

A Common Miracle

com•mon *adj* **1.** Belonging to all; joint. **2.** Widespread; prevalent. **3.** Of ordinary occurrence or appearance; familiar. **4.** Average.

mir•a•cle *n* **1.** An event that is held to be supernatural because it appears unexplainable. **2.** Such an effect or event manifesting or considered as a work of God. **3.** Something that causes great admiration, a wonder; marvel.

by **Bob Grenier**

foreword by Pastor Chuck Smith

I have had the privilege of knowing Bob and Gayle Grenier for many years, on both ministry and personal levels, and can honestly say that they are two very devoted and sincere servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Bob has been one of my dearest friends, and his story is truly one that brings glory to Jesus Christ. As we all know, any “testimony” that does not center on God’s grace and glory is more about man and does not really glorify the Lord. In Bob’s case, it is very clear that all glory goes to Jesus for the wonderful work of salvation that He performed in him, and all glory goes to Him for the continuing work that He is performing through Calvary Chapel of Visalia, California. God has done wonderful things through Bob, but as Pastor Chuck says, “The best is yet to come!”

DAVID ROSALES, *Pastor*

Calvary Chapel Chino Valley, California

It has been a blessing and an honor to know Bob and his wife, Gayle. For many years, they have been a blessing to my wife and me, always demonstrating the love of God in their lives and ministry. As I read his story, I was moved by the incredible love of God in Bob’s conversion. I saw the hand of God leading and directing Bob’s life all the way through his journey to the cross. I marvel at God’s ways, that they are never our ways. God has a plan for our lives, because He loves us so much. God finally captured Bob through His love and mercy, because of this great plan God had for both Bob and Gayle in Visalia, California. We give glory and honor to the Lord for everything He has done and is going to continue to do in the lives of these two servants of God. I pray that many people who read this story will be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

RAUL RIES, *Pastor*

Calvary Chapel Diamond Bar, California

WOW! I have known Bob and loved him for years — but such a gripping story! I started reading the manuscript, and within 15 minutes, I set everything else aside, turned off my cell phone, and could do nothing else until I was finished.

As I read through it, I was reminded of what Moses said to the children of Israel. “And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.” Deuteronomy 8:2 (KJV)

How loving and gracious our Lord is to take us, humble us, prove us, show us what is inside and allow us to be used for His glory. And the Lord has done that wonderfully with Bob.

It is also through these processes of our own journey that the Lord uses us as suggested in Deuteronomy 13, “...to be equipped for the battles of life and enter God’s rest.” Bob and Gayle have been “made ready for battle,” and their message is helping many find Jesus Christ.

I hope that this book finds its way into the hands of many who feel useless, lost and confused in their journey. May they find, as Bob points out, that “Jesus is the main thing,” and that the main thing in life is keeping Jesus just that — THE MAIN THING. May the Lord Jesus bless each reader.

PASTOR DON McCLURE

Calvary Way Ministries, Corona del Mar, California

A personal testimony of a life changed by Jesus is a powerful thing in the hands of the Holy Spirit. I am very thankful that Bob has told his salvation story. May God use it to bless all who read it, instilling hope in human hearts that change is possible, and then leading them to a faith in Jesus, who will then give them their very own salvation story as well.

PASTOR DAMIAN KYLE

Calvary Chapel Modesto, California

Like Paul's Damascus-road experience, Bob's entire personality went through mutation upon his own encounter with God. He was turned inside out, as he let Jesus light the recess of his darkened soul. *A Common Miracle* is a moving narrative of human actions and Divine providence converging all at once at the intersection of despair and desperation in Bob's life. This Divine encounter transformed forever his mind, heart and soul. Bob not only went from darkness to light, but he is, and has been ever since, a faithful emissary of this Light — proving, once again, that Jesus chooses the stones He desires to fashion for His purposes.

PANCHO JUAREZ, *Senior Pastor*
Calvary Chapel Montebello, California

I would like to take a moment to demonstrate my appreciation for the ministry of Bob and Gayle Grenier. Certainly this is a genuine couple who exemplify through their lives a true love for the Word of God. In reading Bob's story, I am impressed with how God has worked in Bob's life and molded him into the man he has become today. I believe that many who read the story of Bob's life, and especially those who are searching for answers to break out of a situation in which they feel trapped, will be encouraged by Bob's transformation. I strongly encourage you to pick up this book and reflect on his story ... and transformation.

BOB CARDEN, *Chief of Police*
Visalia, California

Bob Grenier's life was completely transformed by the love of God. He tells his story here with a deep sense of gratitude, profound joy, and genuine humility.

FERNANDO ORTEGA, *Singer/Musician*
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Every ministry is important. The poor, the hungry, the sick clearly need actual physical help. They also clearly deserve our compassion and the comfort of God's Word and our Savior's promise. Less clear are the ministry needs of Christians in leadership positions in each of our communities across our nation. Pastor Bob Grenier understands the hunger these men and women have for the spiritual strength to face the challenges and overcome the temptations of power. He knows they, too, must seek God's will in the decisions they make daily that impact so many lives. This book is the documentation of a Christian journey: how one man following God's will travels from abject sin to ministering to the needs of those in the low places, but also the high. Small gifts can be most precious. Give prayerful thanks for these small touches of Pastor Bob — the caring for souls that changes lives as it changed mine.

PHIL CLINE, *District Attorney*
Tulare County, California

I was honored to read your book. To learn about your transformation to Christianity and how you overcame such serious obstacles to achieve success in every aspect of your life is very inspiring. This book is remarkably motivating. Bob, you have been a true and loyal friend to me for many years now, and I am very thankful for our friendship. I wish you continued success in every path you take.

