there are in that place? Just picture it: beautiful, single women everywhere you turn, just waiting for you to make your move. It could be your lucky day." She paused for effect, making sure she'd made her point.

Blake couldn't help but crack a smile. "Well, if they're so great, then why don't you introduce me to one?" he said with a grin. Bridgette was taken aback for a moment before responding, "Maybe I will! You never know what can happen when you step foot into the House of the Lord. It could be your lucky day!"

The two of them shared a laugh as Blake tried to imagine himself at church surrounded by all these beautiful ladies.

Blake seemed to contemplate her suggestion, and Bridgette was hopeful as she saw the wheels turning behind his eyes. She felt she had perhaps gotten through to him, and this was the trick that would attract him to church and set him on the path to salvation and redemption. But her heart was broken when, a few minutes later, he burst out laughing and slapped his hand on his thigh.

"Come off it, sis. Thought you had me? There are prettier women at the club, and they are definitely sexier than the holy ones that would be packed at your church," Blake said as he attempted to counter his sister's plan.

Bridgette was not sure what to say next. Blake was right. Even she had seen the kind of women Blake associated himself with, and they sure looked appealing to the eyes. She wondered how he would burst out laughing when he saw the women completely covered up decently. She knew he was not saved yet, so his eyes were fixed on a certain class of 'hot' women who were definitely not within the walls of the church.

*God, you have to help me. Blake is my brother, and I love him more than anything else on earth. I need him saved because I never want to lose him, Lord. His eyes are closed; please help me!*

When Bridgette was about to leave, she lingered at the door and made a final plea for him to reconsider his position

about God and the Church. She had always been a strong believer in her faith, and it saddened her to know that her brother had strayed from it over the years. She was determined to have him accompany her to church at least once, even if it were for just one service.

It was as if she had received forewarning that they would not see each other after that day, and the feeling kept drawing her back, and she obliged it, pleading nonstop with Blake to go with her to church just that one time, even if it would be the last.

Bridgette's premonition was right.

Could this be the last time they see each other?

# THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY

*Different*



Mrs. Anderson was drained. The aged woman often put on a brave face, but in truth, she was struggling to cope with the challenge of raising her beloved son Jed. She spoke positive affirmations and prayed fervently for the Lord's intervention in her difficult situation.

Jed was no longer a baby; he had reached the age of 16 and was just weeks away from graduating high school. To Mrs. Anderson, he would always be her baby boy—the last son out of several children in their family unit. She loved him dearly, yet it was sometimes hard for her to ignore his character defects and mistakes.

His flaws were becoming more visible, and this put a great strain on Mrs. Anderson's mental well-being as well as her physical energy levels. Despite his missteps, however, she still noticed the small traits that made him lovable and desirable—little things such as his soft-spoken nature or generous spirit, which made it easier to forgive him when he went astray. Thus she continued to keep hope

alive that one day Jed would change for the better; she persevered in her mission to ensure that Jed would ultimately become a blessing to the family instead of an obstacle they had to continually overcome.

The Andersons had four boys, and they had done their utmost to instill strong values in them. They taught them to be honest, hardworking, and God-fearing individuals who could make a positive difference in the world. The first three boys all seemed to flourish, each having successful careers, wonderful wives, and polite children. Even the eldest of the brothers had become a pastor in a church close to his own home. But then there was their fourth son—the one who struggled so much more than any of his siblings; he found it hard to do well in school, he got into trouble with the law on more than one occasion, and despite all his parents' efforts to help him along throughout life's journey, and nothing seemed to change for him.

Mrs. Anderson constantly worried if her son would ever turn his life around or have any success in the world. She tried talking to him, but he never seemed to listen or take her advice seriously; instead, he seemed determined to make his own way down a difficult path. The eldest Anderson son offered words of comfort, saying that God had seen this day coming and would guide them through it. But Mrs. Anderson still feared for her youngest child's future—she knew that making poor decisions when young could lead to serious consequences later in life.

Her heart broke whenever she thought about how much potential her son had, but also how easy it was for him to throw away such a precious gift as freedom and opportunity with just one wrong turn. She prayed every night that he would find a way out of his troubles, though it didn't seem likely at times, hoping that God would provide some kind of miraculous solution in due time.

Jed was the black sheep of the family, a stark contrast to his perfectly pious brothers. He loved nothing better than spending his weekends at the club, knocking back a few beers and not even bothering to contain himself. His wild behavior had gotten him in trouble with the law on more than one occasion, so you can imagine the parental concern and dismay that Jed's antics caused. It was almost comical to see him try and sneak back into the house late at night after a night out, all tipsy and disheveled, only to be caught red-handed by his parents. The scolding that followed could only be described as epic! Despite his outward rebelliousness and lack of interest in church life, Jed was actually quite knowledgeable when it came to religious teachings and scripture; he just had other priorities. He wasn't all bad though; while drinking definitely clouded his judgment at times, he still managed to come up with some pretty witty words of wisdom during conversations; they just didn't always make it past the censors at home.

Reverend Anderson was doing mission work in the Philippines, and he was not home that much, so these days,

it was just Mrs. Anderson and her baby living together. Mrs. Anderson hoped that things would change.

Mrs. Anderson often felt disappointed that her husband was away on his mission work, leaving her to deal with Jed. Even though she was thankful for the opportunity for her husband to do God's work, it was difficult to be without him at times. When he would return home for brief visits, Mrs. Anderson felt grateful for the time together, but she couldn't help but feel disappointed when it came time to say goodbye again. She desperately wished that things could be different and that her husband could stay with them more often instead of being away most of the time, but until then, she had faith that God would see them through this difficult period in their life together.

The family had tried all the strategies that worked with the older boys whenever they misbehaved. They had shown him love and tried to talk to him as affectionately as possible about changing his ways. They had even paid for counseling classes and signed him up to see if that would work. When they saw that there was no acceptance of these approaches, they tried using firmer and more aversive strategies, from grounding him when he misbehaved to early curfews. Sadly, none of these worked because he was not the kind of kid that could be intimidated into submission. He had chosen a life that contradicted his background and upbringing. He did not seem willing to change for any reason.



Jed said to his mom one day, "I want this to be my life." Jed's mother was surprised when she found him with several empty bottles of gin in his room. She was scared for Jed and didn't know what to do. Jed said, "It's only wrong because it's different." He thought there was nothing wrong with being different.

She had rushed to her room and fallen to her knees in prayer. Her heart beat violently against her chest as though she had just seen a ghost. She could not stop worrying about what she had just seen.

You can imagine the extra load of worry, fear, and confusion dumped on the poor woman when, one day, Jed announced that he was gay and preferred the company of boys like himself to that of girls. Mrs. Anderson's world seemed to come crashing down, and she could not hide her emotions or keep herself composed; she broke down in tears.

*"Likewise, also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."*

— ROMANS 1:27

"You have to give up this," Mrs. Anderson said **Saturday night** at dinner. "You're losing everything for nothing, baby."

"Mom," Jed said, stamping his foot on the counter. "Are you ever going to respect any of my decisions as an adult?"

"An adult? A blind adult who knows nothing about life but to party and do all sorts of things? How do I respect your decisions, Jed? Tell me how!"

Jed said nothing in response and just stared into space. Then he took a sip from his fine porcelain cup that was used to serve his tea.

"Jed honey," her voice had gone down many tones and was as calm and quiet as possible.

"I have never stopped loving you."

"I know that, Mom," Jed said. "I'm not doubting you."

"Then you should know that I only want what's best for you."

"And I do too," he shot back. "Trust me, I'm having the best life possible right now."

Rev. Anderson almost had a heart attack when he got a call telling him what his son Jed was up to. Jed had chosen a lifestyle that his wife and father both disapproved of, so Rev. Anderson's wife tried to talk him out of it. But when it didn't work, she knew she had to tell her husband. Rev. Anderson was worried about his son and felt like he was at his wit's end. He was close to just ignoring him and letting him experience the natural consequences of his choices, but he didn't want to do that because it would have been too hard on him emotionally. In fact, one of the reasons Rev.

Anderson took so many mission trips was to get away from the whole difficult situation at home with his son.

The Andersons had agreed to keep showing unconditional love to their youngest son and not give up on trying to make him see the reasons why he should change his ways and seek God again. Despite all the anger, they kept praying for him and showed him love and affirmation. But by the look of things, the problem was simply a question of choice. This was the life Jed had chosen, and with all they had seen, there was not much that the parents or anyone else could do. Even more worrisome was how calm Jed was. It was almost as if he saw absolutely nothing wrong about his lifestyle. Shaming him and comparing him to the rest of his brothers never seemed to move him.

"They have their lives, and I have mine too, Mom. Face it, please," he would say ever so casually.

*"And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*

— JOSH 24:15

Early Sunday morning, Mrs. Anderson stayed in her son's room for what felt like an eternity, the emotions and feelings of wanting to give up tugging at her heartstrings. She sat on the edge of his bed, pondering what she should

do next as all her efforts seemed to be in vain. The silence between them was interrupted by Jed's sighs and reluctant eye rolls every time Mrs. Anderson brought up church attendance.

Though she wanted to give up, something inside kept pushing her forward—a voice that kept telling her not to give up, no matter how hard it might be. Knowing that if she kept persisting, her son would eventually acquiesce, Mrs. Anderson steeled herself and replied in a gentle yet firm tone: "Jed, honey, I know you don't want to go, but it is important for your spiritual life." Despite feeling exhausted from having to deal with his constant rejections, she chose to remain optimistic and continue trying to persuade him.

"Nah, momma," Jed said, throwing his hands in the air. "You know you don't gotta be like this; you don't gotta bring up this kinda emotional blackmail to me."

He sat up straight on his bed and looked back at his mother.

"No, baby, I am not trying to blackmail you. I would never do that to you," Mrs. Anderson replied with a shaky tone. "I just feel really sad for your soul, and I would really love for you to change your ways. I love you; you are my baby, and I don't want to see you perish." More tears rolled down her face as she spoke.

"There ain't no perishing, momma. I'm fine; you are fine; we are all fine; and you know I hate to see you like this."

"Just give God a chance, boy," Mrs. Anderson said, pushing harder still. "Just this once."

"Aiiit, Mom, just for today, and that is it," Jed shot back with a firm look on his face.

Mrs. Anderson's heart was filled with relief and joy as she walked away from her son's room. She had worked so hard to convince him to go to Church with her, and it felt like a huge victory for her. She was ecstatic, knowing that he had agreed and that he might have a chance at getting closer to God. As she got ready for the service, Mrs. Anderson hummed her favorite hymn in anticipation of what the day would bring.

But when she returned to Jed's room an hour later, the feeling of joy instantly vanished as soon as she saw him lying in bed again. He hadn't moved an inch since she left him earlier. Mrs. Anderson let out a deep sigh; even though the problem wasn't solved yet, the small step they had taken together seemed lost now. Tears welled up in her eyes as she looked at him curled up in his blanket, his face expressionless and unresponsive when he said, "Maybe next Sunday".

Except that he might be wrong this time. What if there were no other Sundays—not for Jed, not for Mrs. Anderson, and not for anybody else in the entire world?

# REBELLIOUS ROOMMATE

*Searching for true love*



"Lord, you gotta speak to Loretta," Antoine said out loud. "Make her see the truth and help her to come to your knowledge."

If a person heard Antoine from a distance, they would be convinced she was praying for a sister or someone who was tightly related by blood, perhaps. But Loretta was not Antoine's sister, and neither were they related by blood. Loretta shared a small apartment with Antoine, and this was the only relationship they had.

Antoine was excited when she found a roommate. Loretta was very pretty, with shiny black hair. She had bright eyes and a smile that could light up a room. But the best part was that Loretta was also very responsible. She liked to keep things clean, and she didn't mind helping out with chores like grocery shopping and cleaning the apartment. Antoine felt blessed that she had found such a great roommate.

One Friday, Antoine worked hard all day studying for an exam. When she finally had some free time, she made

dinner for herself and Loretta. Loretta had been in bed all day, so Antoine was excited to be able to serve her the meal she made.

"I made dinner, Lo," Antoine said with a big smile. She was well-rested, at peace, and in love with how the apartment smelled and felt. It was bliss. "It's Singapore noodles in soup, and it's absolutely best when it is hot, so grab your chopsticks!"

Loretta strolled to the refrigerator and grabbed a bottle of pineapple juice. It was the last one, and Antoine knew they were her roommate's favorites, so she left it and took water and soda.

"I guess I would have to turn that down, Antoine," Loretta said with a gentle smile.

"Yeah, you can have it later tonight," Antoine said. "Just reheat."

"I don't want a bulge in my stomach when I wear my dress for the outing tonight."

Antoine was not sure she heard right. "Tonight? It's 7 p.m.

"I will be out by 10 p.m. and won't be back till morning tomorrow. There's a new club on the other side of the city, and I'll be visiting with my friends."

"Oh." That was all she could mutter. She dug her chopstick into her bowl of noodles and ate in silence. Her heart was filled with so many questions, so much concern, and so much worry. In just a few weeks, she had grown to

love this roommate of hers, and everything really seemed so aligned between them. There had not been a single serious argument between them, and they both understood each other's needs and respected them. Everything would have been great and perfect if not for the only issue: Loretta's atheism. She did not believe that there was a God, and this served as a barrier to how well Antoine could have a meaningful relationship with her.

*"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?*

*And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them.*

*I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*

— 2 COR 6:14-16

Loretta was considerably liberal in her way of life. She hung out at parties, had a boyfriend she was sleeping with, and a couple of other 'male friends' with whom she was 'sharing her body.' Antoine had tried as much as possible to strike up discussions that would gravitate a discussion toward eternity, heaven, and the love of God, but Loretta would just not budge. In her words, she preferred spending a Sunday morning leisurely reading a novel rather than being among a group of people screaming and reading from



a book of fictional stories that were created to intimidate people.

If she wasn't busy reading a book on Sunday mornings, she would be at her boyfriend's apartment, where she spent the weekend, or at the beach with some other friends. Whenever Antoine tried to talk to her about faith, she would say that she never hurt anyone and that she was doing fine.

"Listen, girl, I don't hurt anyone. I live my life and only try to enjoy myself. Even God should not be mad at me for having some fun. After all, he created these things, right?"

When she would say these things, Antoine would patiently try to explain certain things to her from the Bible.

*"But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives."*

— 1 TIMOTHY 5:6

Loretta would just laugh at her and continue with what she was doing. Antoine was always worried about her roommate's soul and kept praying to God to help her get through to her and show her the grace of God that was available and waiting for her.

Antoine continued to show her love. She kept being nice to her; she told her that she was available to talk whenever she needed help and that her door was always open. All of that and more.

Loretta thanked her for the kind gesture but never really took her seriously. She realized it was all in a bid for

Antoine to eventually win her over and make her 'become a Christian.' Of course, she was not willing to give up her life of pleasure for the Bible, Saturday night rehearsals, and Sunday churchgoing. But the girl means no harm, so why not humor her? This was Loretta's mindset, and they kept living like this for the next couple of months. Antoine kept trying; Loretta did not outright reject her, but she did not make any commitment to God or Christianity, and they were able to keep getting along just fine despite their religious differences.

Then came the **Saturday night** where this chapter begins — the night when Antoine whispered a hasty prayer for her roommate's soul under her breath while returning from choir practice. Like many big things that happen without much attention or noise, the prayer she said that night, which would turn out to be so critical, was not even one of the long prayer sessions she used to have all the time. She had prayed so much and at various times concerning her friend's spiritual situation, and this was just another of those times.

*"In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand: for you know not which shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both alike shall be good."*

— ECCLESIASTES 11:6

As the mind often does, Antoine's mind drifted from Loretta to other topics such as assignments, a worship concert she had been looking forward to, and various other

things, so by the time she got back to the room, she had virtually forgotten about the prayer she had mumbled some moments earlier. But just as she got back to their door, she noticed something strange—the lights were on!

Loretta usually sleeps early on the weekends, but this time was different. Antoine saw that the lights were on in the house, and she was up. As Antoine got closer to the door, she grabbed an old hockey stick and put her bag over her shoulder. She was ready for a fight if needed.

Antoine said, "If you know what's good for you, come out this instant!" She flung open the door and looked around carefully. Although burglaries were not very common in the area, she knew that she had to be careful. She took slow steps, looking at the apartment and turning around quickly at intervals. *Oh God, help me.* The apartment was silent. If there was a burglar, Antoine figured that there would be noise because it was not that big of a place. Just as she was about to push open the door to her room, she heard sniffing sounds and dropped her hand down in fear.

"Lo?" Antoine called out. "Lo, is that you?"

There was no answer, but Antoine could see Loretta sitting on the floor with her head on her bed. She dropped the stick in a hurry and rushed to her side.

"Lo, are you okay?" Antoine had never seen or heard Loretta cry. It was not something she ever imagined. Loretta, prim and proper, confident, beautiful, and as strong

as a rock, crying? This was huge, and it gave Antoine serious concern. What could have happened?

Loretta said nothing. She kept sniffing and sobbing quietly, not doing anything to acknowledge her roommate's presence.

"Take your time, okay? I'm here."

Antoine sat beside her roommate and began patting her back slowly, often stroking her hair. She said nothing at all; she just sat there, being a comfort to Loretta. The comfort of a friend in the room seemed to make her want to pour her soul out through her tears, and so she cried even more intensely, blowing her nose loudly and resting her head on her roommate's shoulder.

After a few more minutes of sobbing, she gathered herself and fell into a deep stillness. Antoine did not ask her to speak, apologize, or try to figure out what was causing her to cry. Instead, she offered her support by simply being present.

"There is just so much to say, Antoine," Loretta finally said between tears. "This should not be happening to anyone!" The tears had reduced a little, and Antoine saw how red and swollen her face was. Her heart sank, and she felt sorry for whatever the issue was. She continued patting her back, trying to comfort her.

"Just take a deep breath, okay?"

After some minutes of silence, the dam seemed to break, and Loretta started pouring her heart out to Antoine. She explained that the reason behind her tears was her breakup with her boyfriend. The whole happy demeanor she always had was just a disguise for the story she was telling. She was in an abusive relationship with a man she loved, but he constantly mistreated her. She seemed to be stuck with him for a long time, enduring the mental abuse and slugging through it. But tonight, she had confronted him about a cheating allegation, and instead of apologizing, he told her that he did not love her or want to be with her anymore, and he had asked her to get out of his life.

She then went on to tell Antoine how she had stayed with him all because of her inner need for love and acceptance. She had grown up as the only child in a wealthy family where she did not lack anything, but her parents were never around. This made her love-starved, and she spent her early college life trying to compensate for the lack of love she had experienced while growing up. It was what made her fall victim to Leroy's, her ex-boyfriend's, advances.

*"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.*

*If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.*

*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment,*

*that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."*

*- John 15:13*

It all made sense to Antoine now. She now understood why Loretta never totally rejected her friendship despite not wanting to become a Christian. The poor girl was just looking for love one way or the other. Antoine realized this was her cue and started telling Loretta about the love of God, the death of Jesus, and the good news of the gospel. She was still a little reluctant, but she seemed desperate after losing the love of her life. After Antoine had spoken for close to an hour, Loretta finally gave her a response.

"Thanks a lot for listening to me and telling me all of this. I do not promise anything yet, but this stuff sounds good; I guess I'll go with you to Church tomorrow."

Antoine hugged her and told her to get some sleep so they could wake up in time for Church. Loretta reiterated once again how grateful she felt.

How could she know that this gratitude would have an eternal impact?

# **Pre-rapture Stories: Outside the Church**

# ETERNAL CHOICES

*Layout or kneel down*



Sally could not resist the temptation to be at the beach on such a bright and beautiful day. The sun's warmth that streamed through the window when she woke up was inviting to her. She sat up in bed and gave herself a good stretch.

Then she looked at Ruth beside her, still fast asleep, and hurled herself off the bed to the kitchen to get a cup of coffee. Sally's room had a window that opened toward the east, permitting the direct entry of sunlight, and with the entry of the sun's rays came the accompanying natural warmth and brightness that only the sun could give. It is just one of the many things that Sally loved so much about her apartment.

Being a young woman with colored skin living in a predominantly white community, the comfort of her apartment has always been her source of succor, especially her bedroom. The sparsely furnished living room and the neatly decorated bedroom with pink wallpaper and artwork showing pictures of different pop stars remained



the core of the little apartment. The convenience and other areas of the apartment only made up the complete package.

Sally meandered back to her bedroom with a steaming cup of coffee in hand. She stared out the window at the flowers outside. The radiance of the sunlight on the flowers was a delight for her. She envied the flowers somewhat and wished she were at the beach, sunbathing.

Sally glanced at the untidy bed and her dear friend, Ruth, who was still fast asleep. She wondered what life would have been like without her. She understood that she had been a bad influence on Ruth several times in the past, but there were also times when her presence around Ruth had a positive effect.

The two women worked together at the same job. They were different from most of their coworkers, who were white. The two women became friends and formed a strong bond. They also developed a friendship outside of work.

Sally learned that Ruth was actually from a well-to-do background despite her tendency to opt for an easy lifestyle. It was not long before Sally persuaded her friend to pressure her parents into buying her an expensive convertible Mercedes Benz car. She also insisted on the specifics of the vehicle on behalf of her friend.

Eventually, the pressure on Ruth's parents yielded a result, and Sally was the first to take the pink-colored Benz to work. The few times Ruth had been to work with the car, she drove the car with the hood in place. For Sally, the story

was different. She hated driving such a beautiful car without everybody noticing her presence, so she drove the car with the hood down while blasting some loud rap music or pop songs for good measure.

*"I have not sat with idolatrous mortals, nor will I go in with hypocrites. I have hated the assembly of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked."*

— PSALM 26:4–5

Ruth stayed with her parents even though she worked, but that changed recently. Sally made her see that it was old-fashioned and too simple to stay with her parents. Ruth started spending more time at Sally's apartment. Sally welcomed Ruth and knew that she could gain a lot from their friendship. Ruth spent the night again at Sally's apartment and, as usual, was still asleep when the sun was up. Sally took care of her friend and knew what she could gain from the friendship.

The night before, Sally talked her friend Ruth into going to the club with her. They both dressed in revealing clothes and went to a popular club in town. While at the club, they were approached by two men. Sally was more open to talking to them, while Ruth tried to avoid them.

Sally collected money from the men to pressure Ruth into accepting their demands without Ruth's knowledge. Sally tricked Ruth, and before long, Sally ended up in the arms of one of the men.

In the end, both ladies got drunk, and Sally barely managed to drive them home safely in Ruth's car. By the time they got to Sally's apartment, they were both reeking of alcohol, and Ruth was barely conscious. However, Sally was not new to this lifestyle, so she could stay alert.

*"What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death."*

— ROMANS 6:21

Ruth fluttered her eyelids and then opened her eyes. She raised her body into a sitting position and winced as if in pain. Her right hand flew to her forehead as she felt a pounding headache. It was the outcome of the escapade of the night before.

"Are you well?" Sally asked her bleary-eyed friend.

"I have a terrible headache. I think I drank too much last night," Ruth said with her hand still pressed to her forehead.

"You need to have such experiences more often to get used to it," Sally responded with a proud smile. "Anyway, I have a solution to that. Give me a second." Sally assured her friend with such confidence and pride. She sauntered off to the kitchen again and returned with some aspirin and a cup of water. She sat by Ruth and watched her take the two tablets and water.

Sally needed her friend to recover fast. She had a plan for the day, and with Ruth in such a horrible condition, Sally's plans would be ruined. She had her eyes on going to

the beach to enjoy the sunshine and the cool ocean breeze. It, however, would not have made sense to go alone in Ruth's car while Ruth lay sick back in her apartment.

Ruth laid down again on the bed, trying to get over the headache. She remained in bed for some time before mustering some courage to get out of bed. Sally, who had earlier left the room to watch some program on television, was glad to see Ruth walk up to her. Her hope of going to the beach was rekindled.

"Good to see you up, girlfriend." The gaiety in Sally's voice was undeniable.

"Anything you want me to do for you? Would you like some coffee? Can I add toast for you? You need it, you know."

Ruth was silent, rubbing her eyes with the back of her palm.

"Ah! I have a bag of chips somewhere, and those bars of chocolate are still in the kitchen waiting just for you."

Sally kept talking as she strolled toward the kitchen, quite excited to go to the beach soon.

Ruth sat on the sofa and smiled to herself. She felt loved. She felt her friend was the best thing that happened to her. Her parents loved her, which she dared not deny, but when in the company of her only friend, she felt a kind of love that was different from what she felt at home.

Her mother would scold her and refuse to put up with her excesses, claiming it was out of the love she had for her

daughter. Her father would frown upon her staying out late at night or having wild friends like Sally. To him, it was still out of a feeling of love for her only daughter. Ruth, however, preferred the kind of love she got from Sally to what her parents offered.

Ruth's parents were Christians whose great characters had earned them respect in their community. Though they lived among Caucasians, they were still greatly respected and loved. They had named their only daughter Ruth after the Biblical character with the same name, hoping their daughter would grow up to be fervent in worshipping the God they served. Ruth grew up as they wished but soon deviated after meeting her dear friend, Sally.

*"There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof is death's ways."*

— PROVERBS 14:12

*"Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set."*

— PROVERBS 22:29

Sally knew how best to get her friend to do her bidding. She darted about the kitchen while a lazy Ruth sat in the living room with a remote control in hand, changing stations on the television. Sally returned to the living room

setting the table with everything Ruth could possibly want. She needed to set the groundwork before making her request known.

Ruth ate with satisfaction written all over her face. Her legs were folded under her on the sofa as she leaned to one side, enjoying her toast. She was not aware of her friend staring sideways at her. She was not aware of Sally monitoring her mood with close attention.

Immediately, Ruth laughed at a funny scene from the show on television, and Sally went into action without delay.

"Girlfriend, I have a little suggestion to make—or, let's say, a little request to make," Sally said, sounding very nice and pleasant.

"So, what is it this time? Your wish will be granted as long as it has nothing to do with my ride." Ruth answered, guessing correctly.

"Come on, Ruthie baby. You know it has to be the car."

Sally was fluttering her eyelids flirtatiously. She knew how to force her friend's hand open in such situations.

"No. No, I am not looking at your eyes this time. You drove poorly last night, and I was hoping the car could rest today," Ruth said firmly. She stood her ground and continued to resist her friend.

After a few minutes, just as expected, Ruth gave in. She sighed loudly and threw both her hands in the air in

submission. She could never say no to her dear friend, she thought.

"Okay, okay, I give up. So, what do you want to do with 'our' car this time?" Ruth asked while rolling her eyes.

"Not just I, but we," Sally answered, slowly introducing her intention.

"We? Come on, what the heck are you up to this time?" Ruth turned to look at her friend with genuine concern.

"Erm... Actually, I want us to go to the beach today. You see, it's such a sunny and beautiful day out there, and it is such a shame to allow such a day to go to waste without sitting in the sun and soaking in all the pleasant feels of the golden beach sand. Pleeese." Sally held her friend's arm with both hands, trying to convince her to give in to her request.

"I'm sorry, Sally, baby. As you can see, I am still trying to get over this head-splitting headache. I sure can't imagine going to the beach today," Ruth said, suddenly looking dull and placing the palm of her right hand against her forehead.

"Alright then," Sally said with a sulky face.

She knew that as soon as Ruth was not feeling fine, there was no way of getting her to go out.

The two young ladies continued watching television in silence for some time. Ruth felt relieved as she managed to make Sally accept her view for once — it's not something that happens often. She dropped her feet to the floor and

adjusted herself on the sofa. She was prepared for a quiet **Saturday afternoon** indoors. Sally, on the other hand, had another plan.

"Um, Ruth, dearie, since you can't go out today, how about tomorrow?" Sally asked; this time, she was not ready to take no for an answer.

"Tomorrow?!" Ruth almost shouted in exasperation.

"Sunday of all days? How on earth can I tell my parents I decided to go to the beach on a Sunday rather than go to Church? After the service, I'm supposed to be at the sanitation department meeting. Sunday is simply out of the question!"

Ruth could not imagine not going to Church the following day.

"Now, Ruthie baby, if you deny me this time, I'm killing myself, and that will be your fault," Sally said, playing her last card.

"No, you would do no such thing!" Ruth did her best to stand her ground and let her friend know that she was not ready to miss Church for anything in the world.

Sally tried to change her friend's mind about going to church the following day but kept hitting a brick wall. She stopped pressing Ruth and got up from the sofa. She returned to her room and sat sulking.



Poor Ruth could not stand hurting her friend, so she apologized. Ruth thought, after all, there will always be other Sundays to be in Church.

Or will there be?

*"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."*

— MATTHEW 24:36

# MOTHER'S DYING PRAYER

*Where is your God now?*



The gentle breeze blew through the trees in front of Christ Center Hospital on a Friday night. The great white building with reflective windows attracted the sun as it shone from a distance. The neatly carved walkways and well-trimmed green lawns sent a soothing feeling down the spines of first-time visitors to the hospital. A few people could be seen walking along the walkways. They were all staff at the popular hospital.

A young girl walked along a path beside one of the beautiful, lush green lawns. She was well-dressed in a neatly ironed multi-colored floral dress, and her long, dark hair looked neat, even from a far distance. Although she looked beautiful, her face told a very different story.

She looked worried and confused as she shuffled along the pathway toward the special unit section of the hospital. She entered through the sliding glass door that was set to appear as though it opened on its own accord and continued walking along the sparkling, neat corridor that led to her destination.

She turned left at the end of the first corridor and walked to room 108. When she got there, she stopped, unsure if she could face what had happened in that room. She tilted her head toward the door, her eyes trained on the door number as she tried to muster enough courage to enter. Within seconds, the events of the last few days flashed through her mind.

She had returned home from school to find her mom sitting on a chair in obvious pain. Her father sat beside her mom with his arm around her. She was later tucked in bed after taking some drugs for pain relief.

By the following day, the pain had not only persisted but had grown worse. Her father could not go to work, and she barely managed to go to school herself. At school, she could not concentrate on what the teachers taught in class — not when her mind was constantly on her sick mother.

After school, she raced home to find her mother looking quite pale and very sick. That was when she was taken to a nearby medical center. The doctors on duty did not take too long before referring her to the Christ Center Hospital, where a confirmatory test was carried out. The seemingly ordinary lump in her breast turned out to be cancerous.

Susan and her father were surprised to learn that the pain her mother had endured for so long was actually cancer. To make matters worse, it had reached an advanced stage, putting the life of the gentle, loving, and prayerful lady in danger. The doctors could not promise much, but

they pledged to do their best in helping Susan's mother gain back her health.

Mrs. Jameson, Susan's mother, was immediately placed on admission and closely monitored. The doctors administered the best drugs possible in the hope of salvaging the situation. The nurses displayed first-class care in a bid to save the gentle Christian lady, but it did not appear that the battle would be won.

Finally, an elderly doctor with a sterling reputation in the oncology department from another hospital was invited. He recommended several medications and unequivocally indicated that a more drastic approach would be taken if the medication did not help to improve Mrs. Jameson's health within two days. It had been three days since that consultation.

Susan stood in front of the door that led to her mother's room in the hospital, knowing that if her mother's condition failed to improve, chemotherapy would likely be the next option. She could feel her forehead going damp. She felt like walking away from that door.

Suddenly, a nurse pulled the door open from the inside, and Susan had no choice but to enter. She walked in slowly, fearing the worst yet hoping for better. Her fear was confirmed when she saw her mother in the same frail condition. Not even the sight of her dad sitting by her mother could brighten Susan's mood.

She walked in and sat beside her father in silence. A quick glance at her father's face revealed he had cried earlier that day. His eyes had large dark puffs around them, and the whites of his eyes were cloudy and red. Susan felt tears trickling down her cheeks as well. She quickly dabbed her face with a handkerchief while trying to stay strong for both her parents.

Susan's father placed a loving arm around her shoulder and pulled her close to himself as if he could hear her heartbreak. They were in the situation together and needed to support each other even as they did their best to support their ailing loved one. Susan placed her head on her father's shoulder, but her eyes were fixed on her mother in the hospital bed.

"We are getting through this." I remain positive that she will survive this ordeal," Mr. Jameson said to his daughter.

Despite the brave face he put on, his voice was strained with doubt, fear, and lots of worries.

"I hope so, dad. I really hope so," Susan said with teary eyes.

"Susan, let us pray for your mom. Shall we?" Mr. Jameson said, turning to look at his daughter. He wiped his eyes with the back of his palm like he had just heard the great news.

"Pray to who, dad?" Susan asked sharply. "Pray to who or to what? We both know that there is no God up there to pray to, so why do you continue to waste your time, dad?"

You do that all the time, but I am still not convinced as I am yet to see the results." Susan, retorted, seeming a little upset.

Mr. Jameson removed his glasses and studied his daughter closely. He wondered how she had changed since she gained admission into college. He reflected back on all the efforts he and his wife had exerted to try and raise their daughter to be a good person. He thought of how promising she was while growing up and how confident he and his wife had been in her moral stance.

Mr. Jameson recalled his then-little daughter singing Christian songs in Church and people applauding her, expecting her to grow up to be like her parents. All that changed once she started college.

*"Blessed is the man, who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law, he meditates day and night."*

— PSALM 1: 1-2

**Saturday night.** Mr. Jameson cleared his throat to say something. Susan knew what was coming—the usual preaching and quoting of Bible verses. She was no longer interested in any of that. She stood up and shot one final glance at her mother before heading out the door. Mr. Jameson sat with his head in the palms of his hands. He prayed briefly for his daughter and then focused on his sick wife.

Susan's matter can wait, but his wife's case was urgent.

"John."

Mr. Jameson heard his name, but it sounded like someone had called him from afar, so he thought he was hearing things.

"John, are you awake?" It was the soft voice of Mrs. Jameson. Though laced with weakness and illness, she still sounded so sweet and gentle. To Mr. John's surprise, his wife was awake.

"Viola, sweetheart! You are awake. So glad to see you awake, my love," Mr. Jameson said, rushing to his wife's bedside.

"Where's my daughter?" Mrs. Jameson said with a weak smile on her lips.

"She left a while ago. We were here together till she stepped out," Mr. Jameson replied, not showing any sign of a misunderstanding with Susan.

"I worry for that girl. I wish she would accept Christ into her life again before I die," Mrs. Jameson said, staring at the blank wall opposite her bed.

"Die? And who is talking about death here? You shall not die but live to proclaim the works of The Lord in your life," Mr. Jameson reaffirmed with a very solid tone and a firm countenance.

Mrs. Jameson laughed and coughed a bit, squeezing her eyes to show that she was in pain.

"Amen," she finally said.

The couple held hands and started praying. They prayed audibly and were engrossed in prayer so much that when the door opened, they did not notice. They continued to pour their hearts out to God with faith.

Susan opened the door to her mother's room and saw her father next to her mother's bed. She could tell that her mother was awake because they were both praying. Susan rolled her eyes and quietly left the room, choosing to stand in the hallway instead of staying in the room and being forced to pray with them. She no longer believed in God, so she didn't want to pray.

How could she have known how much she would need faith later on in life?



# THE FAMILY SECRET

*Slave to the flesh*



Mrs. Johnson was getting ready for church on a Sunday morning. She had to hurry to get everything ready before she left. She knew that she would have to face some challenges, but she was willing to try. Her husband was awake and lying in bed while she got dressed. He watched her leave and then come back into the room. Then, the main challenge happened: their children had to get ready for church too.

When Mrs. Johnson got back to the room, her husband had left the bed. He sat at the table, fidgeting with his laptop. Soon, he was trawling through his favorite pornography sites. He was so engrossed in the pictures and clips that he was unaware of his wife standing behind him.

Mrs. Johnson stopped in her tracks when she saw what was displayed on her husband's computer screen. She folded her arms across her chest, silently observing her husband decide on a site and a video clip. Just when he settled down with a lewd smile on his face, Mrs. Johnson

stretched an extended hand over his shoulder and slammed the laptop shut.

"Hey, woman! What do you think you are doing? Do you want to damage the laptop? That thing is expensive, you know?"

"When will you be ashamed of this nonsense you do all day? You are addicted, and this is embarrassing," Mrs. Johnson said, trying her best not to raise her voice because of their children in the next room.

"Embarrassing? This is a 'man thing.' Every man does this. In any case, you have no point; here you are running off to church while I am home alone." He flipped the computer open again and returned to the pornographic clip.

"This is what we fight over every day. For God's sake, Wayne, you need to change, please!"

Even though Mrs. Johnson was calm, it didn't affect her husband's decision. He just put his earphones on and continued to watch the movie. Mrs. Johnson gave up and left the room. That was the first battle for the morning, which I lost as usual. It had become a routine every morning, except that on Sundays, the battle doubled. She headed for the children's room, determined to win the second battle.

The two boys knew their mother was going to try to make them go to church every Sunday. They also knew that they would probably end up having a fight with her about it. The boys had tried different tactics in the past, but they

knew that their mother was prepared for all of them. So even though they had never won a Sunday morning battle before, they were still prepared to fight.

"You lazy hooligans, get your behinds out of bed and into the bathroom. If you do not do what I say this minute, there will be no breakfast for either of you," Mrs. Johnson shouted before even entering the children's room. She knew their routine and could easily predict what the two boys were up to at that very moment. "We don't mind taking a bath, mom. But we don't want to go to church," Pete, the older of the two boys, responded. At the age of ten, he had the reasoning of a fourteen-year-old boy.

"Yes, mom. I agree with Pete. We will take our baths for sure, but we are not going to church." Young Mason shot back immediately. At age eight, he was already just as defiant as his elder brother.

"You two must be joking. Whether you want to or not, you are going to church. If I have to drag you there by your ears, that is exactly what I will do. Got it?" Mrs. Johnson replied, communicating her true intention.

"But mom, why do you always do this? You make us go to church all the time, but you never try to make dad go. It's just not fair," Pete proclaimed with a slightly irritated tone in his voice.

Mrs. Johnson knew the question had to be addressed every Sunday. Her husband, always being at home on church service days, had become an excuse for her boys to

keep resisting going to church with her. Unfortunately, it hurt her too that her husband had not turned a new leaf about his attitude toward his issues concerning the church. She glanced at her children, looking for the best way to tackle that question again.

"I love you two boys, and I can't risk the devil taking you. I am responsible for how you grow up, and I need you to have a relationship with Jesus. So, you have to be in church to hear more about him. Otherwise, you will be distracted by the evil things of this world." Mrs. Johnson dropped the sharpness of the tone in her voice to drive her point home: "I love you."

"So, does that mean you don't love dad? Why don't you care if he comes to church with us?" Pete asked, cocking his head to one side with both arms crossed.

Mrs. Johnson had grown tired of this unnecessary drama. Coupled with that, she was almost late for the morning service. She glanced from one boy to the other and decided to change her approach to a Christ-centered one. She took two steps closer and wrapped her arms around her sons.

"I love your dad, of course, but he is a grown man and can take care of himself. You two are my responsibilities." She paused for a while. Then she looked from one to the other as a better idea crossed her mind.

"Okay, suppose I can take you guys to accompany mommy to church. I promise you it will be a fun ride."

"On one condition!" Mason said, almost shouting. "You must play my favorite song when we get in the car."

"Of course, I can sing you that song right now as you take your bath," Mrs. Johnson giggled as she smelt victory.

The two boys rushed to get ready for church, and their mom started singing to encourage them. She felt fulfilled that, even though she had never won the first battle, she had again won the second.

*Jesus loves me, this I know; For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong; they are weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.*

Mrs. Johnson continued singing and could feel the tension that had built in her voice. By the time she got to the second part of the song, she could hear her children singing along with her. It touched her heart so much.

Before long, she was on her way to church with the two boys singing along with her in the car. But she could not help but pray for whatever sinful actions her husband may be committing alone. The small apartment became quiet. No sound of anybody walking back and forth, especially Mrs. Johnson.

Wayne Johnson sat alone in his room before his computer with his face and perverted thoughts glued to the screen. He was thoroughly engrossed in the lewd actions playing out before his eyes.

He knew what he was doing was wrong. He understood all too well that he was addicted to pornography and that it was slowly destroying his life. He, however, could not find a way out of the snare in which he found himself.

Because his computer was always displaying dirty pictures and videos, his wife stopped their children from entering that particular room. Not only that, the two boys knew something was wrong; they looked at their parents with suspicion and gossiped about them in the privacy of their room.

Mr. Johnson lost his job some time ago when he was caught watching pornography during working hours for the fifth time using the office internet. When he was given a final chance, he openly admitted that he could not promise that it would not happen again. The organization had to let him go.

Sadly, he used to be a Christian, but he changed because of his unwillingness to stop viewing pornography. He thought that he could not continue to attend church programs while so deeply rooted in the world of pornography. He settled for pornography and the immediate pleasures it gave rather than his Christian faith when he had to choose between the two.

*"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."*

— 1 John 1: 8-10

His disconnection from God grew so deep that he openly fought his wife over his lifestyle choice. He had also excused himself from several family get-togethers to avoid the issue of his addiction. Each time his brothers and sisters came to his house to talk to him, he found a way to dodge them. He was simply not ready to entertain what he called their 'judgmental attitudes.'

Recently, he had added heavy alcohol drinking to his addiction. He only needed to wait for his wife to leave before ordering drinks from a nearby store. Even though he tried to keep his drinking from his wife, the smell of alcohol always betrayed him. As if all that was not enough, he had invested a lot in pornographic material, often using them once before throwing them away. He soon started struggling financially and became entirely reliant on his supportive wife.

About five blocks away, Mrs. Johnson could not concentrate in church. It was not the first time she had left her backslidden husband at home on a Sunday. But on that particular day, she could not get over the thought of her husband not being with her in church. All her prayers that day centered on her husband and his need for repentance.

The sermon by the pastor was from First Peter, chapter five, verse seven: Casting all your cares upon Him; for He careth for you. That reassured her as she poured out her worries to God and accepted by faith that he would eventually experience a turnaround.

Coincidence?



# MODERN-DAY PHARISEE

*The Speck in thy Brother's Eye.*



*"A hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbor: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered."*

— PROVERBS 11:9

The road was smooth and inviting as the Honda sped on. The driver of the SUV was enjoying his job as he drove on, even though driving his boss had nothing to do with his job specification. Suddenly, a truck appeared out of nowhere, heading straight for the SUV from the opposite direction. The truck driver lost control of it and veered off into the opposite lane.

The truck careened towards the oncoming SUV, tilting dangerously as if it would fall. The driver saw the trailer and tried to get off the road but hesitated as the shoulder of the road was too steep and dangerous.

"Jesus! Jesus! Help me! I don't want to die!" shouted Mr. Robert from the backseat of the SUV. He was so scared that he later found his reaction embarrassing.

"Holy Ghost! Holy Ghost!" shouted Mr. Duggar beside the driver of the SUV.

Everything happened so fast, from the time the truck appeared to when the driver managed to veer off the truck's path to safety. Mr. Duggar stared with horror as the car whizzed past the SUV on his side, taking the side mirror along with it. Mr. Robert instructed the driver to stop the vehicle, and the driver complied.

Mr. Robert was angry. "What is this nonsense?" he yelled from the back seat. "How did you let the truck get so close to you?"

"I tried to dodge it, sir," the driver replied. "Thank God, we escaped unharmed."

"It's because you're not sanctified!" Mr. Robert said in a serious tone. "Such things don't happen to true Christians like me."

"You should be thankful and blessed that I was in this car," the driver said knowingly.

Mr. Duggar and the driver stared at each other, aware of their boss's behavior. This was not the first time he had spoken in this way; he saw everyone as inferior to him in faith.

Mr. Duggar was about to laugh, but he stopped himself because he was afraid of losing his job.

They got to the office before it closed, and Mr. Robert went into his office, where he expected someone to be

waiting for him. When he got there, he met the man who was waiting for him. The two men exchanged pleasantries, and the visitor stood up from his seat.

A business associate of Mr. Robert sent the visitor to show him a business proposal in hopes that Mr. Robert would be involved in a significant business deal with this person. But when the visitor spoke, Mr. Robert smelled alcohol on his breath and immediately asked him to stop speaking.

"Just stop there, please!" Mr. Robert raised his hand to halt the man's talking.