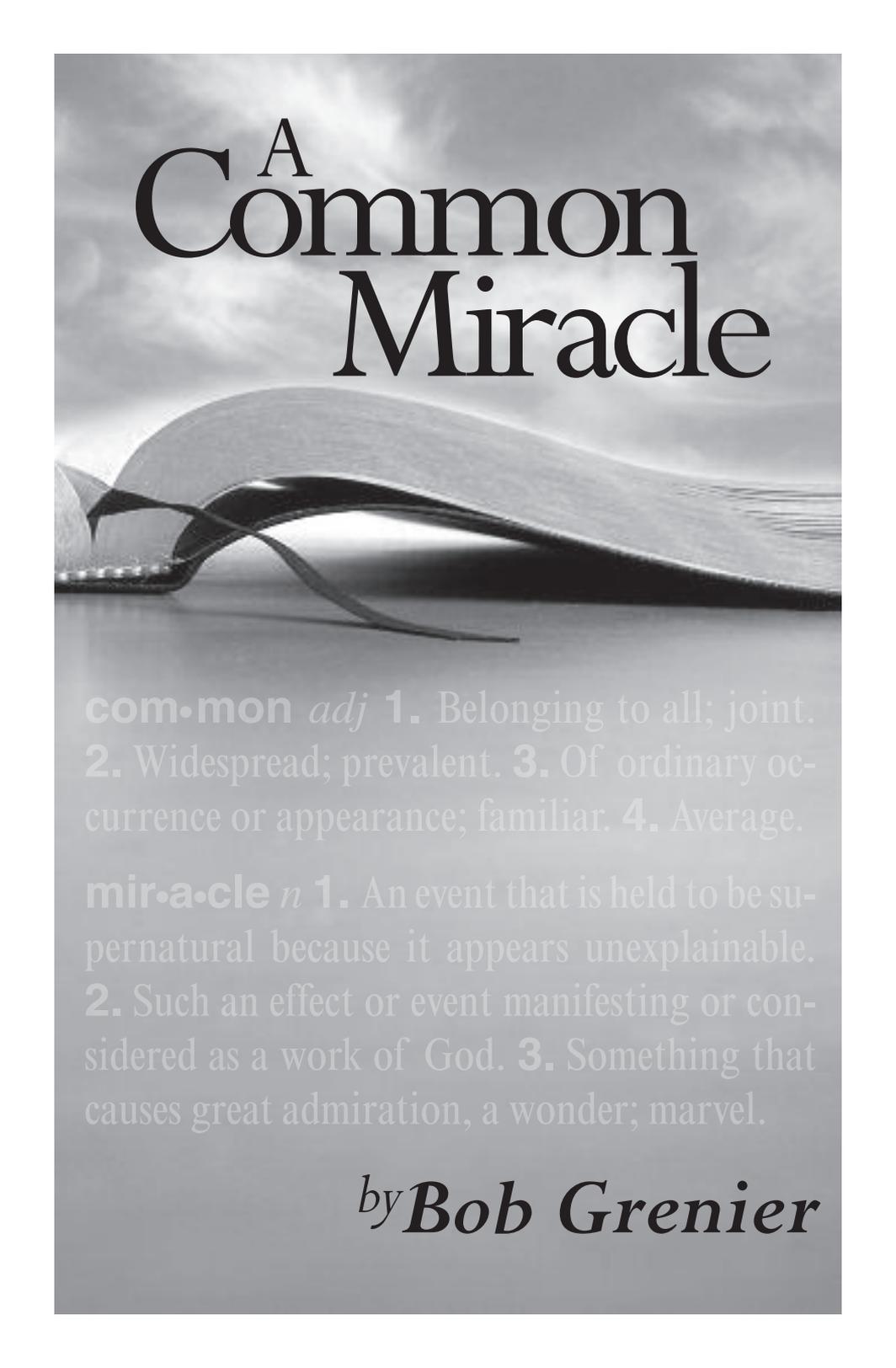
BILL WITTMAN, *Sheriff*
Tulare County, California

Multitudes will identify with Bob's childhood religious upbringing. Hopefully, the reader will find a personal relationship with God, as Bob Grenier has.

This book is a must-read — for all seekers of truth. It's easy reading, simple to grasp, and so relational between the writer and the reader

If you need hope, this is the book for you. Bob Grenier weaves a childhood into manhood with shocking openness. Then — when you least expect it — a miracle enters his life and pulls him from self destruction.

MIKE MACINTOSH, *Pastor*
Horizon Christian Fellowship
San Diego, California



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by **Bob Grenier**

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FOREWORD

There is nothing so indisputable as a personal testimony. When the blind man who was healed by Jesus was being challenged by the Pharisees, who were seeking to dispute with him over the miracle wrought by Jesus, enabling him to see, he answered them, “One thing I know, that, once I was blind, now I see.” When Peter and John were standing before the council with the once lame man, who was now standing with them, we read, “And seeing the lame man standing with them whole, they could say nothing against it.” Bob’s thrilling testimony is of a spiritually blind man who now sees, a man crippled by sin who now walks; it is a powerful and indisputable witness that the power of Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The days of miracles are not over: there is no greater miracle than that of a transformed life.

*Pastor Chuck Smith
Calvary Chapel
Costa Mesa, California*

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to a number of people: First of all, to my youngest son, Robert. Without his encouragement to share my life's story — the story of how God's grace and love changed me — I'm positive I would never have put it down in writing. So, thank you, Robert, for your persistence and affirmation. Your mother and I continue to be blessed by you, and we are so proud of you. We love you so much, Robert.

Secondly, to my pastor, Chuck Smith, who has been the single most influential Christian leader in my life. His example of leadership, shown by his love and care for God's sheep, has been, and continues to be, a daily inspiration to me. Furthermore, his example of teaching God's Word, the Bible, in a verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book method, is what our church has been built upon and what continues to grow it to this very day. So to you, Pastor Chuck, my deepest appreciation: thank you so much.

Finally, to the flock here at Calvary Chapel Visalia: There are so many people who over the years have been part of God's ministry here in the church. They have allowed me to be their pastor and to grow with them in Christ. That was the original vision God gave to me when Gayle and I came here. "Find a small group of people, begin studying the Bible verse by verse, and grow with them in Christ." So, from Gayle and myself, thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, thank you, Janet Lowry, for reading the manuscript, and helping me with my grammar. It was a personal blessing to share in the joy of this project with you. Your diligence and encouragement are appreciated.

Also, to the man who designed the cover and text pages for this book and helped to get it printed and in hand: Ed. Kesterson, your gift for creating a visual of an idea in my mind is clearly seen on the front of this book. Thank you, Ed. May God bless you greatly.

INTRODUCTION

A COMMON MIRACLE is about the way God can take a common, everyday, ordinary person and change his life by the miraculous work of His grace, through coming to Jesus Christ for salvation. Not only is it about a common man being changed, but it is about what God commonly does for anyone who will let Him into their life. And it's also about what is common to all men, and that is the need to come into a relationship with their Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Men need to be saved from and forgiven of their sins, and this is why God sent Jesus into the world. (John 3:17)There are really two things that are ultimately important in life, according to God's word. One has to do with your soul being saved, and the other has to do with what happens to you after you are saved, that is, what you will do with your life.

Jesus said it this way: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36) According to Jesus, a man's soul is the most valuable thing there is in this life. Jesus posed an interesting question to His disciples about the values in life and the things that people will seek after. What good would it be if a person could gain the whole world, but lose his own soul (that is, to leave this life without your sins being forgiven and your soul saved)? While it's not possible for the common man to

gain more than the average man, the point that Jesus was making remains true: that even if you did gain the whole world — all of its fame, all of its material wealth, all of its pleasure, and so on — but in the end, if you lost your soul, that is, you left this world without the forgiveness that is found only in Jesus Christ, what good would all that you gained be to you? It would have been no good. All the pursuits made in this life would be no good. That's what Jesus is saying here. You see, God loves you. He sent His Son to die for you, and to give you eternal life through faith in Him. He will save you, if you will turn to Him, and call upon Him to forgive you, asking Him for His mercy. He will save the common, everyday man like you.

The other important thing, according to God's Word, is what a person does once their soul has been saved. That's also what *A Common Miracle* is about. Here's what Jesus said in Luke 11:2-4 "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God has a will for each and every person, and He has given to each one a measure of faith and gives us the great blessing of serving Him while we are here on this earth. God wants to use your life for His glory. He has given you gifts to use, along with the Holy Spirit to lead you and empower you in your service to Jesus Christ.

A Common Miracle is about how God will take a common, average person, and use him for His glory, if he or

she will let Him do so. Can you imagine what God might do in your life and through it if you were to let Him? Alan Redpath once said, in speaking of so many Christians, “A saved soul, and a wasted life.” Oh, how God wants your life to be useful and effective. This is the common desire that He has for you — that your life would not only be saved, but useful.

It’s my prayer that God might use this book to encourage you along both lines mentioned: to be saved, and then to be used by Him. It’s what God can do, if you will but let Him do it. Will you be “a Common Miracle?”

Bob Grenier

A GUN TO MY HEAD

CHAPTER ONE

But when he came to himself...

LUKE 15:17

I LOOKED UP JUST OVER THE BARREL OF THE .25 caliber pistol that was pointed right between my eyes and saw David M.'s eyes looking back at me. He then moved the pistol to the right side of my head and fired off a round. He moved the pistol back to the middle of my eyes and said, "If you don't get me the money you owe me (the money was from a drug deal gone bad ... more about that later), you're in big trouble with me; and I'm going to hurt you." Off to the left, my friend, Russ B., was laughing as if all this was really funny. It was not funny to me. It was terribly frightening.

At that moment, I wondered a number of things. How could my friend, Russ, be so cruel as to laugh when I was so scared, and this was no idle threat? And then, more than

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anything else, I wondered to myself, “How did I get to this spot in my life? What had happened to me that I had wound up in this situation?” It was one of those “your life flashes through your mind” moments. I thought to myself, “How did I go from being a normal, everyday kind of kid from a pretty decent and normal family, to getting myself into this kind of a fix?” Little did I know that I was “coming to myself,” much like another young man had done many years ago.

Happy childhood memories are in my memory bank, like most kids: lots of friends down the block, spending the night at your friend’s house, and playing all day long, or so it seemed; summers that would never end; and childish, naughty things that your parents did not know about. You see, I could never have imagined, as a young boy, that my life would come to where it had come.

My parents put me in an all-boys’ Catholic boarding school called St. Boniface in a suburb of Winnipeg, Canada, where I had been born in 1947. Even then (and even though I only saw my parents once a month for about an hour), life was fun. Recess was my favorite. Playing in the sandbox every day, swinging on the monkey bars, and learning to play baseball filled my days.

The dorm was huge, as all things are for young children. There must have been dozens and dozens and dozens of single-spring, mattress-type beds lined in row after row after row. The nuns taught the classes; the priests conduct-

ed the Masses every morning and heard our confessions every week. I had lots of fun and very little trouble or sadness in my life.

Speaking French, thinking in French, and hearing the church services in Latin and in French was normal and common for me. Staring at Jesus upon the cross up behind the altar was an everyday thing for me. Little did I know that calling out to Jesus was what would happen the night when that gun was pointed at my head. “Jesus Christ” was something my dad seemed to say often (along with other words that I knew were not right to say) and meant that he was very mad about something.

In all those Masses and other religious services, I had no idea that Jesus was even alive, that He was someone I could know, who truly died for my sins and then had been raised from the dead; no idea that heaven was truly a place where a person can go once they leave this world; and most of all, I had no idea of the events that would lead up to that gun being placed right between my eyes.

Oh yes, I almost forgot to tell you that there was another boy named David who used to sleep next to me in that dormitory; and one night I felt him pulling back the covers of my bed and getting into bed with me. I was not sure what was happening and not sure what to do. I just lay there frozen as David did what he did. No one ever knew about it ... not the nuns, the priests, or my parents. Only David and I. Not an uncommon thing to have happen to boys and girls.

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What I'm about to tell you is, in fact, not uncommon; and what happened to me is indeed a miracle. Perhaps if you need to, you also can "come to yourself" as the boy in the story did in Luke Chapter 15. I was "coming to myself" looking up over the barrel of that gun. You see, the boy in the story — known to us today as the prodigal son; "prodigal" means "wasteful" — he had it pretty good, also; and he went out, leaving his father and home to live it up, only to find himself at the bottom of the barrel of life. But, he "came to himself," realizing that what he had been doing had only ruined his life. That's what happened to me; it's not uncommon. In fact, it's quite common and normal for many people.

What brings a person to ruin? It's simple. It's a one-word concept given to us in the Bible. It's called "sin." You see, one thing that people have in common is the problem of sin. The Bible says that all have sinned — Romans 3:23 — "... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin came into this perfect world that God had created and brought ruin and destruction to man. Man created his own problems, but it's God who will solve them, if you let Him. You see, the answer to sin is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins. Here's what the Bible says in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." And John 3:17 tells us, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

I want to tell you my story of how God took a young man who had made a mess of his own life, miraculously changed it, and is changing it and will change it more and more. It's simply a common miracle, and I pray that you might find that miracle to happen in your life.

DO YOU WANT TO SMOKE A JOINT?

CHAPTER TWO

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

JAMES 1:13, 14

ST. BONIFACE, TO NEGRIL, JAMAICA ... from 4th grade, to age 26 ... from a normal kid, to running from the cops in Montego Bay and all around the island.

Let me take you back to the first time I ever smoked a joint in New York City. No one had ever asked me that question before, but I remember it like it was yesterday. Sully was my friend, and he had a friend named Fox, who lived in NYC. Sully and I worked together at the Westchester County Airport in White Plains, NY. We pumped gas into private and commercial airplanes. Little did I know what I was about to get into and where it would take me. Sin, by the way, is like that. It's deceptive; it makes promises that it does not deliver. The Bible says in

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Proverbs 16:25, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Boy, did I find that out!