*"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*

— Matthew 7:1–5

"Have you been drinking alcohol? Then you are on your way to hell. You will surely die and rot in eternal misery! The Bible says no Nazarene or a true child of God should taste alcohol." Mr. Robert carried on with his sermon while embarrassing the man. He had a very stern look on

his face like he could beat up the poor man if he got the chance to.

When the visitor could not take it any longer, he left in anger. This did not bother Mr. Robert one bit. He was only concerned with proving a point that he believed to be scripturally correct.

That night, Mr. Robert was at home with his family, sipping on a few glasses of wine. It was his usual hypocritical routine to end each day with a few glasses of wine or a martini. He had his glasses on and read a daily newspaper, still sitting at the dining table. His phone rang, and he picked it up after carefully checking the caller.

"Yes! Elder Robert from the Holy Ghost Assembly speaking. How are you?"

He listened to the voice on the other end of the call. It was a member of the disciplinary committee from his church. He wanted to know his opinion on the matter of a member of the church caught drinking alcohol in a public bar. The person at the other end tried to persuade Mr. Robert to support him in convincing the other members of the committee to give the offending member a second chance rather than a sanction. He, however, found himself struggling to make his case.

"No, no, no! It is unacceptable. A member of the Holy Ghost Assembly should be intoxicated by the Holy Ghost and not alcohol. He has to be suspended. We should never condone

such and we do not want people like that in our midst," Mr. Robert replied, gesturing wildly with his left hand.

Then he listened to the person at the other end of the call again before responding. "You see, Deacon Harry, the Bible states it clearly: A little leaven leavens the whole lump. We don't want hypocrites contaminating the innocents in our assembly."

Mrs. Robert and her daughter, who were with Mr. Robert, stared at each other for a while. They both shrugged and continued their meal. While Mr. Robert's daughter was busy eating, her mother was deep in thought. She watched her husband talk on the phone, taking sips of an alcoholic beverage while insisting someone be suspended for the same offense. She patiently waited for him to finish the call before airing her thoughts.

"Why do you want that brother suspended? Come to think of it, you are doing the same thing the brother did, or do you not see that?" Mrs. Robert said, analyzing the whole situation with her index finger on her chin.

"No, madam. We are clearly not doing the same thing. I am drinking in the privacy of my home, but he was in a bar! Can you imagine that? A member of Holy Ghost Assembly?!" Mr. Robert raised the glass of alcohol to his mouth again, then brushed off a few drops off his mouth with his shirt sleeve.

"So, what exactly is the difference? You are both wrong! You should not be drinking alcohol either!" Mrs. Robert insisted.

"Did not you read that Apostle Paul encouraged Brother Timothy to drink some wine? It is not *always* wrong to drink alcohol," Mr. Robert argued.

"That was because he had some abdominal ailment, Elder Robert. Are you struggling with the same ailment?" Mrs. Robert stood her ground on what she believed from her knowledge of the Bible.

Mr. Robert became angry and said, "Are you praying for me to have an illness? What a terrible wife you are."

"I can now see why you are going to spend eternity in hell. It is a sin to question an elder like myself who has such a close relationship with God. Avoid fighting against my authority," Mr. Robert said before he ran out of patience.

Mrs. Robert stood and left the dining room, disgusted by her husband's behavior. She felt sickened by his increasing hypocrisy. She went to her room and knelt by her bed to pray. She prayed that God would touch her husband's heart before it was too late.

A few weeks later, Mrs. Robert was stunned when she saw her husband gambling online. She challenged him, and all he had to say in defense of his actions was that he did what he did in the privacy of his home, so he was justified compared to people who gambled in a nightclub.

The following Sunday, Mr. Robert's daughter got to church late. She walked into her dad preaching the sermon. It was not the first time her father was delivering a speech, but what drew her attention to her father's sermon was how he kept saying, "And the Lord told me..." She scratched her head in discomfort.

As Elder Robert continued the sermon, several congregation members hailed him as a true man of God. His daughter felt embarrassed, knowing who her father really was behind closed doors. She knew her father was a great lover of money and alcohol. He gambled, and he was extremely biased and judgmental.

She was lost in thought as her father preached, shouting at the top of his voice. Despite the decent sound system, he was still shouting as much as he could. She was pulled out of her deep thoughts when she heard something her father said.

"You may sleep during service, you may not pay attention during sermons, but if you do not pay attention to my sermon, you will go to hell. If you doubt me, then hell is already prepared for you," Mr. Robert continued while delivering his condescending warnings without any remorse.

Mr. Robert had been brilliant in managing his finances without needing a church treasurer. Still, he was extra careful not to clash with church-related activities until one **Saturday night**, he received a call from his friend Mr. Justus.

Mr. Justus was a business tycoon who associated with men of similar caliber to himself. He played golf for fun and recently introduced betting to the golf matches he organized among his friends. Usually, he played with his friends on Saturdays, but on this particular occasion, a considerable bet was placed on a mini-competition scheduled to take place on tomorrow on a Sunday.

Mr. Robert was not exactly a fantastic golf player, nor was he an avid golf follower. But when he heard Mr. Justus placed a price tag of ten thousand dollars on a mini-competition, he opted in. Not even the fact that it would be on a Sunday discouraged him. The plan was simple: he would just contact the church secretary and call in sick.

When his wife reminded him that he had preached several times that anybody who spent time on activities outside the church service or church activities on a Sunday would have a special place in hell, he simply shrugged off her objection. To suppress his wife's persistent badgering, he pointed out to his wife that the golf competition may be his chance of winning the souls of the rich men involved.

He went on to say that God had told him that this was his burden: to go into the world and bring men out of damnation.

A few hours later, he learned that the venue of the competition had shifted. The competition that was earlier scheduled to take place in a nearby golf course was rescheduled to take place in a neighboring state. The good



news was that a private jet belonging to one of the business big shots would fly all participants to the resort where the competition was scheduled to take place.

But would it take place?

# THE ELEVENTH HOUR

*It is not too late*



*"I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh to the  
Father except by me."*

— JOHN 14:6

It was a brisk cold that night, and people on the street were in a hurry. Almost everyone had somewhere to go, except for one young man. He had left home several years ago and was struggling to find a job in the city. He had heard many stories of people leaving the suburbs for the city and becoming rich, but his story, so far, appeared to be a long way from such success stories.

He sat with his back against the wall, close to the newspaper stand. He watched people walk by him as if he weren't there. He envied the people who had packages from different stores. He concluded that they had families waiting for them at home. Then he dropped his cigarette butt on the ground and put it out with his foot. His stomach began to growl; it was time for him to get something to eat for the night.

Wes crept through the shadows, keeping his eyes open. It started raining again, just like it had earlier that day. Thankfully, he had a hood on his jacket. He flipped the hood over his head and kept walking, looking for something.

Maybe food? Perhaps searching for something more?

The grocery store was still open. Wes was lucky. He walked by the store, taking in the information he needed for that night. After all, his freedom depended on it. He then walked to the back of the store. He had been there before and knew how to get around.

Wes decided it was safe to steal from the store. There were only two people in the store—the elderly Indian woman who owned the store and her young grandson. Wes approached the back door and pulled out his toy gun from inside his jacket. He brandished the weapon and told the young boy to pack a few items in a bag for him to consume. The elderly owner of the store was almost glad to give him what he wanted. She even knew that the gun was a toy, but she didn't want her grandson to get hurt, so she gave him whatever he wanted. She also noticed that Wes only requested edible goods, indicating that he might be hungry and not after money. She encouraged her grandson to pack all of Wes's requests and even asked him to add a few more snacks and a soft drink.

Wes was happy to have gotten food, but he still needed a place to stay. He walked on, looking for a place to rest for the night. He was pleased that he looked like the other

people he saw walking down the road. Unlike them, though, he had no family to go to and no home to rest his head in for the night.

Wes decided he needed an extra jacket for the night, so he walked to a boutique. He knew he had to act fast, and he did. He grabbed a heavy woolly jacket from a mannequin and disappeared into the darkness of a nearby alley.

The homeless young man found a basement of an abandoned movie plaza to settle down for the night. He arranged a makeshift bed out of cardboard boxes, and he sat down to his recently acquired supper.

By morning, Wes was up before the sun. He had mastered the act of beating the sunrise because he never wanted people walking around while he was asleep on the roadside. He went in search of employment, and after a few rejections, he got a day job from a family who needed someone to mow their lawn. By the time he was through with the lawn, he had volunteered to sweep their driveway and then pick up the trash that accumulated around the flowers, which were displayed on the corner of their lawn. He left to get something to eat but did not need to steal this time because he had some money given to him from the lawn mowing.

After eating, Wes stayed around until it was dark outside. Then he went back to the basement, where he had slept the previous night. This time, a few homeless men were there, so he had to move on and find another place to

sleep. That was the usual routine for Wesley Alvarez. He was born in the United States, but his parents migrated from Mexico when he was very young.

They struggled to make ends meet, relying on low-paying jobs like domestic cleaning services and other related jobs. With the little income they had, they could not afford to live in the city. This was the reason behind Wes' fascination with the city. As soon as he was old enough, he decided to leave home and make a living by himself.

Even though Wesley Alvarez had a strong Christian background, he stopped following God when he moved to the city. He felt like God had let him down because he wasn't able to find a good job, and blamed Him for making his life miserable.

Once, Wesley came close to repenting and returning to God. He grabbed a bag of groceries from a man and ran through a path that led to a very lonely area.

Most people would not try to escape a thief by running through a dangerous area. Unfortunately for Wes, while trying to get away from his pursuer, he didn't see a car speeding down the street, and he was hit. As Wes was thrown in the air by the impact, he felt remorse for his recent deeds and sincerely wanted to reconcile with God. He landed hard on the concrete ground, and all of the groceries he had stolen spilled out all around him.

The man who was chasing Wes came over to see if he was okay. The man then picked up the groceries that were

scattered on the ground and handed them to Wes. Wes looked up at the man, still dazed and lying on the ground, expecting the man to detain him until the police arrived.

Wes thought things would get even worse when the man he stole from introduced himself as a retired police officer with experience in athletics as a young officer. But instead, he gave him some money and left the groceries for him. Then he helped him up, and miraculously, none of Wes' bones were broken.

Wes changed his mind and did not repent. He found a place to rest, but he could not go job hunting the following day because he was sore and needed to recover from the accident last night. A few days later, Wes still refused to believe that God was protecting him. He met other criminals and formed a gang with them. They stole as a way of surviving, so they were not ashamed of their actions.

One day, Wes met a young man who was rich. He wore a lot of gold necklaces and chains. Wes found out that he sold drugs in the city. That night, the young man introduced Wes to the 'boss man.' Shortly after that, Wes joined the gang and was taught how to avoid police officers who patrolled the city streets. After a few operations in the city, Wes' fortune changed tremendously. In a short time, he was able to get his own apartment and start a new life.

Wes didn't have the same life as before, but at least he had his own place now.

Wes continued to have trouble with the law and was incarcerated several times during the last year. He learned about selling drugs and eventually created his own business, selling drugs to school kids. He had a few boys who ran errands and sometimes required intimidating classmates to buy the drugs or be beaten.

One day, he was told that the rich man that had introduced Wes to the drug world was no longer in business. Wes grew curious. He sent one of his boys to verify the news, and the young man returned with confirmation. He even added that the young, rich man had found Christ.

*"For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

— TITUS 3: 3–7

Wes and his two boys laughed when they heard the news. It was hard to believe that a successful drug lord would give up the wealth and power that came with a

successful drug business for Christ. They thought it was crazy.

**Saturday night**, Wes had another opportunity to give his life back to Christ. It was on that night, while delivering drugs to a buyer, he ran into a team of undercover cops. Because Wes was a man of color, he was targeted as a suspect as soon as the police officers saw him in an area known for drug trafficking.

Wes ran away from the men who were chasing him. He knew he had to run or go to prison. He was trying to stay in the shadows so the police wouldn't see him, but they shot at him a couple of times. Wes heard the gunshots and got desperate, so he ran away until he saw a statue and hid behind it. The police shot at him again but missed.

Wes looked at the statue of Jesus Christ and realized it was a real one. He paused for a moment and stared into the face of Jesus. Wes then took a few steps backward, still looking at the face of Jesus. Suddenly, he turned around and ran away. The two police officers saw him, and the older officer was going to shoot him, but people came out of a building to challenge the police officers. That building was a church, and the statue was actually in front of the church. The security man heard the gunshots and bullets hitting the statue and alerted everyone inside the church.

While the church members distracted the police, Wes was able to get away. This was his closest encounter with the law. When he reached the safety of his apartment, he



was breathing fast and panting like a dog. He could not get the image of the statue of Christ out of his head. That statue took the bullet for him.

This time around, Wes was led to pray for forgiveness, but his stubbornness soon got the better of him. He got something to eat and decided that he would be more careful the next time.

How was Wes to know that his future escapes would prove to be even more dangerous?

# BIRTH TWINS

*Separating the inseparable*



*"Then two shall be in the field; one is taken, and the other left."*

— MATTHEW 24:40

Whitney continued to fidget in her chair, tapping her feet, checking her watch, and sighing every few seconds. This was unmissable for the receptionist, who had now watched Whitney's display of impatience for a solid ten minutes. The receptionist could not contain her amusement anymore and gave a small chuckle as she glimpsed at the woman before her. She looked at the tall shelves beside her that were filled with files of patient records and wondered how long it would take before she could get back to organizing them again. Her smile broadened when Whitney stood up and strode over to the door to peer through the glass pane. It made no difference, though; all that lined up beyond the door was an empty hallway illuminated by bright fluorescent lights.

The receptionist tried to imagine what it must be like for someone as impatient as Whitney to wait there—a soul-

crushing experience! She thought about offering the lady some water or even a blanket just to pacify her restless spirit but immediately realized this wouldn't help at all with the intent of improving Whitney's disposition towards waiting in line.

Whitney seemed to be on a mission, determined to get to the bottom of her sister's mysterious procedure. She stood there with a defiant look on her face, sending a clear message that she wouldn't budge until she got an answer. Even if it meant standing there for hours—and even days—until someone broke the silence and provided some sort of explanation as to what was going on inside.

The receptionist had seen many a determined person before, and they knew that they would have to give in to Whitney's relentless demand eventually. Sooner or later, someone was going to have to pass on the news regarding her twin sister's condition, and it better be soon! After all, one can only stand around aimlessly for so long before their patience runs thin.

Miss, do you understand what is going on in that room?" The receptionist asked Whitney again before answering the question herself. "It's a simple scaling and polishing procedure—nothing more," The receptionist threw her hands out comically, and the three patients waiting their turn in the waiting room laughed.

Whitney knew that scaling and polishing may not be a painful procedure, but she thought that since her twin sister

was in the dental chair, she owed her a responsibility to worry. Earlier, she was asked to wait for her sister in the waiting room rather than stay with her during the procedure because she was fretting so much over her sister.

Despite the laughter all around her, Whitney remained defiant and stood there, staring at the door to the office of the senior dentist, unmoved. The three patients in the room encouraged her to at least sit, but she refused. They continued snickering and exchanging glances behind her.

After a while, Holly walked out of the office to meet her twin sister, Whitney. She looked at her identical twin sister and wondered why she looked so worried. Holly hurried up to her sister. The two young ladies hugged and comforted each other.

"I was so worried for you. I could not help but think that you may be going through pain," Whitney said with teary eyes.

Holly laughed and shook her head. She couldn't believe how much trouble her sister had gone to just to make sure she wasn't in pain. "Oh, Whitney," she said fondly, rolling her eyes. "I should have known better than to worry you like that!"

The two sisters shared a laugh as they made their way down the street, enjoying the sunny afternoon together. But then, as if on cue, Holly stopped in her tracks and looked up at the sky with a confused expression on her face. Whitney

followed suit, trying to figure out what had caught her sister's attention this time.

"What is it?" she asked hesitantly.

Holly gestured towards the horizon and pointed out a small formation of clouds in the shape of dental instruments—tweezers, pliers, and toothbrushes! They both burst into laughter at the sight—it seemed like the universe was sending them a message! The two enjoyed the lighthearted moment together before continuing on their way home.

Whitney and Holly were identical twins. They looked the same, sounded the same, and had similar mannerisms. They grew up close together and often wore the same clothes, making them look like replicas of each other.

They had recently graduated from college and were meeting new people. They struggled each day to stay together, even though their friends were pulling them in different directions. Whitney turned down a good job offer because her employer wasn't ready to employ her twin sister. Holly broke up with a promising young man because he said Whitney was too emotional about her sister.

Their parents became concerned about the seemingly inseparable twins and thought out a plan to help them grow independent of each other. Mr. Miller, the father of the inseparable twin, was a reputable engineer, and his job made him travel to different states and countries to oversee projects on behalf of his company.

Mrs. Miller, on the other hand, was an early childhood teacher who had to resign due to severe knee arthritis. She could not move anywhere without assistance, and her family had adjusted accordingly, ensuring that she had someone around to assist her when needed.

At the conclusion of their plan, Mr. and Mrs. Miller announced that one of them would be required to travel with their father for a month in order for him to work on his projects.

The excuse was that one of the twins was needed to help their father with on-site record-keeping and other minor work so that he could save money for their mother's possible knee replacement surgery. They drove home their intentions by insisting one of the twins stay back with their almost helpless mother.

The Millers were filled with a mixture of emotions as they braced for the upcoming separation of their inseparable twins. They were filled with both excitement, as the traveling twin would get to experience new places and opportunities, but also dread having to be apart from each other for an entire month—something that had never happened before. Mr. Miller had to make the difficult decision of choosing which of his daughters would travel with him, a decision that would ultimately shape their futures and destinies.

The next day, Whitney and her dad left town. Whitney was excited, but Holly felt like she had been sent to prison.

Holly was always more creative than Whitney and came up with a way to keep herself busy while her sister was away. She opened social media accounts and made new friends. Whitney, on the other hand, kept to herself. She didn't have anything in common with the other workers on her dad's project, so she just stayed by herself.

Whitney's father noticed her and encouraged her to talk to the workers. He told her to be friendly with them but also to know her limits. Whitney decided not to talk to any of the workers, but she didn't stay away for too long.

One day, she walked over from the makeshift office to where her father was supervising the construction of a building. Mr. Miller and his workers were standing and staring at a crane that was swinging slabs of concrete around in the air. From time to time, they would offer advice.

Whitney watched in awe as the crane swung back and forth, effortlessly carrying the huge slabs of concrete through the air. She felt a rush of excitement as she heard the loud thumps and crashes that came with each load being dropped into place. In between the loud noises, instructions were shouted from her father to his workers, guiding them in their movements below.

Suddenly, without warning, there was an almighty crashing sound followed by a deep rumble as the entire crane lurched sideways down a small slope. The slabs had caused too much weight for the sand underneath it to take

and had caved in, pulling down the whole crane with it. Everyone around was frozen in shock, unable to believe what they were witnessing.

Whitney was walking, unaware of a crane that was falling. Her father and the men around him noticed and shouted at her from afar to watch out, but she had earphones on and could not hear them shouting. They watched helplessly and kept shouting, but with no result.

One of the workers on-site, Mark, had his reflexes kicked into overdrive as he sprinted toward Whitney, who looked up in terror. He was determined to protect her and get her out of the way of the tumbling crane that appeared to be gaining momentum. The wind whipping by them felt like a warning sign, as if they had no time to spare. Mark grabbed one of Whitney's arms, his heart pounding in his chest as he half-pushed, half-dragged her off the path of danger. His energy seemed boundless as he pushed forward, almost lifting Whitney off the ground despite her protests.

Just when it seemed like they were out of harm's way, a deafening crash echoed behind them as the crane slammed into a nearby tree with enough force to make the earth tremble beneath their feet. Mark and Whitney both froze for a moment before looking at each other in relief; thanks to Mark's quick thinking and courage, they managed to escape disaster. They were both breathing heavily from shock and adrenaline, relieved but weary from their close call with certain doom.



Mark and Whitney grew closer after this incident. Because of the same incident, Mr. Miller restricted Whitney's presence close to the building under construction. Even though it made it difficult for Mark to see Whitney as often as he would have liked, he managed to check on her every evening before retiring to his room in the workers' quarters.

That Saturday evening, Mark decided to check on Whitney as he usually did, and they shared a few bottles of drinks.

"I bet by now you're missing your twin sister a lot," Mark said, his cleft deepening as he smiled at Whitney.

"You can say that again. I can hardly wait to be back with that silly girl," Whitney said, her voice drooling with fondness.

She then asked Mark, "How do you cope out here so far away from loved ones?"

"We get busy with the project and savor the beauty of what we create with the building materials," He said effortlessly. "The view of this surrounding from the topmost floor of the building will stun you. These are some of the things that keep us going." He took another sip of his drink before speaking up again.

"How about we go to the roof of the tenth floor to view these surroundings? I could die of boredom. I think that should help my sanity." Whitney agreed to go to the top floor to see the surroundings. They went without anyone seeing them. When they saw two men, they hid behind a

pile of concrete. After the men passed, they continued going. Whitney realized that climbing the stairs of the skeletal building was more difficult than she had earlier imagined. By the time she got to the tenth floor, she was too exhausted to continue. Mark only laughed, still trying to impress her by skipping up the staircases with ease.

The scene was one of horror as Whitney slipped and fell backwards off the floor, her hair billowing out behind her in the wind. Mark watched with a mixture of shock and excitement. He could hear her muffled screams echoing off the walls of the building, growing shorter and shorter until they muted in the distance. Her hands and feet flailed wildly as if she were trying to reach for something that wasn't there, but nothing could stop her from falling.

As if in slow motion, Mark saw her pass through a beam of light that connected earth to sky—a stark contrast of beauty amidst tragedy. His heart raced faster than ever before as he heard it thump loudly within his chest—loud enough to drown out any sounds coming from outside his mind.

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew in her direction and pushed her away from the rocks. Whitney fell onto a sand pile. It felt like she was on a water bed because it was softer than the stones she would have hit. A hand must have carried her and dropped her there.

But Whitney was still unlucky: she landed on her left side. This caused sharp pain in her shoulder and neck. She remained still for a while, then tried to lift her arms but couldn't because of the pain. She moaned with pain as she struggled to remain conscious.

*"For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you,' and, 'In their hands, they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"*

— LUKE 4: 10

As she began to feel faint, Whitney saw two familiar faces hovering over her. Then a third person arrived, one she had known all her life. It was her father. She smiled at him before passing out.

By the time Mark reached the ground floor, Whitney was already in a car, speeding to the hospital. Mr. Miller felt terrible and wished he hadn't made his daughter take this trip with him. He sat with Whitney's upper body on his lap in the car, headed to the nearest hospital.

Nurse Rose was not supposed to be working that evening, but she got a call an hour ago asking her to cover for a friend. She is known to be cheerful and easy to work with, but many people do not know about the pain in her heart.

Nurse Rose showed immense sympathy for Whitney and her situation. She understood the pain of losing

someone close, as she had lost her own daughter recently. Nurse Rose was gentle and caring, speaking softly and compassionately with Whitney and reassuring her that everything would be okay. With a heavy heart and tears in her eyes,

Nurse Rose prayed to Jesus Christ to heal Whitney's wounds, both physical and emotional. She used comforting words from the Bible to soothe Whitney's soul, encouraging her to stay strong during the difficult time. Knowing the pain of loss too well, Nurse Rose dedicated her entire shift to tending to Whitney's needs with an understanding few could match. Her commitment to providing comfort was clear and admirable, demonstrating true dedication to ensuring that all patients were treated with dignity and respect by all hospital personnel.

*"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."*

— JOHN 14:6

*"For He (God) will keep him on perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Him."*

— ISAIAH 26:3

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that who so ever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

— JOHN 3:16

Nurse Rose's gift of The Holy Bible enabled Whitney and Mark to embark on a spiritual journey that would bring them both closer to God. They began to learn about the teachings of Jesus and how His love and grace could lead them to salvation. As they read the scriptures, they found hope in passages like Romans 10:9–10, which promises that if we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved. Through his words and their faith, Whitney and Mark were able to accept Christ as their personal savior.

They experienced the joy of being forgiven of all their sins and having an eternal home in Heaven waiting for them. Both Whitney and Mark dedicated themselves to living a life for Christ, going out into their communities to share His good news with others.

Could there be even a greater experience awaiting them?

Whitney was discharged from the hospital after two weeks. She went back to live with her dad until they could go home. Whitney's dad didn't tell his wife or Holly about the accident because he knew it would only make her wife's health worse.

Holly spent her days meeting new people. As she made more friends online, she also made friends in person. Some of her friends from social media wanted to meet her in person, so she met them. Holly was very interested in

learning about new things, like fashion and food, as well as alcohol and drugs.

Holly had a lot of fun with her friends at first, but then she realized that it was getting her into trouble. She knew she needed to stop hanging out with them, but it was hard to do. Luckily, her sister Whitney came back and helped her out. The twins were so happy to see each other that they talked all night about what they had done since they last saw each other. Holly told her about all of her friends, but Whitney only talked about one person—Mark. Holly got jealous because she thought Whitney was mentioning his name too much, but she didn't understand that Mark was the only friend Whitney made while they were apart.

The first time Mark visited Whitney at home, the resentment he got from Holly was very strong. Whitney tried bringing her sister and her friend together, but she was not making much success of it.

Matters got worse when Mark and Whitney introduced Christianity to Holly. She felt so irritated that she had to hold herself back from slapping Mark across the face.

Mark returned the following Sunday to invite Whitney to Church, but as expected, Holly resisted him. Whitney had dressed up to leave for Church with Mark when her sister flew into a rage. She claimed that Whitney had betrayed her by accepting Christianity.

You're a traitor and a spoilsport," Holly said to her sister. "Since you met this devil, you've been pulling away from me."

"How can you say that?" Mark tried talking some sense into Holly. "I could never take your sister away from you. You know that."

"Whitney, we are going nowhere!" Holly turned and left the two of them standing there.

"I'm sorry, Mark," Whitney said as she turned her back on him and left him standing alone.

Mark felt terrible but went to Church anyway. The sermon was striking, and it was about repentance and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark felt a burden in his heart. He wasn't sure if he was saved or not, but he could feel Whitney's salvation slipping away. He left Church after service with a heavy heart, determined to help her.

Mark left work on Wednesday evening and went to check on Whitney. By now, the change in him was obvious to everyone. His manner of speech, dressing, and lifestyle preferences had all changed drastically.

Some people in Mark's office and community had noticed that he was different. Every time someone mentioned it, he would refer them to the Bible. Second Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 17: "Therefore, if any man is in

Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new."

The more of the Bible Mark learned, the better his life became. He was confident that he could talk to Whitney and her sister about their attitude towards God.

As expected, he arrived at the Millers' home, **Saturday night**, and the sisters were together. Whitney was back to dressing the way she used to, and they sat, watching some program on television. Mark was surprised by the nature of the program they were watching. He felt a true child of God should refrain from watching any program that has the potential to corrupt their mind, but he kept his cool.

After exchanging pleasantries with the sisters, Mark took note of Holly's frosty reaction. He smiled and waited for the right moment to address Whitney. When Holly dashed out to get some drinks from the kitchen, he asked Whitney, "You were not in Church today. I hope everything is okay?" He tried not to sound aggressive or forceful.

"My sister," Whitney said, looking sad, "I don't want to hurt her feelings. I tried convincing her to come with me, but she wouldn't have it. I don't know what to do." Whitney said in a low voice.

"You have to try, Whitney. And if it doesn't work, you have to force yourself away from her control." Holly, who had been listening in on the conversation, spoke up at this point.



"The Bible says we have to work out our salvation with trembling hands. It is an individual race, Whitney. Remember what Nurse Rose said about the rapture? That two people can be close, yet judgment will be separate?" He continued talking to Whitney, unaware of Holly's presence.

"Jesus said that if you focus too much on this life, you might miss out on heaven. He said it's better to go to heaven with one eye than to end up in hell with both eyes," Mark reiterated that God will judge each person individually.

"Mark, are you suggesting I break off my relationship with my sister because of Christianity?" Whitney asked after a moment of silence. "She has been my twin all my life, and this Christianity is something I just discovered recently. So, which is more important to me then?" Whitney remarked.

"Christianity is over two thousand years old, and the Bible contains instructions on how to live a good life and make heaven in the end. Your faith is more important than any relationship on earth; remember what Nurse Rose taught us..."

Holly interrupted Mark before he could finish his sentence. She was very angry, and she hit him from behind. Holly was tired of him influencing her twin sister. She wanted to have a showdown to protect her sister.

"Your faith is fake if it tells you to stay away from your loved ones. That's a really selfish God. And how can you trust an old book to tell you how to run a new machine?"

That doesn't make any sense." Holly stood up to Mark and was ready to attack him again, but Whitney stopped her.

Mark apologized and tried to explain his position, but Holly wasn't having any of it. Everyone sat down, and it was quiet in the Williams' living room. Holly then brought out some drinks—a soft drink and a bottle of liquor.

Mark was surprised to see Whitney drinking with her sister. It seemed like Whitney had never tasted alcohol before they met. But it was clear that her sister had a negative influence on her.

"Whitney, I thought you didn't drink? This is dangerous for you..."

Mark was not allowed to finish his statement. Holly stood up from her seat, walked over to Mark, and poured the content of her cup on him. The smell of alcohol all over him got Mark angry. He would have retaliated, but at that point, he recalled what the Bible study teacher said that evening about men reviling against a Christian.

*Yea, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.*

— 1 TIMOTHY 3:12

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations; knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience.*

— JAMES 1:2–3

Mark was quiet for a while, and then he got up and left the room. Whitney was confused and stood up too. She felt sorry for Mark but didn't want to offend her sister. Holly pulled Whitney back by the wrist when she tried to leave with Mark.

"You have to choose between me and him," Holly said angrily. "I'll be praying for you, Whitney. And you too, Holly," Mark said before leaving feeling disappointed.

Mark walked along the street, feeling burdened for the two ladies. He knew Whitney could be saved if she wanted to, but Holly was the problem. He prayed under his breath as he walked on, not minding people who were staring at him. He felt a sense of urgency concerning the ladies' salvation, especially Whitney's.

# GOD'S CALL FOR SERVICE

*My gift, My choice*



*"But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.*

*Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God."*

— 1 CORINTHIANS 7:17, 20, 24

The Craig Pawson Seminary was established over thirty years ago in the United States and has since then produced hundreds of devoted, faithful graduates who have gone on to become successful Christian leaders and evangelists. One of its most renowned alumni is Pastor JA Allens. He has achieved tremendous feats in his lifetime, demonstrating an unwavering faith and a bold passion for God. Popular amongst pastors, ministers, and aspiring spiritual leaders alike, he is renowned for being able to bring the dead back to life and curing all manner of illnesses. His revivals are attended by thousands who flock to him in the hope of witnessing one of his miracles firsthand. Pastor JA

Allens' impact can be seen through the many new church programs that have been created under his leadership. His life serves as an inspiration to those seeking a closer walk with the Lord and reminds us that nothing is impossible if we put our faith in Him.

Pastor Paul Smith was a beloved figure in his local community, known for his faith, compassion, and dedication to serving others. He devoted his life to helping those in need and spreading the gospel message. He had been a pastor since he was 20 years old, and during this time, he had built up many relationships with members of his congregation and those close to him. He had also written numerous books on faith and Christianity, which were popular among many of his followers. Pastor Paul Smith's friend and roommate, Pastor Richard Rowe, shared many of the same beliefs as him but put more emphasis on following God's plan for one's life instead of making decisions based on individual desires.

Pastor Paul Smith and Pastor Richard Rowe were classmates in high school. They did not know each other very well back then, but their friendship grew when they met again in college. They both went to the same university, but they took different courses. However, they still kept in touch. After finishing their years of study, they both graduated within a year of each other.

Even though they were still in school, they were respected as future pastors in their church denomination. They were offered scholarships to a popular seminary

school and could have been employed as full-time pastors. Pastor Paul Smith enjoyed being called a pastor, but some of the other students, like Pastor Richard Rowe, weren't comfortable with that designation.

As the two friends grew in faith, their areas of interest changed. Pastor Richard became more interested in topics like theology and apologetics, while Pastor Paul became interested in things like demonology and deliverance. However, this made it easier for them to learn because they could better understand each other's interests.

Pastor Richard became concerned after a few months of studying with his friend, Pastor Paul. He started to worry about Pastor Paul's motives and intentions. Pastor Paul never showed interest when deep issues such as the validity of Jude's claim in the Bible about the Angel Michael and Satan contending over the body of Moses came up. However, when a discussion on the relative wealth of pastors came up, Pastor Paul would be very knowledgeable with information on which pastor owned what property.

Pastor Richard knew he had the calling of a teacher of the word of God. But before he decided to specialize in that, he embarked on several days of fasting to confirm this. Pastor Paul felt it was a waste of time to fast and pray over his decision. He decided he wanted to be a deliverance minister without first seeking God's guidance.

Pastor Richard saw his friend still struggling to put words together to make up his assignment. Pastor Richard

was puzzled and decided to engage him in a conversation concerning his calling.

"Why didn't you fast and pray before deciding your area of specialization? Maybe by now, the Holy Spirit would have revealed what to write, and you would be through." Pastor Richard observed as he watched his friend and roommate.

"I know where I am going, brother. I have a focus, and I am staying on that focus, no matter what," Pastor Paul said without looking up from his desk.

Pastor Richard adjusted his glasses and studied Pastor Paul intently, the seriousness in his gaze clearly visible. His dark hair was slicked back to match the shade of his short-sleeved shirt, and he had one hand on his chest while the other was outstretched in a gesture of emphasis. He spoke slowly, wanting to make sure that every word carried its full weight of meaning.

"Why did you choose to be a pastor?" Pastor Richard asked with an air of seriousness.

"Pastor, you don't know what it's like to be a pastor outside of here in the real world," Pastor Smith stated firmly.

"You may be right about what it is like outside here," Pastor Richard said, as if considering all the possibilities. "But there are still blessings to be found through serving our Lord and Savior, no matter what other people think." He paused for a moment before continuing in a determined yet

gentle tone. "We need to remember that God has called us to this particular path with a purpose in mind, no matter how difficult it may seem at times — we must trust that He knows best."

*"A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."*

— PROVERBS 16:9

"No matter what God has called you to do, he will bless you for it. It doesn't matter which calling or department you're in. There is nothing that God can't bless," Pastor Richard reaffirmed his submission.

"Why are you so mad, Pastor Paul?" Pastor Richard asked his friend. "Do you think money, cars, and houses are the only way to measure someone's worth?"

It seems like you're saying that spiritual gifts and talents don't matter."

"What you think in your heart is what you become. This is according to Proverbs 23:7. And God will give you the desires of your heart.

I know what I want; I know what I'm thinking." Pastor Paul said, pounding his chest for emphasis.

"What if God is not calling you to be a deliverance minister? What if, according to the dream you had some time ago, you are actually called to be a children's minister?" Pastor Richard asked. Pastor Paul said nothing in response.



"Remember, Cain, choose a different sacrifice than what God required. It was what Cain thought was a better sacrifice, which is why it was rejected."

This time, Pastor Paul ignored his roommate completely and continued to work on his assignment. He knew where the discussion was headed, and he did not want to go there. He had already decided on the sort of minister he wanted to be, and that was all that mattered to him, regardless of the opinions of the others.

Pastor Richard was praised for his hard work and consistency. Pastor Paul, on the other hand, was struggling in school. However, towards the end of their program, both pastors were asked to do a work project reflecting their area of specialization in ministry. Pastor Richard did his project and defended it very well. He received a standing ovation. Pastor Paul, however, struggled to put his project together and had a poor defense. Some of the lecturers suggested that he stay back for six months to understand his calling better. However, the suggestion was later dismissed after he begged for another chance.

On graduating from the seminary, the graduates were all posted for a one-year field experience in ministry. Pastor Richard was assigned to a large church to help with the teaching department, while Pastor Paul was posted to a medium-sized church where an experienced deliverance pastor could keep an eye on him.

Though the two friends lived in different states, they remained in contact through phone calls and social media. Pastor Richard called Pastor Paul out of concern for his friend's welfare, knowing that he may not be serving in the ministry God called him for.

One night, while asleep, Pastor Richard had a dream. In it, he saw his friend teaching a class of children, and a particularly stubborn boy broke down in tears. He was so touched by Pastor Paul's words that he surrendered his life to Christ. Pastor Richard also saw that the boy was the only child of a wealthy couple. The couple visited Pastor Paul and showed gratitude to him for changing their son's life. Before he woke up, he saw the couple gifting Pastor Paul a car and a house.

Pastor Richard called his friend excitedly to tell him about his dream in the morning. He was as excited as he explained the dream, but he was disappointed by his friend's reaction. What he heard from his friend on the phone shocked Pastor Richard very much.

"God forbid! I am not a children's minister; I reject it." Pastor Richard was embarrassed but played along like it was nothing.

On another occasion, God again sent his will in the form of a dream. This time, Pastor Paul had a dream where he was with several children. Suddenly, they all got sick and started to die. He tried to help them but couldn't. Then he started praying for them, and one by one, they got better.

One of them was dead, but he brought him back to life. When Pastor Paul woke up, he was encouraged to focus on his beliefs more than ever before. Pastor Paul's interpretation was focused on "bringing back to life" and totally overlooked the "working in the children's ministry" message in the dream.

*"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."*

— EPHESIANS 4: 17–19

After one year at the seminary school, the graduates were sent to their local churches. Both friends returned and celebrated together. They showed everyone their results and the recommendations of the men of God they worked with. Their area of specialization and performance influenced where they were placed next.

Pastor Richard was given a job in a city where there were many children who needed help with Sunday school. He accepted the job with gratitude. Pastor Paul was given a job in a small town to help the pastors who were already there. He did not like the idea, and he let others know about it.

When the senior church pastor and members insisted, he threatened to leave. The senior pastor later succumbed, not wanting to lose him after investing so much in him.

He chose to be assigned in the city as well, in an upscale area, and his wish was granted. There was little reason to stand in his way since he claimed the Holy Spirit led him to serve in that area — an area that had the greatest number of rich and influential people in the state.

Pastor Richard's sermons were amazing. People in the church started to prefer his sermons to those of the senior pastor. Pastor Richard was grateful to God and the senior pastor for their support. He published a book called "Understanding Your Calling in Christ." The book was a best seller and helped Pastor Richard's career.

On the other hand, Pastor Paul found himself in an overcrowded church. There were over twenty pastors, thus resulting in limited opportunities to minister. After a few weeks, he approached the senior pastor and accused him of segregation and favoritism.

Surprisingly, the senior pastor smiled and told the young pastor that he needed to prepare a sermon for the following Sunday. Then he made a statement that Pastor Paul failed to grasp.

"It is not just about our will, but it is about God's spirit that backs up what we do."

Pastor Paul arrived at church in his favorite suit. He looked like a dignified man, and it would be easy to mistake

him for a senior pastor. But he avoided talking to any other pastors because he didn't want their thoughts and beliefs to contaminate him. He needed to stay sanctified, or so he thought.

Time for the preaching of the sermon came, and Pastor Paul mounted the pulpit without thanking the senior pastor. He also failed to read out the main text of his sermon before starting his sermon, which sounded more like a speech. Clouded by his eagerness to impress the crowd, Pastor Paul made compounding mistakes.

Pastor Paul asked all of the sick people in the church to come to the front of the congregation. He said that God had whispered to him that he would lay his hands on them, and they would be healed. But nothing happened. Absolutely nothing. The other ministers were embarrassed as Pastor Paul tried to cast out different spirits unsuccessfully. He was sweating profusely in front of the congregation of a few thousand people. The senior pastor applied some maturity and experience by joining Pastor Paul on stage and praying for the sick.

Pastor Paul felt very embarrassed after what happened. He decided to redeem his honor before the entire congregation by staging a miracle. He went to a nearby ghetto alley and found a homeless man to help him. Pastor Paul paid the man thirty dollars and gave him instructions on what to say and do.

The homeless man wandered into the church on Sunday, walking as if he was crippled. When people were already seated, he became the center of attention. Suddenly, during a sermon, Pastor Paul started speaking loudly in tongues. Then he stood up and walked straight to the man, who appeared to be crippled. Pastor Paul placed his hands on the man's head and prayed continuously in tongues for over five minutes.

The other ministers started to feel uncomfortable. Some adults in the congregation were also not comfortable. Suddenly, the 'crippled man' stood up and jumped up and down. The church erupted in shouts of joy. People started singing praises to God as Pastor Paul returned to his seat at the altar with a smug look on his face.

The senior pastor and some of the ministers suspected that something was not right, but they did not say anything. They hoped that it was a genuine miracle. The senior pastor also knew that time would tell what had really happened.

The attention and praise Pastor Paul received were so impressive that he became tempted to perform more miracles. It looked like real business was about to start up in his favor. He recruited a few more homeless actors, and they pretended to be suffering from one ailment or the other. They came to the church while the service was on and started shouting that they should be allowed to see Pastor Paul; the healer. The disturbance got too much for the ushers to control, and Pastor Paul stood up and walked up to the pulpit. He took the microphone from one of the

assistant pastors ministering and opened his Bible. He read out:

*"Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with diverse diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them."*

— LUKE 4:40

Pastor Paul closed his Bible and proceeded to heal all the sick and diseased. Everything looked authentic, and the people were thrilled, but some watched him closely with their spiritual eyes. When one of the newly healed blind men claimed that he was born blind and had never seen before but could now see, people fell to their knees, praising Jesus. He then started naming the colors of things around him, making people cheer with excitement.

The senior pastor rubbed his chin and wondered how a man who has always been blind knew the names of colors that he said he could now see. Some of the ministers objected to Pastor Paul's healings. They thought that he was taking undeserving credit for healings that God had done. But the congregants shouted them down. People who were genuinely sick came to Pastor Paul for healing, but sometimes he would say that the spirit of God wasn't moving or that the person's faith wasn't strong enough. Other times, people were healed by their own faith and came to church to give testimonies. Pastor Paul took the credit for these healings, even though it wasn't deserved. He

was becoming so popular that he was given the nickname "The Healer."

Pastor Paul came back to the ghetto a few days later to find new people to help him with his miracles. As he gave each of them the usual thirty dollars, some of them couldn't help wondering why he was paying them just to pretend.

"What do you get out of this, man? Why are you paying us to act like your miracles happen?" One of the beggars asked.

"You won't understand," Pastor Paul said with a smile. "The benefits will come."

Pastor Paul had an answer for the woman who asked him if he was lying to people. He said that he was only building their faith and that many people had received their healings without him taking anything. He also said that soon people will get their healing without him having to fake anything. He smiled at the woman, who was about his age and pleased with his answer.

Pastor Paul's fame grew faster than he had expected. Soon, he started getting invitations to minister in different churches throughout the United States. He hired a few of the homeless men to help him hire other actors. They recruited people and paid each of their miracle candidates thirty dollars while even offering to transport them to the various venues. They also made arrangements to strategically place them within the church, and business became so profitable for Pastor Paul that churches paid him



heavily to minister at their churches. 'The Healer' quickly became sort of a celebrity.

Pastor Paul started his own ministry, Divine Power Healing Ministry. The name of the ministry grew, and so did the size of the congregation. Within the first year, they relocated three times to accommodate members better. Pastor Paul bought a piece of land and built a vast network within record time.

Pastor Paul said that you need to be healed if you believe it. But if you want to be healed, you have to pay tithes. Tithes should be fifteen, twenty, or ninety percent of your income. Ten percent is old school and means you don't have faith.

Pastor Richard continued to grow steadily, but not as rapidly as his old friend Pastor Paul. Pastor Paul stopped selectively answering calls from "small pastors with nothing to offer." Pastor Richard was comfortable but still on the payroll of his church, with no thought of starting his ministry. He also got a few invites to minister, but not like his old friend Pastor Paul, the miracle man and the healer.

How could Pastor Paul know his measly price would come at a higher cost?