Fourth grade was finished in Ft. Myers, Florida. We moved there from Winnipeg, Canada; then very quickly moved to Clearwater, Florida, where I spent my elementary, junior high and high school years. Wow! Little did I know that I was on a downward slide, like the prodigal son. Little did I know that I would meet Jesus face to face, and that Jesus would change my life.

“Do you want to get drunk?” “Sure, why not?” I said to my friends who posed that question to me. My dad got drunk almost every night. Why not? And so I did, a number of times. I’m not blaming anyone, because I have done the same thing myself ... that is, being an influence for bad on others. My, what trouble we can bring to others in our thirst for fun and excitement and our misguided youth ... our years of no parental watchfulness.

“Have you lost your virginity yet?” That was the big question in those years. “Not yet, but I’m sure trying and hoping to soon,” I said. Sure enough, it was not too long after that it happened. Through those years, the power of sin was casting its grip upon my life, even though I thought I was having a good time. Little did I know where I was headed. It’s pretty common, isn’t it? To not know what is happening to you and only find out later — in my case, just before it was too late.

I got in my car after receiving my high school diploma

DO YOU WANT TO SMOKE A JOINT?

in June of 1966 and headed for Canada to spend my last few months before going into the Marine Corps. I left my mom and my dad and rushed off headlong into more and more sin than I could ever imagine. I figured if I was going into the Marine Corps, there would be a good chance I'd go to Vietnam; so why not "live it up," I thought.

From June to September was a blur of sin and sensual delight, as they say. Boot camp at Paris Island, South Carolina, was a wake-up call; and so was landing at Danang Airbase in South Vietnam in March of 1967. I was sure I would be sent home in a body bag, so while in Vietnam, as much as I could, I continued living it up. Down deep, I knew the things I was doing were wrong.

I couldn't wait for Sundays to roll around, because the Catholic priest would give what is called "general absolution" for our sins. That was the point in the Mass that I would wait for. When he said it each Sunday, I was so relieved. Everything was now OK, I thought. But then I would go right back out and live like the devil. The bad thing was that my life was on the line each and every day. Somehow, that was not enough to scare me into changing my ways.

Then my sergeant told me that word had come that my father was dying of cancer, and that I was being sent home to see him before he died. And he did. He died in January of 1968. When I got home, the terrible problem of cancer had all but taken my dad's life. How kind my mom was to care

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for him in his dying days. I don't know if he ever made his peace with God or not; I hope he did. We had never talked about God in all the years he was alive. The only thing he ever said about God was the "the family that prays together, stays together." But we had never prayed together. By the way, that is true. Prayer, as I have found out, does wonders for a family, marriage, etc.

When my dad died, my mom and I moved to White Plains, NY, to try to start over in our lives. Prior to moving, the Marine Corps took a long time to resolve my case. I had asked if I could remain stateside, so as to be close to my dying father. The months seemed like decades to me, waiting for a response from USMC headquarters. Finally, the answer came. I could either go back to my parent unit (2nd Battalion First Marine Division) in South Vietnam, or take a discharge by reason of hardship. The Sgt. Major asked me to think it over through the weekend. There was nothing to think about, as far as I was concerned, but I got back to him on the following Monday. "I'll take the discharge, Sir." And the process started, which led to my discharge some months later. My mother and I were all that each other had. There was no money, no estate, only bills that my only and older brother, Bill, paid. He is one of those quiet people who has sacrificed his entire life and is always ready to help someone else. It was many years later before I found out all that he did to clear up bills that were left behind. He did this for the sake of the Grenier name, and because he is a man of

DO YOU WANT TO SMOKE A JOINT?

character. Once in White Plains, we found a little room to rent; the bathroom was down the hall, as I remember. There was a hot plate to cook on, one bed to share, a table, a chair ... that's about it. I got a job at the Westchester County Airport in White Plains, NY, pumping gas with the hope of moving up into the world of Corporate Aviation. I had used my GI bill after my discharge from the Marine Corps to get my Commercial Aviation Certificate and my Multi-Engine Rating. Starting at the airport held all the promise of moving up the proverbial ladder.

It was interesting that while in Vietnam, I had no interest in drugs or in smoking pot; but one day, I was in NYC for the day with a fellow line jockey from the airport. Someone pulled out a joint and said, "Hey, do you want to smoke a joint?" And I did, and did I ever like it! I wondered why I had not tried this years before. "This is the greatest feeling I've ever had," I thought to myself, laughing and feeling great in the back seat of that Chevy Corvair, in the middle of New York City. This was great, I thought. And that began my use of drugs, from the weekend joint to everyday use later on.

Now, I can look back and see how temptation got the best of me. I wish Christ had been in my life, but He was not. He would have made the difference, as He does today in my life; but evil is something that destroys, and Satan is the master destroyer through temptation and sin. Sin is in each and every man, and Satan, who is the god of this world,

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loves nothing more than to help people sin more and more and more. He knows that it will ruin their lives, all the while thinking they are having a good time.

Well, that was me: having a good time. By the way, there's something very interesting about sin. It's pleasurable, but only for a season. Too bad it's pleasurable: people wouldn't sin as much as they do if it weren't. It's a lot of fun to sin; however, it's only fun for awhile. I had not found that out yet, but I was going to find out soon. That's common for people, isn't it? To be going along, having a good time ... only to be heading for disaster.

Looking back now, I can see where the Lord was being merciful to me. He kept me from dying in Vietnam, and at other times, as well. Perhaps God is doing that for you, right now, as you read this. Or perhaps you can also look back and say, "Hey, I have that in common with you, Bob. God has kept me, also." I pray that He has, and I pray that He will.

BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

CHAPTER THREE

Be still, and know that I am God...

PSALM 46:10

SITTING IN THE WAITING AREA just in front of Air Jamaica's ticket counter at Miami International Airport around the 5th of February, 1973, reading a small pocket testament containing the books of Proverbs, Psalms, and the New Testament, was this long-haired, bearded hippie with all his earthly possessions in a small backpack. It was me, and it was one day after the gun had been put to my head. I was on my way to Montego Bay, Jamaica, to finish the dope deal that had gone bad and to recover the money I owed my partner in crime, David M.

Traveling to Jamaica was something I did very often. The "Ganja," as it was called (or marijuana, as we know it here in the states), was cheap, readily available and of very high

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quality and potency. Jamaica was also a place where many would-be, and “want-to-be big time dope dealers” would go to try to make the deal of a lifetime happen. Such was the case with me.