**Tribulation: Rapture**  
**Left behind in the church**

# MY NIGHTMARE

## *The Church's protection*



I, Sonny, woke up from the dream, sweating. I was shaking, even though it was the middle of summer. The sweat made my pajamas stick to my skin and added to the cold effect that made me shiver so intensely. As dreams may usually go, this was a very strange one. I looked at my luminous watch, which I always wear, even to bed, and saw that it was only 4:00 a.m. I had been asleep for roughly five hours, yet the events that took place in my dreams spanned various lives and were spread out over a great number of hours.

Dreams can be really weird. Sometimes they're like a movie where we see things happening in other people's lives. I had a dream where I saw what happened in the lives of Jed and the Andersons, Loretta and Antoine, Blake and Bridgette, and John and Winifred Williams. But the scary part of the dream hasn't happened yet. It made me afraid to go back to sleep.

I dreamed that all the characters' lives were centered in a church. This was on the **Sunday after the Saturday nights**

**and Sunday mornings** that had been previously described. Later, I began to look at the lives of those outside the Church during the tribulation.

It was a typical Sunday morning at a small, little non-denominational church. The church workers, volunteers, Pastors, and others who had important roles to play had all arrived early, as usual, to prepare for the morning service.

As my dream unfolded, I felt like I was on a platform looking down at the Church. People started to arrive for the Sunday service, but I only noticed the people who had come into the Church that I had described in my dream. The first person to arrive was Mrs. Anderson. She had probably been delayed by the emotions she was feeling from her son's situation back at home. But I didn't see any sadness in her expression.

She walked into the Church, talking to people on the way and asking about their families and weekends. Mrs. Anderson went over to say hello to her husband's colleagues who worked at the home church. After exchanging pleasantries, she returned to the main service area and took her seat, reading some verses from the Bible while she waited for the service to begin.

The next to enter the Church were Bridgette and her dashing husband. Just like Mrs. Anderson, you could not find a single trace of the sadness she felt the previous night following her brother's refusal to accept the free gift of salvation. Being in the Church and sharing community with

other members provided an instant calming effect as soon as these people showed up at the Church.

*"in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand, there are pleasures forevermore."*

— PSALM 16:11

The service started, and the usual activities, like singing hymns and saying prayers, were happening. Loretta and Antoine did not get to Church early. About thirty minutes had passed since the start of the service when they walked in. They quietly found seats toward the back of the Church and joined in the service as much as they could. And just as if the service was designed specifically for Loretta, a hymn was sung shortly after their arrival. The hymn was called "How Deep the Father's Love for Us."

The lyrics seemed to cut straight to her heart, and they touched places she thought she had buried deep within herself over the years. The lyrics sounded as if God was directly speaking to her from heaven.

*How deep the Father's love for us*

*How vast beyond all measure*

*That He should give His only Son*

*To make a wretch His treasure*

*How great the pain of searing loss*

*The Father turns His face away*

*As wounds which mar the Chosen One.*

*Bring many sons to glory*

*Behold the man upon a cross*

*My sin upon His shoulders*

*Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice*

*Call out among the scoffers*

*It was my sin that held Him there*

*Until it was accomplished*

*His dying breath has brought me life*

*I know that it is finished*

*I will not boast in anything*

*No gifts, no power, no wisdom*

*But I will boast in Jesus Christ*

*His death and resurrection.*

*Why should I gain from His reward?*

*I cannot give an answer*

*But this I know with all my heart.*

*His wounds have paid my ransom.*

She sobbed silently again as she sang along, barely audible. Her friend simply placed a hand on her shoulder and allowed her to express herself.

When the sermon started, it was again as if God had a direct conversation with her. The Pastor was talking about how much God loved her and how Jesus had died for her. This was different from the condemnation and sanctimony that Loretta had expected to experience at Church. This did not even sound like a sermon. It was as if God was writing her a love letter through the message that she was now hearing. She felt at peace and calm in her deepest heart, and the void in her soul that she had had all her life seemed to be slowly filling up with a supernatural presence.

When the Pastor finished his sermon, he asked people who did not yet believe in Jesus to come forward. Loretta went to the front of the Church and got on her knees. She prayed and accepted Jesus into her heart as her personal savior.

*"For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."*

— 2 CORINTHIANS 6:2

Loretta returned to her seat after the prayer. A kind of joy filled her heart, and it was an unusual kind of joy. It was not the type she felt when she went to parties or had just enjoyed other carnal pleasures. Instead, this was a peaceful joy. It was a deep feeling of contentment that spread through her being. She felt at peace with both God and man.

The service continued, and soon it came to an end.

Then something amazing happened!

In the twinkle of an eye, the dream escalated, and I began to feel terror. I heard a deep rumbling noise and a high-pitched sound like a trumpet or shofar, and it momentarily became pitch black. When the light reappeared, most people in the Church had vanished. One minute they were there, and the next, they were gone.

*"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."*

— 1 COR. 15:52

Mrs. Anderson's seat was the first noticeably empty seat, next to three other seats of elderly people. There were a couple of other people who were not found in the congregation. The unaccounted-for members included Bridgette and her husband, Loretta and Antoine, her friend, and a couple of other regulars.

There was panic in the Church!

Many struggled to understand what was happening, while those who knew about the Bible and the book of Revelations broke down in tears. They knew that this meant trouble. The Pastor who had led Loretta through the prayer of salvation less than an hour ago stood at the altar in disbelief at what he was seeing happen.

*"And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of*



*heaven. But the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness:  
there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

— MATTHEW 8:12

*"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, have we not  
prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils?  
And in thy name done many wonderful works?*

*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from  
me, ye that work iniquity."*

— MATTHEW 7: 22-23

*It had begun...*

## *Rejecting Christ*

About ten miles down the road, John Williams sat in his armchair at home after his wife had gone to work. He liked this armchair and its positioning within the house because it directly faced the mantelpiece, where he could view pictures of his late little daughter. John always had these kinds of periods, downtimes, where he would sit on that armchair and stare at his baby all day long — his Anita. She was his world, his universe. Anita was almost everything he had — well, except for Winifred, and he loved her dearly, too. But losing Anita was like losing himself. There was nothing left here for him worth living. He kept going over the events again and again.

"I prayed, didn't I? I was a good person when I was a salesman. I never cheated anyone, and I never looked at other women with lust. I deserved to live happily ever after and watch my baby grow up and teach her how to ride a bike, swim, and drive."

John broke down again. He was distraught.

"She should have lived long enough for me to walk her down the aisle and give her hand out in marriage to some handsome, responsible young man."

John kept thinking these thoughts over and over. He felt like he had been treated unfairly. This should not have happened to him. Suddenly, he remembered a Bible verse that he had heard in Church.

*What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*

— JOB 2:10

John thought about this for a long time. He thought about how his baby did nothing wrong, and she didn't deserve the pain she went through. But John also thought about how God is in charge and how he knows what is best. While John was thinking, he read a devotional that someone had given them when they lost their daughter. It had some Bible verses meant to help people deal with grief and pain. John's wife had prayed over those verses and used them as an anchor during their daughter's death, but John was stubborn. He rejected every form of peace and comfort. Yet, as he was thinking that morning, two of those verses particularly attracted his attention.

*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord*

— JOB 1:21

*And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel's, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*

— MARK 10:29

John felt like a knife had been thrust into his heart with these two verses from the Bible. It was as if those parts of the Bible were specifically written for him because he was going to experience something like this. But once again, John rejected those words in his heart and rebelled against God even more.

When the incident happened, he made up his mind and decided that he would never go to Church again. And with all of the thoughts that were swirling around in his mind today, he came close to changing his mind. However, his stubbornness ensured that he stuck to his guns and kept alienating himself from God in his mind.

### *Anita was taken and now Winifred*

It was **Sunday morning** and John finally dozed off to sleep when suddenly awoken by a loud noise and then a trumpet sound. He was frightened and wondered what was happening. After a few minutes, he decided it was nothing and went back to sleep on the sofa.

He woke up and saw that it was pitch black outside. When the lights returned, John turned on the TV to see what was happening and saw that there were reports of strange disappearances and graves that were empty. John didn't know what to think about this. He tried calling his wife, but her phone just rang without going through.

John became worried. His daughter was gone, and now he couldn't contact his wife. He grabbed his keys, hopped in his car, and drove to the hospital. John didn't notice the commotion on the road, nor did he realize that there was no guard at the hospital gate. All that John's mind was on was reaching his wife and keeping her safe because if anything happened to her, he would never be able to go on after that. She was all that he had left in the cold world his daughter had left him in.

## **Where are the babies?**

John ran to the maternity and pediatric department, where his wife worked. When he got there, he saw that her phone was on the table, but she was nowhere to be found. He saw that she had missed fifteen calls from him. He tried to calm himself down and figure out what was going on. Then he noticed something strange. The maternity and pediatric ward was usually filled with the sound of crying babies, but it was now silent.

When he turned around, he noticed that the cribs were empty. The babies had vanished! It was then that it occurred to him. Was it possible that the rapture had happened as promised in Church? Did God take Winifred as well?

John fell to his knees, crying in agony. Then John remembered what he had always thought growing up. Why would God finally show him love and then take it away? Then he quietly mumbled, "I will never follow this God! He is not my father!"

# THE STUBBORN BROTHER

*The Gut-Punch Reality*



Blake woke up that **Sunday morning**, confused by the strange feeling in his stomach. It was unusual for him to get up before noon on weekends, and he wondered what had made him do so. He usually spent his time on Sundays catching up on sleep, reading classic literature or social media posts, or eating. However, when the woman he had spent the night with turned out to be a terrible cook, he would have to pay for their meals.

Even though it was difficult for him to get up early, Blake was excited about having some time alone. He hoped that something exciting would happen this Sunday. He couldn't wait to find out what it would be!

This morning was different than usual. He woke up early, but he wasn't with a woman. Bridgette had come over and stayed most of the night. He was hungry, but it was too early for any restaurants to be open. So he made himself some coffee and sat down at his computer to work on a report that was due Monday morning. He had been

procrastinating about it all weekend, and he needed to get it done.

Since Blake woke up early, and he felt like he should use the extra time well. He started working on a report, and he got really into it. He heard a loud noise and some shaking, and it became momentarily pitch black. He thought it must have been a truck that hit a power line. He lost track of time, and before the lights returned, it was almost afternoon.

Blake was almost finished with his report, but he needed a final review. He decided to call it quits and take a break. His iPhone had been vibrating with notifications all morning, but he had chosen to ignore them so he could focus on his work. He knew it would be either notifications from the App Store to update some of his applications or maybe some messages from his sister, Bridgette, trying to tell him that he could still come to Church and he would only be thirty minutes late.

For some unknown reason, he still did not check his phone even after he had stopped working on the report and decided to continue developing a website that he had been working on for over a month. He soon got very hungry and decided to grab a bite at the nearest fast food. He grabbed his phone and headed out the door. The day had started strangely. But the sight that greeted Blake outside his apartment was more bizarre than anything he had ever seen in the city. The streets were virtually empty. The only people he could see from a long distance were all gathered



around either a mobile phone or a small tablet. There were no cars traveling on the road either.

His first instinct was to go back inside, but he ignored it. He thought that maybe people just decided not to leave their homes today. But he still walked carefully and kept his mind alert to be able to escape in the event that an emergency occurred, maybe even an evacuation order.

He got to the restaurant and noticed that only one attendant was serving. Blake was too stunned to even ask any questions. He just bought his usual triple hamburger and left. When he got back home, he had his late breakfast while trying to push the weirdness of the day out of his mind.

After he finished eating and working on his website, Jake decided to visit the cemetery. This was a regular event for him—every Sunday afternoon, he would go to the cemetery where his parents were buried and spend some time with them. Even though he did not believe in the afterlife, he would go talk to them and sometimes bring flowers to put by their graves, which were next to each other.

This Sunday afternoon, Blake locked up his apartment and left for the cemetery. Again, he noticed the weird lack of people and vehicles on the streets and roads. When he pulled into the cemetery's parking lot, the Spanish caretaker, who had already recognized his car, hurriedly came toward him. Blake was expecting the usual, "Hola,

Amigo." But the elderly man was visibly frightened and worried. He approached the car but did not exchange his usual pleasantries before starting to talk in broken English. Blake tried to calm him down and asked him what was wrong.

"There has been disappearing. Some of the graves are broken, and the dead in them are disappearing."

Blake wondered if the old man was becoming senile or whether he simply failed to understand him. But the man repeated himself, more frantic each time. Then Blake asked, "How... How about my parents' graves? Are they intact?"

The guard's response to his question was simple and quick. "Follow me."

Without another word, he quickly walked back into the cemetery. Blake walked behind him with his heart pounding and his head feeling light. He did not understand what had suddenly gone wrong with the world this Sunday. He realized the old man was taking him to where his parents' graves were located. He knew something was wrong, but he did not know exactly what it was.

When they approached the area where his parents were laid to rest, Blake noticed that everything looked like it had been hit by a tornado. This was getting stranger. Perhaps the strangest part of all was the condition of the graves.

Blake thought it was blasphemous when he saw that both of his parents' headstones had been smashed. He

wondered who could have done this. Then he noticed that the graves were empty—his parents' bodies were gone.

*For this, we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.*

*For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first*

— 1 THESSALONIANS 4: 15-16

Blake was surprised. He did not understand what was happening. After questioning the guard in both Spanish and English, the guard explained that his parents' graves were not the only ones whose occupants had left. Some other graves of Christians had been cracked open, and the bodies had vanished mysteriously.

Blake pulled out his phone and dialed his sister. Her phone number rang and rang, but no one picked it up. Strange, he thought. He repeatedly dialed her but could not get through. He then gave up and decided to call her husband instead. The same thing happened—both phones were switched off. After unsuccessfully trying to reach his sister and her husband, he decided to check the notifications on his phone. Most of them were from news alerts telling the stories of random disappearances and strange happenings worldwide.

It all made sense to Blake suddenly. He remembered hearing about the rapture in Sunday school when he was a kid. Now he understood what it meant. He felt a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. Just then, a reminder about his work came through on his phone calendar. But nothing mattered now. Not his job, not his boss, not even all the money in the world. He had been left behind!

*For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world  
and lose his soul?*

— MARK 8:36

# THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY

*Final Departure*



Jed listened to his mom's car leave the driveway, but he didn't get up until he had spent some extra time in bed. He didn't want to go to church. It was okay if it worked for his parents and older siblings, but he wasn't ready to sign up for that life where he would have to listen to sermons and say prayers. He also wouldn't have to live by the Bible and other boring stuff.

Jed thought that there was more to life than following rules that were meant for the past. He laughed at how many of his friends joked that he was probably adopted. He was different from everyone in his family, and he thought of himself as the "black sheep" of the family.

Jed was not sure why he felt different this morning. Maybe it was because he could understand and feel his mom's emotions when she tried to convince him to go to church. But on the other hand, Jed also found himself thinking about his lifestyle and how it related to what he heard at church. He realized that it was his life, and he could

live it however he wanted. If everything they said at church was true, Jed thought about the consequences.

Jed was not ignorant of Christian living and doctrine, even though he led a wild lifestyle. He had been taught biblical ideas since he was a child, and he had even attended Sunday school on a regular basis. As a result, he knew a lot about the Bible and God's word. He just didn't want to follow it.

Jed began to seriously think about whether he would end up in hell if it really existed and whether there was actually 'judgment' as it was recorded in the Bible. "Dang, I would really be in trouble if those things were true," Jed chuckled. Then again, he thought, "Jesus was supposed to come several years ago; what's taking him so long?" Unknown to Jed, he was only reiterating what Apostle Peter had prophesied.

*Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?"*

*For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this, they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.*

*But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.*

— 2 PETER 3:3-4

These thoughts kept rolling around in the back of his mind, but he continued to surf aimlessly through social media, looking for nothing in particular. To tell the truth, Jed was feeling sort of empty and a little confused. All the drugs, his sexual orientation, and the other things he was doing were just a sort of cover. He had an emptiness in his soul that only God could fill, but he had consciously turned his back on God, and nothing else could be done.

*"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,  
God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things  
which are not convenient;*

*Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness,  
covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit,  
malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful,  
proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,  
Without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural  
affection, implacable, unmerciful"*

— ROM. 1:28-31

Jed woke up from bed and thought about what to do with his free time. He thought of the usual things he could do, like smoking, drinking, or going to the beach with friends. But he didn't want to do any of those things because he knew he would still feel empty and hopeless after doing them. Nothing could satisfy him. While still in this confused state, Jed felt hunger pangs and decided that maybe getting

something to eat would make him feel a little better about himself and life in general. Like his mom always did, she had left him some breakfast before leaving for church. Jed whispered a silent prayer of thanks to his caring mother.

While he was on the stairs, making his way to the kitchen, he heard a loud noise that made the ground shake. It was a high-pitched note that came from what must have been a trumpet. A cold fear seemed to reach out and seize his heart, but he fought against the feeling and ignored the sound. Then it was momentarily pitch black!

Maybe there was an earthquake, or someone hit a transformer — probably an earthquake. It appeared to be related to a tremor in the ground or something similar. Jed reasoned that science would undoubtedly have an answer for it and that he would go check it out on National Geographic.

He continued to the kitchen and got the leftover food. He put it in the microwave and waited for it to get warm. When it was done, he took the food back to the living room and turned on the news. He saw that regular broadcasting had been interrupted with news about people disappearing from churches and some graves being open with their bodies removed.

Jed felt an urgent need to talk to his mom. He pulled out his phone and dialed her number, but each time he tried to call, he got her voicemail. Jed then tried calling his dad, but he didn't answer. Jed started to panic and feel very



scared. This was really happening—it was not 'just a story in the Bible.' At the same time, Jed wondered what he should do. Then his phone started vibrating. He was startled by the sound of the vibration and saw that it was Ben, a buddy from high school. Ben's mom was also a believer, but like Jed, she had chosen to reject Christ's gift of salvation and live her life however she wanted. Jed answered the phone and said hello.

"Jed," Ben replied, "mom is gone. We are in deep trouble!"

# SEEKING REDEMPTION

## *Gnashing of Teeth*



Something interesting happened at this point that I found surprising. My attention returned to the Church, the initial scene of pandemonium, where most people did not know what was happening. Except the Pastor did, and a few other people who paid attention during all the Bible study sessions. They were all in fear and did not know what to do next.

But the shocking part was that the people in the Church were all those whose lives had been shown to me and who did not make it in the rapture. I suddenly saw them assembled at the Church: Blake, Jed Anderson, John Williams... they were all there like scattered sheep without a shepherd, seeking guidance and direction. I saw Jed walk to the seat where his mother usually sat and discovered her Bible. He picked it up and held onto it tightly, weeping profusely.

Jed was confused and scared. He felt as if he was alone in a dark tunnel with no way out. He had been running

away from his problems for so long, only to find that they had caught up to him now.

On a typical day, other people would have been pointing fingers and talking amongst themselves, gossiping about this boy who had brought so much grief to his parents. Today was different. No one even seemed to notice him; they were all lost. It no longer mattered whether your sin was just a little white lie or homosexuality, as in Jed's case, or rejection and blasphemy, as in John William's case. What mattered was that they were left behind, and this marked the beginning of trouble.

His stomach churned with fear and regret. He wished he had listened to his parents more, taken their advice seriously, and stopped running from his problems. Now it seemed like it was too late, and he didn't know what to do or who to turn to for help. His mind raced with the possibility of being rejected by even the people closest to him, including his parents and siblings. Nothing seemed certain anymore; all of his plans were suddenly in question. Jed felt hopeless as each thought brought a wave of helplessness washing over him, making him feel smaller than ever before. Yet despite everything, Jed held onto one hope: that things would eventually make sense again and that he would somehow manage to get through this mess in one piece.

*"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God"*

— ROMANS 14:12

Jed was overwhelmed by what lay ahead of him. He felt frightened and confused, unsure of what to do or how to even begin. He was aware that his fate rested heavily in the hands of God, and he had no idea if he would make it out alive or not. As more people began pouring into the Church, Jed noticed all the different faces—some filled with hope, some with fear, and many more with a sense of helplessness. All these people wanted to know what they could do to save their souls or repent before it was too late. Jed felt a deep sadness as he realized how little power he had over his own future, and it only added to his feelings of confusion and despair. He knew that whatever happened next, no matter how desperately he wished otherwise, there was nothing he could do but wait for God's judgment.

*"Then the scriptures were fulfilled, which said: "But in the last days, it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it."*

— MICAH 4:1

The fear and confusion spread across the crowd like wildfire with each mention of the anti-Christ. The Pastor's words echoed through the Church, each one more terrifying than before.

"People, I have to be honest with you. We are in trouble." This announcement drew more tears and sighs from the curious mix of congregants. "This is not the time to

be teary-eyed and sentimental. We have no choice but to press forward at this point." He paused and looked at the faces of the people, which were filled with regret and sorrow.

"The anti-Christ will be exposed shortly, according to the Bible, and will demand that we receive the mark of the beast."

Some began to shake in their seats, while others let out loud cries of despair. It seemed like a scene from a horror movie—a beastly figure threatening mankind with its powers. The Pastor continued to explain that only two choices were given: accept the mark of the beast or face certain death. All around them, people murmured and cried, some asking questions about what would happen if they chose not to accept it. There was an overwhelming sense of dread and hopelessness in the atmosphere as everyone grappled with this impossible decision. Many prayed for divine intervention, asking for God's grace and mercy in their darkest hour. Still, others grasped at straws, hoping for some kind of miracle that would save them from this nightmare situation.

The Pastor paused again. "While the judgments are poured out on the earth, the anti-Christ will offer safety and protection, and the hopeless and naive will follow him. Many will receive the mark, and their fate will be eternally sealed. Time is not on our side, and we have to act fast. Who has any ideas on how we can go about this?"

Uniformed men stormed the Church. Fear and panic coursed through my veins as I realized the gravity of the situation. Everyone was scrambling to escape, but they were facing impossible odds. The men in uniforms had guns and were blocking every exit. Even if somebody did manage to make it out, there was no guarantee of safety—soon, the mark of the beast will be made mandatory for everyone, and without it, you are doomed. I could hear screams of terror echoing throughout the room as people came to terms with their fate. I felt like my heart was about to burst out of my chest as I watched my friends climb out of windows, desperately trying to find a way out. There was no time for goodbyes or promises of reunion; all that mattered now was getting away from this place alive.

In the midst of it all, John Williams managed to hide long enough while his eyes frantically darted around the room, looking for any opportunity he could take advantage and escape. He seemed so determined not to surrender. I almost found myself praying he would make it out alive against all odds.

The Pastor felt an overwhelming sense of fear and failure creeping in. He had failed in his mission to spread the Gospel and prepare God's people for the coming of the Antichrist. As he walked out of the Church, surrounded by enemy soldiers, he thought about all the warnings he had received but had chosen to ignore. He thought about all those pastors who had put money over the mission and focused on selling books, cable shows, private jets, and

building large churches instead of preparing God's army. Those decisions seemed so shortsighted now, as they were all now under siege from a force that was obviously better prepared than them.

The fear in the air was palpable as the Pastor, and the remaining members of the congregation watched their fellow brothers and sisters leave them one by one, never to be seen again. All of them were overcome with a sense of dread that was almost too much to bear.

They knew that if they accepted the mark, they would only cause further harm and potentially bring more pain upon themselves. Despite all of their efforts to resist, they could feel themselves slowly slipping away as they were left helplessly waiting for what would come next. It was a feeling of failure, a feeling that no matter how hard they fought, it seemed inevitable that this tragic chapter in their lives would soon draw to an end. Now, with no way out, their only hope was for some sort of divine intervention, but even then, it felt like it would be too late.

However, the worst of the tribulation is yet to come and will occur when God removes the light and unleashes his fury on mankind.

Then, within a "twinkle of an eye," the sun became black as sackcloth.

It had only just begun!

**Tribulation: rapture**  
**Left behind outside of the church**



# ETERNAL CHOICES

## *End of the Road*



Sally had a busy morning preparing for their trip to the beach. She packed all of the essentials, including sunblock, snacks, and a change of clothing. By the time Ruth woke up, Sally was dressed in a bright red bikini and a long, transparent dress. Ruth could not help admiring her friend's outfit, and she stared at her in shock.

Sally made sure Ruth ate a light breakfast and was dressed nicely for the beach. Ruth felt uncomfortable having to wear a bikini, but Sally said that was what she should do. Ruth put on a pink bikini and a dark-colored mini-skirt. The two women skipped to the car, carrying their beach hats and sunglasses. Sally drove while Ruth sat in the passenger seat of her convertible Benz car.

The two women were driving to the beach with music blasting from their car. They were in a good mood, and several people turned to look at them as they drove. However, their good mood was short-lived, and they didn't realize the danger that was ahead of them. The danger was closer than they could have imagined.

All of a sudden, they heard a loud trumpet sound, and the ground started shaking. It was as if there was an earthquake. They were confused and scared. Then everything went dark. It was as if the light switch had been turned off, but they weren't in a room—they were driving on a highway. It was very dark and unlike anything the ladies had ever experienced before.

They could not see anything at all, but they could hear noises that were telling tales of fear and chaos all around them. Sally instinctively stepped on the car's brake, and it came to a halt. She placed the gear to park even though she couldn't see her hand or the gear stick.

The two ladies could hear other cars screeching to a halt and some colliding into other vehicles. They heard screams of people all around; mothers shouting the names of their children and children calling for their mothers. It was a scary situation as the sun's light went completely absent, plunging the world into darkness no man had ever witnessed before.

Fear seized the hearts of the two ladies. Ruth was the first to react; she grabbed her friend's arm beside her in deathly panic. Her grip was so tight that her fingernails drew blood. The two ladies fearfully held hands, trying to make sense of what was going on.

"I can't see anything!" Ruth kept saying over and over again.

"Neither can I!" Sally began to sob quietly.

"Is this the rapture? Is the world coming to an end? I heard about this in Church, but it was not this vivid. I am so scared, Sally!" Ruth began to cry like a baby.

"Come, let's get out of this car. Someone may hit us from behind." Sally pulled Ruth, and they climbed out of the convertible car, still holding hands and using their minds' eyes to move around.

Even though they couldn't see, they could feel the madness going on all around them. People were howling in pain and regret for their sins. Some were crying loudly for a second chance that would never come.

Ruth knew her parents must have been raptured. She knew she would never see them again, and she felt heartbroken that she had missed it. She realized the recent change in her lifestyle had derailed her from living a Christ-centered life. She wept bitterly as Sally dragged her, feeling her way through the dark. Ruth felt resentment growing toward Sally and angrily pulled her hand from her friend's grip. She should have been in the Church today. She would have been safe if she had helped clean up the auditorium after service and sat for the prayer meeting and Bible study. But it was too late now. A semi-truck rammed into the two ladies in the dark, crushing them to death. Their fate was sealed with no opportunity for repentance. They were both spiritually and physically dead.

*For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance, but from him, that hath not shall be taken away even*

*that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

— MATTHEW 25:29-30

# MOTHER'S DYING WISH

*Spending Time with God.*



*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*

— JAMES 5:16B

Susan returned to the hospital early the following day to see her sick mother. She wore a pair of jeans and a shirt like she usually does. Susan doesn't think that this particular day is special anymore. When she was younger, Sundays were very special to her because it was the day she had to dress her best. The family would go to church, sing hymns together, and then pray, just like other families attending the same church.

However, all those are now in the past, like a used napkin tossed in a trash can never to be picked up. Perhaps such a lifestyle may yet suit children, but not her anymore, she thought. For her, it was a final turning point with no possibility of change.

She got to her mother's room in the oncology ward that morning, not that she was expecting any good news or for her mother's situation to have improved, but she felt she

had to be with her all the same. To her, chemotherapy is something her parents need to decide on quickly.

To her surprise, Susan heard someone singing in a low tone when she opened the door to her mother's room. This was strange, as her father was not in the room, and neither was the nurse. Her mother was singing, and the song she sang was strangely familiar to Susan. It was a song from her past years, from when she had faith.

*With my Savior ever near to guide me, I am safe whatever may betide me.*

*From the storm and tempest, He will hide me. In the hollow of His hand*

*In the hollow of His hand In the hollow of His hand  
I am safe, whatever may betide me. In the hollow of His hand.*

Susan listened to her mother sing the hymn. She remembered it from when she was younger and understood why her mother had chosen it. Susan felt very emotional, but she didn't cry. She stayed quiet and waited for the song to finish.

Then her mother began to pray for the safety of her soul. Susan listened in silence. Soon, Mrs. Jameson's prayer was for God to send salvation to her only daughter, Susan. Susan glanced at her mother as she lay on the bed praying with palms together and eyes closed. It was a bit of an awkward situation for Susan.

When Mrs. Jameson opened her eyes, she saw her daughter Susan by the door. It was as if God had made her appear out of thin air. Mrs. Jameson was very happy and signaled for her to come closer.

Susan was in awe of the radiance on her mother's face that **Sunday morning**. Suddenly, Mrs. Jameson did not look sick at all. It was as if she drew strength and health from prayer. Susan, however, did not mention this observation because she didn't want to hear a sermon from her mother about the power of prayer. She thought this belief was over in her life.

"I'm so glad to see you, my lovely Suzie. Come closer and let me hug you." Mrs. Jameson hugged her daughter warmly, laughing heartily as if she was ten years younger and healthy.

"The only thing I would have loved more is to know you were at church today, on such a day as this." She looked at her daughter closely, still smiling, then continued.

"Today is Sunday, you know?"

Susan avoided looking at her mother's face. She didn't want to see the disappointment in her eyes. But her mother hugged her and asked her to sit on the bed. Susan did, but she was careful not to hurt her mother, even though she looked like she was getting better.

"Your father is at church," Mrs. Jameson told her daughter. "I wish you would also go to church again. You used to sing

so well back then, and you had memorized scriptures." Mrs. Jameson held her daughter's arm lovingly as she spoke.

Susan was no longer comfortable. She had smartly avoided such conversations with her mother recently, but she felt trapped as she did not want to walk out on her given her current condition. So she looked for a way to change the topic.

"Mom, you look so radiant this morning," Susan said with a smile.

"That's because the Word of God is living and breathing in me!" Mrs. Jameson said, hoping to steer the conversation back to the Bible.

"Don't you think it could be because you had a good sleep or something like that?" Susan knew her mother was trying to find an excuse for her.

"You could say that, but remember what the Bible says in Psalms one hundred and twenty-seven, verse two, I think; it states that God gives His beloved sound sleep." Mrs. Jameson knew exactly what she was doing.

Mrs. Jameson continued, "Isaiah 26:3 says 'God will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Him.'" She paused, letting her words sink in before continuing. "Susan, I know you're not happy with me right now, but I want you to think about what I've said." Susan sat there, staring at the floor. She knew her mother was trying to get her to go back to church and to the Bible. But she was



determined not to listen to her again. She tried not to let her face reflect her thoughts as she sat in silence.

Mrs. Jameson knew what her daughter was thinking. She laughed and drew Susan close to her. Then she left her and let her sit in a chair by the bedside. Susan thought she was free, but the dying woman had another plan.

Mrs. Jameson felt so strange that morning—she felt light and happy, even though the pain in her chest persisted. She felt pain all over her body, but there was a certain spring of joy welling up within her soul. She felt a bit dizzy as if she was going to pass out, but there was one thing she wanted so much before transiting from this world.

She remained in bed with her eyes closed, slowly praying in silence for the salvation of her daughter's soul. She knew that she could not do anything to force her, but there was a God who could win her over. So she prayed and prayed for wisdom from God.

Susan was sitting in silence when she took out her phone to check some notifications on social media. She needed to take her mother's advice off her mind. She hadn't been on her phone for long when her mother spoke again, with eyes still closed. Susan didn't know that her mother was feeling dizzy and rapidly losing consciousness.

"What was that last verse you memorized in church?" Mrs. Jameson asked.

Susan looked up at the ceiling, trying to remember. "Something about difficult times in the last days, I think," she answered.

"Yes. That should be the second Timothy, chapter three. Do you mind reading it out for me? Since I cannot be at church this morning..." Her voice trailed off weakly.

Susan picked up the King James Bible by her mother's bed and was forced to open it to the portion her mother requested for. She read, at first absentmindedly, but the words soon started jumping at her and pulling at her consciousness.

*"This also means that terrible circumstances are coming in the end days.*

*Men will be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, haughty, blasphemers, disobedient to their parents, unthankful, and unholy. Trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, furious, and those who are excellent are despised by those who lack natural affection. Traitors, high-minded, and more interested in pleasures than in God. Having the appearance of godliness yet denying its power..."*

Susan felt guilty as she read, but she was determined not to let it bother her. She continued reading out the words slowly so her mother could hear her well, just like she used to like it. She raised her eyes to look at her mother and noticed she prayed again. Susan returned to reading the Bible aloud. Susan did not notice that her mother's hands had gone limp or that her head had fallen on her right shoulder and that her lips were parted slightly.

Susan continued to read until an enraged nurse rushed into the room and made her stop. The nurse looked at Mrs. Jameson and knew something was wrong. She ran to her side and checked her pulse. After that, she put a hand on her chest. The nurse was in panic mode and started applying pressure to Mrs. Jameson's chest in an attempt to resuscitate her. Then she paused to press a bell by the bedside before returning to her cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Susan was paralyzed with horror when she saw other nurses and a doctor coming into the room. They were trying to resuscitate her mother. But it was too late. Mrs. Jameson had already 'gone home.'

When the doctor and nurses stopped and covered Mrs. Jameson's face, the reality of the situation slapped Susan in the face. She was heartbroken and refused to be comforted by the nurses. She pulled away from them and ran out of the hospital gates. Susan ran down the empty streets with tears streaming down her face.

She had lost her mother. It slowly dawned on her that the last few days she spent with her mother were probably her "last days," according to the Bible passage she read. The words from that passage kept popping up in her mind. She felt a sense of unrest in her thoughts. Susan was physically tired and lonely, and she needed help.

As she ran on, her pace reduced by the minute; she was drawn to a small church along the roadside. She ran into the

church, still in tears. Although she disturbed the ongoing service, the congregation of few men and women were glad to receive her. They sat her down while consoling her as best they could.

Susan told them all what had happened to her that morning. The pastor, a man in his fifties with a permanent smile, said these words to Susan with so much dread: "Daughter, you need to give your life to Christ."

The pastor continued by letting her know that her mother had gone to be with Jesus and that the only way for Susan to be with her mother again was if she gave her life to Christ. Susan obliged and was prayerfully led back to Christ.

Glory to God!

She looked at the image of Christ on the cross. Susan felt remorse for rejecting Christ for so long. She prayed with tears streaming down her eyes, asking for forgiveness. Suddenly, she felt a sense of joy as she was surrounded by women who were praying for her. They all rejoiced together over Susan's saved soul.

While still in church, a few minutes after Susan gave her life to Christ, there was a loud trumpet sound that could be heard by everyone in the small congregation. This was accompanied by a shaking of the building like an earthquake. Suddenly, the area became deserted. Every single soul in the small church had vanished! The rapture had begun.

As deep darkness momentarily covered the earth, some large, organized mega-churches in the region still had most of their members left behind. However, this small non-denominational church, which Susan entered, had nobody left behind — not even Susan.

# FAMILY SECRET

## *Beneath the Surface*



*Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come into him and will sup with him, and he with me.*

— REVELATION 3:20

The next Sunday, Mrs. Johnson was faced with the same challenge as before. However, this time, God had a surprise in store for her. She left home with her two boys after much urging, but her husband stayed behind with his computer. Once she got to church, she sent her two sons to the children's section and sat alone in the main auditorium.

As usual, Mr. Johnson was excited when his family left. That meant he could do what he wanted to without them knowing. He brought out some of the pornographic materials he had bought the Saturday before. By the time he put the first CD in his computer, he was already excited, like a child in a toy store.

As he watched, advisement popped up on the screen. It had something to do with a remedy for poor sexual

performance in men. It was not the ad that stunned him, nor was it the product. A closer look at the 'doctor' in the ad revealed it was his former classmate from many years ago.

It occurred to Mr. Johnson that he had been going nowhere, and the pleasure of watching pornography was short-lived and never brought him any happiness. He wondered why he could not just quit, go cold turkey completely.

While he was wasting his life away, pouring his energy and time into pornography to mask wounds from childhood physical abuse, others were making progress in life. He could not understand why this was his case. Suddenly, his hands began to shake.

Mr. Johnson could not control himself; he grew restless. His past played out across his mind as he shut his eyes, holding his hands together to regain composure. The physical abuse he endured as a child made him feel restless, and the thoughts lingered in his mind into adulthood. He discovered pornography to alleviate the pain, but it only made things worse.

He remembered a dream he had long ago that didn't mean anything to him. But then, as he recalled the elderly man's words from the dream, it all made sense to him. The tears streaming down his face were a testament to how powerfully those words had affected him.

*"For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord: because they called thee an Outcast,*

*saying, this is Zion whom no man seeketh after. The book of Jeremiah chapter thirty verse seventeen."*

The elderly man said those exact words. Mr. Johnson stood up and lifted his face towards the ceiling. He felt he had to make a decision.

In his mind, there were two options to escape his bondage: one was to commit suicide and end the mess his life had become; the other was in the form of a whisper.

*"Go to church."*

He liked the second idea better, so he walked over to his wardrobe. He pulled open the door and looked at his shirts and suits, which were now useless since he stopped going to church. Suddenly, he saw a revolver he had kept there for years. His eyes pondered on the revolver.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Johnson was in a good mood at church that Sunday. She sang and danced with joy. The service was beautiful, and any true believer easily felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. All was going well until the pastor asked couples to come to the altar for special prayers of sanctification and rededicate their lives to Christ.

Many people thought the pastor's request was unnecessary. Sanctification and rededication are for backslidden people, and it was saddening to think that some members of the congregation would not be sanctified. However, the Holy Spirit led the pastor to call couples to the altar today; therefore, the pastor was obedient.



The couples started to go down the aisle, one after the other. The pastor prayed over them while a choir played soft music. Mrs. Johnson felt terrible. She wished her husband was with her in church. She felt embarrassed that she would have to walk to the altar alone.

Just as the pastor finished praying over the last couple, a handsome, well-dressed man in white who had been lingering by the door for a few minutes walked alone toward the altar. When he got to the row where Mrs. Johnson was sitting, he paused and looked at her, then motioned for her to join him.

She then looked closely at the well-dressed man; it was her husband!

"What are you doing here, Wayne?" Mrs. Johnson asked.

"I met the Lord today," was his simple answer with a winsome smile.

"Even on the screen of your computer, of sin?" Mrs. Johnson fired as they walked on slowly to the altar.

"The Lord works in mysterious ways," Mr. Johnson replied as he took his wife's arm. Then it all began to make sense to her why the pastor asked couples to come to the altar for sanctification and rededication. She stood up in a hurry and rushed to her husband's side.

Some members of the congregation recognized him. They knew his story. They prayed with his wife for his deliverance. But they were surprised to see him in church again. Some members were glad to see Mr. Johnson in church again after such a long time. But some people did not believe he was a changed man, and they thought it was not real.

The couple had not yet settled down in their seats when a loud noise rang through the auditorium and beyond. Then the whole place shook violently, as if the building was going to collapse. The disturbance lasted for about a minute. Then there was calm again.

When it was quiet, only a few people were left in the church auditorium. The pastor and Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were gone. The few people who had laughed at seeing Mr. Johnson in the church were still there. They realized that the rapture had happened and started to panic. Suddenly, great darkness enveloped the world, and the sun disappeared.

*But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night; in the which, the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*

— 2 PETER 3:10

# MODERN-DAY PHARISEE

## *Hypocritical Viper*



**Sunday morning**, Mr. Robert, an elder of the Holy Ghost Assembly, met with his friend, Mr. Justus, and his associates at the airport. Soon they boarded a private jet that was very luxurious inside. Mr. Robert had been in private jets before, but he was surprised at how elegant the interior of this one was.

Soon, people were served exquisite and expensive-looking snacks and drinks. While others ate and drank alcohol, Mr. Robert only drank water and ate snacks.

"Hey, man, the drinks are free. You can take any of your choices," the private jet owner teased, directing his words at Mr. Robert.

"Sorry, Mr. Balakov, my friend is a pastor," Mr. Justus said while touching his friend on the shoulder and smiling back at him.

"I'm sorry, pastor," the man said. "Well, I drink occasionally, but I hope that doesn't block all my good works before God.

I put in my best in all I do as a Christian, even though I'm not perfect." Mr. Robert looked back at him blankly.

The private jet owner said as he bowed slightly toward Mr. Robert, "What do you think, pastor?"

Mr. Robert remembered everything he had said in the past about how alcohol drinkers and people who spend their Sundays on activities besides Church will go to hell. He also preached against the super-rich, saying that they should redistribute their money to others or else they would all go to hell.

Now, looking at the super-rich man before him who was right there waiting for his answer, Mr. Robert could not repeat all he had said in the past. Falling out of favor with such a man could mean missing a chance to compete for the ten thousand dollars, and he would not want to take that risk.

*"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are*

*treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and  
revelation of the righteous judgment of God."*

— ROMANS 2: 1–5

"It's okay, sir." You can take as much as you want for the greater good."

Mr. Robert tried to sound convincing, adjusting himself in his chair. The private jet was gliding effortlessly through the air. It was a sight to behold. In roughly twenty-five minutes, the people on board were expected to arrive at their destination. Mr. Robert sat fixed to his chair, reading a golf book he had picked up just before the flight at a nearby store. He was determined to soak up as much information as possible before heading to the golf resort.

Something strange happened that Mr. Robert couldn't understand. There was a loud noise, and it seemed to come from both inside and outside the private jet. He raised his head and noticed that there were fewer men around him than when the jet first took off. Mr. Robert knew that the missing men couldn't be in the restroom, and they couldn't have gotten off the jet. He stood up, wide-eyed, as it dawned on him that something serious was happening.

There was a sudden vibration on the jet, and it threw Mr. Robert off balance. He fell sideways, hitting his head on the passenger seat.

Mr. Robert struggled to his feet, looking just as bewildered as the few men who remained. He noticed that

'sinners' such as Mr. Justus and the wine-drinking owner of the private jet had also disappeared. Mr. Robert realized he had missed rapture and wondered why.

"No! It can't be! I must have missed the rapture. I'm an elder in the church, and I preached about it last year," Mr. Robert said to himself as he walked in a circle.

Suddenly, the private jet tilted sideways, then the nose tilted downward as it hurtled through the air toward a rocky hill. The pilot had also been raptured, so the doomed private jet was in free fall. Mr. Robert thought he had seen it all, but the sudden blackout made the experience worse for him. Then he heard a voice say something to him from the impending darkness surrounding him.

"You hypocrite, I never knew you."

It was the final nail in the coffin for him, as it dawned on him that he was going to die.

Mr. Robert did not immediately think of seeking forgiveness. Instead, he was preoccupied with bitterness toward God for not being fair to him.

*Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

— PROVERBS 16:18

The things that men valued most caused their downfall. The things they created for pleasure resulted in their deaths. The greatest ships capsized, and the fastest cars crashed. It was a tale of the vanity of the quest of the human mind.

While Mr. Robert fumed within himself and tried to find his balance in a badly tilted jet in sheer darkness, the distance between the jet and the Rocky hill reduced drastically. The beautiful gold-colored private jet struck the rocky cliff with a sickening impact, and it was all over for those still on board the private jet.

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves:*

*it is the gift of God:*

*Not of works lest any man should boast.*

— EPHESIANS 2: 8-9

*The night is far spent, and the day is at hand: let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.*

— ROMANS 13:12

# THE ELEVENTH HOUR

*Overcoming will be Difficult*



Early **Sunday morning**, Wes answered his door to find one of his boys there. The boy asked if he could speak with Wes privately, so Wes invited him in.

"Boss, I do not know if you are thinking what I am thinking," He started but was halted halfway by Wes.

"What are you thinking, man? How can you expect my brain to think on the same level as yours? I think like a boss, not a delivery boy."

Wes had grown confident over the past few years, and he was sure to stay on top of his game at any chance he got.

"I know, sir. Sorry, I just want to make a suggestion. Why not take control of your friend's business and get his contacts off him? Then we can leave him to continue with his Jesus Christ?"

Wes was intrigued by these words. He had never thought of that until his boy brought it to his attention. Wes stared, deep in thought, for a moment. He processed the idea and asked his boy to leave him while he pondered on the very high profitability of the idea. He left to visit his



friend and was surprised to find him looking more radiant than ever. He joked about his new look and behavior, announcing his intentions.

"Word on the street is that you are closing your shop. Any reason for that?" Wes asked his friend as he lit a cigarette.

"You heard right," the man said. "I've seen the light. I found Christ Jesus, my savior, and I don't want to continue living in sin." Wes' friend spoke with newfound excitement, but Wes was bitter. "You? Found Christ? If Christ were here in this room, you couldn't find Him. You're such a sinful person. I need to be sure of what I heard before telling you my plan."

"Well, it is true. Wes, I brought you into this deal. Please give your life to Jesus before it is too late. Rapture may happen at any time, and I don't want you left behind," the new convert pressed Wes.

Wes answered back, "I was born into a Christian home and already know all the stuff you are saying. In any case, you are a bigger sinner than me. What makes you think that you, of all people, could make it to heaven? No, my friend, stop fooling yourself." Wes was getting angry as he spoke. He felt like his friend was only wasting his time.

*"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to*

*Me I will by no means cast out."*

— JOHN 6:37

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

— 2 CORINTHIANS 5: 17-21

The rich young man said, "I am a changed creature, bought by his blood. Wes, my brother, I am saved." Wes stared at his friend with anger and thought about how stupid he was to join a sect of dull people who believed in an ancient faith that was no longer practiced. As he stood up to leave, a loud noise rang through the neighborhood like the sound of several trumpets. Wes panicked and thought some police were around in the neighborhood. But then his friend vanished, and a violent earthquake rocked the entire city.

Wes remembered hearing about something like this happening in the past. People called it the rapture. He realized that this event might be related to 'the religion of those dull humans who believed in an ancient faith that is no longer in practiced'. But it was too late for him.

He ran out onto the street and saw a scene of chaos that he had never witnessed before. People ran in every direction, and some vehicles with their engines still running collided with buildings without drivers at the steering wheel, causing the buildings to collapse and trapping some people inside. Some people, despite the chaos, started looting shops.

Wes ran to the church as fast as he could. He found the statue of Jesus Christ there, the one that had saved his life. Then he found a few members of the parish who were also in church and shaking with fear and shock. They all prayed for forgiveness and a second chance. Later, Wes realized that one of the church's senior pastors was also left behind. The pastor started trying to assemble the ones left behind and teach them what to expect in the next few days and months.

They all stayed in the church as darkness momentarily descended on the world. Fear could be smelled in the air as everything went crazy and mad—people died by the thousands in the first twenty-four hours after the rapture.

Wes felt very bitter, not just because he did not make it to heaven, but also because he, who was originally born into a Christian home, missed it while his young friend—who introduced him to crime and only recently became a Christian—made it.

# TWINS AT BIRTH

*An even Stronger Bond*



**Sunday morning** arrived, and Mark got ready for Church. As he got dressed, his mind was firmly on Whitney and her twin sister. He had called Whitney twice, but his call was rejected. He suspected Holly must be the one cutting the calls, and he wasn't wrong.

Mark arrived at his destination that faithful morning and was surprised to see the two sisters waiting at the little car park in front of Miller's apartment building. Mark could not believe his eyes, and a sudden gladness filled him. He quickened his pace, eager to meet the two ladies.

Mark was very surprised when he saw Holly and Whitney. They were wearing very revealing clothes, which made him speechless. Holly was wearing a very short skirt and a crop top that showed her stomach. She also had an ankle bracelet on her left ankle, which made her look like a prostitute. Her brightly painted lips and stilettos completed her look.

Whitney had similar attire: leather pants with a tiny top held by a thin strap on one shoulder, exposing the other. Her

belly, too, was exposed, and Mark could see that she was trying to hide a pack of cigarettes behind her purse. Clearly, she was not waiting for him to take her to Church.

Mark felt really hurt when he saw the two women. He wondered where their parents were and if they approved of how the women were dressed. Holly interrupted Mark's thoughts, and he realized that she was enjoying the meeting. She had a big smile on her face, and her red lips shone.

"Well, well, well, who have we here? As you can see, young man, we are on our way out. We are heading for a party to have a great time with some real men — not with a loser like you."

She watched Mark's expression, then added, "And I am glad to have my sister back from your evil grip."

"Do you realize what you are doing at all? Remember what Nurse Rose told us about the dangers of backsliding? You may never get a second chance. Whitney, please don't do this."

Mark could not even find the right words to express his views.

"Mark, thanks for your sincerity, but I can never leave my sister for you or your little Bible. I have chosen the path of fun, dear," Whitney said with a strange boldness.

Holly said, "Please go away with your outdated, two-thousand-year-old manual." The two girls laughed loudly at Mark.

*"For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb; The dog has turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."*

— 2 PETER 2:21-22

Mark turned to leave but only took two steps before he heard screeching wheels behind him. He saw a purple convertible car with three men stop in front of the twins. Then Holly hailed them and busted some dance moves to the loud music coming from the car.

Mark was angry when he saw the two women get in the car with the young men. He walked over to them and yelled at them. "This is a path of destruction! Whitney, don't you know better than to go with your sister? She's going to get us all killed!" The three men looked at the women, wondering what was happening. Holly yelled back at Mark, and Whitney glared at him as she sat on one of the young man's laps.

Whitney changed her mind all of a sudden. "I cannot go with you," she said. "Please try to understand, sis. We can talk later." Whitney decided to follow Jesus, and though she was tempted to skip Church, her heart belonged to Him.

Whitney kissed her sister and then dashed to change her clothes to an appropriate church attire.

All of a sudden, there was a loud noise, like a trumpet. The ground shook violently, throwing Holly off the man's lap. Mark disappeared right in front of their eyes, leaving them all stunned. Before they could make much sense of what had happened, the whole world became dark. Whitney, who made an important decision just seconds before, was also taken away.

As the four left behind tried to figure out what was going on, one of them with a Christian background started shouting and crying because he realized they had missed the rapture.

*"Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left."*

— MATTHEW 24:40

Even though they were identical twins, one was taken and the other was left behind. Holly cried in the darkness as she realized the world would now be waiting for the antichrist.

*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

— PHILIPPIANS 2:12

# GOD'S CALL FOR SERVICE

*A Man's Worth*



*"Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

— MARK 10: 43-45

Pastor Richard was driving home one evening and heard about a major crusade organized by one of the most prominent church denominations in the city. The radio announcer mentioned a few of the esteemed pastors to be featured at the crusade, and Pastor Paul Smith, who is known for his healing abilities, was on the list.

Pastor Richard smiled as he drove home on the wet, winding road. He thought of Pastor Paul and wondered what he was really doing. Pastor Richard had information from Pastor Paul's old Church about him. The senior pastor had reasons to believe that Pastor Paul might be staging his miracles. Considering what Pastor Richard knew about him



back at the seminary, there was a good chance that Pastor Paul had truly been fooling people about his morals and similar wonders.

The following day, it turned out to be snowy. Pastor Richard was on his way to the administrative building in the Church when another Pastor called out to him. Pastor Richard stopped and waited for the Pastor to come up to him.

"Congratulations, brother," The Pastor said. He shook Pastor Richard's hand.

Pastor Richard was not due for promotion yet, but even if he were to be promoted because of his good works, it would lead to disharmony among the young pastors. He was puzzled at the nature of the man's greetings.

The Pastor quoted a proverb, "See a man diligent in his ways; he will stand before kings." Pastor Richard laughed and said he had no idea what the other pastor was talking about. The other pastor persisted and said that Pastor Richard should imagine what it would be like to have such a big pastor recommend him. Pastor Richard asked what was going on, and the pastor explained.

The pastor told Pastor Richard that Pastor Maguire of Royal Eagles Ministry had recommended him to take his place at the National City crusade. Pastor Maguire had heard a lot about him and also read his book. When he couldn't make it for the crusade, he recommended Pastor Richard to the organizers.

Pastor Richard felt excited as he got ready to minister to over fifty thousand people. He was a little nervous, but he knew that he could rely on the help of the Holy Spirit. He went to the church administrative building to get more information, and when he confirmed that it was true, he took the letter of invitation and left. As he walked to his car, he prayed for inspiration from the Holy Spirit. He knew that he couldn't do it alone and needed divine help.

As he drove home, Pastor Richard thought about how he would share the stage with his old friend, Pastor Paul Smith. He realized that they both had invitations to speak at the same event on the same day. When **Sunday morning** arrived, Pastor Richard arrived at the venue and sat with other guest ministers. He felt very young and humble sitting among them. He saw the great men of God he had only seen on television sitting at the same table as him. He was in awe looking at their faces.

One person was missing from the guest pastors. That person was Pastor Paul Smith. He said that he didn't want his anointing to be contaminated before his administration. The organizers allowed him to sit in a separate room while the program aired.

One of the church ministers who helped organize the program talked to Pastor Paul. The minister said that it was time for Pastor Paul to start ministering. Pastor Paul got angry and said he wanted to be the last pastor to minister. But then a more senior pastor talked to him and said that he could leave the final administration to someone else, but

only if he got to minister after Pastor Richard. The organizing committee agreed, and everything was settled.

When Pastor Richard stepped onto the stage, he was still praying. He had a sermon about God's spirit moving. He talked about how God moves in different ways. His text was from the Bible, First Corinthians 2:14–16.

*"But the natural man receiveth, not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

*But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.*

*For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."*

He said that one of the signs of the Holy Spirit's movement is miracles. Some people reacted positively, screaming and clapping in approval. He then said that if we believe, we could have our own miracles happen right now.

Pastor Richard was giving his sermon when suddenly people started getting healed. He was impressed just as much as everyone else.

Pastor Paul Smith was scheduled to speak next. After a brief musical interlude, Pastor Paul Smith kept everyone waiting before appearing on stage. This created excitement and anticipation. Once he finally arrived, there was a lot of noise from the audience. He then announced that he would start his sermon with a healing and deliverance session. He

called sick people and people with disabilities on stage, many of whom were pretending.

Before Pastor Paul could start his healing and deliverance, there was a loud noise that shattered the air in the big auditorium. It was like the sound of a million people blowing trumpets at once. By the time the audience calmed down, people began noticing that others around them had vanished into thin air. Almost all of the guest ministers had gone, including Pastor Richard. Pastor Paul was still on stage, gazing emptily into space.

People realized that the rapture had happened. Many people in the crowd started to cry and moan in pain. Pastor Paul stood up, scared to death. He thought of all he had and looked for Pastor Richard but couldn't find him.

Soon there was a huge earthquake that shook everything. Part of the auditorium fell down and killed several church members. People ran in every direction, and Pastor Paul didn't know what to do or where to go.

Pastor Paul regained his composure and ran like the others. Suddenly, a metal rod broke off from the auditorium roof and came straight down, piercing him through his left shoulder down to his heart. Pastor Paul screamed in horror and fell off the stage. As he slowly faded, he noticed a small tag that had been accidentally left on the rod when it was purchased for the building. The tag identified that the rod was part of a set that cost how much? Thirty dollars!

# Tribulation

# TRIBULATION

## *The Mark of a New World Order*



Shortly after the trumpet sound and the shaking of the world, deep darkness momentarily engulfed the earth. This was a sign that God was withdrawing His Spirit, who gives life and light to men. The few believers who were left behind, including John Williams, learned that this darkness was only a sign of what was to come. It was just a shadow of the horror that awaits all mankind that rejected Christ. As certain as the prophecy concerning the rapture, it is also true of the prophecies concerning what would happen after the rapture.

After the rapture, something significant happened: men's consciences stopped working. People started doing wicked things without any feelings of guilt or remorse. As a result, wickedness increased rapidly across the earth.

*"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;*

*Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron"*

– 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-2

People had been prophesying about this for a long time. The last days arrived, and with it came all the signs that show the Spirit of God is not present. Consciences were eroded, and wickedness became the norm. People who realized they missed the rapture were very upset. They did wicked things to other people as revenge.

As the world collapsed into chaos, evil doctrines became the norm. There were wars and reports of evil happening everywhere. People returned to their natural state, without the Spirit of God guarding against the evil that is always present in their hearts. Even from the days of Noah, mankind has shown themselves to be naturally inclined towards evil when they don't have the Spirit of God to guide them.

*"And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

*And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth,  
and it grieved him at his heart.*

*And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created  
from the face of the earth; both man, and Beast, and the creeping  
thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have  
made them."*

– GENESIS 6:5-7

The governments of the world could not control the rioting people anymore. There was a lot of violence and property damage. The world needed an answer! So the leaders had a meeting and decided they needed someone to help bring order back to the world. One man, known as 'the Beast out of the sea,' in the book of Revelations, claimed to have prophecy power.

He prophesied that the darkness would clear and that there would be order on the earth again. As a result of his influence and confidence, many put their faith in him. He blasphemed God and promised a peaceful parallel kingdom on earth. He wielded so much influence among the world powers that it was not difficult for him to emerge as the singular ruler of the central government by consensus.

Immediately, he became the head and started waging war against the few who were yet to give up thoughts of making heaven one day. He claimed many obscene things against God and raised himself to the level of god among men.

He even claimed to have wrestled with God and that the garish, dark scar on the left side of his head was from that battle with God Almighty. He told people many other lies, claiming he was going to raise an army that would fight God to avenge those whom God had rejected out of favoritism.

The Beast decided that in order to 'unite the world,' there should be a single currency. After a few months, he decided that every person's records must be properly



profiled. Then he announced to all the heads of regions of the earth that a new way of identification would be introduced to the world: every man must carry a mark of identity on their right hand or their forehead.

Some people spoke quietly and were arrested for questioning his decision. Others complied as the world became scared of The Beast. John Williams took the mark without any hesitation. He felt that taking the mark would really demonstrate to God how angry he was for his suffering life.

At the beginning of his reign, the Beast claimed to feel sorry for the 'good' Christians who were left behind by God. He promised to take them under his wing, but many believers doubted him. They rejected him and tried to maintain a Christian lifestyle despite the new order. Then he claimed the Christians were evil and all bibles and literature should be destroyed.

The Beast saw any rejection of the mark as rebellious. If someone refused to take the mark, they were seen as traitors and would be captured, tortured into submission, or killed.

*"And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a Beast rise out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.*

*And I saw one of his heads as it was wounded to death, and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the Beast.*

*And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.*

*And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.*

*And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.*

*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

*If any man has an ear, let him hear."*

— REVELATION 13: 1, 3, 5-9

Despite the "hell on Earth" experienced during and after tribulation, there are still Judgments yet to come; including punishment for those who received the mark; and the Great White Throne's eternal punishment.



# THE GREAT TRIBULATION FINAL DAYS

*Hunted like Wild Creatures*



The world changed after the believers became fugitives. People started to believe in the mighty ruler more and more. The Beast, also known as The Beast from the sea, was controlled by The Dragon, also known as The Beast of the earth. The Beast was a human empowered by the devil. While the devil, referred to as the Dragon, was a spirit operating through The Beast.

The tribulation continued for 42 months as life got worse for the believers. It was so bad that whenever someone died, the people would celebrate, and their bodies were left in the street to intimate any remaining believers. While this was happening, there were a few different religions still being practiced in the world. However, those religions did not threaten The Beast. He was silent concerning other religions and only concerned himself with what he called the 'unfortunate remnants.'

He persecuted them with all his might, using torture centers in all the world's major cities. The city of Jerusalem in old Israel was destroyed as The Beast did everything he could to completely obliterate anything that could be associated with the original God of Israel.

In a further bid to make people comply with his order of an identification mark on their forehead or hand, it was decided that all who fail to get the mark should not be allowed to trade or use public facilities. They were tagged criminals, and the situation of the remnants of believers became worse. Many of them were caught and tortured to accept the mark, and some did after much pain in the torture centers.

The situation got worse for the Christian remnants as those who gave in to pressure and accepted the mark attacked them even more. They wanted everyone to have the mark so they could all have a similar fate.

After the first three and a half years of the reign of The Beast, he proclaimed that the whole world should have a single religion. He introduced the one called The Dragon or The Beast from the earth and insisted that people should worship him.

*"And they worshipped the Dragon which gave power unto the Beast: and they worshipped the Beast, saying, Who is like unto the Beast? Who is able to make war with him?"*

— REVELATION 13:4

A huge fire was made in honor of The Dragon. People sacrificed things to him before he came out. A spirit that didn't have a body came out of the fire and went into The Beast. That's how The Dragon's spirit entered him. That day, he became very strong and performed miracles in public. This made other leaders of the people fear him more.

*"And I beheld another Beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a Dragon.*

*And he exerciseth all the power of the first Beast before him and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first Beast, whose deadly wound was healed.*

*And he doeth great wonders so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,*

*And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he had the power to do in the sight of the Beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the Beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live."*

— REVELATION 13:11–14

*"Now The Beast was a counterfeit savior, and he tried to do all that Christ did but in his own different way. Christ said if men do not worship Him stones will cry out His worship in the place of men. Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.*

*And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them,*

*I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."*

— LUKE 19:38-40

*"The Beast further demonstrated his powers by giving false life to the image of the Dragon, who empowered him. He also demanded that everyone should worship the talking image. Else they will be killed.*

*And he had the power to give life unto the image of the Beast, that the image of the Beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the Beast should be killed.*

*And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:*

*And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the Beast, or the number of his name.*

*Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the Beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six."*

— REVELATION 13: 15-18

Open wickedness began to grow soon. People attacked their neighbors with weapons, and blood became common on the streets. People who were struggling to pay rent or mortgages would take possession of any house by killing or forcibly evacuating the owner. The police did nothing. If an arrest was made, the criminal was back out on the street the next morning. Things soon got worse when the television announced that the world was under Marshall Law with full government control.

The Constitution was rewritten by the corrupt Congress and New World Order to give them unlimited power. The remnant believers moved into the church, living together and consoling one another. They followed the news more than ever before. It was their primary source of information, as walking on the street had become dangerous.

One day, the government announced that people should not worship Jehovah anymore. It was a crime punishable by death. All the Bibles were destroyed, so people had to remember certain verses by heart. Then a new law was created: the president should be the only one people worship. If someone tried to bring their old religion into the new world, they would be considered an enemy and tortured or executed.

As the fear increased among the followers, they prayed more. They fasted for a longer time, but it was hard to get food because they refused to accept the mark of the beast on their right hand or forehead. This mark identified that the



person had chosen to worship the anti-Christ and reject Jesus.

Before long, the church doors would be kicked open by armed men. Some people would escape, but many would be captured, brutally beaten, and possibly killed because of their beliefs. Some died knowing that they could still overcome the Antichrist if they endured and that they would avoid eternal hell that awaited the others.

Wes managed to escape into a bush and keep running. He couldn't buy food, nor could he be seen in the open. He became a fugitive, separated from the other few believers. He felt for the others he saw that were taken away to the torture chambers. It was a terrible experience, and he wished it was just a nightmare. But unfortunately, it was not a nightmare. This was his new reality — a dreaded one at that.

Wes was sitting under a tree in the bush when he started crying. He was wondering how long the ordeal would last and how long it would take for him to die. Wes decided that he would rather die than accept the mark of obedience from the Antichrist, so he surrendered to Christ. Even though he knew what was ahead would be harder than anything he had ever encountered. Wes started reading some Bible pages that were hidden in his pocket.

*"And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark on their right hand, or their foreheads:*

*And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark,  
the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”*

— REVELATION 13:16-1

Wes hid himself just over the hills so he could see what was going on. He knew that it was very important to be careful and not get caught, because then everyone would be in danger. When he saw that it was safe, he went out with his friend. He knew that his friend was counting on him to stay safe and help him get through this safely.

They went down a hill using a secret path, being very careful not to make any noise. They knew it was important to stay silent and stay hidden in the bushes. They kept going until they got to the bottom of the hill

Their destination was a big grocery store across town. They were doing well, but they still had some distance to cover. Just as they were about to leave the bush at the bottom of the hill, they heard a van driving towards them. They crouched down low in the bush, watching as the van drove past them and left town.

As soon as the van had passed, they ran across the road and continued their mission. Wes noticed an unusual movement in a bush close by. He paused and motioned to his companion to stop too. There were some men in the bush not far away. Wes decided to wait for them to come out, and after a while, three men stood up from behind another bush and walked, bent over, toward town.

Wes identified one of them, and he called out to him. "John, John Williams," Wes called as he stepped out of his hiding place. John looked back, startled at first. Then he

regained his composure when he realized who had called him.

"Wes! It's been a while. You didn't go too, did you?" John asked with concern in his voice.

"Brother, we're still here. We need to make the best of our situation." Wes tried to laugh, but the crack in his voice showed it was not genuine, and understandably so.

"What are you doing here?" John asked as his two colleagues walked on ahead impatiently.

"Trying to get food for my group," Wes answered.

"Then we must be heading the same way. Where is your group located?" John asked innocently.

Wes laughed and gave his old friend a close stare.

"You know, the times are delicate. Everything is kept secret. Nobody reveals where they are staying." He said, shaking his head slightly.

"Nobody can trust anyone outside their group. In case you are ever forced to reveal it under the pressure of torture someday, we are somewhere in the hills." Wes managed to offer.

"I understand you perfectly, my brother; keeping quiet is extremely important now. My group lives somewhere in the forest across the hills. We need food, and that is why we are out here."

The five men approached the grocery store and watched from a safe distance. They noticed a few staff members moving around and waited until there was no one at the back of the store. Then they went in.

Wes instinctively looked at the three men from the other group. He checked their foreheads and wrists for the mark of the Beast, but they didn't have it. They were together in hiding and hungry because more and more people who refused to accept the mark of the Beast were being rounded up and thrown into torture centers.

The men at the back of the store quickly gathered what they needed and left through the back door. They had done this before, so they knew what to do. But this time, they were not fast enough. One of the staff members saw them and shouted, which alerted the security guards. The security guards chased after the men.

Wes had been in this situation before and had always managed to outrun his pursuers. He faced the hill and ran as fast as he could, still carrying the heavy bag of groceries. His companion struggled to keep up, panting like an old steam engine. The other three men ran as best they could, with fear written all over their faces.

One of John's companions fell, sustaining an injury to his left leg. John dropped his bag of groceries and ran back to help the injured man. It was futile; he couldn't carry the man and still outrun the security men chasing them through

the bush. A gunshot rang through the bush, scaring the running men.

"You have to go now," the injured man said, holding his injured leg. "Our people need you. Go!" He started to cry as he said it.

John stepped back, tears streaming down his face. He looked at the injured man for a few more seconds, then turned and ran away.

"Say goodbye to my wife and daughter for me," the injured man called after him. "Tell them I love them."

John ran to his bag of groceries. He lifted the bag on his shoulder and continued running through the bush. John knew he had to deliver the injured man's message to his loved ones. As he ran, John wondered when he would be caught. He wondered if he would be able to stand the torture or just accept the mark without much torture and persuasion.

The security men found the injured man and took him away. He was crying and in pain, but they did not listen to him. Two of them dragged him away, and another carried his groceries. They were excited about their capture and thought that justice would be served.

Wes and his companion returned to the hills, where they were greeted by the women. The women were happy to have the food, but they were even happier to have Wes and his companion back. Wes knew that some of John's group would mourn because of the man who had died.

The "remnants" have been living in hiding for many years. They come out only to find food. This has been going on for a while, but it has been especially hard recently. They are grateful when they see a ray of hope, and they pray to God even though He seems to have abandoned them.

*"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer"*

— ROMANS 12:12

Wes had become restless over the last few days. He was hiding with his group all day, and whoever saw them just killed them like they were worthless animals. Even though Wes was a Christian before the rapture, he had never really studied what was expected after the rapture.

He recently understood that the Bible spoke of seven years: the first three and half years, and the second three and half years. He wanted to know what was to happen after the seven years but had no one in his group to tell him. The few older men in his group were also unfamiliar with the Bible.

Wes started searching the Bible for information that would help him. He knew he needed to read the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the New Testament books, especially the book of Revelations. He found out that most of the Old Testament books contained prophecies that had already come true. The New Testament books contained both prophecies that had already come true and prophecies that had not yet happened.

After reading for a few days, he got to the book of Revelations. He expected all his questions to be answered from there, but he only became more confused by the symbolism and style of description of events to come. Wes was frustrated. One detail he forgot is that it takes the Holy Spirit in man to read and effectively understand the Bible. With the Holy Spirit withdrawn from man, reading the Bible with understanding was no longer possible.



One morning, Wes decided to go look for an old pastor who also missed the rapture. He wanted to ask him some questions. The Pastor used to be a really important teacher of the Bible, but after he missed the rapture, he became very depressed and reclusive. Rumor has it that he missed the rapture because he got involved in a shady deal just two days before the rapture. But even now, he's still one of the most knowledgeable people about the Bible. Wes left his group with a small bag containing a few belongings and set out in search of an answer to his burden. He didn't know that finding an answer would only cause more trouble for him.

Wes continued his journey to find the elderly Pastor, even though the soldiers had given up looking for him. He had to avoid a few armed soldiers and escape some men who had the mark of the Beast. Wes wandered in the wilderness for days before he finally found the Pastor. The Pastor looked very weary and refused to talk to Wes.

Wes tried different approaches to get the man to come out of his shell, but nothing worked. He was frustrated and sat beside the older man for a while. Then he had an idea. The man needed empathy, just like everyone else there. They could only encourage and comfort each other; none of them could solve the other's problems.

"I understand how you feel," Wes said comfortingly to the old man. "We're all in the same situation."

"Thank you, my son. You don't belong in our group, do you?" The old man asked Wes.

"No, sir, I don't," Wes answered. "I've come a long way to find you and ask questions."

The old man looked interestedly at Wes. "And what might your question be?"

Wes paused for a moment before asking his question.

"We can all tell now that the rapture actually happened. We are all facing tribulation right now. For the first three and a half years, The Beast reigned. For the next three and a half years, he has been empowered by The Dragon, who is Anti-Christ. His reign has become stronger, and so on. We are within the second three and half years. What happens after this period? What are we to expect?"

By the time Wes heard the answer he had sought, he had become much more sober than the old man. He realized that what he was hearing was true when it hit him like a punch in the gut that made him reel in his seat.

"The future is bleak, my son. We are in a terrible mess. We are like sheep now that must be slaughtered," the old man said without a change in facial expression.

"How do you mean?" Wes asked for clarification after he could find his voice.

"The truth is only a few of us will make it out alive at the end of the seven years. We can either be killed (possibly beheaded) and join those who went before in the millennial

reign or be tortured until we give up our faith. Sure, life will appear to return to normal for those who have the mark, but that is temporary, and the mark of the Beast is a gateway to the most extreme pain and suffering imaginable, all by the hand of God, as prophesied.”

*”And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the Beast, neither his image neither had received his mark upon their foreheads nor in their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”*

— REVELATION 20:4

Wes rubbed his neck unconsciously as he thought about what was coming. If God doesn't help us leave this world soon, things will get so bad that we will all give up our faith because the Beast will deceive everyone into thinking he is Christ Jesus.

*”And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake, those days shall be shortened.*

*Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo here is Christ, or there; believe it not.*

*For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

*Behold, I have told you before.”*

— MATTHEW 24:22-25

*"Even though there had been many antichrists in the world before now,"*

*Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time."*

— 1 JOHN 2:18

"At the end of seven years, God will visit the world with darkness that is even worse than before. People will try to die, but death will flee from them. What we face today is better than what is to come. Especially for those who receive the mark." The Pastor warned.

Wes was still very curious. He wondered what the fate of overcomers will be— so he asked the pastor.

"What about those who missed the rapture but refused the mark? Do they still have a chance?"

"Yes, they do!" replied the pastor.

The pastor tells him about a group of young adults who had missed the rapture but refused the mark of the beast.

"There was this group of young adults that stumbled across our camp. Each of them had their own very different tribulation stories, but they found each other and formed a group. Jed and Ben were two gay teens who enjoyed drugs and drinking, living a sinful lifestyle.

Then there was Holly, who lost her identical twin during the rapture. Finally, there was Jake, who engaged in constant sexual activity with multiple female companions."

The pastor continued. "They all had two things in common. First, they were all raised as Christians but lost their way and rejected a Christ-centered life for the pleasures of the world. They each made up reasons to avoid church every week. However, because of their unfailing love for their family members, they made up their minds to avoid the mark of the beast and follow Christ during the tribulation."

The pastor looked at Wes with a stern expression on his face. "Do you know what else they had in common? They all wanted to see their families again and knew that if they accepted the mark, they would never see them again."

A serious look fell upon the pastor's face. "I wish I could tell you they are still alive, but they were sadly killed with the rest of a group about a mile down the road. Glory to God!

They were killed as late overcomers. So, despite their rejections in the past, they will live with Christ and be reunited with their families for all eternity. You see, Wes, they understood that a physical death was preferred over a spiritual death," praised the pastor.

"Then there were those that were weak in their faith and accepted the mark to enjoy the things of the world; they didn't care about eternity. Many rejected Christ, but mostly

out of anger as a result of the rapture of loved ones, which pushed them over the edge, and they blamed God."

The pastor looked up at Wes. "Your friend, John Williams, was one of them. At the end of tribulation, they will first have to experience the fullness of God's wrath for taking the mark, and then after the millennium, they must stand before the Great White Throne to receive their judgment and eternal punishment."

The pastor continues. "It is still possible, even for those that commit murder and other crimes while on earth, to still be judged worthy of eternity. It all depends on their repented heart and if their name is written in the books. But for those who accept the mark; they will sadly be separated for eternity and never see family and friends again."

The old man described how the waters would turn to blood, and many would seek death and not find it. The picture he painted was so gloomy that Wes burst into tears.

Wes left the old man with a promise to overcome and meet him in paradise. He traced his way back to his group in the hills. After evading countless soldiers, he got to the hills with the hope of sharing his knowledge with them. Then he noticed that bushes around the hill, which once provided safety, had been cleared. He got to the hollow in the hills and saw that every group member had been killed. He felt his knees buckle.

Wes sat among the dead; he did not know what to do. He had no more tears left to cry, and the stench of blood no

longer bothered him. All he wanted was to be in paradise. He had no strength to stand or do anything except sing himself to sleep. He began to sing slowly and in a low tone:

*How sweet the hour of praise and prayer, When are devotions  
blended,*

*And on the wings of faith divine, Our songs of joy ascend;*

*'Tis then we hear in tones more clear, The gracious promise  
giv'n,*

*That though we part from friends on earth, We all shall meet  
in heav'n.*

*We all shall meet in heav'n at last We all shall meet in heav'n*

*Through faith in Jesus' precious blood, We all shall meet in  
heav'n.*

Wes soon fell asleep in the dark. When he woke up the next morning, he was ready to face his fate. He walked out of the hiding place where his group was and saw that the area had been cleared for a government project. He saw engineers in brightly colored helmets discussing a plan. He also noticed armed soldiers and laborers. Then out of nowhere, he saw a tractor approaching and realized this was his opportunity to die.

One of the other soldiers discovered Wes and shot him repeatedly. Wes fell to his knees and died while he was still smiling. He was at peace. The soldier who shot him walked up to him and wondered why a dead man would be smiling.

Just as the Pastor had told Wes, before the end of the second three and a half years, some of the Christians in hiding had been killed, some were thrown into prison and detained and meanwhile some who were in detention had given up and renounced their faith.

The fallen world returned to an uneasy place. Men were free to do whatever they wanted as permitted by The Beast. Notably, there was an increase in activities that were an abomination to the Lord.

*"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,  
God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things  
which are not convenient"*

— ROMANS 1:28

The Beast had so much power that he deceived people to started calling what was happening the new normal. There was no such thing as righteousness or grace. People were not conscious or scared of God. They only needed to be obedient to The Beast's blasphemous words.

People kept living their lives each day, and some started convincing themselves that the rapture never happened. They formed several theories to explain what happened; some put forward a theory of mass cult suicide of followers of Christ Jesus, while some held on to the new scientific theory of spontaneous disappearance, and even, UFOs. The more they dwelled in the period of rule of The Beast, the more their minds became corrupted.



People soon stopped talking about the rapture. And new ideas and discoveries filled the news, distracting people from the impending doom. The situation was made worse because The Beast's rule lasted for so long, making people forget about the true God and his prophecies. John Williams was glad he willingly took the mark. He was accepted by others and finally felt he belonged somewhere.

The Bible became a relic that eventually disappeared completely from homes. It was a world so different from the era before the rapture. So, men and the Beast continued in their foolishness and deception of a parallel paradise.

Then those that took the mark and were still alive would face something more horrifying yet: The Wrath of God!

# **Post Tribulation: God's Wrath on the mark**

## WARNING GRAPHIC DETAILS

WARNING GRAFFIC DETAILS

**GOD'S WRATH AND DEEPER  
DARKNESS**

*Woe to those who accepted the Mark.*



*"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them."*

—EPHESIANS 5: 1-7

My Horrifying Dream!

*It is very dark, but for some reason, I can see everything clearly. It is as if I am wearing a pair of night vision glasses. I can*

*see that the judgments from God are happening already. God wants me to see all this. Those who accepted the mark of the Beast will have to endure God's wrath. I cry uncontrollably as I am forced to watch what unfolds before my very eyes.*

*The darkness was so thick and oppressive, it felt as though it was pressing against every inch of my skin. I could feel the fear in the air; everyone was desperately trying to survive in this nightmare. The stars had disappeared from the sky, and all that remained were thick clouds of ash and smoke. People screamed and fought with one another in a desperate attempt to find something familiar, but nothing could be found.*

*The smell of death permeated everything, making me sick to my stomach. Corpses lined the streets, and rivers ran red with their blood. Everywhere I looked, there seemed to be devastation, sorrow, and heartache. Everywhere I looked, people were suffering; some perished while others just stared listlessly into nothingness as they waited for their doom.*

*The screams never stopped; they echoed throughout the night like tortured souls crying out in pain. All around me, I heard cries of desperation as people begged for mercy or help that would never come. With no hope left, people began to lose faith in themselves and each other, causing further turmoil in an already dire situation. Tears continued to stream down my face as I saw no way out for them all; they were doomed to suffer God's wrath until their destruction was complete.*

*The fear and pain became intense and present. People in the darkness couldn't see anything, and sometimes they fell down*

*cliffs or into ditches. Some people got hurt with sharp objects, but they would get up and keep moving.*

*People began to feel hopeless, as if they were constantly stuck in an unending nightmare. There was no escape, just like when the relentless onslaught of locusts that stung those who had not been sealed for five months, and the people were desperate for death to come and bring them some respite. The locusts seemed like a sign of divine retribution, as if God had forsaken their pleas for mercy and understood their cries for death but refused to answer them.*

*The days blended together into one long, nightmarish period of suffering that never seemed to end. People became increasingly desperate and started making bargains with God in order to find the release of death. They sacrificed whatever little possessions they had left in an attempt to make God answer their prayers, all in vain.*

*The most heartbreaking scenes were witnessed when parents watched helplessly as their children lay dying due to starvation or disease caused by the swarms of locusts or from lack of medical attention during this time of utter chaos. They were filled with grief, despair, and helplessness as they realized there was nothing they could do besides hold on tightly to each other while listening to the agonizing last breaths of their beloved ones slipping away into eternity.*

*I continued to helplessly watch this nightmare unfold.*

*The darkness was so thick and oppressive as if it were alive and ready to swallow anything that dared cross its path. Every*

*time someone took a step forward, they didn't know what kind of horrors awaited them. The air felt like it weighed a ton, and the only sound that could be heard was the sound of heavy weeping. The woman had been crying out for hours, yelling at God to just let her die, but still, she suffered in pain, feeling like her body was being ripped apart from the inside. Other people started screaming too, their voices echoing through the void until all that could be heard were cries of anguish.*

*The loneliness was almost unbearable; every time someone got close enough to touch another person, it felt like a reprieve from their misery. People clung to each other for dear life, for fear of ever experiencing such excruciating isolation again. Even when two strangers bumped into each other accidentally, there was no hostility – only the need for comfort and human contact in this bleak world.*

*Some people tried to make sense of what was happening, while others chose to ignore reality altogether. In order to cope with their suffering, they resorted to various forms of self-harm, anything to distract themselves from the terror that surrounded them. They would scratch themselves until they bled or bite themselves until their skin turned blue; anything to feel something other than pain and despair.*

*People began to fear the wrath of God, and they had good reason to. Everywhere one looked, the world seemed to be covered in a blanket of despair. There were dark clouds hanging low in the sky like an ominous sign of what was to come. The sun didn't shine anymore, and it felt as if the world had been cursed with*

*darkness forever. Why? Because the Holy Spirit, the Light, has departed the Earth.*

*The smell of death and decay was everywhere. Corpses filled up entire streets, piled one on top of another as far as the eye could see. Flies crawled all over them, buzzing with anticipation for their next meal. The ground was slippery with blood and pieces of flesh mixed in with dirt and dust. Nothing could seem untouched by death or pain anymore.*

*It seemed every living creature had lost hope; even the birds stopped singing in fear of further angering God's wrath. People huddled together in groups, weeping for mercy and praying for deliverance from their suffering. But no matter how much they prayed, it seemed that their prayers went unheard by a seemingly indifferent Almighty.*

*Rivers ran red with blood from all of those who had died within its waters, so much so that when people tried to take water from it for sustenance, it made them gag or vomit up whatever water remained inside them from before the wrath had started. Everywhere individuals looked there was nothing but sorrow and desperation as yet another life ended due to this tragedy inflicted on humanity by its own hand; a tragedy which could have easily been avoided if only people hadn't rejected Christ and forced to take the mark of the Beast. Once the mark was placed on your hand or forehead, it sealed you for eternal damnation!*

*God also showed mercy in His judgment. Warnings of impending destruction had gone out beforehand, giving people a chance to find refuge before the rapture and warnings of*



*punishment for receiving the mark. In addition, despite His anger over the wrongs that had been committed against Him and His people, God always tempered His punishments with grace, forgiving repentant sinners and restoring them into fellowship with Him.*

*Ultimately, what shone through was not wrath or retribution but love and compassion: through all of these acts of mercy, it became clear that God was not only punishing wrongdoing but also showing loving kindness towards His children when they most needed it. In times of disaster, we can be confident that our Father will never leave us nor forsake us—and will instead meet us in our sorrows with a love beyond measure. However, for those who rejected Christ and sealed their fate with the mark of the Beast, there is no hope of grace and forgiveness. They will be eternally judged but must experience God’s wrath first, and many continued to blame God for their mistakes and their suffering.*

My conclusion of this dream is that those who choose to ignore the opportunities they were given to come back to Jesus will face a punishment far worse than they can ever imagine. Those who reject Jesus and choose not to accept his gift of salvation will suffer the consequences of eternal damnation, separated from a loving God and all that is good in life. The people who had chosen to reject him while alive were now condemned to spend eternity apart from Him, knowing full well in the deepest depths of their hearts that they had been given a chance but failed to take it. As Scripture reminds us, *“What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or*

*nakedness, or peril, or sword? No! In all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!" (Romans 8:35-39).* Therefore, no matter what life throws at us here on Earth—hardships, suffering, and difficulties—if we cling onto Jesus and accept His gift of grace and mercy, then no matter what happens in life, there is hope beyond it.

At that point, I woke up from the dream. It was so scary that I shook and broke into a cold sweat. I was led to write everything down.

So I did.

However, The Great White Throne Judgment is yet to come...

# The Great White Throne

# The Solitary Room

*John Williams Awaiting Judgment*



"What is this place?" I whimpered as I looked around the dark, cold, and worn cave. I boasted of a wondrous vision, yet I could hardly see anything. The room was pitch black, and I quivered against the chill of the rails I had just grabbed. My hand touched a portion of iron, and its coldness jolted me back as I fell. My heart raced as I searched for something to hold onto in the dark room. Suddenly, bright lights flooded the room. Reflexively, I squinted and looked around to get my bearings.

The place was small, and I felt trapped. Letters jumbled together all over the walls of the room as if someone had scribbled the words repeatedly until they muddled together in an artistic mess. I whimpered again against the cold and held my hand over my shirt; the cold bristled my hair.

I moved my body faster and raised my voice a little louder, "Where am I?" But my words muddled off the walls, resonating throughout the cramped space. As I glanced at two words on the wall: the fall, sadness overwhelmed me as my last memory flooded my mind.

## **The Solitary Room Part I**

*How did I get here?*

I had just finished running on the treadmill after the fall occurred. One minute I was running with my gaze set on the timer in front of me with five more minutes to complete my workout; the next minute I was on the ground.

The gym instructor had smiled at me from afar, a proud smile. I was finally losing the flab in my stomach. Gary, my potbellied friend, was with me. He was beside me on the red treadmill, going at a slower pace as his stomach danced in an up-and-down motion that intrigued me. He nudged me to go slower because I was dehydrated and tired, and I laughed. Now, I had two more minutes to go; my heart was beating wildly; my legs became heavy, and the air in the room was still. I inhaled deeply, but nothing entered because of the obstruction. The air was preventing me from breathing, and I eventually lost focus on the timer. My eyes drooped, and everything went black.

I could feel the air still swirling around me as I heard my name called from all directions, simultaneously rendering the air silent. My body refused to move, and I tried again. I screamed that I couldn't breathe, but my throat was rough and parched. There was no sound. My voice suddenly cleared, and fresh oxygen rushed in. For the first time, I could breathe. I breathed quickly in and out of my chest with every breath. I opened my eyes again to see my

baby, whose memory always made my heart race when I saw children on the street.

My baby, Anita, was wearing a long, pink dress that flowed around her. Her blonde hair was tied up with flowers. She looked happy, but I knew something was wrong. It couldn't be my Anita; her skin was purer and milkier than it had been during those final days when leukemia consumed her body and stole away her youth just before she turned seven.

I remember it was a Sunday in March. I had just ordered her birthday cake, which featured a large seven-pointed star balloon. My steps were springy as I entered her hospital room. Anita's grin never faltered, no matter how much she hurt. However, on this day, she couldn't smile. She was pale and motionless in Winifred's arms. As she took her last breath, surrounded by motherly love, I was sure God was punishing me for something. Losing my daughter Anita so young to the disease that ravaged her body until she gave up everything, even her smile, was a punishment to me.

I regained consciousness, still lying on the floor with people surrounding my limp form as Gary called out my name. As I stretched out my hands to try to feel Anita, I blacked out once more. And that was the second time God afflicted me with punishment. The first time, He took Anita away; the second time, He prevented me from holding her, even in my unconscious state.

## The Solitary Room Part II

### *Chained to My Memories: Mark of the Beast*

I woke up to a loud noise and a burning sensation on my forehead. I screamed, and the sound bounced off the walls of the strange room. I put my hand over the mark on my forehead, but it didn't help. The mark was still hot, even though it hurt so much that I couldn't stand it. As before, I tried to focus on getting out of the room, but my thoughts wouldn't let me concentrate. The gate was huge and black, and my mark burned brightly. I was so overwhelmed by everything that happened the day I got the mark that I couldn't focus on anything else. I tried to clear my mind and think about how to get out, but thoughts about my wretched life and the choices I made just kept swirling around in my head.

I thought about that Monday in spring, the year after Anita died, and the day Winifred and I finally spoke. She had started attending church again, but I refused to serve a God who took my daughter's life. When she walked into the dining area wearing her black boat-necked dress, she stopped by our table and said, "John, you can't keep this up."

I walked past her into the guest room that I now occupied. She followed me in, her mouth set into a hard stare, and continued, arms now akimbo. "You can't keep living like this. We are a couple, and we both lost a child." At this, I sharply turned and set my gaze on her, my lips

quivering with the intensity of the emotions that ran through me. She moved a step back as I moved one forward.

"We are a couple?" I inquired loudly, repeating myself.

"You call us a couple, yet, you abandoned me for your faith when we lost her. Do you think I didn't love her as much? Do you feel God loves her so much that He took her away? You're insane! In our darkest hours, you chose God over me. Has He returned our daughter to us? You've always served God, but He still took your child. Why give her to us in old age only to take her back? Are we simply tools in God's hands?"

"You can always talk to God, John. He listens, and He will give you peace. You need peace, John, and I can't give you that. I don't hate you; I just want you to come to Jesus. He isn't going to leave you as your father did."