I knew my way around the island pretty well. I had Jamaican friends with farms up in the hills, where I would go and hang out and smoke the Ganja to my heart’s content.

There was a little beachfront town called Negril. Today, it’s a huge tourist area, but back then it was just for the locals and for the “in-the-know hippies” who came to Jamaica to do what I was doing. On the beach one night, something tremendous happened to me . . . but more about that in just a bit. How did I get there, to Negril? Let me tell you the story.

“Bob, how would you like to work for the lieutenant governor of Florida, who is running for the U.S. Senate seat on the Republican ticket?” my friend said. Sandy and I were old friends from back in my high school years and someone I had run around with after coming home from Vietnam. He had moved into the area of state politics and was now working as the assistant for the lieutenant governor of Florida.

Sandy called and asked me to come down from White Plains and interview for the position of personal aide and traveling companion to the lieutenant governor. “What an opportunity,” I thought. “I’ll just take a break from my aviation career plans and do this for awhile. It can’t hurt me; and it will only help me,” I thought. I mean, how many people get a chance to do this kind of thing?

With my mom's blessing, I went down, interviewed and got the job. I moved to Tallahassee, Florida, shortly thereafter. Here's something interesting: I was using pot on weekends while in White Plains, like many use beer and alcohol ... just a little bit, and only on certain days of the week. It was my little secret.

Here's another secret that is kept hidden: Sin is sin, however you may describe it or disguise it or live it.

Wearing a three-piece suit, flying around the state, meeting all the bigwigs (and I mean "*Bigwigs*"), staying at fancy hotels, being picked up at airports by the Florida State Troopers, being given personal escorts, and so on, did not erase what I was doing. Here I was, rubbing shoulders with the top Republican political people in Florida (By the way, many of them who were young at that time are now well known and seen on TV all the time.), carrying a little bit of weed in my suitcase and smoking it in my hotel room. I used to get a big kick out of seeing the state trooper pick up my bags from the plane, put them in his trunk and then drive me and my bags to where I needed to go. All the while, he never knew what was in my bag. "What a blast!" I thought. Was *I* ever in the dark about what is truly cool and important in life.

Do you remember the tragedy at Kent State back in May of 1970? The ideological revolution that took place among the youth of our nation in the late sixties? Stemmed flowers being placed in the rifle muzzles of national guardsmen

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on college campuses? Yep, I wound up doing that very thing on the campus of Florida State University. I had “turned on, tuned in, and dropped out” as we used to say. Literally, I quit my job and joined in with what was happening around our nation.

That grip of sin was. and had been, tightening its grip on me without my knowing it. You see, as the campaign for that Senate seat wore on and I did my job, I had to find connections for buying weed. Little did I know that it was weed that, for me, was becoming the real connection into the counter culture.

Imagine a bunch of long-haired hippies, sitting around cross legged on the floor, listening to the Beatles, Jimmy Hendrix, etc., and there is this young man on his lunch hour, wearing his three-piece suit, toking on the joint as it’s being passed around. That was me. All the while, I was thinking, “This is so *cool*, that I have this job; and I also have this other secret life.” The grip of sin and the devil were at work and pulling me right out of my job into what I thought was a whole new and exciting life. I started letting my hair and beard grow, met new friends and smoked more and more dope. Now it was not only on the weekends, but it was nearly every night and would soon be every day ... in fact, all day long.

Not too long after I quit my job and due to the cost of weed, I would buy a little more than I needed and sell that extra bit to help offset the cost of what I used myself. It

seemed harmless ... and cool. And it worked.

Pretty soon, I met more and more people who were into this life of drugs, music and rock and roll. "Wow!" I thought, "Now this was really the very best thing that had ever happened to me." Oh, I forgot to tell you that back in NY I had tried LSD once or twice. I remember my friends, Tony and Ted and Ben, offering it to me. "This won't turn me into one of those hippies, will it?" I asked. "No way," they said; "It's cool; you will enjoy it." And I did. We used to "drop the acid," as it's called, when we would drive into NYC to go to clubs. Just the acid and the joint. Nice combination ... or so I thought.

Hair grown out now to shoulder length ... big old scraggly beard ... selling ounces and pounds of weed in plain sight of the state capitol building I used to work in, I started using cocaine and then selling grams of coke — using hashish, opium and any and all other hallucinogenic drugs I could get my hands on. Not uncommon for many in that generation. A flight to Jamaica was cheap, and the pot was everywhere. So, back and forth, Tallahassee to Montego Bay, I went. Many, many times.

One day, I rented a car from a Mr. Oliver H., who had a car rental agency in Montego Bay. I allowed one of my Jamaican friends to use it, and he banged it up a bit. I turned the car in without any acknowledgement that it had been damaged. Well, Mr. H. had me summoned to his office; and there I sat in front of this man who was about to be used by

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God to change the course of my life for eternity. I don't even remember him talking to me about the car and the damage done to it. I only remember him talking to me about the damage I was doing to myself. "If you keep this up, you will kill yourself," he said to me. "Using this Ganja will destroy your life. Living the way you are will ruin your life," he said. And then he pulled out the little pocket Bible that I mentioned earlier. He opened it to Psalm 46:10, read it to me and then gave the little Bible to me.

As I sat there in front of Mr. H., I started crying and sobbing. From deep inside me came this feeling of being naked emotionally and not knowing what was happening to me, except that Mr. H.'s words were piercing my soul ... hitting me like a knife ... stunning me inside. Nothing like this had ever happened to me in my life. I don't think I had cried since I was a child. The only other time was sitting by my dad's coffin. But now, here in this car rental office, my life was about to change. Mr. H. went on, and every word cut like an arrow into my life. There was no response from me to him, that I can remember. I wonder what he thought as he was speaking to me and after I left his office ... "no hope for this one."

Can I tell you something I've found out over these years of knowing Christ? It's about the Bible. The Bible is God's Word to man, and He uses it to change lives, just as He did with me. I didn't know then, when that little pocket Bible was given to me, that it would become my most treasured

BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

possession. I've long since lost that very Bible; but the Bible is my everyday companion, for in it I have found a relationship with my Father in heaven through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit of God. If you are in a turmoil and tailspin at this time in your life, like I was, may I direct you to that very same Scripture, Psalm 46:10 — “Be still, and know that I am God.” May God bless it to your soul, as He did to mine.

ARE YOU A JESUS FREAK?

CHAPTER FOUR

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

MARK 1:1

I REFER TO THE SCRIPTURE ABOVE, the one in Mark 1:1, because it was through that Scripture that my new life began.