The room grew silent as I mulled over her words. Winifred's eyes bulged, and her pupils dilated as she watched me in shock, and I instantly regretted my words. We had gone separate ways from the day Anita died. She clung to her faith like a rare treasure while I lived in willful abandon. The room fell silent as I pondered her warning. "God always listens, John," she said softly.



## The Solitary Room Part III

### *Remembering my Suffering Childhood*

I grew up feeling unloved. My parents divorced when I was eight years old. The recollection of my parents' divorce has always left me devastated, and I have felt rejected and unwanted ever since. Even now, the memory of my father's cheery expression as he departed is painful. He had appeared in his big, faded blue shirt with a grin on his face, the same one he exhibited each time he exorcised bad spirits out of me with his cane. He would begin by reading from the Bible while flexing his biceps.

Sometimes, he would open the book of Proverbs and read a chapter. With each verse, his hands would strike me into oblivion. At the end of each beating, we would recite the grace together. He was a religious fanatic, and it was evident God punished sinners for even the little things.

My mother was different from other mothers. My father's hatred for me made her very angry, and she began to hate me too. Hence, I grew up feeling scared, and I told Winifred everything. So she knew about it.

It was my thirteenth birthday, and my mother was putting on her favorite dress—the green one with the protruding belly that matched her eyes.

"John!" she screamed, her veins bulging. I walked out of the corner I had been hiding in for an hour and knew I

was in trouble. She glared at me and then started pacing the room.

"I am sorry," I whispered. "I didn't know." I didn't need to hear her say it before knowing I was wrong. She eventually stopped staring at me, and I could finally breathe again. Just as suddenly, she spoke.

"What did you do to my mug?" she fumed.

"Mom, it wasn't me," I said. "It was Jasper." I pointed at my dog.

"It was Jasper. We played, and he jumped on the table and knocked over the mug."

"You shameless liar!" She grabbed me and removed the belt hanging from her waist. She muttered prayers with each lash that landed on my back. The minute she was done beating me, she dragged me into the kitchen and placed my hand on the hot burner.

"Mom, please!" I yelled.

"Now, how does it feel?" she said with a grin.

"Mom, it hurts so badly," I cried.

Mom laughed vengefully. "This will teach you a lesson," she retorted. "Don't touch my belongings."

The next morning, my mother walked into the house with a woman in a light gray suit and a black briefcase.

Mother had accused me of attempting to start a fire. To demonstrate, she showed the woman my hands. I said, "I

got this burn yesterday, and it was due to my mom putting my hands over a hot burner."

My mother snorted, declaring, "It's true that my son has a mental illness."

I was taken to a facility where I spent the next few weeks learning how to handle mental illnesses. When I returned, my mother was wailing in the doorway. She hugged me lankily and nastily, grinning deviously through her tears.

"I'm sorry," she murmured as she held me tight. Her gaze spoke volumes about her plans for future mischief-making.

Everyone was affected by my parents' divorce, especially me, since it happened when I was young and powerless.

Winifred was aware of all this, so she knew what she was talking about. God had abandoned me just like my father and made sure I received the same punishment. I remember one day, she came closer to me, running her fingertips across my forehead, and she said,

"John, you must stop blaming God for all that has happened. Return to this faith and allow God to be your Father." I uncurled my fingers from her touch, flinging her aside in the process.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Winifred. I don't need a father, and if I did, it wouldn't be God. I will not return to a religion that has made me who I am today!"

"I have no choice," I responded before exiting the room.

That was our final conversation. The rapture occurred the next day, and I lost Winifred to God forever. Again, as usual, God took everything away from me.

### **The Solitary Room Part IV**

#### *Recalling Tribulation and Post-Rapture*

I was brought back to the present by a slithering movement to my left. I found myself in the dismal chamber again, with words scrambled over. This took me back to my most traumatic memories. My heart pounded against my chest in fear as I closed my eyes and attempted to make sense of everything that was happening without revisiting my worst memories.

Something crawled by my left side, and I shrank from the motion while turning my head to look away, only to see a red, long, slithering locust. The locust reminded me of the ones from when the beast ruled. They would bite you, but you wouldn't die.

The memory of the impact sent me screaming once again, and the pain of the locusts returned. It forced me back into my previous memories as a captive under the beast's reign.

## **The Beast and his mark**

Immediately after the majority of Christians were taken from the Earth in the rapture, everything was in danger and turmoil. The people who remained were afflicted by epidemics, and each viral outbreak caused them to fight to survive. But death was out of reach. Swarms of locusts came from the west, making life unbearable. They stung us for five months and the pain was so intense that we wanted to die. Only death was not possible. God would not allow us to escape the pain from the stings. There was nowhere to hide. Borders were closed, and the fear of catching new illnesses kept everyone indoors in constant hunger, sickness, and discomfort. Living in such a chaotic world was unbearable. But out of the blue, a superhero appeared and seemed to erase everyone's problems. His name was "The Beast," and he started a movement that changed the entire world.

A new alliance government was formed that controlled the tax, education, and health care systems, as well as every other institution known to humans. No one could question this government's decisions. Economic growth occurred, and with central coordination in place, life became promising again.

In the process, this autocratic government implemented a program that required everyone to have their mark on their forehead or right hand. It was advertised by the media as a progressive way to ensure control and accountability. It made absolute sense! But my prior

knowledge of the Bible made me suspicious. Nevertheless, I took the mark anyway. After the hell-on-earth I'd experienced, I wasn't going to discard the opportunity to live a good life.

### **The Solitary Room Part V**

*I am not alone*

I gasped when I felt the electric shock from the door of my solitary confinement cell. I was relieved when I wasn't chained to my memories anymore. This room must have been for revisiting bad memories. Looking back, I couldn't remember seeing the locust-like beast as before. Once again, I asked if it was just my imagination or if the room was making me go crazy. Alone in the room, I felt like someone was watching over me. Was this hell?

"What is this place?" I softly gasped for the umpteenth time, wide-eyed as I looked ahead.

Something else felt odd about the room. It meshed my soul with uncontrollable gloom. It was almost as if it had a life of its own and wanted me to suffer. "Hello...is anyone here?" I called out, hoping someone would answer.

I introduced myself and explained I had never done anything wrong before. "The candy thing was my way of showing my resentment. My mom never..." I said, and then my voice trailed off. "...never liked me."

I was so upset that I started crying. "Someone, please talk to me," I begged. But there was silence in the room. My

painful memories were still too loud to ignore. I didn't deserve this, so I got up and stood firm. If they caught me, I wouldn't sit still. In a desperate effort to find a way out, I looked for a window, a ladder, or even a door—but there was nothing. Suddenly, the echo of my thoughts broke through the rumbling silence. I recognized what sounded like another male's voice.

"Hello, John," the voice said. It was booming and deep and came from inside me. I wasn't sure how deep it was, but it was very deep.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"You don't want to know," the voice said. I shivered against the cold wall. Someone was speaking from inside me; yet, the person wasn't me. Was I possessed?

"Who are you?" I mumbled.

"Pride, John," the voice softly replied. "Pride has always been your downfall. It has caused you to make the wrong decisions throughout your life."

"I'm dead, right?" My hands shook in anticipation. "What is this place? Is this heaven or hell?"

"Neither," the voice said. "This is a holding prison while you await the great white throne judgment. You're here to remember and reflect. It is called the solitary room."

"Remember what?" I snapped. "I don't want to remember."

"You need to," the voice said. "It is a necessary part of your judgment."

"What should I remember?"

"Your sins, past decisions, and rejection of the life of Christ," the voice said. "You claim that you've suffered more than anyone. Others have suffered more, and you will soon learn how much more."

"I didn't commit those sins intentionally; the world pushed me too far," I said.

"There was nothing I could do," I said. "You murdered my Anita, raptured my beloved Winifred, and abandoned me to sorrow. What alternative did I have?" I pleaded.

There was no response. Instead, something else occurred. A severe pain forced me to the ground and filled me with agony from the inside out. My muscles bunched together across each other, drawing tightly until my joints were strained and I was short of breath. With each labored intake of air, the agony increased dramatically. Seconds ran into minutes, minutes into hours, and hours into days. Every day was just as painful as the first; the intensity remained the same, as flaring as when it began. "I'm sorry," I cried out in painful regrets for blaming God for my situation.

Interesting thing about pain: From the standpoint of reason, pain is a good thing. It works as an alarm that goes off in your brain, telling you when something is happening that could hurt your body. For example, if you get too close to a fire, your brain will tell your body to stop because it's dangerous.



Pain also begins the healing process. The dead can't feel pain. If you hit a dead dog, it won't bark. Pain signals there is still life in something, no matter how bad it seems sometimes. Pain gives you hope that your body will go through the path of restoration and be healed again. Even during painful experiences, sometimes the body finds relief when the healing process starts.

After thinking about it, I realized people who have not accepted Christ can't relate to pain in the same way. The pain I felt never stopped. There was no promise of healing or assurance that my body would get better.

This kind of pain was uncomfortable. It made me feel heavy and left me breathless. It went through my bones and into my soul, and I hated myself for rejecting the Healer, Jesus Christ.

"No! No! No!" I screamed at the voice in me. "I've suffered enough. As you've said, I've been horrible and have made grave decisions. But, that shouldn't be something worth remembering, should it?" I fell silent.

"Please take me away from here."

"No," the voice finally replied, softly as before, "but I will show you a place."

My body floated in the room. The ceiling above me burst into fire, in which I was engulfed. Then the floor beneath me started to burn too. It melted away like an ice sculpture in a kiln. In my mind's eye, I could see flames of hellish intensity engulfing half of the world and consuming

everything. My eyes adjusted to the darkness, and then I gazed upon the inferno and its overpowering blackness.

At times, the fire bellowed down, and at the same time, it rose up. People crammed themselves into each burning structure; screams rent the air, and my ears bled with pain. The cries were the most heart-rending noises I'd ever heard, and they haunted me for days after. When they brought me back to prison, I asked only one thing: "Oh, my God! What was that?" My suspicion was confirmed.

"That was hell," the voice said.

"I don't want to go there, ever!" I pleaded, "Please, let me be with my family. My daughter, Anita, I want to see her."

"You can't be with her," the voice replied. "You have taken the mark of the beast, and you are awaiting judgment."

The last statement hit me like a punch in the gut. I felt weakened. Yes, I had taken the mark of the beast. But wasn't it harmless?

*"It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and enslaved, to receive a mark on their right hands or foreheads. So that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name." (Revelation 13:16-17).*

"It wasn't my fault."

"It wasn't?" The voice taunted.

Anger filled me again.

"God could have kept me with my wife and daughter, but He took them away. It was always about his anger. My mother didn't want me. I stole because my father beat me, trying to get the devil out of me. My wife was taken away during the displacement of the chosen ones. Did I ever have a choice? Was I chosen? I chose to be branded because that was the only way to save myself."

The voice whispered softly as if to comfort me as I leaned against the harsh walls. "Do you want to see Winifred?"

A window appeared before I could nod yes, and there stood Winifred, glittering and smiling in her angelic robes. I watched her in silence. In that gaze, more was said; yet her smile remained.

"You loved your faith more than me," I accused her, finally breaking the silence. "You had your chance," Winifred said. "But you didn't take it. You could have come with me to heaven."

I scoffed at this. "How is it?" I asked with interest, bracing myself for her response. But in an instant, Winifred vanished.

I was startled when I saw her. I wanted to look at her one last time before she left, but the window was gone. I looked where the window was and started to cry because of all the memories I had lost and the times that I could have spent with her if things were different.

"No, no, no," I said to myself as I remembered these events. "I don't want to remember these things again. I have suffered enough."

Or have I?

# Love or Unprovoked Murder?

*Remembering Mrs. Catherine*



I tried to lead a normal life in my neighborhood. I played with my dog Jasper in the fields and attended Sunday service with my mom like every other kid. But I always made sure I arrived early for Sunday school so I could get Mrs. Catherine's delicious homemade cookies before anyone else did. Her cookies usually came in several forms—angels, animals, supermen, and even babies.

I looked forward to knowing what shape we'd have each Sunday, relishing that I'd get to eat another of her unique creations at church and her home later in the evening. The day Mrs. Catherine handed me a dinosaur-shaped cookie, my eyes brightened and glinted as I jumped in excitement about the unique shape. "Oh my, oh my, I'm about to gobble up a dinosaur."

Mrs. Catherine was loved by everyone. She was always happy and wore colorful evening gowns with unique patterns. We compared her to Mother Teresa of Calcutta because she was so kind and loving. Mr. Elton, her husband, had a beautiful singing voice that rang out during services.

He was also very kind and loving, and the kids looked up to him.

The couple spent a lot of time with us in the neighborhood, telling us about love. Mrs. Catherine would sit on the balcony of her house and talk to all of us kids. I would go over on Sunday afternoons and eat cookies with her and the other boys. For hours, we would listen to her talk about love and then move on to Bible stories while drinking chocolate milk.

Love?

Mrs. Catherine talked for a long time about the power of love. I thought she was going crazy when she started talking about a guy like this. How could she be so passionate about a man and also express her devotion to Him in public? Wasn't her ideal spouse enough for her? I wondered.

After another passionate episode of love, I spoke to my close friends Randy, Bridget, and Foden about it. I said, "Look here." I pointed at the cookie in my hand. "I don't know what's going on with Mrs. Catherine. That woman is after another man," I exclaimed.

"An older man," they said, laughing at my absurdity. Bridget pinched me and whispered: "She was talking about Jesus, the Savior. If you had stayed at church, you would have known this."

Stuffing another half of my cookie in my mouth, I looked at her quizzically, eyes narrowed in youthful

confusion. "But does Jesus Christ love us that much? I mean, would He love Mrs. Catherine more than her husband does?"

I thought to myself that what she was saying was crazy. I knew about Jesus, but the Jesus Mrs. Catherine referred to was still alive. She used to act out His story dramatically, and she always had a sparkle in her eyes.

I was stunned the following Sunday when I heard Mr. Elton declare his devotion to Jesus as well. Wasn't Jesus the same individual Mrs. Catherine loved? I couldn't believe what I was hearing. How could a wife and her husband love one man?

I had heard about this man. He came to the world as a Messiah. I knew His name: Jesus Christ, the Nazarene. I knew what color His clothes were: white robes. And I knew where He stayed: Heaven, no doubt. But I didn't understand why He died for us all. According to Mrs. Catherine and all the Sunday school teachers, it was because He loved us. But even though He loved them, I doubted He even knew my name, much less where I lived or what was going on in my life.

I asked myself, "What is love? Have I ever loved someone or has anyone ever loved me?" The questions plagued my young mind, racking it with inquiries that had no answers. I was sure about my dog's value because he was my company in my misery

In my wanderings and sojourns, I could not discover or understand love. It thickened my heart with more perplexity. How could I relate to something I didn't understand?

Mrs. Catherine was always looking at me in a way that made me feel uncomfortable. She tried hard to persuade me to talk, but I remained silent. As a last resort, she told me about her lover.

"One certain time in the distant past, a powerful man owned everything we see today in the world. This man also had a beautiful farm over which he placed a man, asking him to manage his property. The powerful man gave the farm manager the chance to do whatever he wanted, but he told him not to eat from a specific plant. He said if he did, he would die."

In anticipation, I interrupted her, my face filled with the excitement of the privilege of a story without the other kids. "Why? Was the plant dangerous?"

"It was," Mrs. Catherine said, a note of pain and despair in her voice.

"What happened? Did the farm manager get close to the plant?"

"His wife did," Mrs. Catherine said.

Her eyes widened.

"She didn't eat it. Did she?" Mrs. Catherine responded sorrowfully, "She did."



"Oh! That's sad," I said.

"She not only ate the plant, but she also gave some to her husband."

"And the husband... did he eat it?" I rose from my seat, eager.

"Yes, he did."

I was in a frenzy. "Why would he eat the plant? Wasn't he afraid of dying? He was the one the powerful man told about the plant, right?"

"That's right, John."

"He ought to have known better."

"He ought to."

"And both of them died," I added.

"You are correct. They both died," Mrs. Catherine said.

I grew silent as my mind filled with images of a bony-faced farm manager and his plump wife's lifeless bodies. My cookie slipped out of my hand in shock. Mrs. Catherine picked it up, dusted it, and placed it on my lap.

"If you were that powerful man, what would you do?"

"I'd bring them back to life," my face lit up, and I replied instantly.

"That was exactly what the man did."

I exploded with excitement. "Wow, you don't mean it!"

Mrs. Catherine waited for my excitement to settle. "And how do you think the powerful man brought the farm manager and his wife back to life?"

"Well, I never thought of it. Now that you're asking, I think it must have been magic." I said with conviction, flexing my small arms.

"The powerful man was neither a magician nor a wizard."

"Okay," I said, standing and raising my hands. "I guess since he owned the entire world, he called all the doctors together and told them, 'Fix these guys, will you?'"

"Just like that," Mrs. Catherine said, beaming.

"It isn't impossible, rig—"

"John!" My mother called from a distance.

I stood up and without looking back, I ran up to my mom. She was waiting by her cream pickup van. As always, the trip home was quiet. "Are you going out with an older woman now?" she asked as she stopped the car in front of our house. I tried to open the door, but it was locked. Then she started yelling at me. I tried to stay calm, but I was so scared.

"Mom, please," I said, trying to sound calm. Then I saw her face and I closed my eyes, waiting for the hit. But it didn't come right away.

"Why were you with her alone? So you could tell her that I don't treat you well?" She took off her bracelet and slid it between us. "Despite your father's lack of interest, I

do all I can to educate you properly," she yelled as she hit me.

Before she could touch my face, I sensed the hit. When she beat me, I wondered what love was once again.

The next day I was watching the boys play football as the sun set on them. Their skins glistened in the evening light as they ran around the field in front of our home, which also served as a football field for the kids. As they went by with their brown ball, Jasper wagged his tail excitedly in a rapid back-and-forth motion.

Then, I saw someone who was smiling and appeared to be beckoning me. Was that God? I giggled at my own silliness as I gazed at the figure in the rain. The figure kept motioning and greeting me. I returned her smile. If love was like this, I wanted to keep on smiling for eternity. The image continued beckoning as I studied it, and I felt an inflow of joy course through me as I ran toward it with delight.

Mrs. Catherine was standing in the rain in a huge black coat and a yellow bonnet. Her glasses were drenched with water spots all over them. She usually donned flowing gowns, but because of the raincoat, she looked youthful and attractive.

"Mrs. Catherine, what are you doing here?" I said, beckoned, and ran over.

"Two things," she said, smiling, and shivering, "to complete my story and give you this."

She handed me a box. I was thrilled—the drizzle, the gift, and Mrs. Catherine's proximity. It was time to meet the powerful man, finally.

"I'm all ears, Mrs. Catherine," I said with a ghost of a smile.

The powerful man did not allow the farm manager and his wife to perish. He loved them so much that he let his own son die in their place.

"For God so loved the world that He gave us His only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

I was confused and disappointed. I had expected something amazing, in the style of a powerful man who rules over the dead and the living, a man who would go to Earth to rescue the farmer and his wife.

"The powerful man let his son die in their place because he loved them so much. How come? I thought you said they ate the poisonous plant together. How did the strong man transfer the poison to his son after eating from it himself?" I inquired, my perplexity growing as I mulled over each word.

"Remember, he created the whole earth and was a powerful man."

I thought about the story.

"Are you talking about what God accomplished through His Son, Jesus Christ?" I asked, raising my hands in resignation.

I couldn't deny seeing it coming. It was easy to see that Mrs. Catherine's narrative would always refer to God's love. She nodded, and I looked away to the field where the boys were playing. One fraction of me was ecstatic, while the other was dejected.

I felt Mrs. Catherine's intense stare, but I couldn't hide my disappointment. It was the same old boring story to me. To me, the powerful man murdering his son was not love; it was unprovoked murder.

"I'm here to introduce him to you formally. I perceive you're going through a tough time. You are a really strong boy. Accepting Jesus into your life will change you completely."

It wouldn't. I loved going to church and attending Sunday school, but becoming a Christian, as Mrs. Catherine put it, was a big decision, and one I wasn't interested in making. If He loved me, as I was told countless times, why did He allow me to be born this way? What kind of love subjects one to a life of misery?

Mrs. Catherine's voice jolted me back to reality. "John, this may be the most important day of your life," she added. "The Lord directed me here. He says you are restless; you may never have another chance like this again. Accept Christ as your personal Lord and Savior."

"No."

"What did you say?" She watched me, pity shadowing her beautiful, aging face.

With all the courage I could muster at thirteen, I stood and puffed my chest. "I don't want to surrender to Him. If He's so powerful and loves me, then why would He let His Son die for a stranger? How is He any different from my father?"

Refusing to be bribed, I dropped the cookie box and ran away.

# The Court Room

*Memory of my first courtroom experience*



I remember the first time I visited a courtroom, I was with a lawyer friend. This would be my first of many visits to the courtroom. The accused that day was an unusually wrinkly 80-year-old woman. She had a mesh of tissue scars in the hole that had once housed her right eye. Tissue was meshed together to form strings of ruffled skin. Although she was eighty, she looked more like she was ninety in her oversized gown, big, cheap boots, and frail frame.

Mrs. Rose Norfolk, the widow of the Duke of the City, who had died many years ago, was one of my earliest memories. Mrs. Rose recounted how she met the Duke at an old Baltimore hotel where she worked as a maid in her early twenties. She described it in a soft and pleading tone. Hers was a Cinderella story, delicate and lovely, with the Duke playing the part of her ideal lover.

Sadly, our beloved prince charming was a lover of young people and had been courting several adolescent females while married. Mrs. Rose, on the other hand, averted her gaze each time, clinging to the faint hope that

one day, the Duke would recognize his faults and stop forcing minors into his bed. Despite this terrible secret, she kept smiling.

However, dear Prince Charming was also a very jealous man. He always got mad when he found Mrs. Rose happy and pretty. One day, he got so mad that he removed her right eye. And just as always, he begged for forgiveness. But this time, Mrs. Rose had had enough. It was early on a Saturday morning, and she made his favorite coffee—black and bitter. The next day, she buried him in the backyard of her estate.

The Duke's body was discovered fifty years later, and the cold case was reopened there. On the stage stood Mrs. Rose, now a grandmother, with a group of women, many of them elderly, who had been sexually abused by the Duke as teenagers.

Everyone in the courtroom remained still, listening to all the details as the case opened. The team of prosecutors mounted fresh evidence, produced thick files, and submitted them to the court. Here was a woman who had lost her husband, her youth, her sanity, and her eye and had lived with the guilt of a dead husband for fifty years. Yet, emotions never win in a courtroom.

All in the courtroom held their breath as the judge signaled that the court was in session by banging his gavel on the bench. In the end, we all wept for Mrs. Rose as she didn't get justice in court.



With so many prosecutors, this courtroom was the only thing I remembered when I was abruptly awakened as the sounds of millions of trumpets blew a long and sustained note in synchrony and the great iron doors of the solitary room flung open. I hated the sound of trumpets—they were so loud and obnoxious. Every time I heard one, it felt like a drill going through my head. I couldn't stand them.

# The Great White Throne

## *Separation of the Sheep and Goats*



I suddenly became weightless and rose toward the gate. As the noise increased, it sent shivers down my back. I closed my eyes, thinking about Mrs. Rose's eyes. I got lightheaded in the air, and my legs dangled beneath me. I was not falling, though. I just hung there. I shut my eyes, dread washing over each breath I took. The trumpets blared again, and this time, they were so loud they made my hands shake. I wanted to scream, but I couldn't.

My weight was pulling me down. I was falling endlessly. I prayed for someone to save me. Suddenly, I was thrown onto a large, shiny surface. When I opened one eye, I saw the biggest room I had ever seen in my life. It was decorated with gold and white. Chandelier-like lights hung from the sky in this room, and the beams and rays reflected on each other, sending light everywhere.

The great white throne of God was a sight to behold. It was a celestial terrain that glittered and sparkled with purity, radiating luminous splendor and heralded with beings too wonderful to describe. Still, it was God's outer

glory that overflowed from His temple. The minutest fragment of God's wholesome and majestic aura edged out the dazzling sight, and before it, I was as bare as stone. There was no place to hide from His glory. There were no shadows or darkness. The light shone so brightly that darkness had no place or space.

The left, right, and center walls were the brightest in the room. The entire chamber was covered in gold, yet it glittered like diamonds. A magnificent white throne stood in the middle of the chamber, with stairways that went on and on to reveal an even more breathtaking sight: THE GREAT WHITE THRONE!

On either side of the stairways were elders with wide grins and gold-plated hair. They all bowed in unison. Their robes were clear and sparkly, and each one was overflowing with happiness. They radiated joy, which came from within them as they bowed and rose continuously. Each side of the great white throne was so tall that my eyes could barely see its end. Winged celestial creatures were flapping their golden wings in synchrony on either side.

People's voices rose from the right side of the great room, where the golden city stood. They were speaking different languages: Greek, Italian, Chinese, and Roman. These languages merged to create a symphony of octaves that transcended human languages. The people in the golden city were laughing and leaping with joy, and their spirits were filled with happiness.

The glorious city was protected by a dome. It looked like a geranium. Within the dome were tiny castle-like structures, and each resident had his own castle. Pure gold was used to create these tiny citadels. I recognized Winifred, Anita, my family, and my friends among the throngs of people in white robes, golden crowns, and limitless happiness.

Winifred wore her smile with her characteristic dimples. But something was different this time. Her beauty was like Mrs. Catherine's—ethereal, pure, and flawless. She glowed and looked young, without the wrinkles I was used to seeing on her face.

I saw friends and family and the guy from my office. Yet something else was unique—everyone was ageless. Everyone appeared in the physical form and age at which I knew them the most. I jumped and waved, spreading my palms haphazardly toward the side, but they couldn't see me. They giggled as their voices rose in cadence as they exclaimed, "Hallelujah!" asking only to live together, love, and worship God. I pictured myself in the dome, in my castle, gallivanting about in my white garments while everything remained unchanged.

I was still on the left side, ignored by those in the golden city. I despised my frail body, bleeding ears, and my life. My desolate condition disgusted me. The anger I felt gave birth to resentment. Why did I give up my life for such selfish and sinful desires? The Bible foretold all of this. But I still hoped things would change. This was far worse than the previous

confinement. I was bursting with rage. None of this was my fault!

I was the one with an abusive childhood. Guilt pricked my skin, and I shed the layers. I didn't know who God was, and it wasn't my fault that I refused to believe in the same person my father called his God. How could the same man who told my dad to leave us also claim to love me?

I felt that living as a Christian was like living in slavery. I saw this from Mrs. Catherine's life and the lives of a few other faithful people. They behaved as if they had no control over their lives. They talked to a Being whom they couldn't see or touch, calling it prayer. But to make this thing work, you had to believe the Being heard you. And Christians were expected to behave and think the same way Christ did. Furthermore, they had to recognize the Lord as King over their lives and do exactly what He said. If one morning the Lord says, "Hey, son, don't touch your breakfast today. We need to talk," the typical response should be, "Yes, Lord."

I didn't know this Jesus; was I supposed to give my life to Him? Was it my fault that I chose not to trust Him? Was it? I shed the guilt, even as it overpowered my mind and taunted every breath I took. The resounding no I told Mrs. Catherine filled my mind with unique tones and octaves, all echoing and reverberating until I could no longer stand it.

I screamed, my hands pulling at my chest to pluck the memories out. My legs trembled and gave way. I wondered if it was hard to say yes to God. Should I have given Him a

chance? I sat, my lips quivering as I asked myself questions I had already forgotten. My eyes became blurry as tears streamed down my face with vigor. I gasped for breath as I tried to suppress the tears, yet they flowed like a deluge, spreading wetness all over my tattered, filthy garments.

Anger and guilt warred in my thoughts. I was furious with myself for being so stupid and not seizing all of the opportunities I had been given to follow God.

These citizens of the golden city would never understand what it meant to be John Williams.

"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it" (Luke 9:24).

It was hard for me to say yes to God. But if I were honest with myself, I always knew God existed. There was evidence of Him all around us—in the beauty of nature, for example. And my conscience bore witness to this. I also wondered about the brain behind these amazing scenes, like a magnificent mountain or an intense waterfall. Someone must have created all of this.

I studied sociology at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. I learned that societies function because they have structure. When legal and administrative measures become obsolete, disorder is sure to follow. But I didn't consider the person who created this order. Even during the rule of the beast, people could see something was wrong with the world. But they just didn't know who to blame.

I began to understand Scripture better. I had never studied the Bible before, but now I could see I had been ignorant of the truth. Once, I saw a man who was very excited as he preached by a waterfall in Chester, NY. He had a strong Northern Irish accent, and his voice was very sharp. I admired his energy as he spoke about the great white throne and how it separates the sheep from the goats.

The words of that preacher stood as a witness while I was before the great white throne. His words blasted like blaring cymbals in my ears. He said: "That day will be great. You will stand before the white throne and remember these words. By the God I serve, you will. The goats will be separated from the sheep. Woe to you if you find yourself on the left-hand side of the Great and Mighty One. That will be bad news, brother. It means you are one of the goats, people that God does not like."

That day at the waterfall, the preacher's voice was nothing but a cacophony of mucho gusto. I loved how he put energy into his words and found it tremendously thrilling. I imagined he would make a great salesperson. But his message? It was the same boring stuff my father preached all the time.

I tell you the truth, the goat and the sheep thing isn't a made-up fable, nor is it by any means figurative. I saw them. They were as clear as the linings in a silver sky. The sheep wore white clothes, had glamour splayed on their faces, and were unworried. On the other hand, the goats had anxiety written all over their faces. They were restless, agitated, sad,

and fed up. I shifted my hands away from my face to see where I stood on the left in a long queue of similar tattered and frail people. "Who will plead my case?" I thought. "What chance do I stand before the great white throne?"

I wiped my tears with the back of my hand and puffed my chest out to look strong. Then I prepared to present my case to God as strongly as possible because He is just, isn't He?

The sound of trumpets bellowed again, and the ground trembled. I felt goosebumps all over my body. My resolve wavered, and I shook. I glanced everywhere but not at the golden city. I focused on the person in front of me. He didn't have to say a word for me to know some basic information about him.

He had worked as a scientist for the Nazis in Auschwitz and subjected Jewish prisoners to cruel and inhumane experiments. Later in life, he worked with a red-label organization. I could sense he became a nuclear scientist and the genius behind a chemical weapon that killed close to a million people. Unfortunately, he died from cardiovascular disease.

I looked behind me and saw a man, a Duke, who had raped teenage girls and tortured his wife. He died from food poisoning.

Even though I didn't do anything nearly as bad, I still felt scared. I told myself I stood a chance, but I wasn't sure if that was true or not. My hands started to sweat, and I



trembled because I was worried about what might happen to me if I didn't survive.

I told myself, "You have a chance." I clenched my fists and tried to comfort myself with these words. I had not killed or raped anyone. I was only a victim of circumstances. I repeated the words until they felt true, but doubt crept in. My palms started to sweat, and I trembled as doubt overwhelmed me. Maybe I didn't have a chance after all.

When I saw Him, my whole spirit was overwhelmed. The trumpets began again; billions at once rent the air of silence as the sounds penetrated my eardrums fiercely. I gasped for breath. I coughed and attempted to breathe, but it was practically impossible. My eyes watered again, and my temperature rose in my clothing. This was the final summons.

The Great One entered in a crescendo of words, voices, and music. Everyone sang in a variety of languages and tones like an orchestra of song that filled the space with notes. Worship poured out, extolling God, who rides on the cloud. Angels dropped to their knees before His feet. Everyone fell before Him, and the winged creatures at the throne flapped their wings harder, adding to the glitter and glamour. Who could resist His glory?

I had heard of the Lord's awesomeness. I had listened to Christians recite lyrics that tried to describe how great God is. They combined metaphors made up of precious

stones such as jasper, gold, silver, and anything else their minds could comprehend, aided by the Holy Spirit.

When I stood before Him, I saw it was impossible to accurately describe the Great and Mighty One. Human language couldn't bring Him to life vividly. The lifting of gates made His coming alone possible, and the pulling down of everlasting doors.

*"Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty— he is the King of glory" (Psalm 24:7–10).*

I kept my head bowed. We all did. The judgment began. It started with people who belonged to the household of faith, the sheep.

People on the left waited without knowing what would happen to them. We had no idea what our fate would be. We only felt a sense of doom, as if we were being punished for something we did wrong. And we knew that this punishment would last forever.

Satan and his assistants moved around in a box on the left side of the room. They were getting ready to condemn us. We saw Satan as we looked at ourselves in the mirror. He had lots of paperwork with each person's name on it. As he shook the files, his flock of winged creatures flapped their arms violently in the air as if enraged.

The great white throne was a courtroom where the passage of time did not change our judgment. There was an oval cubicle overlaid in pure gold. Angels surrounded the cubicle, each wearing an expectant face. In the middle of the table was an elevated throne, on which the Father of Light and Judge of both the living and the dead sat, presiding over the court.

Before Him, a file of books on which the deeds of every person who ever lived were recorded. Each person's life file showed up in a book. In the middle of the cubicle was a brass bowl that bore the Lamb's blood. The blood represented how sheep overcame, destroyed their files with Satan, and found it difficult to take their form.

They obtained the form of Christ and vanquished Satan and his foes using the blood's power. Satan, the attorney, could not bring a charge against any of them. However, in our situation, it was different. It was him versus us; he and his accomplices were eager to accuse us.

When it was my turn, I fought back the urge to break down and cry. I wished I had a defense lawyer. I wished I didn't have to stand before the judgment throne. I wished I had led a normal childhood and was raised by normal, caring parents, attended church services with a clean and open mind, and lived like every other kid. I wished God would see my suffering the way I saw it and experience the bad days the same way I did. I wished God felt the torrents of emotions as I felt them.

I wished any of the twenty-four elders would take a break, alter the hand of the clock, go back to Ohio, and live the life of John Williams from infancy to this present moment. If any elder did that, he'd have no restraint opening the door to the glorious city for me.

I wished I could go back in time and do things differently so I would have a better life. This included having a loving, respectful family where everyone got along. I also wished I hadn't done things that broke my spirit and made me see life differently; if only I could rewrite my story.

"John," the Mighty One spoke through my heart in a peaceful, lovely, powerful yet soft tone, "You have said well."

I trembled as my eyes dilated. The Lord had heard me. He was speaking through me. He was hearing my words. Teeth gnashing, lips quivering, and coughing, I said, "My Lord, I didn't mean to put it that way."

"What claim do you bring to my court today?" the Great One inquired.

I breathed in and out rapidly, blowing air through my mind. This was my chance. This was my chance to defend myself.

"Mm, my Lord, I suffered on Earth. A man shouldn't suffer as much as I did."

"True," the Great One paused.

I counted my breaths as fear gripped me. Again, I must have said something wrong.

He continued, and I exhaled, "But I gave you the chance to live beyond the natural."

I fell silent, my heart roaring against my chest. "I was blinded, my Lord."

"I gave you sight."

"I was lost, my Lord."

"I sent people to show you the Way."

"Was Mrs. Catherine You?"

"The Chester, NY preacher was Me as well."

Mrs. Catherine's words filled my mind again, and I tried not to listen to her. I didn't want to see her smiling face in the rain. But then her image faded away, and she became Winifred, and the memories jabbed me. The shrill voice of the Chester, NY preacher replaced Winifred's soft voice, and I pulled at my ears, screaming in agony.

I was tired and sure of my suffering. So I screamed the words out. They were my reality from childhood. Weren't they the reason I didn't accept Christ? Doubt clung to me, and I shrugged it off.

"Do you know what suffering is?" the Great and Mighty One asked.

For a moment, my heart stopped beating. I puffed my chest and said, "Yes."

"You talked about altering the hand of time. Didn't you?"

"Yes, my Lord," I said and waited for a reply. When none came, I added, my heart now beating faster, "I didn't know my thoughts were that loud."

"Nothing is hidden from Me."

"Every creature is aware of this eternal truth, my Lord."

"Do you also know that with Me, nothing is impossible?"

"In the little time I've spent on this side of the universe, I have rightly observed that all power belongs to You and there is no invariableness."

"You wanted to have time at the tip of your finger. This you will. Being the first of its kind, I pass this verdict to you. You shall return to the Earth. You shall go through seasons. Seven seasons in all. Each season, you shall put on the form of a different person—seven persons in total. Then, you shall return to the solitary room at the end of a season, where you will reflect on your sojourn. Finally, you shall return to court at the end of the seventh season."

I smiled, "Your judgment, my Lord, is forever gracious."

What a session!

## *Seven Seasons of Judgment*

# The First Season

*True Innocents: The Unborn Child Experience*



One minute I was talking to God; the next minute, I felt a strong surge of energy go through me. It was like a knife cutting off my air supply and sending me back into space. Then I wasn't in the room where the Lord's presence exploded.

Whether a baby or a tree, life starts small. For a tree, life usually starts with a single seed, which grows slowly, developing roots and leaves until it becomes a majestic tree with many branches.

For an individual, it all starts in a woman's womb, an environment conducive and safe for the fetus to grow until maturity. I was like a small seed as tiny as the soil in an oven-like place with no air or light, yet, I was comfortable.

I had no legs, eyes, or skin; I was a mass of blood clumps, hoping and praying to live in this comfortable, yet, stagnant place so I could live to my full potential, my purpose. There was no day or night in this gloomy, humid place, and I kept tumbling about. My cries and screams



produced no sound. I wept and wailed, but nothing changed.

Gradually, I grew until I became a fist-sized cluster of blood cells jumbled together.

A sharp tingling hit my ears, and they rang for a long time— a shrill, thin, and sharp sound. There were too many sounds outside of this place called home that I couldn't tolerate. However, I was ecstatic since I could hear again at last.

"Stop it!" Someone screamed from outside. I cowered as I retreated deeper into the space. Suddenly, there was a loud crash and then silence. I trembled. What was going on?

"I'm four weeks pregnant," my mother cried. My body shook with anticipation as this woman's heart pounded as if expecting something. There was silence after that, and my mother's heart rate slowed as she sobbed in agony, flooding my tiny mass of blood and tissues with water; her feelings were mine, and likewise, mine were hers.

Whenever she was happy or afraid, her heartbeat raced erratically, and on days like this, I receded into the corners, afraid to move or shake. And when she was sad or hungry, her energy level drained, and I starved. She was sad and fearful simultaneously, always on the edge, and her heartbeat was erratic. I longed to comfort her in my tiny corner and perhaps tell her to take it easy. Could she not see that whatever she did affected me as well? We shared the same compartment for now. When she ate, I ate. If she drank, I drank too. She ran; I ran—the list was endless.

Unfortunately, my mother never quite reached a state of inner peace, and, as a result, my growth was hindered. The situation deteriorated with each passing moment. I wasn't receiving enough nutrients to meet up with my daily needs. It was five weeks. What was going on? Weren't the people out there happy I was coming? I coiled up further, afraid.

"We are not having a baby now!" another person screamed. My mother's heartbeat rose in tandem as she clutched the compartment that held me and squeezed. Someone kicked this compartment, battering me with an iron-like object. I ran about in agony, but there was no escape. My mother was no longer breathing well; her heartbeat slowed so much I held on to the walls of this compartment, praying for a miracle, even as the kicks reduced in frequency until they ceased. Someone was beating my mother.

"I am that baby's father, and I have the right to decide as well," the other person said.

The pain of rejection can be terrible. It may not be that impactful for fully grown humans since they have many options to pick from. I mean, it's pretty difficult for someone to be rejected by everyone. One person has to accept you and love you for who you are. Yet, I knew only one person, and there was no place to hide, so it was tough to accept I wasn't wanted, even in the space where I grew up.

The events that followed eventually revealed concealed facts. My mother picked herself out of her mire of sadness. Her heart rate returned to normal, and she began moving us about once more. I caught a whiff of affection, and I eased back into my cocoon. My mother started resting well, eating properly, and getting enough sleep. So did I, but the dread never left me. Her devotion screamed insincerity; she was too cheerful, in my opinion.

So, it wasn't a shock when substances that hurt me entered my safe space. Although I didn't know what they were, I had never needed them before, and each time, they hurt me deeply. The purpose of the introduction couldn't be mistaken, the intent misunderstood, or the effects on me forgotten. They wanted to take me out; they tried to kill me.

I plunged into despair. What had I done? Did I do something ignoble or unbecoming? Had I incurred the wrath of anyone from this impasse world of mine? Why did they want me dead? To be rejected was one thing. To live in constant fear of being killed was another. Living with rejection and the fear of being killed is terrible.

I had to learn the hard way. I had to accept living with severe aches all over my unformed body. I learned to silently bear the burden of a crime that wasn't mine. My mother forced me to live under harsh conditions. Even so, I refused to give up hope. I had a mission in life. My mother became agitated and restless; she stopped sleeping and eating at night. It was eight weeks now.

The intent to snuff out my little, dangling light was still strong. But my will to let that light burn, come what may, was much stronger. I had a purpose, and I was going to live. So, the tug of war between life and death lasted. It was twelve weeks.

Hell broke loose each day, but I kept up the good fight. I had a purpose. Twenty-two weeks passed. I couldn't wait to hit the road. A while longer, and my perseverance would pay off.

With no warning, a brilliant light burst in. It was a tiny aperture. Voices were hushed as people conversed outside, but I couldn't understand what they were talking about. Nonetheless, it didn't matter. "I was about to be born soon," I reasoned with delight, squealing and giggling. It was finally time for me to fulfill my purpose.

The opening got wider and wider, and I started seeing images of the outside. For the first time, I saw a picture of a whole person. It was a portly baby who dangled from the wall. How could this be? A man in white robes appeared before me. He moved quickly. "Oh, boy," I thought, "today is your lucky day." To verify my preconception, I looked for proof inside myself. I discovered one clue there. I wasn't fully developed, so what's the big deal?

The man in white would be my right-hand man, meaning he would usher me into life.

"Hello, man in white. I'm good to go. Are you set?"

I longed to hear the man tell my mother to push, but she was sleeping. Her heartbeat was relaxed. She must have been sedated so she wouldn't be aware of what was going on.

"Would I come out through the belly? Was it a C-section? I mean, not everyone goes for a natural birth, right?"

The opening, however, wasn't a cut. It was the natural birth canal. So, I was expecting to see the hands of the doctor reach in and deliver me into this fantastic world.

To my chagrin, I saw a claw-like instrument heading toward me. The man in white needs to be careful; otherwise, he might harm me. To avoid being harmed, I scurried away to the other side of the room, but another tool approached and seized my legs first. I screamed as the plier-like device twisted and contorted until it fractured my bones.

"That hurts. What are you doing to me? Will you please stop?"

Jab.

That was my toe.

I screamed, "My goodness! Will you please stop butchering me? I'm not a chicken. Can't you see?"

Jab.

My right leg was gone.

I resorted to empathy as I wept, but there was no sound besides the man's heavy breathing. Maybe the man would change his mind if I appealed to his emotions. Even if I did, the man wouldn't hear me and certainly would not listen. The pain surging through my body was overwhelming and unbearable as they ripped apart my flesh from tendon to limbs. My thoughts cleared, and I realized I was in a clinic, not a hospital. I was being aborted! I was John Williams, the unborn child who never had a chance to live.

A burst of strength went through me, and I was back in my solitary chamber, sobbing loudly as I yelled in agony, my voice now loud and reverberating throughout the room. His unheard screams echoed in my head like a chiming church bell, tormenting me. And the devastation of being ripped apart overwhelmed me.

"What did he do?" I screamed. My voice was hoarse, and the words echoed back at me.

Nothing.

He was a shining light and a man on a mission. He was to advance the helm of justice and let peace reign. Equipped with an unwinding heart and a mind not easily waved, he was to be an unbiased judge who would fight for the rights of the oppressed and set the captives free, including those wrongfully imprisoned.

I sat in the dark room and recalled the baby who was murdered—death by detachment—my chest hurting from anguish and my throat raw from sobbing. If I were God, I

would deal severely with the parents and those involved as accomplices. Those individuals had minds that were more banal than any animal.

Comparing my experiences as the unborn child to my life, I saw parallels. He didn't have a chance, but I did. His pain was unavoidable. They murdered the unborn child in cold blood. I could have prayed to God for protection and healing. The unborn child could not pray and was not protected. However, the child will be in heaven. As for me, well, we have to wait and see.

# The Second Season

## *Experiencing the Man with a Smile*



Once again, my spirit departed my body. This time, I was in a man's body. Let's call him Albert. Unlike the baby, who wasn't allowed to fulfill his purpose, I was in a man, and I knew I was in him. Our souls merged so that I could see life through his eyes and experience his pain. Unlike every other man, Albert, a short, wiry man with a limp in his left leg, was not desired by anyone. He was thin and pale, and although he was thirty years old, he appeared much older. No one treated him with sincerity, and that itself agitated my spirit. I was in the body of a man no one loved or cared about, and I could do nothing about his situation.

Albert was a sharecropper in Mississippi. He worked hard on the land every day, but he never got anything out of it. The landlord would give him a set amount of money, no matter what happened. As the landlord got rich, Albert became weak and tired. Eventually, he was sent away with nothing because he couldn't afford to stay anymore.



Albert worked hard and eventually bought some land to farm on. However, that year, a huge flood ruined all his crops. Albert was forced to sell the farm and served under a cruel, mean Hispanic boss. The boss would hit Albert every day while he worked. Albert did this for seven years until he saved enough money to move to Michigan and start his own grocery store.

Fortunately for Albert, the store he started in downtown Detroit became prosperous. Albert's yellowish-white skin glowed under the influence of money, and soon he saw a woman whose heart he longed for—Rose.

Rosaline was a petite woman with green eyes and dark black hair who charmed Albert; he soon ordered her flowers from France to win her affection. She succumbed to him before the season ended, and they were married at the church downtown. They had three children: Michael and the twins.

However, on the twin's fifth birthday, tragedy struck. After working hard the night before to prepare for the twin's party, he woke up in the morning to the news from his closest friend and employee, Alvaro, that his store was robbed over the weekend and burned to the ground.

The following Monday, Albert had already spoken to his insurance carrier about the tragedy. His agent reviewed what happened and explained how much the insurance covered. They submitted a claim. The next day, the insurance firm sued Albert because they claimed he had

maliciously set fire to the business to profit from them. Alvaro, his employee and friend, testified against him in court and said that he saw Albert burn down the store. It didn't take long for everyone in the street to brand Albert as a desperate and dangerous person.

He sold his house for a cheap price and took his family with him. He drove to his old friend's house, who lived in Oklahoma, in an old truck that served as both a temporary home and a way to get around. But after two days, they had to leave because the friend's house was too small. His wife was forced to move back to her parents' house with the kids, and Albert went to his parents' home in Florida. But his father called him aside that night and said in a stern voice, "Son, you can't stay here. We're barely scraping by."

The next day, he left his hometown back to Rose's parents' house. They weren't just wealthy, but they also lived in a large house, where he prayed he might stay with his family for a few days until he could get back on his feet; he could also get a loan. However, they were angry about the situation and sent him away in the middle of the night, leaving him with nowhere to go. So he returned to the only other area he knew in downtown Detroit, to see what he could possibly accomplish at the location of his former store.

The store was rebuilt and had a new owner, Alvaro, the same employee who falsely accused him of fraud three weeks after the fire. Albert went to see Alvaro that night to ask why. Albert questioned Alvaro, his lips quivering in response to the power of the words.

In a hooded jacket, he sat opposite the man who had taken away everything he'd worked for, and yet all he could say was, "Why?" There was so much to say, but that one word mattered. He raised his voice once again, this time barely above a murmur.

"Why, Alvaro?" He removed the hood, revealing his small face, that had become saggy over the last few days. He touched Alvaro, who refused to turn after hearing the familiar voice.

"Alvaro, why?" Alvaro walked away faster without saying a word. The next day, Alvaro filed charges against Albert in the local court for attempted murder. Alvaro made a false claim that Albert tried to kill him, but his dog saved his life. Unfortunately for Alvaro, fate was not on his side this time, and he lost the case.

Albert, on the other hand, chose not to sue Alvaro in court. He decided to leave it all up to God. Because I was part of Alberto, I was angry at this decision and thought Albert was an idiot, lunatic, and weak. He was desperate, but he still had a smile on his face.

Albert eventually took a job in a factory. He went in with an open mind and was willing to learn. The operations manager valued him highly because he had been taught all his life to trust in the good and give everyone a chance. As a result, everyone admired Albert because he was kindhearted and helpful.

They got Albert to take on the position of a regional manager because of his honorable conduct. He did not let them down. He performed his duties with the same enthusiasm and diligence that he began with. But soon, jealous co-workers devised a plot against him. They charged Albert with money laundering, and a local judge sentenced him to seven years in jail for a crime he did not commit. In addition, his wife, hearing of the news, filed for divorce.

Albert was released from prison when he was 37 years old. His wife had moved back to Detroit, but she was married to someone else, and his kids no longer acknowledged him as their father. He had nowhere to go and no one to help him. He was very unhappy to work. I was angry with all of the people involved in his situation, but there wasn't anything I could do. I knew everything about the guy, but it didn't make me feel any better. God allowed this to happen for a reason. In one life, I was John Williams; in the other, I was the man whose thoughts made me very angry. He nodded his head and accepted everything that happened to him calmly. I wanted to fight for his rights, but I couldn't do anything because I didn't have a voice. His voice was mine, but I couldn't control what he did.

I needed to take his body and descend on Alvaro, giving him the beating of his life, but my legs wouldn't move on my command.

I did nothing because I was powerless to help this man, Albert, who had been forced to survive on the streets and

beg for money. My fury increased with time, and I came to despise the individual himself, his smile and apparent dim-witted behavior that got him into trouble. Alvaro deserved what he was going to get, but I couldn't do anything about it. So instead, I began telling people about the man no one wanted every time someone walked past him. Although I was aware she couldn't hear me, a youngster once dropped a dollar bill in the man's bag, and I began again.

"Life, my pretty angel, doesn't always give you what you deserve. Everyone who knew this man who is begging for your penny rejected him. You should count yourself lucky."

She walked by without looking back.

A woman walked past me without a glance as she ate a hot dog. I called out to her, "Can't you see this man needs some money?" But she didn't listen. Over time, I just watched and flowed with the situation.

I wondered what would happen to us as the weather turned to winter and before the clouds changed to gray. I had concerns and desired answers. Where would we get clothing and warmth? Would anybody who passed be charitable enough to offer shelter?

I felt worried because I didn't get any answers to my questions. I didn't know how we would be able to survive in the open. The weather was getting colder, but Albert stayed positive and greeted strangers with enthusiasm. Then, suddenly, Albert's spirit left him, and I, John

Williams, remained in the body, as if it were my turn to take action.

"What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, only turmoil" (Job 3:25).

Finally, I could communicate with other people and be heard. I could go wherever I wanted. I was free from the trap. But someone else's happiness was taken away for my freedom. After spending a few months as a spectator inside his body, another thought lingered in me—revenge. It was finally time to pay a visit to Alvaro.

I dusted my dirty clothes and walked the short distance to Alvaro's home. The wind had gathered and was blowing hard. I needed to do what was right: fight for what was rightfully his. I sneaked into the house through the window. My heart seemed to stop when I saw Alvaro asleep on a sofa. That made me angry; I had endured the cold of the nights, my teeth chattering, while he was there in front of the fireplace, resting on a couch and dozing off. My fisted hands shook from the cold and my fury. I tapped his head, and he sat up, his eyes widening as recognition dawned on them.

I replied in a mocking tone, "Your time is up."

Alvaro asked, "What do you mean by that?"

I smirked and said, "Don't you speak English? I told you your time was up."

Alvaro said, "You don't want to do this. I have six cameras in this room; you can't get away with it."

"Thank you for that piece of information," I said, not afraid and unbothered by the new information. Clearly, he thought I was the same Albert he knew, the one who took nothing to heart. He was mistaken. I laughed again and attacked him, venting my disappointment, misery, and anger at him.

I thought of my previous journeys, taunts, and Albert's family. I had nothing to lose. So I kicked him with all my might. As Alvaro's wife (Albert's ex-wife) hovered at the edge of the room, her terror grew greater, becoming more intense as she gazed at me beating up her husband. She saw me pummeling him.

"Why?" I asked. "Why did you abandon him, your lawfully married husband, for a moron who cost him his business through lies? Why did you go after a guy who shattered your family?"

Rose yelled as she moved closer, "Get away from me, you lunatic!"

Alvaro staggered to his feet, bloodied, yet, desperate for revenge. He charged at me like an angry bull. I saw him coming out of my peripheral vision. I knew if he hit me, it would probably send me reeling and writhing in pain. But I couldn't move. Rose's words played over and over in my head until they became a loud symphony. I couldn't lift a finger. Alvaro descended on me like a starving tiger. When

he couldn't get any more pleasure out of me, he hurled me out of his home into the snow.

Rose stood in the doorway. She stared at me for a long moment before slamming the door shut and retreating inside. She never returned my gaze. I felt a strange sensation in my heart. The power of love moved through me and warmed the tears on my frozen cheek. I considered love to be a feeling. I believed it was based on the sight and majesty of things. Love, I thought, was confined to the teenage years and limited to the indigo sky of adulthood. My assumptions were incorrect. I did not know what love was because I had never experienced it in my entire life.

I prayed for someone to help me, but no one came. I knew the man I was with had lost the battle. He held on to happiness and life and refused to let them take his joy away. Even though his friends had abandoned him, his parents rejected him, and his wife and three kids had deserted him, he fiercely guarded his joy and made sure that no circumstances in the world robbed him of it. In fact, he overcame life despite living in a society where there was no love or compassion for him; he did not want to be defined by it.

"They have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, and no mercy" (Romans 1:31).

I struggled to my feet, ignoring the pain. With considerable effort, I continued with the man's life. Winter's cutting cold was far more distressing than Alvaro's fists and



a dozen times more devastating than my love story that had gone sour. I believed I would pass out from the cold.

"Death, when will you embrace me?" I cried, screaming at no one in particular.

"I can't bear this cold a second longer."

"Please let me have just five minutes of warmth, and I will be grateful for eternity. Please let me sleep in a cozy bed for just one night, and I will thank you forever."

Yet, nothing changed. On winter nights when the icy wind paralyzed me, I thought about his children, who rejected him, and their mother, who slammed the door in my face.

I remember the day she called me a lunatic. But that didn't stop me from getting up every morning. Christmas came with its dazzling lights, but I was alone in the streets until a fever took hold of my body. That evening, my warm soul departed my beaten body as I lay outside on the icy sidewalk, having lived the life of the man with a smile.

Sharp pains assaulted my body again, and I was back in the solitary room. The person whose life I was blessed to live was a treasure. He had his heart set on God. Every day, he smiled at tough times and carried the cross over his body. He devoted his life to worshipping God. His heart sang hymns and melodies in his mind, and he raised his hands in praise. He rejoiced when it looked like his beliefs would suffer more rejection, but even though his life was worthless, he still lived for God.

I wanted to scream, shout, or cry, but I had no energy. So instead, I coiled up in the corner of the solitary room and stared into empty space. As I thought about the man's life, I trembled.

Everything he did was done with the best of intentions and in the most polite way possible. He was that guy whose life was devoted to pleasing the One from whom he was created, as well as the people placed on his route by God in His infinite mercy. He bore immense pain throughout his entire life, yet his smile never faded.

I had endured most of my suffering growing up, but I blamed God for it every second of my life. As understanding washed over me with dread, I shook again. There might be a chance for me; then I trembled even more.

# The Third Season

## *The Young Soldier's Experience*



As I was reliving the pain over and over, my spirit once again left me, and I was in the body of a young, abused boy. Unlike my previous experiences. I could only watch and wait as he was mercilessly beaten.

The boy, young David, hacked and coughed as he gasped for breath while his father continued to strike him. He put up his hands in surrender and said, "I'm sorry, Daddy. I won't say no to a fight ever again." He heaved until he couldn't breathe anymore.

But on this particular occasion, young David had initially refused to fight. As a result, his father hit him in front of his mother until he complied. The fights were scheduled every Saturday when the father came from the local tavern, usually drunk beyond standing. With a beer bottle in his hand, the father would call his twin boys into the living room. He would usually place an open beer bottle against the wall at a 45° angle and leave six empty bottles around it.

He would sit in the rickety reclining chair, front and center, by the fireplace, eyes red, enormous stomach protruding and quaking, while his knees shook. The youngsters would stand before him at arms' length, so he could easily hit them if required.

He would start with a disgusting burp, his eyes straying to his wife, the boy's mother, who peeped from the door with a void expression on her heavily bruised face. The event was neither new nor unusual. So each time, she stood at that door, face blank and body trembling, as she watched her husband order her twin boys to beat each other to death at the command of their father.

Every weekend, Daniel, the slightly bigger of the twins, would win. This would cause wounds to form on young David's body until his skin became a map of his shattered soul. Their mother was powerless, no matter what occurred. Every day, the man would beat her with abandon for minor faults as if she were a punching bag. She shrank in her frumpy clothing; her matted hair thinned out; her sagging face aged, and the scars on her body increased. Her purple back represented an image of sorrowful harmony made up of many beating scars that merged to form an exquisite representation of desolation. She was helpless and could do nothing about the weekly battering of her sons.

The following weekend, after the father beat young David, the stakes changed, and the boys trembled in helplessness as they rushed to their mother. "Mommy, we

don't want to fight today. We don't want to fight. Can we just go outside and play with each other?"

Daniel's eyes glistened with tears as he glanced at young David's swollen eyes and immediately looked back at their mom. She drew the boys closer to her bosom as the tears fell in torrents, and shook her head. She embraced them tightly and, without provocation, pushed them away. The two boys staggered back to the living area, their bodies dripping with sadness.

Their father laughed when he saw they didn't want to fight. He knew they were scared. Then he said, "The stakes have changed." He paused and coughed. "Whoever loses today's fight will have to battle me." He picked up a beer bottle from the floor and took a large swig. He stood up and spat the beer on the boys. Then he drew an imaginary line in front of them and said, "The battle line is drawn."

Young David attacked his brother as soon as he could, remembering the beatings from the previous week. Even though he had never beaten his brother in a fight, he felt compelled to do so now. He couldn't face fighting his father again, no matter what happened, so he threw punch after punch at an unconscious level, obsessed with wondering what would happen if he lost again.

But Daniel was scraped, and he fell to his knees, clutching young David's arm. Daniel coughed up blood as he battled to rouse his brother out of his frenzy. Daniel was

too locked in a panic to defend himself against him, and he became reliant on a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

The twins grew older; they never spoke to each other again after their father's death. No matter how much young David attempted to communicate with his brother, Daniel remained silent while gazing ahead into space and ignoring him.

This grief led young David to paint, telling the tale of his emotional, physical, and mental abuse through each brush stroke. The paintings showed a boy whose life was a nightmare. Monsters who chased him in dark corridors haunted his dreams, demanding his flesh and life. The monster was the stranger who kept combing his hair in a distressed manner. The strange man seemed disturbed by it as well. But then again, he wasn't furious, just frightened that no one could understand him or that they might think he was like them. He had this sensation before whenever someone new entered his life. It felt as if everything was spinning out of control, yet, at the same time, there was something comforting about it all.

Young David had nightmares about a monster whose face morphed into his twin brother's. The nightmare always ended with screams of "Why have you broken me for life?" Sometimes, the monster appeared as his mother, crying silently for help. And on rare occasions, it appeared as his father, laughing in that crooked way and telling him he was just like him. On most nights, when he awoke, breathless

from these dreams, the boy rushed to paint, making heavy and light strokes in a flurry of emotions.

"They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them" (Romans 2:15).

When he was eighteen, the form for the US army was published. Young David enlisted when he ran away from home. He broke all of his paintings to break free from who he was becoming. Then he went to his brother's room and knelt in front of him with the enlistment letter. Daniel read it carefully for a long time before slowly shaking his head no. As they made eye contact again, his twin said softly, "Never come back to this hole. Run! Run far!"

Young David soon turned into a young soldier, and that soldier became a man.

As he raced toward the base, two feet at a time, rumbling thunder and lightning lit up the horizon. Bullets were carried deep into targets by torrents of wind. The moaning and screams of the soldiers were heard in every direction. David ran as a bullet passed him, Bullet-dented bodies scattered across the ground, and the man in front of him dropped dead. He stepped on the lifeless body as he rushed forward; it was critical to reach the base without being killed.

David finally reached the top of the base, beaming with pride as he ran the last few strides before a bullet shattered

his shoulder. He made his way to the doctor on duty, who immediately doused him with disinfectant without notice. In anguish, David rose from his seat and convulsed in pain, his muscles and veins swollen.

The doctor said, "I'm sorry, but I'm not going to give you anesthesia. I'll give you something to make you sleep instead." The doctor stitched the young soldier while he screamed. The soldier's view blurred, and he fell unconscious.

The next morning, David was no longer inside his own body. Instead, I was alone in the body of the young soldier. As I considered all of the challenges I would face while in this new body, dread rose up within me. For a long time, I looked at my reflection in the mirror, examining each scar and shuddering at the scars on my new skin. The flesh on this body was engorged with fresh welts, both purple and dry ones, which represented his painful journey.

As soon as my shoulder healed, I was rushed back out on another mission. I was part of a Special Forces team sent to the Kalahari Desert to confront a band of militants who were residing in the wilderness. It didn't make sense that terrorists would be hiding in the Kalahari jungle because it's so dangerous due to landmines and predators. It was said that no soldier had ever emerged from the forest alive. Ten of us were sent there, nonetheless.

When we got close to the jungle, I had a panic attack. I said, "I'm not going into that jungle." The commander



looked at me and then away. He didn't want to deal with me. The other fighters agreed with me. They were scared too. But when the commander told us to keep moving, I asked him if we could wait one day before going in. He said no and went into the jungle anyway.

The woods were thick with many different trees of various heights, and, from time to time, the wailing of wolves was heard. A soldier emerged from behind me and gently patted my shoulder. "Thank you for rescuing me."

I looked at him empathetically. We both knew what was happening; this could be our last conversation.

"I did nothing." I smiled softly. "I only saved a wounded soldier. You would have done the same had the roles been reversed."

"Still, thank you," the soldier said as we both stood up.

I had a feeling I wouldn't make it out of the jungle alive. With every step, that feeling grew stronger. I was exhausted from walking for 72 hours straight, and the cold was so piercing it made my teeth rattle. Our clothing blended with the surroundings so well that we moved like graceful lions. Every step was critical, and we needed to be careful not to make any noise. We were walking on "landmines," and anything could happen at any moment.

## Captured and Tortured

The sound of gunshots pierced the air. I heard a rifle, and something hit me. I blacked out. When I woke up, I was in a dark room. Someone threw a bucket of water at me, and the cold water made me shiver. I tried to stand up but couldn't because the pain in my calf was so bad.

"I don't want to waste your time and mine," my captor said seriously. "I know you American soldiers can be stubborn, but let's not make this hard." My captor signaled with his index finger as he said, "I will ask you one question. And you will provide the answer."

I stared at him expectantly, and fear crawled further up my spine with each passing second.

"Where can I find the M6 explosive?" he asked. I looked at him in confusion. I had never heard of that before. "I'll give you the benefit of the doubt," my kidnapper said as he raised his hands. He yelled so loudly that his voice shook the basement. Other captives were visible behind him. In a rage, he dealt me a blow to the stomach.

"The finger, my captor said, showing me a box I didn't know was there, "was not designed to go through pain." He ran his hands over the box as he talked. "I believe you are aware of this, soldier."

I nodded.

He grabbed a sledgehammer from the box and, with the metal head, went to work on my body. He ran it over my skin and then stopped at my finger. He placed my thumb on an iron plate and delivered a blow. Bolts of agony shot through me like high-voltage electricity. It pulsed through my veins and made me shake violently. I could barely hold back the tears in my voice as I yelled and cried out. The door slammed shut and locked, and my captor punched me.

The pain was unbearable. My lips wouldn't cooperate when I tried to speak. He struck me again, and I screamed. I saw myself in hell, screaming in agony, "I can't take this any longer. I can't."

"Where can I get my hands on the M6 explosive?" he asked, striking harder.

The rain pounded down on me, and my body turned into a pillar of fire. My flesh burned in the rain; yet, I remained frozen. All at once, I was both hot and cold.

"How about I smash all your fingers, soldier?"

I couldn't speak or take the torture anymore. My captor untied me and pushed me to the ground. Then uniformed men descended on me and started pounding me. It felt like I was dead for a moment, but the pain told me I was still alive. They hung me upside down on a pole and tied my hands and legs together. They lowered me into a boiling pot of water over and over. My body was scalding while I was also drowning. They considered my silence as resistance, so they tortured me until I died.

*"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).*

I was back in my solitary room as soon as I gave up the ghost. And all I could think about was the young soldier's life, from birth to his adult years, which were filled with violence, especially the constant guilt he must have felt for crippling his brother.

We both had unfair and suffering childhoods, but my experiences failed in comparison. I know. I just lived his life.

He had a tremendous tolerance for pain at all levels. But the suffering he went through as a POW was simply too much for any human being. He would not go down as an unsung hero. His name would not be listed among the fallen. He would not be honored with medals of valor and presented with neatly folded flags; he did not deserve his body's final resting place.

# The Fourth Season

## *Experiencing a Slave on the Run*



I was in deep thought about my experiences thus far when a familiar feeling began to stir in my body. The suffering of these season are weighing me down, and I don't know how much more I can take, and I still have four more to go.

This time I was in the body of a man running for his life away from a farm. His name was Ja, and he was tired of working in the fields and getting whipped. He wanted to be free. The wind blew through the corn field, and the leaves rustled as he kept running, not stopping to catch his breath. This was his chance to escape. His skin was brown like gold, and he wasn't supposed to be a slave. His master cared more about his dogs than him.

He ran quickly through the endless corn field. He had worked in it every day for the past eight years, but now it seemed so much bigger. Even though they were slaves and tended to different areas of land, He always thought the end of the property was where he could see with his own eyes.

But as he ran, he realized that wasn't true. The end of the property was much farther away than he thought. And

even though part of me wanted to believe he would be free from Mr. Thompson's land soon, another part of me knew that wasn't true.

Ja thought about the ocean and how he couldn't wait to go home to his father's property. There, he wouldn't have to worry about people looking at his scar, and he could go to school and eat like other kids.

## **Recalling Captivity**

Ja's father was a well-respected chief in Africa; his mother was a successful trader, and their family had no shortage of the necessities of life. That's why his father would never have sold him. His sister Je and he went to elementary school in the morning and retired to their mother's store in the evening. There, they ate delicious food like steaming pap and bananas dipped in fresh, glistening palm oil while counting stones. They completed their schoolwork with the open-flamed lanterns that they occasionally used while gathering insects.

As the last child of his father, Ja was the disobedient one who got into trouble every time. He was causing havoc, starting disturbances, or simply being a participant in the mayhem. He would rather stay at school to play with the other boys than accompany his sister to her store. The other boys and Ja would play until the crows went to sleep, until the twilight fell and night prevailed. But one time, they didn't go home.

They were all captured and put into a large vehicle. More than fifty people were crammed together in the vehicle. They were taken away from their little African village and exchanged for money. Then, they were put on a ship with many other people. The boys and Ja huddled together, trying to stay warm. Their chains clanked against each other as they shivered from the coldness of the sea.

They were kidnapped and taken to a place where they would be either murdered or made to work hard alongside other people of different skin colors. They were all shackled together. Each morning, they would be escorted outside where they could urinate, and then they would return inside and be fed only water at set intervals.

On this ship, Ja encountered an old woman, Ka, from his hometown. She and her 14-year-old daughter were kidnapped while on their way to the farm. Because of his well-known stubbornness, she recognized Ja, and on that boat, they all became like family.

They all told stories from the village to raise their spirits, but by the seventh day without food, their throats were sore. They escorted the young girl, Ko, into the ship captain's chamber each night. One day, they threw her into the river. The Captain said Ko cried too much and was uncooperative, so he smacked her with a club. That day marked the end of the old woman's speech until they departed Africa for the white man's territory. She would gaze into space for hours, clutching her breasts.

## **A different kind of mark: Branded like cattle**

When Ja was purchased, he was lined up with other enslaved people. They were all naked and waited for someone to pick them up. They were commodities and looked at as nothing by white masters who filled the purchasing area. They would banter until they agreed on who to buy. Usually, grown men were bought first.

The chains were tight and dug into Ja's body as he was forced to stand up straight. I couldn't believe what was happening as I watched through the eyes of Ja. They were being treated like livestock, even though some were respected members of their communities who had been kidnapped.

I felt Ja's hunger because he hadn't eaten well for months. But these people didn't care. They were treated like animals being bought and sold in the market.

When Ja's owner arrived, I was still confused about what had happened. I watched as a white guy with bright green eyes, long blond hair in a ponytail, and a hefty physique pointed at Ja. I felt Ja's terror because he, like me, didn't know what it meant. His owner looked at Ja so intensely that I felt he could see right through Ja and see me. It was unsettling.

Ja was so exhausted that he just fell to the ground. The white man didn't say anything at first; he just looked at Ja. I could see he was trying to figure out what to do with Ja.



Finally, he sighed and came over to where Ja was sitting. "Stand up!" he ordered.

The seller held something in his hand that I couldn't identify. Ja was guided from the stall like a horse. The buyer shook his head and whispered something to the seller. They pointed at Ja, smacked their lips, and then the buyer gave something else to the seller. The seller beamed as he beckoned for a slave to approach him. To conclude the transaction, they branded him with their property rights mark on his cheek.

I had seen other slaves go through the cruel branding ordeal. I had watched them cry out in pain, and I had shed a few tears for their sakes. But even though it made me shudder to hear their screams, it was not my pain. Now, it was my turn. Although Ja was being branded, I would also suffer the pain as well. Some men grabbed Ja and held him down. Ja yelled and cried for help as a red-hot iron traced a line across his cheek. I felt the hot branding iron as it was embedded in Ja's skin.

The agony of the heat, the iron's intensity, the threatening grips of my buyers, and madam Ka's despair as she shouted at Ja while they passed by her stall haunted me whenever I closed my eyes. My mentality was perpetually affected.

"Ja, do not allow them to take your spirits from you. You are a man. Do not let them take that away."

The words echoed in my heart each and every day of occupying this boy's body during the eight years of slavery. The words from Madam Ka gave Ja the courage to plan his escape when the time was right. If he could just dash past the field, he would be free in no time.

### **Returning to the beginning of the story**

This is what is happening to Ja at the beginning of the story. He was fleeing from his master's property with scars on the side of his face.

Footsteps approached, and Ja dashed about in a zigzag pattern, fleeing like a crocodile across an endless expanse; no matter what, Ja would not allow himself to be captured. He would rather die than be enslaved and returned back to his abusive master.

Ja was running down a rocky trail when he tripped and fell over a stone. Immediately, he got up and continued running. But then, two people grabbed him from behind. They pulled him back, even though Ja tried to keep going. After several people grabbed him, I sensed that Ja knew it was all over and he couldn't escape. He had to stay and be a slave. Madam Ka was incorrect in saying that men were only slaves if they believed they were. But in the end, didn't they continue to be slaves? Ja closed his eyes as he succumbed to the beatings that left him unconscious.

## **Ja's spirit has left me**

I woke up and found myself chained to a stake with other slaves gathered around me. Ja has left this body to me, and I must continue to suffer what he would have suffered.

I had injuries on my hands; my body was in pain, and I closed my eyes tightly. I refused to cry; if I was going to die, it would be like a man. Just like my master's son, who came from time to time to visit the plantation. My voice had become deeper, just like his; my body was going through the same changes as his, so I refused to feel anything less. I no longer wanted to lose my spirit, no matter what happened.

This was not the first time a slave had tried to escape, so the punishment was not new to me. I knew the master would come, and they would whip me one hundred times before being allowed to die. And yet, as the long, shrill sound of the gong that usually awakened us filled the place, fear crept into my heart.

The sound of a gong was used to wake us all up at 5 a.m. If we didn't get up and start working, we were punished. At 3 p.m., the gong would sound again. It meant it was time for an hour lunch break. At 9 p.m., the gong would sound once more, signaling it was time to stop working.

There was also another time when the gong would sound, and we were terrified because it meant our master was nearby and we would be in danger. They also used the

gong as a signal for punishment if any of the slaves did something wrong. When the gong sounded three times in a row, it meant someone was going to be punished, usually with death.

I was thinking about my master's words as he spoke. I realized his words were becoming a part of my life. I heard the sound of the crowd growing louder, and I knew that my master was already there. He saw me, and I had to think fast about what to say to him. Should I beg? Should I make up a story about why I needed something? My mind raced through several possibilities, but as soon as my master reached the arena and moved into the place where I would be hung, his words refused to leave my mind. He approached me and looked at me with anger. He took out his pocketknife and addressed the other slaves in a thick accent.

"I care for my slaves, and I treat them well. Every day, I give them a loaf, but this one is different. This one has made the mistake of wasting my money by attempting to run away. Look at him; notice how he looks at me." His brows furrowed as he spoke. "You never listen to the advice I give you, no matter how much I tell you not to run away." He climbed onto the podium and ran the knife over my skin. Its chill against the morning cold shocked me. "As a reminder to pay attention, I will remove this one's left ear." He amputated my left ear. After that, the other slaves wrapped it up, and they dubbed me Ja, the slave with only one ear.

I was a dog who only wanted to please my master. All I could do was cry out in pain while my master looked at me with what appeared to be sadness. Then I rebelled. I refused to listen to anyone, and I made a promise never to give up my spirit again. Even though I was a dog, I deserved respect and the same rights as other people. No one talked about it, but deep down inside, I knew that I could do anything my master could do. I also served a purpose.

"When you open your hand, you satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing" (Psalm 145:16).

I was living, and I contributed to the universe. I existed and thought, and I could feel. My unconscious mind learned how to communicate with others. This made me self-aware. I started to think differently than before, which caused problems with my master. He became harsher toward me because of it.

He whipped me, beat me, crushed me, grated me, and chopped me. He wanted to break my spirit. He tied me to a tree and left me there for days. He fed me just enough bread to keep me from dying. He needed me to stay alive so that other slaves would be scared. No one wanted to get near me because I was like a virus. I worked so hard that my master couldn't easily replace me, or so I thought.

I was working in the field early in September when my master came to me with a group of men following close behind. As they got closer, I raised my head from digging the ground to see them. Some had long poles with curved

ends, while others were carrying clubs. One man rode on horseback, armed with a shiny blade. As they drew closer, my skin puckered with goosebumps.

I had never seen such an angry crowd in the fields before, and my heart started beating quickly. I knew I had done nothing wrong, but I sensed the group was coming for me.

The young, white lady I had seen with the master's son a few times walked ahead of the men, and she looked happy. I would have paused to admire her beautiful white skin, her waistline, and her grey eyes, but the people behind her scared me, so I returned to digging in silence.

I looked up and saw a young woman that appeared to be pregnant. She was looking in my direction and pointing. My heart raced as I prepared to run. It wasn't every day a white lady comes to the farm with men and pointed at a slave. I didn't know what would happen, but I knew it wouldn't be good.

The men who were with her looked very angry, and they came over to me. I turned around and ran away from them as fast as I could. I didn't know where I was going, but I had to get away from them. The mob was getting closer and closer to me, and they were getting more excited.

The speed and anger were confusing. They threw stones at me and shouted. A rider on a horse stopped the other slaves from helping me; they ran away in fear. Blows hit my head, and I couldn't breathe. My ribs broke, and my lungs collapsed. I was beaten all over my body—and my

soul. A white horseman grabbed me as the others rushed at me. I was terrified and didn't know what would happen next. Would they kill me? Torture me? I could only wait and see.

I was barely alive and covered in blood when I stood. I saw men who looked as tall as trees, and I fell back. Someone held me down while they tied my legs to a cart. The cart galloped, and they dragged me along while dust, debris, and shame entered my sores.

I was injured and barely alive. The cart stopped abruptly, and they dragged and tied me to a tree. Now, I was standing in front of a council of white men, including my master and the young pregnant lady.

I closed my eyes and surrendered to the pain as they accused me of raping her. I knew I was innocent, but they didn't believe me. I kept quiet as they examined her. Paralyzed by fear, I couldn't run or hide. If only they knew the truth, but how could I tell them that this body I inhabited was sterile and couldn't have possibly gotten her pregnant? I remained silent. The young lady's father had already decided my fate. There was no turning back now.

It was no surprise I was pronounced guilty, and they would hang me by the neck until I was dead. As the noose tightened, the rough fibers scratched my skin, and the knot dug into my flesh. The rope cut off my air supply, and everything started to spin. I was going to die. But before my soul breathed its last breath, I remembered Madam Ka's

words: "Ja, do not allow them to take your spirits from you. You are a man. Do not let them take that away."

I was suddenly brought back to the solitary room without Ja's body, but still struggling to breathe from the rope choking me. However, his memories and life were still mine. I sobbed loudly and uncontrollably. I had to go through the agony of his death. I had to endure the lack of food and the inhumanity. How could people treat others so callously? It made me angry and sad all at once. I felt helpless. I could do nothing to change the situation.

Yes, Ja, the son of a king, was persecuted like an animal and treated as one. And why? Was his skin so dark it diminished him to a lesser human being? Was he so repulsive they made him into a tool of labor rather than a person? Was it his skin color or the disposition of people's hearts that caused him to be lonely?

What does this tell us about our society, if this is true? That we are heartless people who value power and money above human kindness. I refuse to believe that. Something must be lacking for things like this to happen. Society needs to change so that everyone is treated equally, no matter their skin color or where they come from.

But then I remembered something Mrs. Catherine always used to say: "You can't change the world, you must change yourself." I didn't think I could do that, but I decided to try. I resolved the fact that I grew up rejected and



unloved, so I rejected everyone because that is all I ever knew.

The words from Ka will remain with me for eternity.

"Ja, do not allow them to take your spirit from you. You are a man. Do not let them take that away."

*"All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3).*

# The Fifth Season

## *Experiencing Unfaltering Faith in God*



This time, I was in a Jewish woman's body. At first, I was shocked to see the curves in the body I had taken over. But my surprise soon gave way to confusion. I knew myself as a woman, and being in another person's body scared me. But becoming a woman's body terrified me even more. However, despite all of this, the woman's form soon became my own. I was able to understand her past, as though I was reading her life story, but soon I would inhabit her body and experience everything that happened to her firsthand.

The woman's behavior confused me a lot. She was with her countrymen, but they were being held back by forces from other countries. They were all packed together, but she still had faith in her heart that everything would be okay. I was amazed that, in spite of her circumstances, she had so much confidence and faith.

She was more curious than fearful, despite her piercing eyes. This woman had suffered many hardships in life but refused to be labeled as a victim. She was quiet and mature. She moved swiftly and spoke softly. She sounded like a little

boy with his pet cat. Her wonderful and loving spirit always believed, forever hoped, and was willing to forgive. She had lost her husband and two children—devastating situations that would adversely affect most individuals. But the Jewish woman remained strong.

Her husband died after five years of marriage, and left her as a young widow and mother of two active boys. She mourned in the Lord, as she had been instructed in the synagogue as a child. Being the only daughter necessitated double dedication, according to her father, who was a rabbi in the synagogue.

She always wanted to be like Esther in the Bible and have a strong relationship with God. Esther was someone who believed her sense of selfhood came from Christ. She was willing to stand up for what she believed in, even when things were tough. Esther saved the Jews from death in a foreign land.

I wished I had known her name. One was not made known to me, and perhaps it was because God wanted her to represent all suffering Jewish women. However, this woman loved David, the man after God's heart. God affirmed him and said he was a man just like Him. It surprised her that even though David had killed many people in battle, God still loved him and thought he was special. But it was clear that these two famous people had gone through many tough times. David battled Goliath, and Esther confronted evil, supernatural forces in Shushan.

When this young Jewish woman's husband died of an illness just after their fifth wedding anniversary, she thought it was for the best. She believed God was trying to teach her something important. Every night, while weeping for the loss and pain in her heart, she filled the void left by the death of her spouse with Scripture while clutching tightly to her children as she smiled with hope.

However, there was only so much pain she could bear before breaking down completely. A year after her husband's death, just when she could sleep without prescription medications, tragedy reared its ugly head again.

Her two sons caught the flu that year and died. She lost three family members in a short period of time because of the pandemic. The pain of losing her sons and loved ones was so unbearable it threw her into a psychological crisis. She stopped going to the synagogue and roamed the streets searching for her kids, talking to herself, and screaming.

At last, she emerged from her bubble, praising God with all her being. She was a hero who sacrificed everything for those she loved. She never gave up praying or petitioning God for the strength to cope. The Bible was her only comfort, and Job's story was her favorite and most relatable in Scripture. She found the courage to get out of bed every day and had faith she would be fully healed.

She didn't give up when a foreign country invaded her nation and killed and imprisoned many people. As a

captive, she fearlessly spread optimism among the other prisoners. They mistook it for her crazy episodes.

She didn't care what people thought about her or if they were afraid of her. It was not the first time she was in that situation. And she always managed to escape. She knew Jehovah, who parted the Red Sea and made the ancient fathers walk on dry land, would help her again.

She leaped to her feet and ran away from the other captives and headed toward the door, but it was closed. So she then ran to the other side of the room, where there were only a few soldiers. She opened the door and ran outside into the bright sunlight. The sun turned her skin into a golden color. She laughed as she ran through the empty town. As she looked up, she saw the sun was setting. Hope arose in her heart, and she believed God was with her. Suddenly, she heard footsteps coming closer, so she started to run without thinking. The wind rushed past her ears.

She ran down the street, her dress waving behind her and soldiers pursuing her. But she laughed with joy. She refused to think about what could go wrong. All she could focus on was the exhilaration in her soul. Suddenly, she departed her body, and I became her completely. I was in full control of her body and her thinking. I wanted to scream at the irony of becoming her at a stage when I needed to run.

The transition was sudden, and my heart raced as I ran further. Obviously, I couldn't outrun the increasing number of soldiers chasing me; nevertheless, I wouldn't give up

without a fight. I turned and ducked to avoid an iron crossbar on the right side.

I ran faster, covering more ground. The soldiers didn't see the crossbar, and they hit their heads on it. They grimaced in pain for a second, giving me time to run ahead. When I got to the junction of a long road, I flew into an empty candy store. I gasped for air and hid behind a counter. I peeked out to see if the soldiers had lost sight of me. One soldier went left down a road parallel to my route, while the other went right down another street parallel to my path. The few opened boxes of sweets on the floor took me back to when our town came under attack.

Jews worldwide were under attack. I was mad at the widespread persecution of my people. No matter where we ran, we were not safe. The Jewish race was in danger of extinction. Jerusalem was in pieces, and it reminded me of a story from the prophets about a time when Jews were captured.

"How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave" (Lamentations 1:1).

I knew a script was being played out against the Jewish people, as well as the rest of the world. But I also trusted Yeshua, and his awareness provided me with confidence and strengthened my determination. We had to do

something. But we did not know what wrongs we had committed as the Jewish nation.

*However, if you do not obey the Lord, your God, and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you. The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth.*

*(Deuteronomy 28:15, 25)*

The Jews hid in the shadows and were crushed beneath the feet of men. The impending darkness intrigued me, and I thought it would only get worse. We were like a tent without a covering; we couldn't worship, and God's light couldn't be seen. They condemned us without His light.

I emerged from concealment and made my way through the desolate city, where I saw dead bodies on the ground with flies buzzing around them. It was obvious the devastation was great when I saw cars parked on the roads and goods scattered across the floors of now-closed shops. People were killed in strange locations. The spirits of monuments and structures remained, some of them still standing, and two youths' bodies hung from two shelves in a shop.

Night was quickly approaching. I breathed a sigh of relief, hoping for darkness to conceal my movements. But when I least expected it, a light flashed before my eyes. It was the soldier I'd met earlier. He excitedly alerted his buddies to my presence. I stood motionless and weary,

anticipating death. The soldier tried to seize me by the neck but released his grip when he saw me struggling to breathe. I coughed out blood but maintained my resolve that if I went down, I would do it with style.

I refused to be scared, and the soldier was delighted in my discomfort. My body was begging for mercy, but I knew that wasn't going to happen. The people who attacked the Jewish population didn't care about human life. Expecting them to be kind or understanding was like expecting an olive tree to turn into a cedar tree.

Two other soldiers appeared, pushing four more people in front of them with guns pointed at their backs. They forced me into the line as they took us back to the city center, where hundreds of Jews were huddled together in the train station. They shoved us into an empty cart, kicking, slapping, and intimidating us with their shouts.

They continued to push us into the crowded cart, and we trampled one another with each step. Some people died, but the soldiers could care less. They kept packing more people in.

The train station soon became a war zone. Shots were fired at the village, and a big fire started razing the entire community to the ground. Troops ran back and forth, shouting at each other as they screamed above the rain of bullets. Amid the upheaval, the cart rolled out as the weight of dead and living passengers slowed the journey considerably.



The box train slowly crawled out of the station and headed towards a new land. We moved through the woods for days in the overcrowded cart with only a little ventilation. We breathed in stale air. The cart was about thirty feet long and six feet wide, with no ventilation. People tried to position themselves close to the only vent, which was about a foot wide and two feet long and stood about six feet from the ground. That led to a stampede, but I refused to lose hope.

I knew the woman whose body I was occupying would hold on to hope in this situation, so I did too. No one spoke as we all grieved our shared and personal losses. Every one of us had lost one thing or the other—family members, homes, work, peace, and, without a doubt, the Jewish community. Our hearts were too heavy to speak. I gazed out the window. My eyes focused on whatever scenery was available as I tried to figure out where the cart was going.

We all knew we didn't want to leave our community. But we knew what lay ahead would be worse than what we were experiencing now. The people who had died had been spared what was ahead. Others would die soon, but they just didn't know it yet.

### **A part of us all died today.**

The passengers, who were packed in the cart, emitted a strong odor of fear and worry. Everyone's eyes were filled with fear as we considered what else we might lose. They

had driven us to live on the poverty line in recent months, taking away our livelihoods. We had to hide in the dark because we were afraid of what was next. They had crushed us, dehumanized us, and reduced us to nothing. What else could they possibly take from us?

I was standing for a long time, and my feet were numb. I really wanted to fall, but there were so many people that if I did, I might get trampled. So I remained standing. I was also very hungry and tired, and my body was shutting down. The train went past some fields and ranches before arriving at a station. It gradually slowed down until it came to a blood-curling, screeching stop, and then the doors opened.

Normally, arriving at a destination is a time to be happy and excited. But this time was different. We were greeted by soldiers who yelled and pushed us off the train. We were very tired from the long trip, and when we got down, they started beating us. They ordered us into the woods and brought us to a large brown gate. It was nothing like the gates of heaven.

"Auschwitz."

Auschwitz was one of the largest concentration camps operated by Nazi Germany during World War II. The camp was located in the southern Polish town of Oswiecim, about twenty-five miles west of the then German city of Krakow. The Auschwitz concentration camp operated from 1940 to 1945. It was one of the largest of the Nazi concentration

camps, comprising three major camps, Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II–Birkenau, and Auschwitz III–Morwitz, and forty-five sub-camps. Most of the victims were Jewish people, but also Poles and Roma (Gypsies) were killed.

We walked down a dirt path that was overgrown with weeds and thorns. The belts of the soldiers hit our skin as we walked. Some older inmates passed out. We kept walking, but if we slowed down, we were beaten by the soldiers. I was crying, but I wondered if the Jewish woman could remain upbeat in this situation. Would she know something that we didn't? We were terrified when they led us through the gates to see a big brown house with high walls. Our group was separated by gender when we got there.

The men, women, and children were divided into groups. The sick and the severely wounded were set aside. I was in a group of women who appeared to be middle-aged or elderly. Doctors soon arrived to examine us after they split us up. They herded us into a large hall and stripped us of our clothes, jewelry, and dignity. Then the physicians probed every inch of our bodies, and the nurses shaved our heads bald.