I took Mr. H.'s advice and went to Negril, got some weed and went out to the beach one night to do just what the Bible said: "Be still, and know that I am God." Well, what I was doing that night was not the best and most accurate interpretation/application of the Bible; but it was, in my own heart, what I thought I was to do. This is what I thought God wanted me to do. The only way I could be still was to get myself calmed down with some good Jamaican Ganja.

As I sat on the beach that night, the moon was out, the sky was clear, and the ocean was lapping its waves up on the

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shore, one after the other. In my heart, I was contemplating all of this beautiful creation in front of me. I started thinking and asking myself about how it all came to pass. “How did all this beauty come about?” I wondered.

At that moment, God spoke to my heart and told me that *He* was the one who created it. Not only did He speak to my heart about what He had done, but I had two other distinct impressions from Him: one, that He loved me; and two, that I could know Him. Actually there was a third, also, and that was that He *wanted* me to know Him. I remember being so impacted by this moment that the next morning I told one of my friends that he should come out with me that night, and we’d go and talk to God on the beach. You see, God’s Word is true; and He honored His Word in my life that night, even though I was far from truly understanding it. Like the hymn says, “I once was blind, but now I see.” Well, my eyes and heart were being opened.

I went back to Florida and started reading that little Bible every day and continued smoking my dope each and every day ... still dealing and still partying, but reading that Bible with the distinct impression within myself that something was happening to me from above. I would go and sit in the courtyards of a church there in Tallahassee to just think and reflect about God.

A dope deal gone bad is what led up to that gun at my head, and that is what led to something I’ll never forget for eternity. It’s the night of the gun incident. Right there, in the

very house where I had stood outside that day looking up into David M.'s eyes, God brought into my life what I've now come to know is the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of John talks about this in Chapter 16. It has to do with God showing you what you don't know and convincing you that it's true.

There are three things that I came to know that night: (See John 16:6-15.)

He convinced me of sin.

He convinced me of righteousness.

He convinced me of judgment.

Jesus explains that the sin is the sin of unbelief. I came to realize that evening that I had not yet or had not ever come to believe that Jesus Christ was truly the Savior of the world. I realized that I was being called to believe in Him. This was a real surprise, as it is to everyone who comes under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit; I realized that I was a sinner. Yes, a sinner.

The word "sin" means "to miss the mark." All those things that I had been doing my whole life came into view now, and I saw them as sin. I realized that I had broken all of God's commandments over and over again; but one other thing came ringing through to me in the midst of God's conviction: that Jesus was holy and pure, and that God the Father still loved me, even though I was such a sinner.

I cried and cried and cried. I must have spent the whole night on my knees, crying out to God to have mercy upon

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me. The other thing that I came to know that night was that Satan is alive and powerful. *He* wanted me, also. In fact, I believe that Satan was tempting me with power to do more and more sinful things with my life, if I would yield to him and not to Christ.

Two paths lay before me. One was dark, and the other was a beautiful and loving light. One promised more sin, and the other promised the forgiveness of sin. To tell you the truth, the power I felt from God was one of drawing me to Him. His love for me, the big black sinner that I was and was only now seeing myself to be, was no problem for God. Calling out to Him for mercy and forgiveness is what happened the rest of that night. I cried and cried and cried. As that hymn says, “I once was lost, but now am found.” That was happening to me.

The next morning, I left town to save my life from David M. and to finish that dope deal, headed for Miami to catch a flight to Jamaica. Sitting there in the airport, waiting for the flight the next morning, a missionary approached me. His last name was Green; that’s all I can remember about him. He saw that I was reading my Bible and asked me if I was a “Jesus Freak.” “I don’t know,” I said, “but I believe in Jesus.” You see, the same God who was working in my life through His Word and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, showing me His love, His grace and His mercy, had been doing the same thing in California, through the ministry of Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa.

The “Jesus Movement,” as it came to be called, was taking place. Hundreds and thousands of young people were being touched by God in the same way I was. Many of them had been living the way that I had been living. We had a very common experience. The same miracle that happened to them was taking place in my life: I was being saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

On my way to the Miami airport, a trip of many hundreds of miles, the first people who picked me up were Christians. (I was hitchhiking.) The rest of the people who gave me rides ranged from nice, well-meaning people, to some who were just like I had been. In one case, two of these people were offering me drugs and inviting me to go with them to their home and party and do the kinds of things that I now no longer wanted to do. I now had no desire for these things any longer. Something was happening to me on the inside. I didn’t know exactly what it was, but I was changing.

So, Mr. Green, this man I’d never previously met and later found out was a Christian missionary who was on his way to South America, approached me and asked me if I was a “Jesus Freak.” I answered him as I mentioned earlier. He gave me a small, three or four page booklet called “The Four Spiritual Laws.” He indicated that he would be sitting over in a certain area waiting for his own flight, and if I wanted to talk with him about Jesus, to please come over and see him.

The booklet hit me like a floodlight of truth and encour-

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agement about what was happening to me. It helped me understand what had been happening to me: my new awareness of being a sinner, of what sin does to you by way of destruction, and of what God's answer and solution are to sin — namely, to have faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ who had died for our sins ... to surrender my life to Jesus ... to stop running my own life ... and to let Christ sit on the throne of my heart and life.

Everything started to fall into place for me at that moment. Toward the end of the booklet, there was a sample prayer that one could pray to turn away from their sin, to put their faith in Jesus, and to receive Him into their lives as Savior. I sat there quietly and said that prayer. It was at *that* moment that my life changed: February 6, 1973. In the paragraph below, you will find the exact words I read that day. Please look it over carefully. It tells you how you can talk to God like I did.

The following is an explanation of how you can, at this very moment, receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. You can be saved right now, through coming to Him in prayer. Prayer is nothing more than talking with God. God knows you. He knows everything about you, and He loves you very much. He has already demonstrated His love for you by dying for your sins upon the cross. The Bible promises that if you will call upon Him to save you, He will. If you will believe that He died for your sins, and if you will turn away from your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ, you will

be saved. So, here we go. (This, by the way, is just what I prayed back on the 6th of February, 1973.) “Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying for my sins on the cross. Right now, I’m opening the door of my heart and life, and I want to receive You as my Savior and as my Lord. Thank You for forgiving me of my sins and for giving me eternal life. Please take complete control of my life and make me into the kind of person You want me to be. And, Lord, give me the power of God to live for You each and every day. Thank You, Father, in Jesus’ name.”

As I sat there, Jesus Christ having become my Savior, my whole inner sense of who I was and what I was began to change. I continued to read my little Bible, and now it was making more sense to me than it had in the previous weeks. In fact, it was like a glove fitting a hand perfectly. God’s Word was feeding my soul for the first time in my life. It made sense to me, and I kept reading it and reading on and on.