After the doctors' examinations, we were divided into groups of two dozen and escorted to a dark room the size of a bedroom. It was horribly cold because there was no heater. A stack of burlap mattresses lay on the back wall, covered in urine and blood stains. A foul stench from the crematorium next door filled the air.

A very large soldier came into our cold cell while we were still nude and threw some tattered, brown clothes at us. Each of these pieces of garments had a numbered patch sewed over it many times. My number was 3512. The soldier brought in a pitcher of brown and dirty water. He spat in it and then gave each person a tiny cup to drink. We drank it without thinking because we were so thirsty. A moment later, the soldier came back in with a piece of bread the size of a pan of cornbread. He threw it on the ground and left, slamming the door shut behind him. We looked at each other uncertainly.

Then, all twenty-three captives fought for a piece of bread like wild dogs. They devoured it quickly. I didn't care. I watched. I realized that life or death would be determined by the strongest ones. The bread was our only hope, so we would have to ration it in the future and make sure everyone got an equal share. But some people were never satisfied. They would steal from older or weaker ones.

I was starving, but I refused to eat bread that was thrown at me like a dog. The next night wasn't any better. A soldier came with a stick of bread, and we all looked at it with hungry eyes, hoping he would bring more food. But he just left, slamming the door behind him.

I was starved on the third day. I didn't have any energy left, and I lay on the floor because I couldn't stand up anymore. It had been ten days since I last ate anything. I only drank a cup of dirty water. Starvation hurt my stomach.

By the fifteenth day, a few inmates had died, and the cell was polluted by their rotting corpses. Living conditions got worse and worse; no attempts were made to make them better. My emaciated body fought hard just to stay alive in the terrible living conditions.

Shortly after they returned, the soldiers grabbed me by the collar and dragged me across the floor to a well-lit room. It looked like a hospital room. I passed out and couldn't remember anything after that. But I knew they took me to a laboratory where they were testing different kinds of drugs on me. The first drug made my whole body shake, and I woke up immediately. A man in a lab coat with a syringe in his hand waited for me.

The short, wiry, bald man approached me. I looked away. He had a stern countenance. The man in the lab coat told me to do a series of tasks, like adding numbers and reciting the alphabet backward. I did them without any hesitation. Then they injected me with another drug that made me feel really good, as if I was floating in space.

As he came closer, I could see the wicked grin on his face. I knew what was coming, and soon enough, the serum was injected into my veins. My body started to feel hot as if it was on fire. I tore through everything in my path as my hands caused destruction. I let out a loud howl that sounded like that of a lion whose cubs had been taken away. The pain soon faded and was replaced by numbness. I no longer felt or smelled anything, including the antiseptic room or the

hospital bed I was lying in. As I looked ahead, I saw I was halfway to being in hibernation mode.

A little while later, I returned to the cold cell. I was back to normal and could smell the stench of dead bodies. There was a loaf of stale bread and an awkward stew. I grabbed the bread and ate it quickly. But after the first bite, my stomach rejected it. I looked around the cell and realized that I was the only one there.

As the same soldier returned, I was scared. He came over to me and tried to grab me, but I bit his collar and pushed him away as hard as I could. Blood filled my mouth, and I spat on the ground just as the soldier knocked me down and tied me up. The soldier stretched me out on the floor with a broken nose and missing teeth. When he was sure I couldn't put up a struggle, he grabbed me by the collar and dragged me along the floor. I prayed earnestly not to be returned to the laboratory; this time, the faith the Jewish woman had might have been impossible to maintain.

They put me in a room with other women. We were all crying. I recognized some of the women from the box cart and my old neighborhood. There were also men and kids there. They told us we had to take off all our clothes and that we were done with the hard part. Now, we just had to get clean, so they could let us go.

The youngsters were very excited and running around without any clothes on. I also saw a few men looking at me,

but this was not the time to be modest, given the circumstances.

As I stripped, I noticed the forms and statues of people and the emotions on their faces. I wondered what their lives were like. Were they beaten by soldiers? Were they subjected to testing like lab rats? What were their lives like before, and how would this experience change them in the years to come? These people had been through so much. Yet they remained strong and full of optimism and resolve. The fact they survived these conditions was a testament to the human spirit's capacity to endure. Their strength humbled me and fueled my desire to continue fighting, regardless of any difficulties I encountered. They showed me that anything was possible if you put your trust in God.

The shower was on the left side of the room, and for the first time, I let out a deep breath of air as my heart sang. I couldn't wait to get inside the running shower and rinse off the grime. Not only would I wash, but I'd drink to my satisfaction, disregarding who might be watching. As we entered the shower, they opened the doors for us. I became aware of a gut-wrenching clang when the bathroom door was locked, which intrigued me. There was no water to drink after the valves were opened. The body wasn't cleansed. There was no assurance of release because it wasn't water that filled the shower room. It was a deadly poisonous gas.

"While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on

a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

When the poisonous gas entered our bodies, we responded immediately. We felt a burning sensation in our eyes and throats. We began to cough and wheeze uncontrollably. Our lungs burned as we tried to flee the room, but it was too late. The gas had already reached our brains, causing us to fall unconscious on the ground.

I had heartbreakingly witnessed people fall to the ground, as if in slow motion, as each one of them succumbed to the poisonous chemicals. When I finally took the last gasp of breath that God gave me, I found peace knowing I had maintained my faith even to the very end.

I was back in the solitary room. Panic engulfed me as I deeply gasped for air. Burning poison traces were still in my body, and tears poured from my eyes, both from the gas and horrifying thoughts about what I had just witnessed. I fell to my knees, and I swore I would never take the breath of life God had given me for granite again.

I experienced what it was like to live as a Jewish woman. I was blessed with her strong faith. Although she deserved a better life and not death by a chemical bath, my existence flashed before me when I saw how steadfast she was in the face of adversity.

The woman never stopped trusting in God, even when things were tough. She knew He would be with her through everything, and she drew strength from His presence. Even



when she was facing death, she held on to her faith and remained strong.

I will never forget her example. It inspired me to stay strong in my faith, no matter what happens. She was like David and Esther. She was a woman after God's heart.

# THE SIXTH SEASON

## *A Martyrs Love: The Story of Galileo*



People went to the Colosseum for different reasons, but they all wanted one thing—entertainment. All types of people (tax collectors, fishermen, and royals) watched stage plays and gladiators fight, and they participated in other activities for fun. The Colosseum was the ultimate place for entertainment during this time. It was a very large structure in the Roman Empire. Its exciting shows every day were always entertaining and drew big crowds.

On every national holiday, the Emperor would host a dinner. Many people would gather at the Colosseum to see the bands from Galilee arrive with fanfare to entertain the people with their synchronized movements and crescendo music. But the most spectacular show of all was when two gladiators battled to death. It was a bloody battle, but the audience was very excited to see them fighting on horseback or among cushions.

The Colosseum was a place where people had fun, but it was also a place where people were executed. These were mainly criminals or religious fanatics. The last group of

people to be executed were those who believed in a man they said had died and come back to life.

As Galileo watched the play in the stadium, he thought about the last execution he had seen in the Colosseum a few days before. The man who was executed had done some amazing things, and Galileo couldn't stop thinking about the smile on His face as they covered his head. He seemed so calm and at peace. It was as if he believed in what he was dying for.

The executioners said that the man was arrested in the streets for proclaiming that Jesus had died and come back to life. Galileo couldn't understand why people would believe in Jesus so much they were willing to die for Him. He also believed in Christ and loved His teachings, but he would never die for Him. Why would he? His grandfather, who sat beside him, looked at him with scornful eyes as if he was disappointed in Galileo.

"So, are you going to watch the play or waste your ticket? You look happy; I'm wondering what you're thinking about. Are you lost in thoughts?"

Galileo grinned as he turned to his grandfather and then back to the stage, where a lady held a kid while being heckled by a man. Galileo chuckled as his grandfather shook his head. "As you can see, the stage play isn't dull; instead, it's quite amusing."

Galileo laughed back lightly and said, "It's not my fault that I have watched this play so many times that I now find

it boring. Isn't this the third time we are watching it this year?"

"Way to tell me that I love a boring play, Galileo." The grandfather laughed back lightly, and they turned back to the stage and watched.

Why would someone smile in the face of death? Surely this man must have known something that Galileo didn't. Was it simply because he knew his life would continue after death? Or was there something more to it? Galileo couldn't help but be curious about what could make someone so confident.

He had so many questions that even his grandfather, who had trained him in the way of the Lord, couldn't answer. He had been taught to believe in the existence of gods and a supreme God, but the belief was dogmatic. He believed because they had told him to believe and not because he was convinced. Galileo tapped his grandfather,

"Do gods believe in themselves?" The grandfather narrowed his eyes at him and continued watching the play.

Galileo tried again, "Do you even think these gods believe in themselves the way people believe in them?" It was a question that had been bothering him for a while. He didn't see how it could be possible for beings that were supposed to be all-powerful and all-knowing to also have faith in themselves. It seemed contradictory.

The grandfather finally turned to him and said, "It is not for us to question the ways of the gods."

Galileo was not satisfied with this answer. He wanted to understand why things were the way they were. He was not content with simply believing what he was told. He wanted to know the reasons behind it.

"Why not talk about gods, grandfather?" Galileo asked, unable to keep the curiosity from his voice.

"We are here to watch a play, not talk about gods, Galileo," his grandfather said without looking away from the stage.

Galileo heaved in disappointment.

His grandfather turned to look at him then, and Galileo met his eyes. "You know how I feel about gods, boy," the grandfather whispered.

Although the man didn't say anything, Galileo knew his silence was related to the fact that he couldn't walk because of an accident a year before Galileo was born. Even though they believed in the Eternal God, they weren't sure if He could heal the 65-year-old man. But Galileo nodded, and the grandfather turned back to watch the play. He wondered if it could be true—if the God they believed in could really heal him and let him walk again.

Both of them had a dream in which the old grandfather would walk one day again. Their hope, on the other hand, declined with each passing day, and the grandfather believed in other gods as he trained Galileo in God's ways.

"Galileo, do you think your grandpapa will walk again? What use are legs to him? Isn't he already 65-years old?"

people would ask with mischief in their eyes and squinted eyebrows.

Galileo would answer, "My grandpa will walk again; that is all I know. Give it a year."

But these days, Galileo and his grandfather were unsure about the timing. They were unsure if the older guy would be able to walk again. When people continued to ask if he would walk again, he generally responded with a tight-lipped smile, "Of course, wait until the sun turns purple, and you'll see me stroll."

Silently, both men held on to hope that the man would walk someday. For Galileo, the miracle of his walking was what would make him believe in the eternal God and answer the questions in his heart about God and gods.

Many people believe that traditional folklore teaches us not to trust the gods. Even though Galileo was not a follower of Stoic philosophy, he believed in a Supreme Being. He knew the world wasn't created by chance. It was carefully designed by the Supreme Being. But when he thought about all of the different religions around, he had more questions than answers.

The only way he could solve the questions in his mind was by seeing his grandfather walk again. But each day, the possibility faded. He had so many questions that he felt he was losing control of his life. This is why he was surprised by the smile of the Christian as he awaited execution. Even though he was persecuted, he seemed happy. The boy

wondered why this was so. He figured if the Eternal One existed, He should have healed his grandfather's foot.

Galileo decided to seek the Eternal One, not just because he wanted miracles, but he also wanted to know God, the only true God, and meet Him in person. He knew his grandfather would only believe if he had evidence.

If God created everything, then He surely has a say over His creations. He can fix them and make them perfect. Galileo believed this, too. He saw God as a potter who could fix things. Galileo wanted to know more about God, so he asked everyone he encountered if they had met Him.

His heart was so disturbed that he constantly looked for evidence of God everywhere he went, in the market, the stars at night, the air, and even the people. Sometimes, he stared at the sea and asked the fishermen if they had ever found God beneath the waters or on the coasts. Although it seemed crazy, Galileo was very restless for God.

The Colosseum was a great place to have fun and see shows, but when it was over, everyone went home. People would be tired from all the excitement, and then they would have to go back to their normal lives.

Although Galileo was a warm and friendly person, he was not happy inside. He needed to fill his soul with the love of God, but he never found the right opportunity. He wished he had met the Christian before his execution so they could share in the joy of the Lord together. Even though Galileo always tried to make people happy, it was

just a mask that hid how unhappy he really was. He needed to save himself, but no one ever seemed to understand how he felt.

"I feel like I'm missing something," Galileo said to his grandfather. "It's like there's a hole in me that needs filling."

His grandfather looked at him quizzically and said, "A hole? You are a complete man; you don't have a hole."

"It's like I'm not whole," Galileo added.

The grandfather looked on in confusion and asked, "Do you mean there is a hole in you? What does it feel like?"

"Empty," Galileo replied.

"I feel I have a purpose I should be fulfilling, but I can't understand exactly what it is. If I die today, I would die without accomplishing anything."

His grandfather moved closer to him and hugged him. "You are not going to die now, Galileo. Why are you thinking of death at your young age?"

His grandfather removed himself from the embrace and continued, "You have plenty of time to find out what your purpose is."

"It's hard to think about death," Galileo said, "especially when I see people being killed at the execution center. It could be me tomorrow. But even if I tell people this, they will not understand. They will think there's something wrong with my brain."



Galileo's grandfather rubbed his back and spoke softly: "I might not understand what is wrong with you, but I trust in God that He will heal you and be with you."

"Why hasn't God healed your leg?" Galileo asked. His grandfather looked away, and Galileo knew he had gone too far. Even he couldn't believe what he had just said. He still hoped that God would heal his grandfather, but the fear of death scared him. Whenever people around him were on the verge of death, the agony on their faces was always frightening. He wondered if they were sad because of life after death.

He was a student of nature and believed that life didn't end in death. He thought there must be more to life after death. His biggest fear was that he would be empty after death. That's why he wanted to meet the executed Christian. He knew the man would understand his plight and answer his questions about what happens after death.

"And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

As Galileo rode through the streets of Lystra, he noticed a crowd had gathered. He was excited to see his friend, but as he got closer, he saw that the crowd was agitated. People were shouting and pointing in different directions. It was hard to hear what anyone was saying over all the noise.

Galileo heard someone say the word "God" loudly; he got off his horse and pushed through the crowd to get a better idea of what was happening. He lived in the capital,

so he rarely heard the news from other places. He wanted to share the full story with his grandfather when he got back.

He left the capital to visit his friend, who worked as a goldsmith in Lystra. The man's job prevented him from visiting the capital for years, so Galileo went to see him. Galileo had news for him. His shop was just down the crossroad, and Galileo knew he could still meet up with him. Since the goldsmith was busy and lame, it was obvious he didn't have time to watch the spectacle.

Galileo shoved a man away as he advanced to the middle of the crowd. The man tried to stop him, but Galileo pushed through. Two ordinary-looking men in purple and white robes stood in the middle of the crowd. Some people bowed to them, but others were trying to stop them from bowing.

He looked at the man next to him and asked, "What's going on?" The man impatiently replied, "Can't you see? The gods have come to visit us."

Galileo looked at the two men to whom the crowd was bowing and asked, "Are these men gods?"

The man beside him smacked his lips and said, "Can't you see people bowing to them? Do they look ordinary to you?"

The man smacked his lips again, and Galileo looked back at the two unkempt men. They wore regular clothes and looked like regular men. Nothing about them seemed special except their scrawny frames and wild, untamed hair.

The man continued, "They made a lame man walk." Galileo laughed and then said, "I don't believe it."

"If you're not going to bow, leave. I saw it with my own eyes. They made a lame man walk."

The man beat his chest, and Galileo glared at him as he walked back to his horse. He couldn't understand why people would make up fantasies about normal humans. He galloped to his friend's place in anger.

Although he wanted to meet God, he couldn't believe those men were who he was seeking. Anger overrode the guilt in his mind as he galloped away. But when he got to his friend's shop, the place had no sign of life. The usually crowded shop was empty, and even the goldsmith wasn't at his usual spot.

He looked around the shop and checked out the goldsmith's works while wondering what had taken him away from his shop. He marveled at the various idols and the people who would come and pay homage to them. Were they not aware these were man-made idols? Can a man make a god?

He also marveled at the crowd and their stupidity for calling fellow men God. Were they all blind?

The goldsmith called out to him, and he looked up to see his friend running toward him with open arms. He stepped backward and stumbled on some of the idols as he gaped at the goldsmith's legs; this man had been lame all his life. Yet he was running. He screamed when his friend

pulled him into an engulfing embrace but was happy to see him.

Even after the goldsmith told Galileo how he had been healed by two men who called themselves Jesus' disciples, Galileo remained in a state of disbelief. His legs, however, told a different story and were proof enough of what had happened.

"Rise and walk!" Galileo repeated the words of the goldsmith.

"You are a lucky man."

The goldsmith laughed heartily and said, "If being helped by the gods is luck, then I am super lucky."

Galileo insisted, "You are."

"Where are the men?" Galileo asked.

"They were beaten," the goldsmith said sadly, "by the same crowd that called them gods and wanted to offer sacrifices."

"Who cast a spell on the crowd and made them act that way?"

"No one did. Some people came from Antioch, I think, and convinced the crowd that the men were out of their minds and were fraudsters to be avoided at all costs. The crowd should have asked me if the men defrauded me. But they did not. Instead, they took the speaker to the city's outskirts and threw stones at him."

Galileo ran out immediately when he heard this while ignoring the goldsmith's chants of his name. He ran toward the outskirts and hoped the men were still alive. He needed to see them and find answers to his questions. An inexplicable joy overwhelmed him when he saw one of the men staggering to the nearby town. He was hurt and bleeding from every part of his body. His clothes were torn, and his face was swollen. He walked up to the stranger and steadied him.

"You're not God, are you?"

"That is what I was telling the crowd," the man said, spitting blood.

"So who are you then?"

"I'm His servant," the man coughed as he spoke with great assurance.

Although Galileo had more questions, he remained silent as he helped the man walk through the dusty and windy road to Derbe, where the man stayed with his brother. He was willing to wait until the man was better and well enough to answer his questions without distress.

"You must be Galileo," The man said when he woke up on the second day. He continued, "Before you came to meet me at the outskirts of Lystra, the Lord said, 'A certain young man from Rome who came to visit his friend will come to your aid.'"

"The Lord said that to you?" Galileo looked on, still surprised.

"He told me you were looking for the truth."

"I am," Galileo rushed the words out.

"I am Paul, a servant of Christ. Today, you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

The man's words inspired Galileo. He found the answers to questions that had been bothering him and learned that there is life after death. From Paul's words, he found a purpose for his life and discovered new powers he had in Christ. After two days of listening to the Word and getting baptized, he was filled with joy and left for the capital to fulfill his newfound purpose.

*"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).*

When he returned home, Galileo told everyone who would listen about the man called Christ and his love for humanity. "Christ is the Son of the living God who came to save us from the power of darkness and sin."

He preached in the streets as he returned to his grandfather, who was overjoyed and said, "Galileo, what did you bring? I feel a surge of power around you."

He replied with passion, "Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross so we can be saved."

He repeated the words over and over again until he felt an intense desire to know more about the Master. He spent entire nights in prayer, seeking Jesus' face.

One night, something miraculous happened: his grandfather got feeling in his legs and started walking again. The love of Christ filled Galileo's heart, and he started proclaiming this love everywhere he went. He told everyone about how much Jesus loved them and how peaceful it was to have Him in their lives.

Although Galileo was relieved of his duty as a clerk in the capital, he continued to preach the gospel of Christ. He found some believers and took his grandfather with him to where they fellowshiped and preached the gospel with power and authority throughout the city. They performed miracles and saved souls for Christ throughout Rome until the government began persecuting them because of their message of hope. But they didn't stop preaching the gospel of Christ. It cost them their lives.

Galileo and the other men continued preaching to the people on the execution stage. As Galileo smiled and the executioner began to cover his face, he shouted his most important message of life to the anxious spectators.

"Christ is love!"

*"Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love"*  
(1 John 4:8).

After Galileo was executed, I felt a range of emotions that lifted my soul, and I was back in the solitary room

again. I kept hearing Christ is love. The voice echoed in my heart until I felt the weight. Christ is love! Christ is love!

Having observed the life of Galileo from twenty-five years to the end, I had no trouble accepting that Christ is love. I could still feel the love Galileo had for the crowd. He did not want any of them to perish. In his last moments, he wanted to let them know the truth. His own life counted as nothing to him.

Galileo had a perfect understanding. He was very hurt before he met the personality called "Love." When he met the great Redeemer, his whole life changed. I was also amazed by Galileo's attitude toward death. Before he met Christ, his biggest fear was death. But look at how happy he was when he faced death at the Colosseum. He embraced it with joy.

In every other experience, I have had to live through someone else's life, and death was a sad occurrence. But Galileo made it look simple.

*"I will deliver these people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?" (Hosea 14:13).*

Christ is love!!!



# The Seventh Season

*Experiencing the Ultimate Suffering on the Road to  
Golgotha*



Someone kept calling out saying, "Thou son of David! Have mercy on me!" But I was still too stunned in my new body to answer. This body was the epitome of grace, power, and authority. With it came an overwhelming effervescence of calmness, tranquility, and a thrust of another entity: the Great Power within.

The Holy Spirit overcame the feeling of worthlessness I felt when I saw life through this new body. I was not supposed to see my worthlessness and imperfections here. Instead, I had to feel and endure what this body felt. This scared me. One moment, I was reflecting on Galileo's life and love for Christ. The next moment, I became a part of that love.

"Son of David! Have mercy on me!" The man shouted again, and love overwhelmed me with deep affection, bringing forth the essence of life and mercy the man needed. The man was in God's image and likeness and spoke with

the voice of one loved by God so that he couldn't be ignored or shut off. He had found favor from God.

"Shut your mouth!" the crowd booed.

"Don't!" I said as I raised my hands. The crowd hushed in surprise as they fixed their gaze on me. "Bring him to me."

The crowd thought I was crazy for listening to him, but I couldn't ignore someone who spoke with authority and faith in God. For so long, the Father had watched His creation suffer at the hands of the wicked one even though they were rich in His eyes. The Father's creation suffered because of a wrong that happened at the beginning.

He made them perfect, but now they were far from perfection. He made them strong, and now they were weak. He gave them the right to be called His, yet that right was snatched. The situation looked hopeless. But I came as that great beacon of hope. What then was hope if it did not show mercy?

"Have mercy on me," the man muttered as they led him to me. I admired the image of God in him and again blessed God for the gift of humans to the world.

"I will have mercy on you," I said, "tell me, what do you want."

It was important to find out what the man wanted, not just what he needed. Different people followed Jesus for different reasons. Some people wanted to be fed, while some wanted healing. Others wanted to know more about

the kingdom of God and how they could get eternal life. When the man said, "I want to receive my sight," I filled him with love, and I could feel his thirst for God.

I said, "Go, by your faith. You have been healed." The man's eyes fluttered open, and he saw. He smiled, and I turned away and continued my journey.

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2).

This is why the Son of Man came. He came to free those who are in darkness. He set the captives free and preached the good news of salvation to the lost sheep of Israel. He also shined a light on foreign lands. Christ did this so that people could be saved. Christ I did this because the Father wanted Him to do it.

Jesus was sent to Pontius Pilate early in the morning. There were lots of people there waiting to accuse Him. Pontius Pilate listened to them for a while, but he couldn't find anything wrong with Him.

The people were shouting and accusing Him. Pilate was confused and picked a word from one of the accusers. He asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"You said it yourself," Christ answered.

"The people are accusing You. The high priests, chief priest, and everyone want You dead. What do You have to say to them?"

Pilate waited for an answer while Jesus stayed silent. Pilate turned to the crowd and spoke loudly so everyone could hear, "You all know that Barabbas was a thorn in your side. He caused trouble in your cities, disrupted your villages, and caused everyone great grief." The mob became quiet as they waited to see what would happen next. "As you all know, it is your custom that I release a criminal to you as part of your celebration of the Feast of Passover."

Pontius Pilate asked the crowd, "What should I do to this man, your king?"

The crowd chanted, "Give us Barabbas. Give us Barabbas."

Pilate was surprised and said, "He's a criminal!"

The crowd became louder and chanted, "Give us Barabbas. Give us Barabbas."

Pilate raised his hands, and the mob became quiet again. He asked again, "What should I do to this man, your king?"

"He's not our King. We have only one King, Caesar. Crucify Him!" The crowd chanted ominously.

Pontius Pilate looked on in disbelief as he granted the people's wishes and went back into the palace.

Barrel-chested Roman soldiers walked up to Jesus and pushed Him to the cross before a company of soldiers.

He was stripped of His clothing and tied to a pole. Soldiers gathered around Him, holding long whips made of bits of iron and bones.

The first stroke left Christ reeling in shock and pain. As I witnessed this through his eyes, I cried out as well, and I could feel the pain as it dug into His skin and pulled out pieces of flesh. I bit my lips to stop myself from whimpering as Jesus prayed for the strength to bear the burden. The iron from the whip tore away His muscles and flesh. I shook inside uncontrollably.

Christ suffered so the entire world could be forgiven for their debts. Each lash represented a debt paid for each person. He became an embodiment of suffering so that humans could become sons and daughters of God and enter His kingdom. They would not have to pay the price for their sins.

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds, we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

I watched as they put Christ in a purple garment and placed a crown of thorns on His head, which tore through the flesh. Jesus was so weak from losing all the blood that He appeared to lose awareness of what was happening around Him. The soldiers surrounded Jesus, and they took turns hitting Him on the cheeks and mocking him. The only thing that I could see were their forms and silhouettes.

One soldier kneeled and said, "May your royal highness live forever."

"Your scepter, mighty King, another soldier said, "got broken this morning, remember? You could as well make do with a thistle."

In a peal of roaring laughter, another called out, "Have you ever seen a king with a crown of thorns? It's most likely the King of the Jews. His name is Jesus Christ."

They continued until the wooden cross and the physical representation of Christ's burden were ready. He smiled as He bore the cross to Calvary, even as exhaustion appeared to weigh Him down. He stumbled with His head hitting the cross and the thorns of the crown penetrating His head further. I felt every inch of pain in Him. He tried to stand, but His legs failed Him, and He staggered up to bear the cross again. The Father had given Him great strength to bear the burden, but the cross was a physical burden, and I could feel His body was beginning to fail out of exhaustion.

One Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross to Cavalry as Jesus was dragged along the streets by Roman soldiers.

Then I left his body and watched from the eyes of a random observer. I was not permitted to be a part of what was about to happen. Not even a little bit. However, as I helplessly watched, I still felt the pain that I knew He was enduring.

He was nailed to a wooden cross at Calvary. His feet and arms were attached to it. He was lifted up, so His soul could be raised and He could be in perfect submission to the

Father's will. He became a living sacrifice, the only one needed for humans to come to the Father. In this state of perfect surrender, the greatest agony known to humanity descended on Him as the sin of the whole world seemed to weigh Him down and His righteousness was shed away from Him.

He seemed to search for the Holy Spirit deeply, as He needed comfort in His empty state. But the Holy Spirit was silent, and He did not feel His presence. I was in pain as I watched His righteousness take on the sins of the world and His pureness become stained with iniquities. I cried out at the magnitude of the pain I watched him endure that came with carrying the weight of the world.

"It is finished," I heard Him proclaim, giving up the ghost.

### **New revelation about my sojourn**

When I, John Williams, was returned to the solitary room, I realized that Christ's death wasn't an unprovoked murder. It was evidence of the love of God for us and the greatest sacrifice ever. My opinions didn't matter anymore because they were based on wrong notions. I had taken the price Jesus paid for granted and toyed with the greatest sacrifice. I had also taken God's mercy and graciousness for granted.

*"Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).*

I realized that I could not compare the pain I felt to what Jesus had gone through on the cross. The agony I felt was not final. His was a stage that had to be passed through in order to restore the world to its perfect order and save us from sin. Although destructive, the pain had a goal, and Jesus' life was the ransom for our sins. I only lived a life parallel to Jesus, and the pain within Him wrecked me; how much more must Jesus have suffered? How does He feel about how I spent my life, belittling His sacrifice and ignoring the ransom for my sins? As these thoughts resonated in my mind, I wanted to know Christ more and was ashamed of my rejection of his love. Even in my most difficult times, Christ was there for me; and I just didn't see it.

Sometimes things happen for a reason, and we don't understand why. Like my Anita, although I didn't understand why God allowed her to die, Christ was there and offered me strength and comfort, but I rejected it. Why? Because I was angry and falsely blamed God.



# The Great White Throne

*Back where I started: New Revelations*



Do you have a sense of what it's like to be face-to-face with unrivaled riches and splendor? Have you ever caught a glimpse of the magnificent city perched on a hill that the brilliant countenance of God's glory illuminates? God is everywhere present, and He glides across the sky, enveloped in radiance.

The Lord of heaven and earth is the One who sits on the great tribunal throne, and He has authority over heaven and earth. He is the God of all creation, and when He speaks, the earth trembles and the seas are parted. Chains are broken in God's presence, and destinies are altered. Who could confront Him and not be consumed? What kind of man on this planet or in heaven can look upon His face without bowing down to the greatest King ever?

God is everywhere! All creation should remind us of His presence since He is everywhere: in the market, at church, at work, at home, and in the air we breathe. He has always been here for us—even when things appeared to be at their darkest—telling us we are not alone and that He

knows our sufferings. He is present, past, and future. We can't run from Him. His very existence reflects His presence.

During my search for myself, I'm seeing how much love there is in the world. God's presence can be felt even in caves and the highest mountains. However, all of my life, I've ignored it in favor of pursuing worldly desires. I traded an eternity in heaven for a meaningless existence. The seven seasons throughout many ages, times, and worlds taught me that I had a chance to live a life for God.

The unwanted kid never had a chance. The guy from Detroit, with his sunny disposition, chose to live life to the fullest regardless of what occurred. The young soldier was denied the opportunity to live a purposeful life, yet he saved people when he could and gave his life for his country. The African slave didn't get that chance. The Jewish woman defied expectations and trusted God in every circumstance.

The Galilean youngster chose to stand for Christ in the face of opposition, and Jesus, in His amazing love, paid the greatest price with His life and righteousness. I had a chance, but I never took it. I no longer had an alibi. If there was ever a time to repent and return to God, it was now.

I know that I need to keep searching for myself, and in doing so, I'll find my way back to God. My identity crisis is really an opportunity for a spiritual awakening. I thank God for His presence in my life.

I knew the trumpets would summon me soon, and the memories of their harrowing, overwhelming sounds scared

me. I wanted to stay in the solitary room forever, but in the cold room with walls and letterings that sent one back into memories, God wasn't present.

I broke out in an icy chill and paced the room, my thoughts and body agitated. I didn't want to face the great white throne; all I wanted was to be forgotten once again. My past mistakes no longer provided me with excuses. Rather, I had dwelt on the ephemeral things instead of seeing the trauma of my childhood as suffering pain that could end.

I had refused to live a meaningful life. I had been introduced to religion as a youngster, and I even celebrated Christmas every year, but did I ever celebrate the real reason for which Christmas was created? Did I know why it was called Advent season? The concept of gifts, lights, feasts, the holiday period, and the hoopla of Father Christmas attracted me. But did I ever wonder why Jesus' birth was so significant?

Throughout my life, I had been introduced to Jesus several times. There was Mrs. Catherine, the NY waterfall preacher, songs, movies, my wife, and numerous books and hymns that talked about the love of God for me through Christ. Even my conscience stood against me. I ignored Winifred, who had shown me the path many times. I remember the day she called me out on a chilly Saturday morning two years into our marriage.

"Why did you lie to me?" she asked.

I furrowed my brows in confusion and asked, "What are you talking about?"

"You told me you were a Christian."

"I am."

"No," Winifred said, eyes glistening, "you are not."

I had wondered what she was saying at the time; a million questions running through my mind. I went to church regularly; didn't that qualify me to be a Christian? I heaved a sigh, wrapped a towel around my waist, stepped out of the bathtub, and hugged her from behind as I whispered,

"Would you rather I say I was an atheist?"

"It would have been better," Winifred said as she removed my arms and walked away. That could have been a perfect time to know more about Jesus, but I didn't care.

I did not know how long I'd been in the solitary room. Time was meaningless and not measured; nevertheless, it had to be a long time because I went through everything I had ever done. Even though I accepted the mark of the beast for a better life at one point, I relived that decision every day and suffered for my choice. When the trumpets reached their greatest intensity, doors opened, and I was returned to the great white throne with angels, elders, and winged creatures under the pressure of the bellowing sound of the trumpets.

I was once again at the position where everything began, the very place where I pleaded for forgiveness and began my seven-season journey, and those who came before me in line remained the same. Nothing had changed, although it felt as if thousands of years had passed. This was eternity, and time was a mirage.

The Lord's presence was as overwhelming as ever, and the Glorious One was enthroned. His splendor was brighter than a million suns combined, and His radiance surpassed a constellation of billions of stars. I kept my silence before Him since I could no longer defend my previous assertions about suffering.

The unwanted child's pain engulfed me again. Meanwhile, my heart stopped from the coldness of the city streets, and I began to choke as the rope constricted around my neck. My flesh sizzled when the chemical gas engulfed me, and I yelled in agony, demanding that the torment ceased. I no longer had a case or a cause for obtaining the mark of the beast.

I lay on the floor, sobbing. "Please forgive me," I screamed as I fell back in pain. "I have nothing to bring before You. I cannot bring a charge against You or have an excuse for my actions."

Suddenly, the pain departed my body, and the Almighty spoke through my mind, "What did you do with the life I gave you?"

I asked myself again, my pain now coming from a place of regret, "John Williams, what did you do with the life God gave you?"

"Again, it (The Kingdom of Heaven) will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one, he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey" (Matthew 25:14–15).

To God, my response should have eternal value. He was not curious about the automobiles and property I acquired on this earth. He was not concerned with my daily life. These were all things God knew. It was my responsibility to explain what I spent my life on, the lives I changed, and the people who became a force for good because of me.

God wanted me to tell Him about the talents of gold He entrusted to my care. What natural abilities did I discover while growing up? How did I employ them to bring glory to His name? I could play the piano; did I give glory to God with my music? Was it possible for me to write well, or was it just another talent that went unused? My speaking abilities are exceptional, but what did I do with them?

I buried my talents in the earth and did not make use of them. I squandered my resources, and I wasted my life.

What are you doing with the life God gave you?

Are you wasting it as I did or fulfilling your purpose? Are you using your talents and skills for God? Do you ever think of eternity? Do you even believe it exists?

You should ask yourself these and many more questions. The distance between you and me is just time, and your eternity could come today or tomorrow. Are you prepared to meet the Father at the great white throne?

### **Final Conclusion**

You are probably wondering what happened to John, right? Do you think God forgave him, and he can go to heaven and spend time with Winifred and Anita?

Perhaps you believe that he would continue to relieve these seasons over and over again until his heart has truly changed. Some may claim there are no second chances for taking the mark of the beast, but doesn't God have the ability to pardon and have the final say?

What if this was a warning from God to John, and it has all been a wildly vivid dream that all began when John collapsed on the treadmill.

I will leave the ending up to the reader to decide. Yes, you get to determine the end of this fictional story. However, if you reject Christ, you do not get to decide the ending of your personal story; and your Judgment could be far worse than that of John's, and the decision to follow in John's footsteps or those of Christ will have eternal

consequences. Free will is a gift from God. But free will also has consequences.

If you are serious and are not saved, do well to say the sinner's prayer today.

"Father, I am sorry that I have sinned against You. Please be the Lord of my life."

That's it. Is it so hard to say yes?

It's so simple yet powerful and life-changing. The decision you make today could impact your tomorrow. However, no one is guaranteed a tomorrow, so you better make up your mind now before the rapture occurs and your tomorrow is a gone forever, yesterday.

The Bible is your manual, and the Holy Spirit is your teacher, and your decision now will affect your eternity later.

Seek Christ while He can still be found!



# APPENDIX



Since Jesus is the Great Physician. We are going to look at each story as a medical diagnoses: symptom, condition, prescription, treatment/therapy, and aversive consequences, for each diagnosis that highlights each story.

# Suffering Loss

“The Life of Job”



## Story Summary

In this story, the Williams' lost their daughter to cancer. Mr. John Williams was in so much pain that he rejected the Christ that He once knew intimately. As a result, John was left behind and his wife, Winifred was raptured. John continued to blame God for Anita's death.

He also blamed God for taking his wife in the rapture. When the mark of the beast was enforced; John did so willingly. Partly to live comfortably for his remaining years, but mostly as a way to rebel against God.

What can we learn from the Story of Job?

Job was a righteous man who faced many trials, including the loss of his wealth, children, and health. Despite these challenges, he persevered with empathy for others and faith in God. In the end, he was rewarded for his steadfastness and restored to a life of abundance. Through Job's story, we are reminded to trust in the bigger plan and show empathy

towards those facing hardship. May we learn from Job's example and hold onto hope even in the hardest of times.

As we read about Job in the Bible, we can't help but feel empathy for all that he endured. Yet, through it all, Job remained faithful and obedient to God. He serves as a reminder that we can trust in God's plan, even when experiencing immense suffering. Let us strive to have the same level of unwavering faith and love for God that Job exemplified.

### **I. Symptoms:**

*What does Bible say about suffering; especially the loss of loved one?*

The Bible reminds us to empathize with those who suffer loss, as we never know when we ourselves may experience it. In James 1:2-4, we are encouraged to consider trials and suffering as joy because they produce perseverance. And in 1 Peter 5:10, we are told that the God of all grace will ultimately restore us after we suffer. However, it is important to remember that God does not cause our suffering, but rather allows it for a greater purpose. As Romans 8:28 reminds us, all things work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. So although it may be difficult to understand at the moment, we can trust that God is using our suffering for good. It is also important to recognize that, as believers, we are not immune to suffering and loss. As 1

Corinthians 10:13 reminds us, God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. But with His strength, we can endure it. So let us show empathy and support to those who suffer loss, knowing that we may face it ourselves in the future.

## **II. Condition:**

*What does Bible say about turning to Jesus for strength and comfort?*

In Matthew 5:4, Jesus tells us, *“God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* We will experience pain in this life. Being a Christian doesn’t mean you get a free pass from the trials of this life, but rather a way to process and heal from that pain we experience. The Bible tells us that when we mourn, God Himself will comfort us. He will not abandon us to our pain, but come alongside us and wrap us in His loving arms if we would have Him.

Psalm 23:4 says, *“Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.”* This verse tells us that no matter what we evil we experience in life, God is stronger, and He fights for us! If we cling to God throughout our lives, no evil can ever prevail against us.

## **III. Medication:**

### **Scripture Support**

It can be difficult to see the purpose in suffering loss, but Scripture offers comfort and guidance. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, we are reminded that God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others in their troubles with the same comfort we have received from Him. In Romans 8:28, we are assured that God works all things – even the painful events in our lives – for the good of those who love Him. And in John 16:33, Jesus tells us to take heart because He has overcome the world.

Despite these promises, it can be easy to become overwhelmed by feelings of grief and sorrow. It's important to remember that empathy is a vital part of the healing process. Reach out to loved ones and your community for support, and allow yourself time to grieve and process your emotions. Trust in God's plan, and lean on His promises during this difficult time.

- **Romans 8:35-37** - "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
- **Psalms 34:18-19** - The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.

- **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.
- **Isaiah 43:2** - When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.
- **John 16:33** - I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.
- **Psalms 46:1** - God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
- **Isaiah 41:10** - So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
- **2 Corinthians 4:8-9** - We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.
- **1 Peter 5:7** - Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

- **1 Thessalonians 3:3** - May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

#### **IV. therapy/ treatment**

*What to do to when you suffer loss and need of praying for comfort during loss?*

We live in a dark and often tragic world. Senseless violence, shootings, and war flood the news and weigh heavily on our hearts. The world is not what God has created it to be. It has fallen into the grasp of sin and it continues, seemingly stronger, each and every day.

Because God promises us that His original intentions for our world will come to pass, no matter what happens in-between. Revelation 21:4 describes for us what things will be like when God brings redemption to all of creation: *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*

What this verse tells us is that our world will not stay in the grasp of sin forever. Jesus will return and usher in God’s eternal kingdom of peace, love, and joy. As believers, that’s where we will spend eternity at God’s side. This is a beautiful thing to look forward to and something that can give us great comfort in these challenging times.

There is hope to be found in faith. God will replace your pain with joy when you enter His Kingdom. Until then,

cling to Him and He will continually fill you with the hope that only He provides.

#### **V. Aversive Consequences:**

Someone that does not know Christ; including those that died not knowing will probably have a different judgement. However, God puts it in everyone's heart to seek Him. Those that don't know Him just don't want to know Him for whatever personal reasons- usually some type of loss they suffered and want to blame someone, so why not God?

What we must realize is that God does not cause these terrible things to happen to us: they are merely the results of our fallen world. God does offer us comfort, hope, and eternal salvation. His work in our lives is always for good and not evil. If we trust Him and seek Him, we will find healing from our pain and assurance of our eternal future. What more could we want?

But if we choose to continually point our fingers at God, blaming Him for the struggles of this life, we will never truly come to know Him. We will live our entire lives with a false perception of who God is. Sadly, that perception will lead to our eternal suffering as we cast God aside and chose eternity in hell instead of the perfect peace and love of God's Kingdom.



# Rejecting Christ for a Worldly Lifestyle

“The Stubborn Brother”



## Story Summary

This story is about Jake and his sister, Bridget. They both grew up being Christians but after their parents died in a car accident, Jake left his faith for the alluring world of sin. Although his sister pleaded with him, Jake wasn't ready to give up his exciting sinful lifestyle for a boring Christ-centered life. As a result, he was left behind during the rapture and had to submit to the mark of the beast.

## I. Symptom:

*What does the story teaches us about rejecting Christ for a sinful lifestyle?*

If Jake had thought more about it, he might have realized that if he had been brought up in church, the church would have helped him escape during the beginning stages of tribulation. However, trying to escape the mark of the beast would be difficult to avoid because there will be many

laws in place to force the remaining Christians into submission.

If Jake does not accept Christ, he will be punished by God. If he does accept Christ, it will be very hard for him to be saved and see his family again. Jake rejected the free gift of salvation, so now he must pay the price to become an overcomer. Then, his punishment would be decided at the Great White Throne Judgement at the end of tribulation.

If he takes the mark, he will be separated from God forever. But before that, he will suffer God's wrath on earth. This includes things like darkness, earthquakes, blood, hail, and being tortured and stung by an army of locusts-like creatures for five months.

*What can we learn from Lot and Sodom?*

Lot left Sodom, but his wife looked back and saw the city. She loved living there and the lifestyle she had. But because she looked back, she was turned into salt. This is a warning to all of us not to look back on our sinful lifestyles with longing. We must remember that those things will only lead to our downfall. We will be judged for our sins and suffer the wrath of God if we do not turn from them. So let us all take heed and repent while there is still time. Otherwise, we may find ourselves regretting our choices for all eternity.

## **II Condition:**

*What does Bible say about Loving the World?*

The Bible has a lot to say about loving the world and sinning. In 1 John 2:15-17, it reads, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."* This is a clear warning against loving the world, as it will lead to our downfall. The Bible also talks about how sin leads to death in Romans 6:23. *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* This means that if we continue to live in sin, we will ultimately die spiritually. However, there is hope for us! If we turn to Jesus, he will forgive us and give us eternal life.

### **III. Prescribed Medications:**

#### ***Scripture Support:***

I know that many of us have strayed from the path of Christ and turned our backs on him. But I want to remind you that no matter how far we may have wandered, it is never too late to return to Him. He is always waiting with open arms, ready to forgive us and welcome us back into His loving embrace.

As the Bible says in Isaiah 55:7, *"let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the*

*Lord, and he will have mercy on him." And in 1 John 1:9 it states, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

I understand that it can be difficult and even frightening to turn back toward God after rejecting Him. But I want to assure you that He is ready and willing to forgive you, with empathy and understanding. So let us humble ourselves, confess our sins, and come back to our Lord and Savior. He is always ready to welcome us home.