I went over to Mr. Green, per his suggestion, and began to talk to him about Jesus and what was happening in my life. I might add that what he did for me, in both coming over initially and then in the following conversation, were right along Biblical lines. First of all, he witnessed to me, or shared Jesus Christ with me. God’s Word teaches us that this is His plan for our lives. I saw it live and in action, and God used it to bring me to Jesus Christ.

Acts 1:8 — “But you shall receive power when the Holy

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Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Mr. Green had a power about him, but it was not pushy or loud or odd in any way. He simply loved me as he spoke to me; and his heart and goal, as I now know, were to reach out and share the love of Jesus Christ with someone who looked like they really needed it. The other thing he did was to help me with direction for the future. You see, I was essentially homeless and penniless. I had nowhere to live other than to “crash,” as we used to call it, at different friends’ apartments for a few days at a time. I had no clothes, other than what I was wearing and one change of clothes in my small backpack . . . I think; it’s hard to remember. The only other thing I had (and more about him later) was my dog, Bernie, an English Foxhound who was being taken care of for me up in Tallahassee.

Mr. Green began to try to talk to me about where to go, what to do, and what I was going to do now, etc. He asked me if I had any skills to speak of. You have to know that this was a real step of faith on his part, because he was looking into the eyes of someone who looked like people you see walking around the streets these days.

My mind went back to my airplane flying days, and I mentioned this to him. He gave me the name of a Christian ministry in Waxhau, North Carolina, called JAARS — Jungle Aviation Airplane Repair Service. This group of peo-

ple would service and repair small fixed-wing aircraft for the Wycliffe Bible Translators who worked down in the jungles of South America. He said, “Why don’t you go and give them a try? Go meet with them, and maybe they can help you.” You see, there was something inside of me at that moment about wanting to do something for God. That’s what I was thinking. Little did I realize at that moment how the guidance of God had been at work in my life, even before I was saved.

As I look back over those days, being threatened by David M., being convicted by God about my sin and His love and grace toward me, and then meeting Mr. Green and being asked if I was a “Jesus Freak,” I can see clearly now that God had been leading me each step of the way — including this new idea about doing something for God, as I put it. I can also see that God uses people to tell others about Jesus Christ. So far, there had been several in my life: Mr. H. in Montego Bay, the Christians who picked me up on my escape from Tallahassee, and Mr. Green at the airport in Miami. I would say to anyone who has any desire to tell others about Jesus, go ahead and do it, even if the person you are talking to seems and looks hopeless. You never know what God might do!

The only regret I have about Mr. Green is that he never got to see what has happened to me after that night; but I will see him in heaven and will be looking him up. He is one of the first people I’d like to meet there. I want to thank him

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for helping me to come to know Jesus. Come to think of it, Mr. H. has no idea, either; the last he knew was that I was on my way out of his office, and he had to go repair the damage I had done. God was repairing my life, but Mr. H. had no idea. I can't wait to see him; I've thought about him so many times. Mr. H, get ready; I'll be seeing you and thanking you!

I'M HERE TO FLY FOR JESUS

CHAPTER FIVE

*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will guide you with My eye.*

PSALM 32:8

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority; but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

JOHN 16:13

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, 'He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens:...'"

REVELATION 3:7

THE GUIDANCE OF GOD IS INCREDIBLE. It's not something that I understood as it was being given to me; but looking back, I can see the hand of God moving in my life just as those Scriptures say. To guide simply means to give guidance to: to lead on one's way. This is what the Lord does for His children, and this is what He did for me. In fact,

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He continues to guide me at this time in my life. Let's look back at the marvelous ways in which He was leading me, even when I was not aware of it.

The last words I had with Mr. Green there at the Miami airport had to do with serving God. That's not something I had ever thought about or talked about or even knew could be a reality in one's life, but Mr. Green was being used by God to guide me. He didn't know it — nor did I. "Do you have any skills that you could use for God?" he asked me. The question wound up hurting me on the inside. He didn't intend it to hurt me, but it did. You see, at that moment I realized what a mess I had made of my life. I was completely discouraged about ever being able to recover what I had lost. The future looked very dim for me in my own mind.

Drugs had clouded my mind for a number of years. "I'll never be able to fly an airplane," I thought to myself. "I used to fly airplanes," I said to Mr. Green. He went on to tell me about a Christian pilot named Nate Saint who had worked as a missionary bush pilot in South America. He explained to me that maybe God would use my life in service to Him through aviation. "That's a possibility," I thought, and tucked the idea away in my mind.

Well, off to Montego Bay I went on the morning of February 6, 1973, to finish the drug deal. To my surprise, the Customs agent at the airport asked me to go sit in a small room where he would later come and begin questioning me about why I was there and what my plans were. This fright-

ened me. I had heard about young American drug dealers in foreign countries being put in jail and never being heard from again.

Sitting there, I had the clothes on my back (my small backpack had been taken from me and was in another room) and that little pocket Bible. Mr. Larry C. was the agent's name. He began asking me questions about why I was in his country and wanted to know if I was dealing in heroin. "Oh, no," I said, "I only sell marijuana." "And furthermore, I'm a Christian." "A Christian?" he asked. "Yes, I'm a Christian," was my response. He went on to say that Christians don't sell drugs, they don't use drugs, etc.; and that they didn't live the way I was living — that they had lives that were changed, and so on. Well, it's true. I *was* a Christian. I had just literally become a Christian, and my heart was changing; and this conversation was simply the Lord directing me ... closing a door and opening a door.

Mr. C. left me to sit by myself for what seemed like an eternity. As I sat there, fear filled my mind with thoughts of having my backpack planted with heroin; and then I'd *really* be in trouble. One thing kept coming to mind, and it was that little Bible and the thought that God was with me and would be with me no matter what might happen to me. Looking back on that incident, I now know that the Lord was ministering to me and comforting me and giving me His peace.

Pretty soon, Mr. C. came back into the room where I was waiting and informed me that I would not be allowed

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entrance into Jamaica, and that I was being sent back to Miami on the next available flight. God had just closed a door and was opening another. God was guiding me and was directing me, just as the Bible says He will do.