- "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" **(2 Corinthians 6:14)**
- "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." **(Luke 14:26)**
- "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." **(Matthew 7:13-14)**
- "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." **(Galatians 1:8)**

- "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." (**Matthew 24:24**)
- "But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice." (**Philippians 1:18**)
- "In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." (**2 Peter 2:3**)
- "Watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them." (**Romans 16:17**)
- "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." (**Galatians 1:8**)
- "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." (**Acts 20:29-30**)

Ultimately, companionship with Christ means being willing to reject anyone or anything that stands in

opposition to His teachings. May we always seek a companionship with Him above all else.

#### **IV. Treatment Therapy:**

*What are 10 things you can do to strengthen your relationship with Christ after rejecting Him in the past?*

1. **Pray together.** This can help you feel closer to Christ and improve your relationship with him. Communication is vital to every relationship, and prayer is how we talk to Jesus! Consider for a moment the closest relationship in your life. What would happen if you simply stopped talking to that person? The relationship would deteriorate! That's exactly what happens in our relationship with Christ as well. The more we talk to Him, the closer we become. That's why it's essential to make prayer a part of your everyday life.

2. **Read the Bible together.** This will help you understand His word and grow closer to Him. The Bible contains God's very words which He passed down to the biblical authors to write. Through the Bible, we learn all about Jesus, His love for us, and our opportunity to join in a personal relationship with Him.

3. **Sharing your thoughts and feelings** about your faith can help you feel closer to each other and Christ. As a Christian, it's important that we share our faith. In fact, it's a commandment found in the Bible itself! Expressing our faith and sharing it with others helps us to grow in every

way. Most importantly, it draws us closer to Christ as we reflect upon the salvation and spiritual freedom He's brought to our lives.

4. **Attend church together.** This can help you feel Christ's presence more strongly and improve your relationship with Him. Church attendance is irreplaceable in the life of a believer. Church is where we worship God, learn more about His will for our lives, and share fellowship with our family of faith. Jesus moves among gatherings of believers, so church is another place we encounter and grow closer to Christ.

5. **Serve others together.** Christ taught us to serve others, and doing so together can help you feel closer to Him. Jesus, even though He is the only one worthy of worship, chose to serve others instead of being served Himself (Matt. 20:28). We are called to follow His example, being extensions of His love in this world. By doing so, we show others the love of Christ and experience it in a deeper way ourselves.

6. **Give to charity together.** Donating your time or money to a worthy cause can help you feel Christ's love more strongly. God loves a cheerful giver. Jesus praises those who give freely of their resources to help others (Mark 12:41-44). We must remember that everything we have is a stewardship from God. When we embrace this mindset, no money or material possessions will ever come between us and Christ.

7. **Worship together.** Expressing your love and admiration for Christ through song or prayer can help you feel closer to him. Jesus is the only one worthy of our praise and worship. Music is a beautiful creative expression and it can draw us closer to Christ. If you feel timid about singing, just remember that Jesus doesn't care how you sound, He just cares that your heart is aligned toward Him.

8. **Fast together.** Abstaining from food or other things for a period of time can help you focus on Christ and feel closer to him. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus reminds us that we do not live by bread alone. While yes, we need food in order to survive, our true sustenance comes from God's Word. We express this truth by fasting, a discipline that helps us to focus entirely on Jesus.

9. **Study together.** Learning more about Christ and his teachings can help you deepen your relationship with him. Bible study is an essential discipline in the life of a Christian. Everything we'd ever need to know about God, our world, and our role in it all can be found within the pages of the Bible. The more we know about Jesus, His life, and His teachings, the more we will relate to Him.

10. **Spend time alone with Christ.** Quietly spending time in prayer or reflection can help you feel Christ's presence more strongly. We live in a fast-paced world, but we still need time for solitude. In the quiet of His presence, God transforms our hearts and minds. He allows us true rest, safe in His arms from the troubles of the world. Here, we will feel the love of Christ unlike anywhere else.



## **V. Aversive Consequences**

*What does Bible say about denying-rejecting Christ?*

The Bible is clear that those who reject Christ will face harsh consequences. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus says, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.'"*

This passage makes it clear that those who reject Christ will be judged harshly. They will be regretful, but it will be too late. They will be facing the wrath of God, and there will be no escaping it.

If you are currently rejecting Christ, I urge you to reconsider. Turn to him while there is still time. Don't wait until it's too late. You can't simply wait until His return to embrace Him. At that time, it will be too late. If you are putting it off until the last second just so you can live the way you want to now, He will know that. You can't fool God! You will only find eternal salvation if you come to Christ now with a genuine, open, and vulnerable heart, truly desiring to connect with Him.

Thankfully, the chance to accept Him as your Lord and Savior is quite simple. We find the process laid out for us in Romans 10:9: *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,'"*

*and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” That’s it!*

From there, you will have the chance to develop your relationship with Him. That will lead to Him calling and equipping you to do His redemptive work in the world. That is our mission as believers until His return when He ushers in the fullness of God’s Kingdom for eternity.

# Never Knowing Christ (Unbeliever)

“The Rebellious Roommate”



## Story Summary

Rachel never knew about Christ. She had been searching for love and answers. Her friend talked her into going to church, and it was there that she surrendered to God. Just minutes later, the rapture occurred and Rachel was included. This demonstrates that it is never too late to accept Christ.

God has given us plenty of time to seek Him. It will be 2000 years since Christ died so we have no excuse. One of the end time prophecy requirements from God is to share the Gospel with everyone so they can know Him. With the internet, phones, television, and radio, the Gospel can reach everyone-thus fulfilling that prophecy.

## I. Symptom:

*What does the Bible teach us about receiving Grace?*

The Bible teaches that those who are lost will be eternally separated from God. This is a very serious matter, as it means that they will never experience the joys and blessings of heaven. Instead, they will suffer the torments of hell for all eternity. This is why it is so important to make sure that you are not among the lost. If you have not yet received Christ as your Savior, I encourage you to do so today. Seek Him with all of your heart, and you will find Him. He is waiting for you with open arms.

If you are already a follower of Christ, then make it your mission to reach out to the lost. Show them the love of Christ and share the Gospel with them. You never know who might be searching for hope and meaning in their life. Be the light that leads them to Christ. The Bible teaches that those who are lost will be eternally separated from God.

Grace is available to everyone, no matter what they have done in the past. Grace is sufficient for all and it always enough. You are never too far gone or too lost to be saved by Grace. Grace is a free gift from God that we can all receive.

Grace is not something we earn. We do not receive more or less grace based on how obedient we are. However, grace can only be found in Christ. If you want to receive it, you have to ask for it. It's that simple. But many people make it more complicated than it needs to be. Just as a gift is not earned but given, grace is a free gift from God that is always available to us no matter what we have done in the

past. All we need to do is repent and turn to Him. He will forgive us and give us His grace.

## **II Condition:**

*What does Bible say about the lost and lonely?*

The Bible has a lot to say about those who are lost, or don't yet know Christ. In Matthew 18:11-14, Jesus says that He came to save the lost. And in Luke 19:10, He says that He came to seek and save the lost. So it's clear that Jesus is very concerned about those who are lost.

The Bible also says that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). So even if we feel lost, or don't yet know Christ, we can still be forgiven. And that's a wonderful promise from God.

*What does Bible say about Christ being love?*

One of the clearest examples of love that Christ gave us was His sacrifice on the cross. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Christ loved us so much that He was willing to die for us even though we were sinners. This love is unlike any other love because it is completely selfless. Christ did not have to die for us but He chose to do so because He loved us. This love is also seen in the way Christ treats children. In Matthew 18:10, Jesus says, "See that you do not despise one

of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven." Christ loves children and makes it clear that we should not mistreat them in any way. He even goes so far as to say that their angels are always in the presence of God. This just goes to show how special and loved children are in the eyes of Christ.

### **III. Prescribed Medications:**

One of the most beautiful examples of empathy and understanding comes from 1 John 4:19, which says, "We love because he first loved us." This verse reminds us that it is through Jesus' love for us that we are able to truly love others, even those who may not believe in him. That being said, it can be difficult to love those who do not believe in Jesus, but Romans 5:8 tells us, "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This verse reminds us that even in our unbelief, Jesus loves us unconditionally and sacrificially. As believers, we are called to have this same empathy and love for those who do not yet believe in Jesus. Let us strive to show the love of Jesus to all, just as he shows his love to us.

### **IV. Therapy:**

*What are 10 ways to seek Christ and learn more about his love for us?*

1. **Pray and ask God to reveal himself** to you. Prayer is our direct line to Jesus. If we want to speak to Him personally and reap the benefits a relationship with Him provides, prayer is our key.

2. **Read the Bible** and other religious texts. The Bible is our manual for life. That, alongside other Christian texts, are essential for our spiritual growth.

3. **Attend church services** and other religious events. To truly follow Christ, we must be connected to a family of believers. Your local church provides the perfect opportunity to do that. But it's about so much more than worship service on Saturday morning! It's important that we attend church events throughout the week as well to get even more connection to the body of Christ.

4. **Speak with a priest**, pastor, or other religious leaders. God has raised up certain believers to be leaders in our communities of faith. These people can be powerful mentors in our lives. We must embrace their wisdom as they guide us further in our relationship with Christ.

5. **Join a Bible study group** or another type of faith-based group. Bible studies and other Christian groups are wonderful ways to further our spiritual development. The encouragement we find from other brothers and sisters in Christ is irreplaceable, so it's important we invest in our relationships with them!

6. **Go on a religious retreat** or pilgrimage. A spiritual retreat or pilgrimage is a time of unmatched spiritual attunement.

On an adventure such as this, we can take increased time to spend with God and focus on the presence of the Holy Spirit within us like never before. We can then carry that heightened awareness of His presence with us as we go through our lives.

7. **Get involved in missionary** work or other charitable endeavors. Doing ministry means sharing in the work of Christ. This is a beautiful way to draw nearer to Him as we join Him in mission.

8. **Listen to religious music** and watch religious films and television programs. There is an abundance of Christian media out there for our consumption. Spending our time engages with these outlets will help us grow in our faith, so we must devote our time to them and not secular alternatives.

9. **Visit holy sites** and other places of religious significance. Planning a trip to a holy site can have a huge impact on your faith. For instance, going to the Holy Land and being in the places Jesus walked can be life changing.

10. **Spend time in nature**, reflecting on God's love for his creation. God created the world and everything in it. That means that nature itself is a creative expression of God! Spending time in nature helps draw us closer to God as we experience His boundless power and vision.

#### **IV. Aversive Consequences:**



If we don't seek God in this life, we are heading for disaster. A lack of effort in pursuing a relationship with Him will result in us not receiving the inheritance of God's children: eternal life in His perfect, loving Kingdom.

Seeking Jesus is not hard. In Matthew 7:7 He says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." All we have to do is pursue Him and He will be there. It doesn't matter who we've done, where we're from, or what we've done: Jesus will embrace us with open arms.

This is crucial because if we don't, we are forfeiting a relationship with our Savior. Without the salvation we receive through Him, we will never enter the gates of heaven. Instead, we will be drawn into and consumed by a life of sin.

# Finding Your Identity

“The Black Sheep of the Family”



## Story Summary

This story is about a young man searching for his identity. He was brought up in a Christian home with his father a Missionary. Jed was gay and felt different than the others. He was confused about who created him, who he belong to, and whom his identity can be found. He will never be happy with who he is until he learns whose he is. As a result Jake was not raptured and must face tribulation.

Whether or not Jake took the mark is not revealed in the story. However, it is likely that he either took the mark or was killed for rejecting it. For Jakes sake, we pray it was the latter.

## I. Symptom:

*What does Bible say about identity of being gay, a Pharisee, belonging to organized religion and not Christ, rich, pride, adultery, immoral etc....?*

The Bible is clear in its condemnation of homosexual behavior, labeling it as a sin (Leviticus 18:22 and 1 Corinthians 6:9). Being a member of an organized religion, such as being a Pharisee, does not automatically make one right with God. In fact, the Bible warns against pride and self-righteousness (Luke 18:9-14), and Jesus condemned the religious leaders of his time for their hypocrisy (Matthew 23).

Similarly, the Bible speaks against the love of money and greed (1 Timothy 6:10), as well as adultery and immorality (Hebrews 13:4). These actions go against God's commands and therefore can result in punishment.

It is important to remember that our identity is ultimately found in Christ and in following his teachings. We cannot rely on labels or external factors to define us. Instead, we should strive to grow closer to God and align our actions with his will.

## **II. Condition:**

*What does Bible say about finding identity in Him?*

There are powerful words to be found in 2 Corinthians 5:17: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."*

God loves us the way that we are, but He desires even better for us. He wants to guide us from where we are to something more profound. God placed a multitude of

desires in our hearts to lead us in experiencing all that His wondrous Creation has to offer. We are each molded uniquely by His hand so that we can see these adventures through our own unique perspective.

He can take us from wherever we currently find ourselves and mold us into the person that we know deep inside we can become. God has placed an identity within you that He wants to draw out. The life of faith leads us down a road where we grow more and more into the people God created us to be. It doesn't matter what is holding us back from our true selves right now. God can dismantle any barrier that stands between us and a life of meaningful identity.

All we must do to find ourselves is live a life selflessly devoted to Jesus. In Matthew 16:25, Jesus speaks profound words about identity: "*For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.*" When we give up who we *think* we are and accept who God *says* we are, we truly find ourselves.

Follow the path God lays before you. On the journey, you will encounter a version of yourself that you've never known before. God wants you to experience this profound understanding of your identity. Our identities are essential to our mindsets as they dictate how we live our lives. Going through our days with this level of understanding of who we are brings great healing to our hearts.

### **III. Prescribed Medications:**

It is so important to remember who we are in Christ. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. In Colossians 3:3-4, we are reminded that our identity is found in Christ and the old self has been put to death.

It can be easy to get caught up in the world's definition of who we are, but our true identity is found in Christ alone.

As Christians, it is important to have empathy for others and love them as ourselves because we are all children of God (1 John 3:1).

Let us hold fast to our identity in Christ and confidently stand firm in who He has made us to be.

Remember, you are a child of God, chosen and dearly loved (Colossians 3:12).

Stand confidently in your identity and let your light shine for Him.

Have faith and trust in the One who knit you together beautifully for His purpose.

You are loved and chosen, dear one. Stand firm in that truth.

- *Psalm 139:13-14 – "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."*

- **Genesis 1:27** – *“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”*
- **Ephesians 2:10** – *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*
- **1 Peter 2:9-10** – *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*
- **Romans 8:14-17** – *“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*
- **Galatians 3:26-28** – *“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

- **Colossians 1:15-17** – *“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”*
- **Isaiah 43:1** – *“But now, this is what the Lord says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”*
- **2 Corinthians 5:17** – *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”*
- **Jeremiah 29:11** – *“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.”*

Finding your identity in Christ and the truth of who you are in His eyes is such a beautiful journey. As companions on this earth, let us never forget that we were fearfully and wonderfully made by a loving Creator.

We are His handiwork, chosen and called out of darkness into His wonderful light. We are children of God, co-heirs with Christ and clothed in His righteousness. We are fearfully and wonderfully made to do good works that He has prepared for us. Our identity is secure in Him – we are a royal priesthood, His special possession, redeemed

and summoned by name. May we always remember the truth of who we are in Christ and live out our identities with confidence and joy.

#### **IV. therapy/treatment**

*What to do when you are searching for an identity.*

Many people try to find an identity in something. Your identity can be found in your talents as an athlete, an artist, an author or singer. You might find it in your personal life such as worker, church member, club membership, significant other or family member. Maybe your identity is found in a negative way. Maybe you feel you're a loser, failure, addict, too fat, too skinny, and the list goes on and on.

These things are temporary but could affect your entire life and you could carry a burden your entire life as well. So many people are not happy because their life is not the one they signed up for.

God doesn't want you to assume those identities. He is not happy with your life choices as well because you are living a different life than He had planned for you.

You don't have to live that life and you can rewrite it and live the life that God created you to live. The only identity which you will find eternal happiness is through Christ. Lose your identity and assume His. Look in the mirror and you probably don't like what you see. However



when you find your identity in Christ, every single day that you look in the mirror, you will see less of you and more of Him. Then you can start living the life in which you were created.

### **V. Consequences for Failing to Receive Treatment:**

*What if we find our identity in false identities? What happens to our spiritual growth and relationship with Christ?*

If we don't find our identity in Christ, our identity will be found in the world around us instead. Sadly, this is a broken, fallen world and the identity we find there will be a false one. Assuming this false identity means that we will go through life not living to the fullness of the potential God has placed within us. God has put a divine calling on each and every one of our lives, but we have to take up our role as His child to see it through. When we put on any number of false identities we find in the world, that calling will never be able to come into fruition!

Not only that, but when we wear a false identity, we drift further and further away from God. To have a personal relationship with Christ, we have to be our true, authentic selves. Our true, authentic self is found in God, for He is the one who created us!

If we go throughout our lives living in a fake identity while drifting far away from God, we will face eternal damnation in the end times. Instead of being ready to be welcomed into the perfect and loving eternity of God's

Kingdom, we will pass up that opportunity all together, and it will have been our choice the entire time. That's precisely why we must turn to Him now and assume our role as citizens of His Kingdom!

# Choosing Whom to Serve

“Eternal Choices”



## Story Summary

This story is about making the wrong choice. Ruth once had a strong Christian faith but she allowed her friend to seduce her away from her faith. She began to backslide and replaced her first love, Christ with the love of sinful lifestyle of going to bars and getting drunk. It was during her “drunkenness” that she was left behind during the rapture. However, she was killed by a car when darkness came upon the earth. So she will be judged on her works at Judgment.

### 1. Symptom:

*What does Bible say about remaining faithful and backsliders?*

In Proverbs 14:14, the Bible tells us that backsliders will experience the fruit of their ways: *“The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways, and a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways.”* The fruit of a backslider is sin while the fruit of a believer is holiness and righteousness in the

Lord. Proverbs 20:28 tells us that “A faithful man will abound with blessings.”

One story that comes to mind when discussing backsliding faith is the story of Peter in the Bible. Despite professing his loyalty and love for Jesus, he denied knowing him not once, but three times.

But rather than condemning him, Jesus showed empathy and forgiveness towards Peter after his act of betrayal. He reminded Peter (and us) that our faith will always be tested, but it's never too late to come back to the Lord.

As Christians, it can be easy to judge and criticize others for their lack of faith or questionable actions. But let us remember to show empathy and love towards those who have strayed from their faith. Let us offer forgiveness just as Jesus did for Peter. It's never too late for them to come back to the Lord.

## **II. Condition:**

*What does Bible say about living a Christ-centered life?*

**Galatians 5:16** says, “So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.” Living a Christ-centered life is about living our lives by the guidance of the Holy Spirit within us. When we are attuned to the Holy Spirit, He directs our lives according to God's will for us. That direction leads us away from the

sinful pleasures of this world and helps entrench us in God's ways instead.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** says, *"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"* When we choose to live a Christ-centered life, we are given a clean slate. We are no longer bound to the sin that once defined our lives. Christ gives us freedom! In that freedom we can embrace our new identity as a child of God and forge a new future for ourselves.

### **III. Medications:**

#### Scripture Support

I understand that you may be feeling lost and distant from God right now. You may feel like you have strayed from His path and are struggling with backsliding. But I want to remind you that there is hope for redemption and reconciliation with our Heavenly Father. In the Bible, Isaiah 55:7 says, *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."* This verse reminds us that no matter how far we may have strayed if we turn back to God with a sincere heart, he will abundantly forgive us.

Please know that you are not alone in this struggle. We all stumble and make mistakes, but the important thing is to acknowledge our faults and ask for forgiveness. I am sending you love and empathy as you journey back to

Christ. Hold onto his promises and never forget that His love for us is unending and everlasting.

God bless you on your path to repentance and your renewal.

#### **IV. treatment/therapy:**

*What do you do when tempted to follow friends (sin) instead of choosing Christ, church, prayer...?*

While there is a myriad of worldviews prevalent in our society today, there are ultimately only two paths we can follow in life: the way of the world or the way of God. God's ways are very different than what we know and see in the world around us. The world teaches us to worship individuality and seek our own best interests at all costs, while God calls us to live sacrificially and seek the betterment of all in preparation for His coming Kingdom.

He has called us to be set apart and holy, living by a different standard than what the world teaches. This can be challenging as we face immense pressure on all sides to conform to what everyone else is doing. But through His Word, God has made it clear which path is the correct one.

Now, it's impossible to do this on our own power. But God doesn't leave us without aid. Proverbs 3:5-6 reads, "Trust in the *Lord* with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." (NIV). This verse makes our

path forward abundantly clear. All we must do is submit ourselves to God, trusting in His guidance as we live out a personal relationship with Him. He will lead the way from there.

So, as we go through our lives, we are going to hear two voices guiding us: one toward the ways of the world and the other toward the ways of God. Whatever you do, don't listen to the wrong voice. Listen to the voice of God. He will lead you to eternity with Him in His perfect, loving, and eternal Kingdom.

### **V. Aversive Consequences:**

If we follow the ways of the world instead of the ways of God, we will experience a complete breakdown of our moral character. We will halt our progress on our path of becoming more like Christ and separate ourselves from our relationship with God. Living by the ways of the world will steer us off the path God has paved before us in our lives. Going our own way will remove us from His blessings and we will spiral into a life of sin, becoming its slave.

I know it can be tough to continuously live a Christ-centered life. But please remember that the consequences of backsliding and straying from God's path can be serious.

I want you to know that I understand your struggles and am here to offer empathy and support in any way I can. However, know that the ultimate consequence of not living a Christ-centered life is separation from God and his eternal love.

Please remember to turn to God in times of temptation and struggle, and lean on your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ for support. Strive towards a life fully devoted to our Savior.



# Christian turned Atheist (Lost their way)

“A Mother’s Dying Wish”



## Story Summary

This story is about a girl was brought up in Sunday school Christian environment but lost her love for Christ when she went to college and was badly influenced by her peers. Her mother lay in a hospital hospice room, dying from Cancer. Before her mother’s spirit departed her daughter, she wanted to assure that her daughter would be saved. It was her dying wish.

The daughter does get saved so should see her mother again in the life beyond. When the rapture came, having returned to Christ she once knew-she was included.

## I. Symptom:

*What does the Bible say about being lost?*

The Bible tells us that God cares deeply for the lost. Luke 19:10 says, “*The Son of Man came to seek and save those*

*who are lost.*" Jesus' entire mission was focused around bringing us salvation!

That means if the lost are important to God, they should be important to us too. If we find ourselves lost, we must return home to Him. If we find ourselves already in His salvation, we must do the best we can to share the saving knowledge of the Gospel with others.

*Parable: Prodigal son*

The parable of the prodigal son, as told by Jesus in Luke 15:11-32, teaches us about God's abundant love and forgiveness. The younger son in the story squanders his inheritance on reckless living, but when he comes to his senses and returns home, his father welcomes him with open arms and celebrates his return. This parable reminds us that no matter how lost we may feel, God will always love and forgive us. We just need to come humbly back to Him. Let us never forget the depth of our Father's love for each and every one of His lost children. Our Heavenly Father eagerly awaits our return, ready to embrace us with open arms and throw a celebration in our honor. Let us come to Him and experience the boundless love and forgiveness He so freely offers.

## **II. Condition:**

*What does Bible say about the parable of the prodigal son and the lost sheep?*

In Luke 15, Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son. This son asked for his inheritance money early, then left his father's home. Out on his own, he squandered all his money on sin. He became destitute.

Realizing the error of his ways, he returns home to his father, renounces his sins, and awaits his punishment. Instead of punishment, the prodigal son receives an embrace! In Luke 15:24, his father says, "This son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found!" He no longer cares about the sins of his son: they have been forgiven! He is simply overjoyed to have him back home where he belongs. He loves his son unconditionally and is ready to throw a party in his exuberance.

This story is a parable that teaches us how God reacts when we return to Him. Our sins are forgiven instantly and we are met with His unconditional love. God's desire is that we would all return to Him and accept our place in eternity by His side. He rejoices when you come back to Him!

### **III. Medications:**

#### Scripture Support

I know that at times it can feel like we are lost in this world. We may feel lost in our relationships, lost in our careers, lost in our purpose. But I want to remind you that God's love for us never wavers, when we are lost. In Luke 15, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep. The shepherd

leaves his flock of 99 to search tirelessly for the one lost sheep, rejoicing greatly when it is found. This same love and determination are present in God's pursuit of us. We are never truly lost to Him.

But even in the midst of feeling lost, we can find comfort and direction in God's Word. Psalm 119:105 tells us, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." Through scripture, God guides us and shows us the way.

So cling to His promises and trust in His unfailing love. He will lead you home.

#### **IV. treatment/therapy:**

*What you should do when you lost your way and need to find your way back to Jesus?*

The story of the prodigal son expresses some really good advice on what we need to do when we find ourselves lost in sin and needing to return to God. We can follow the example of the prodigal son! So, what did he do?

First, he recognized that it was his sin that landed him in the position he was in. He didn't come back home and simply beg his dad for more money. He explicitly says that he has sinned against both his father and God. That is repentance! After we recognize our sinful patterns and how they've pulled us away from God, we must practice repentance as well. Then, just as the prodigal son did, we

must return to our Father in heaven. He will forgive us and rejoice in our return.

#### **V. Aversive Consequences:**

If we don't recognize our sin, repent of it, and turn back to God, we will continue to spiral into the consequences of our sin. Consider the prodigal son for a moment: what would have happened if he didn't repent and return to his father? His struggles would have gotten worse and worse until there was no coming back from it. He wasn't going to be able to change his circumstances on his own: he needed the power of God in his life. We will sometimes find ourselves in this same place, and we must practice humility and turn to the Lord as well.

# Understanding and Overcoming Addiction

“The Family Secret”



## Story Summary

This story is about a man who engages in countless hours of watching pornographic material. It has affected his family life and employment. It has affected his relationship with God. Like all addictive behavior, there is a root cause and a struggle to overcome the addiction.

The man began missing church, despite weekly pleas from his wife, and began drinking and watching pornography, while his family attended church.

The man's spirit began to convict him, while he was engaged in illicit behavior and he surrendered to God. He immediately not only discovered what he was watching was disgusting and filthy, he got dressed and went to church, surprising his wife with the new man he had just become.

Not every stuck in the bondage of sexual addition turns to God. Sadly, some would have reached for the gun instead.

The rapture happened during the same church service. Imagine the loss the man would have suffered had he not listen to the still little voice that lives him, despite his filthy rags, and led him to repentance when the man could not do it himself. He had to listen and he did.

### **I. Symptom:**

*What is addiction? Is addiction a sin?*

Addiction can be described as a chronic disease that impacts the brain and causes compulsive behavior despite negative consequences. It is not necessarily a sin, but rather a lost battle with an illness. However, it is important to remember that no matter what struggle we face, we are always loved unconditionally by God. Seeking help and support from both loved ones and professionals is crucial in the journey toward recovery. We are never alone in our battles, and we must continue to show love and compassion to those struggling with addiction. This can involve setting boundaries for our own self-care, as well as offering support through resources and encouragement. May we all find healing and hope on our paths toward wholeness.

Addiction is serious disconnection with God. The more someone engages in addictive behavior, the more he will

continue or increase in the behavior. Pleasing God and pleasing oneself become incompatible behaviors.

God gave us pleasure centers in order to use with populating the world, however, sometimes those same pleasure centers are used outside the will of God. The same arousal God created for our relationships is replaced with something material and the more someone engages in the addictive behavior, the more damaged the brain becomes.

There are many reasons why people form addictions like gambling, alcohol, or drugs and act out sexually. They include but are not limited to suffering abuse as a child, depression, and suffering. The pleasure-seeking behaviors that define people with addictions are usually engaged in to find an escape from the pain they are feeling inside. But the pleasure is fleeting, and the effects of their behaviors are lasting and disastrous.

Accountability plays a massive role in finding healing and recovery from addiction. Having a godly accountability partner can help someone find the support and motivation they need to overcome their addiction. That accountability partner can check in on them regularly and provide godly wisdom and encouragement when the person needs it most!

## **II. Condition:**

*What does Bible say about immoral sexual behavior?*



The Bible tells us that there is NO place for sexual immorality in the life of a believer. Hebrews 13:4 says, *“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”* Sexual immorality, inside or outside of marriage, will NOT be tolerated by God.

### **III. Medications:**

Our loving God wants us to live in freedom, and overcoming addiction is a powerful way to experience that freedom. Philippians 4:13, it says, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* This includes overcoming addiction. 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us that God will always provide a way out of temptation. We can lean on God's strength and trust in His plan for us to overcome addiction and live a fulfilling life. Furthermore, 1 John 4:18 says *“perfect love casts out fear,”* and addiction can often be rooted in fear or pain. We can turn to God's perfect love to heal those wounds and break free from addiction's grip. Our loving God desires us to live in freedom and wholeness. As we surrender our addiction to Him, He will guide us on the path toward healing and restoration.

### **IV. treatment/therapy:**

*10 Steps for Christ-centered Recovery*

1. Admit that addiction has control over us and turn to Jesus for help.
2. Seek support from a community of believers who can hold us accountable in our recovery journey.
3. Surround ourselves with positive influences and cut ties with negative influences or triggers.
4. Take responsibility for our actions and decisions, and ask for forgiveness from those we have hurt.
5. Practice daily prayer and bible study to stay grounded in our faith.
6. Attend addiction recovery support groups or seek professional help, if needed.
7. Develop healthy coping mechanisms and lifestyles to replace harmful habits and behaviors associated with addiction.
8. Continuously surrender ourselves and addiction to God, trusting in His plan for our lives.
9. Be willing to forgive ourselves and others, allowing God to heal us from the pain addiction has caused.
10. Stay committed to recovery and lean on Jesus' strength every step of the way. Remember that addiction does not define us – we are children of God, chosen and loved

## **V. Consequences:**

We must flee from sexual immorality and all other manners of addictions. They will do nothing but pull us

away from our relationship with the Lord, degrade our character, and destroy our lives. When addiction takes root in our hearts, it will continue to take and take until there is nothing left. As children of God, we are to give everything to Him, but addiction leaves us with nothing left to give and leaves us spiritually empty.

# Influences

## “Birth Twins”



### Story Summary

This story is about identical twins and one is led to Christianity and the other a life of sinful living and promiscuity. The sister has to make a choice between the love for her inseparable twin and the love for God.

Whitney finds Christ through a nurse named, Rose. She and her friend, Mark, were saved. However, her sister, Holly, told her that she needed her to hang with her and indulge in her sinful life. Holly claimed that becoming a Christian was boring and ridiculous. Whitney agreed with her sister but later was led by the spirit to change her mind, just minutes before the rapture. One sister was taken and the other was left behind.

### I. Symptom:

*What does Bible say about removing non-Christian people and things from your life if it is contrary to God’s plan for you?*

The Bible makes it clear that we are not to have close relationships with unbelievers. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?”* Yes, we should always be kind to them, and yes, we should minister to them. But we mustn’t allow them in our inner circle unless they come to Christ. If we do, their ways and beliefs will come to affect our walk with Christ.

## **II. Condition:**

*What about a Christian’s wife responsibility to her atheist husband?*

The Bible also makes it clear that we are not to leave an unbelieving spouse. 1 Corinthians 7:13 says, *“If a believing woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him.”* Marriage is a sacred union and God hates divorce. A believing spouse that prays for their partner can have an immeasurable effect in bringing them to faith in Christ!

## **III. Medications:**

As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, including those who may not share our beliefs. This is demonstrated in scripture such as 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 which states, *“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with*

*sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”*

While we should not partake in their sinful actions, we are still called to show love and companionship to all people. This can be a difficult balance to strike, but through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can bring light into relationships with unbelievers. These relationships also present an opportunity for us to share the Gospel and show them the love of Christ.

So, let us strive to not shy away from companionship with those who do not yet know Christ. Instead, may we actively seek to build relationships and share the hope we have in Him.

#### **IV. treatment/therapy:**

*What to do when you face hard decisions about your life and letting go of things that are a bad and how to replace those things with biblical Christian things?*

There are many temptations in this world. Everywhere we look, there is pressure to conform to the ways of the world around us. We are encouraged to engage in drinking, partying, gambling, promiscuous sex, etc. Many of these things are seen as completely normal and even exciting by

the standards of the world. Seeing people living this way can make us feel left out or like we are living a boring life by not joining in.

But that couldn't be further from the truth! We must cling to our faith and the standard of God's Word. While different from the ways of the world around us, God's ways lead us to a personal relationship with God. Ultimately, that will lead us to the gates of our eternal home, heaven itself. Living by the ways of the world may seem fun now, but if we go that direction, we will be trading an eternity of perfect peace and love for fleeting pleasures that corrupt our soul.

Being a Christian doesn't mean that we can't have fun and that we can't have friends. In fact, the relationships you build with other brothers and sisters in Christ are MUCH more powerful than the ones you find with worldly people. God DOES want us to have fun, and there are many Christian things to do and Christian places to hang out. There are also many varieties of Christian movies and music! It's all about finding godly alternatives in our lives.

## **V. Consequences:**

As Christians, we are called to love and show companionship to all people, including those that society may label as sinners. Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners, showing us that it is important to not separate ourselves from those who may be struggling in their faith or actions. That being said, hanging out with sinners does not

mean condoning their actions. We are called to be companions and offer guidance and support, leading by example through our own lives. It is important to remember that we ourselves are sinners in need of grace and forgiveness, just as much as anyone else. So let us not judge or shun those who may be struggling, but instead show them the love and companionship of Christ.

If we don't replace worldly influences in our lives, we will continually drift away from the faith. The worldly things we consume will corrupt our godly character and we will find our relationship with God diminishing. If this continues for too long, we will lose our motivation to continue to go to church, read our Bibles, and join in fellowship with other believers. When this happens, we forfeit God's grace in our lives and fall into a spiral of sin that leads to our downfall.



# Hypocritical Judgmental Behavior

“Modern Day Pharisee”



## Story Summary

The story is about a self-righteous, judgmental and hypocritical Church Elder who constantly points out sins of others and condemns them to hell while ignoring his own sins. He also chose to use the gifts God gave him for his glory and not give glory to God. And he chose to work outside the will of God.

## I. Symptom:

Being judgmental and self-righteous can be harmful behavior. It puts us in a position of superiority, making us feel better than others and dismissing their experiences and feelings.

But it's important to remember that we are all human, imperfect, and struggling in our own ways. Let's not forget to show love and understanding instead of judgment. Let's embrace our differences and support each other on our

unique journeys. Let's choose love over judgment every time.

When we judge others, we are assuming that we are better or more knowledgeable than them. This can lead to feelings of inferiority and shame in the person being judged. Furthermore, judgment often leads to excluding and ostracizing individuals, which is a form of bullying.

Instead of judging others, let's choose to love and accept them for who they are. Let's practice empathy and understanding, and refrain from assuming superiority over others. We are all imperfect human beings, walking our own paths and learning our own lessons. Let's support each other on our journeys instead of tearing each other down with judgment.

Remember, the way we treat others is a reflection of who we are as individuals. Let's choose to spread love, not judgment.

## **II. Condition:**

*What does Bible say about self-righteousness and judging others?*

The Bible is very clear on its stance towards judging others. In Matthew 7:1-3, Jesus says, "*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*"

*"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"*

We are representatives of Christ. As such, we must strive in every way to honor His name. Jesus didn't judge others. Instead, He showed them love and ministered to them. That is precisely what we're called to do as well!

Don't forget these powerful words from the mouth of Jesus Himself. He clearly tells us not to judge. If we do, we will likewise be judged. Which one of you wishes for that? Have you led a sinless life? Of course not. Only Jesus has done that. Since your life has not been sinless and yet God has forgiven you, show that same mercy and compassion towards others. You know the life-changing power of God's mercy and grace. Through the Holy Spirit, show that same mercy and grace towards others.

### **III. Medications:**

It can be so easy to fall into the trap of judgment and hypocrisy in our daily lives, especially when it comes to religion. But as Jesus teaches us, we must remember to love others and not judge them. The Bible calls on us to "not judge or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1) and to "*accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you*" (Romans 15:7). "*Let us strive to show love and acceptance instead of judgment and hypocrisy.*" Let us remember to look at our own actions and beliefs before judging others. And above all, let us follow the example of Jesus and love unconditionally.

#### **IV. treatment /therapy:**

*Following Christ and sharing the love Gospel vs  
Condemnation*

As we read through the Gospels, we often see the Pharisees with their hypocritical behavior on display. They preach helping the poor and needy, yet expect others to serve them when they are in town. They preach following God's law, but ignore that God has called them to mercy over sacrifice. They pretend to be humble all while clinging tightly to their reputation among the people. They cling so tightly to that power among the people that they plot to kill Jesus because they felt He was a threat to that power!

We must not be like the Pharisees. We must not judge others. There is NO excuse for it. We are all sinful and Jesus has died for us all to set us free. We must practice humility, love, and grace toward everyone. This is how Jesus treated others and He is our perfect example in everything.

It's important that we live our lives as a genuine reflection of the love of Christ. This is how we will bring others to the faith. If we are pushy and hypocritical, we will only push others away. But if we live out genuine demonstrations of the power of faith in our lives, people will naturally be drawn to us and want to learn about how our lives have come to be this way.

## **V. Consequences:**

If we judge others, we will be judged ourselves. The choice is up to you! If you desire mercy and grace from God at the final judgment, it's crucial that you give those same things to others now. This is what God expects from us as image-bearers. If we face judgment we may think God is cruel, but we've only brought it upon ourselves. We have a clear warning not to do it right there in the Bible.

# Choosing your will over God's will

“God's Call for Service”



## Story Summary

This story is about a pastor that wanted to be famous, he tried to make the crippled walk, give sight to the blind, and heal many illnesses. He was even given the nickname, “the Healer” and had mega church with thousands of members. But he did not have the gift of healing and just like Stephen, the magician in Acts, he was not able to heal anyone. Instead paid homeless people a meager \$30 for pretending to be disabled and then healed to fool everyone.

However the con artist could not fool God and he was killed while preaching on stage when the rapture occurred. After realizing he missed the rapture, he tried to run and hide and fell of the stage. During the quake, rod fell from the roof of the church, and it speared through his left shoulder and out his heart. Just before the Healer died, he noticed the price tag that was left on the bar for \$30 and realized he threw away his eternity for such a small price.

## **1. Symptom:**

*What does Bible say about gifts and misusing them?*

1 Corinthians 12:7 says, "A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other." God has created each and every one of us. As He shaped us in the womb, He placed within each of us special gifts in which to impact the world. As we grow closer in relationship to Him, He reveals those gifts to us and helps guide us to where we can put them in action for the furtherance of the Gospel.

## **II. Condition:**

*What does the Bible say about surrendering to the will of God?*

Romans 12:2 says, "*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*" If we want to know God's will, it's a lot simpler than you think. All we have to is seek out a relationship with God and follow His leading in our lives. If we live a life saturated in prayer and Bible study, God will speak to us and clearly show us the way. All we have to do is surrender ourselves to Him, committing to living out His will instead of our own.

## **III. Medications:**

As companions on our spiritual journey, I wanted to remind you of the warning in scripture about serving outside of God's will. When we stray from His plan for us, we not only harm ourselves but also miss out on the companionship and guidance He desires to give us.

Remember that His plans are for our good and His ways higher than our own. Let us seek to align ourselves with His will, trusting in His love for us.

Using our spiritual gifts outside of God's will can lead to companionship with things that do not align with His plan for us. This can result in feeling disconnected from Him and His love for us. It is important to constantly check in with God and ask for guidance on how He wants us to use our gifts. Together, as a community of believers, we can encourage and uplift each other to use our gifts in a way that brings glory to God. Let us strive to align our actions with His will, allowing Him to lead the way. In doing so, we will experience a deeper sense of companionship with Him and with one another.

#### **IV. treatment/therapy:**

*What to do to ensure you are walking in the will of God and not your own?*

To ensure we are walking in the will of God, we must conduct regular evaluations of our spiritual lives. To do so, we must measure the way we live up against the standard of God's Word!



If we are practicing a daily Bible-reading and prayer routine, we will continually be feeding our hearts and minds godly wisdom that will come to dictate the way we live. Along the way, we must take what we learn any given day and ask ourselves, “Does this lesson from the Bible match up with the way I’m living?” If yes, be encouraged and continue walking in the truth. If the answer is no, make some measurable goals that will help you bring your life into alignment with God’s Word.

### **V. Consequences:**

If we fail to live out God’s will for our lives, we will live out our own will instead. We must remember that we are bound to a limited human perspective, but God isn’t. His perspective is boundless. So, I ask you, which perspective would you rather trust?

We can’t expect to live a godly and prosperous life when we live by our own limited human perspective. We have the opportunity to benefit from the boundless perspective of God, a blessing we’d be foolish to let pass us by. If we do, we have no one to plan but ourselves when we fall into the grasp of sin.

# Overcoming Adversity

“The Eleventh Hour”



## Summary

This story is about a man who was living in the streets. He was a Christian but left to search for something better in a large city. He was given several opportunities to return to Christ but rejected them for his own life. He joined a gang and when the boss gang member gave his life to Christ. He started having thoughts about it and made up his mind that he would rather die than accept the mark of the beast. He would have to overcome tribulation.

## I. Symptom:

In the Bible, overcoming adversity means rising above difficult circumstances and choosing to trust in God's plan for our lives. This can be seen in numerous biblical stories, such as Joseph facing betrayal by his brothers or Job enduring immense suffering. However, it is important to remember that God does not cause these hardships, but rather allows them to happen for a greater purpose.

## **II. Condition:**

*What does Bible say about overcoming tribulation?*

In John 16:33, Jesus says, *"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."* This verse helps us to overcome tribulations in this life because we have assurance in Christ's victory. As believers, we know that the pain of this life is only temporary. When Jesus returns, we will experience an eternity of perfect peace and love in God's Kingdom.

## **III. Medications:**

Through adversity, we can grow closer to God and develop a deeper understanding of his love for us. As 1 Peter 4:12-13 says, *"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange was happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."*

In the midst of adversity, we can choose to turn to God and allow him to shape us into stronger individuals. As Romans 5:3-5 states, *"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and*

*hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*

So let us embrace adversity as an opportunity to strengthen our faith and rely on God's unfailing love. May we overcome adversity with the grace and strength that comes from our loving Savior.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to trust in your plan for us during times of adversity. Give us the courage and perseverance to overcome any challenges we may face, knowing that you are with us every step of the way. Amen.

#### **IV. treatment/therapy:**

*What to do when you face tribulations of the world?*

Being a Christian doesn't mean we get a free pass from the struggles of this life. Remember, even Christ Himself suffered! What our faith offers us is a way to process those trials and undeniable hope for the future that will pull us through any trial we may face. God fights for us and we have His power on our side. When we walk close to the Father, no evil can prevail against us.

When we face tribulations in this world, we must cling even more tightly to our faith. We must remember that Jesus is right by our side and call upon Him. He does not want to see us hurting: He will come alongside us, strengthen us, and give us comfort to carry us through the storm.

With Christ by our side, we can be overcomers. Together with Jesus, we can stand firm against anything that comes against us. Then, during the rapture, we will be prepared to be taken up to heaven with all the others who call upon the name of Christ!

#### **V. Aversive Consequences:**

If we don't cling to our faith and rely on the strength of Jesus, we will succumb to the pain and pressure of our trials. This is precisely why so many people turn to sin and addictions: it is a way to cope with their pain. While it may ease the pain for a moment, it is not true healing. These types of behaviors could never restore and renew us the way that Jesus' love can. That's why we must run to Him instead!

# About the Author



Ronald Fahrenholz was born in Dayton, Ohio, to a devout Christian family. He has always been searching for ways to share his love and adoration for Jesus. Ronald studied psychology at Ashworth University and obtained skills as a Christian counselor through the Christian Leadership Institution and American Institute of Health Care Professionals. For 30 years, Ronald worked as a Program Manager for adults with developmental disabilities in Florida. Not only did he take his clients to church, but he also led weekly Bible studies with them.

Ronald also has a DISC Personality Consultant certificate and was an expert in recognizing spiritual abilities. He ran a life coaching service; however, the Lord directed him to serve in other ways, which prompted him to leave his home in Florida and move to Kentucky to write Christian books.