Coming back into Miami, once again I had to go through Customs, only this time it was United States Customs. Approaching the agent with my backpack in hand, I felt very funny and awkward. You see, it was unusual for me to not have drugs hidden on my person or in my luggage. (Even to this very day, when I go through Customs, I feel kind of funny, even though it's been 35 years since my old days of illegal activities.) The agent went through the normal procedures of asking me questions and looking into my backpack. What I said to him must have become fodder for lunchtime talk with his co-workers later that day. "Can I help you?" I said to him. He asked me what I meant. "Look around at all these people who are like me," I said to him. You see, the area was filled with young people like myself who were coming back in from the Caribbean and/or other countries in South America where drugs were plentiful and easily obtained. "Can't you see what's happened to them?" I said. God was giving me that desire to do something to help others. I didn't know it was God, but He was continuing to guide me and direct me.

Oh, how I wish I could see that Customs man today. How I would love to tell him what God has done in my life since that day. His answer to my statement was that classic,

“Don’t call us; we will call you.”

Through the door I went, and guess what happened next. Two young people who lived as I did approached me in the terminal and asked me if I’d like to go to New Orleans with them to “sin.” Mardi Gras was in full swing. “No, thanks,” I said, and went on my way. This was an invitation to evil. The devil was now starting his never-ending efforts to destroy the work that God was doing in my life. It was not hard to say “no.” It was easy, because the Lord was changing my heart and leading me with new desires within my life. One other thing happened with this couple. They gave me a some marijuana joints to take with me on my travels. As a matter of politeness, and not wanting to insult them, I took them, put them in my pocket and went on my way.

“I’m heading for Waxhau, North Carolina,” I said to myself. That night I slept under a tree in a park, not too far from the airport and freeway. Those two joints were placed under some Spanish moss on the ground ... and left there. When I looked over at them that night, I couldn’t believe that I didn’t want to smoke them. Normally, I would have inhaled them instantly. But, my heart was changing; my desires were changing. My heart was peaceful as I went to sleep that night.

In the morning, I had to walk through a commercial neighborhood many blocks long. The strangest thing happened to me, block after block. I started sensing the love and power of God, of His mercy toward me and of the cleansing

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of sin inside my heart, and I would start weeping. Embarrassed at the thought of crying on the streets, I would run down alleyways between different buildings and get on my knees there behind a store and just weep and pray and try to compose myself. Then I would go back up the alley, back on to the sidewalk and begin walking once again. This same thing must have happened several times. It was a powerful and blessed experience for me. My life was changing from the inside out.

Once again, my mode of transportation was by thumb, i.e., hitchhiking. I made my way back up to Tallahassee to pick up my dog, Bernie. I loved that dog. Arriving in Tallahassee, I spent the night with some of my old friends. They were doing what we all used to do at night — sit around, listen to music and get high on “grass.” As the joints were being passed around the room and came to me, I declined and just passed them to the person next to me. Feeling out of place is an understatement. It seemed to me that the room was filled with evil, and these friends of mine seemed to be evil, as well.

When I went to bed that night there in that house, I once again clutched that little Bible and found comfort and peace by just holding it next to my heart. I was afraid and was asking God to help me and to get me out of that place, safe and sound, and on my way to Waxhau.

In the morning, Bernie at my side, I took off by thumb again, only to run into the most severe winter storm in many

years up in Georgia. An older Christian couple gave me a ride in the back of their pickup truck somewhere up in mid-Georgia. I mention them among the many other rides I got, because somehow in them stopping to pick me up, we talked, and they told me they were Christians. God was encouraging me through them and through their kindness. They put me in the back of their pickup, lying down with Bernie under a tarp, and away we went. Oh, yes, I remember they gave me some fried chicken to eat, and I'm sure I must have given Bernie his share.

Approaching the JAARS area in Waxhau, which was of course located by an airport, I went up to one of the aircraft hangars. It was late in the afternoon; the sky was clear; the sun was shining; it was cold, but a beautiful day, nonetheless. The hangar door was wide open, and down at the end of the hangar were two men kneeling down working on an airplane. They saw me standing there, looking out of place to them. They were clean cut. I was standing there with my shoulder-length hair, long beard, dressed in blue jeans, boots, and an army fatigue jacket (They were popular and cheap in those days for hippies.) and Bernie on a leash. They asked if they could help me, and I responded with, "I'm here to fly for Jesus." "Pardon me?" they said. "I'm here to fly for Jesus," I repeated.

I'll never forget that moment or what ensued. "Just a moment," they said. "Don't move. We are going to get someone who can help you." Soon the two of them and a

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Mr. P. approached me and asked if they could help me. "I'm here to fly for Jesus," I said. You see, it was in my heart to do something for God, and this was the only thing I could think of doing for Him. Although, as I mentioned earlier, with the drugs I had taken, I was not sure how my mind would work in a cockpit. It was, at best, a real step of faith, but the Lord was directing me.

They began asking me who I was, and where I was from, and so on. "I'm a Christian," I said; and "I'm here to fly for Jesus," I repeated. I could tell they were not comfortable with what I was saying. I was afraid they would not believe me about my being a Christian, just like Mr. C., the Custom's agent at the airport in Montego Bay. They took me to a home there at the airport, gave me a room to sleep in, and said dinner would be served shortly. To say that I was uncomfortable at the table would be an understatement. I couldn't remember which piece of silverware to use with the salad, and I hadn't seen a tablecloth under a plate in years. I was nervous, and I thought they were also. I kept thinking that they thought I was going to steal some of their silverware.

The next morning, Mr. P. asked me to join their team for devotions and prayer and then to come to his office. This was now the second desk at which I had sat in the last month or so. Mr. P. began asking me about myself, and so on. "I want to serve God," I told him. He began telling me that I'd need to go to Bible school and prepare myself to serve God. My heart sank. School was the last thing on my

mind. "I just want to serve God, and I don't want to waste time going to school to do it," I thought. He gave me the name of a place in Charlotte that he thought might be helpful to me. So, off I went, and guess who picked me up as I stuck out my thumb. By the way, later I'm going to tell you about the next time I saw Mr. P.

BERNIE, \$5, AND GO WEST, YOUNG MAN

CHAPTER SIX

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

EZEKIEL 36:26

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

... which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth ...

COLOSSIANS 1:6

THE VAN PULLED OVER to the side of the road, and Bernie and I ran ahead to get in. Once inside, the driver asked where I was going. "Into Charlotte," I said. "I'm going to find this group of Christians and serve God," I told him. "C'mon, man," he said; "You don't want to do that. Why don't you come with me to the park where we can score some drugs?" In my own heart, there was no interest in doing that with him. I politely told him "no thanks," and

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we just drove on into Charlotte, North Carolina.

All the while, I was so anxious to get out of the van. It seemed to me that the devil himself was driving that van and tempting me to sin. For years, I had lived for pleasure and would never have turned down an offer like the one being made to me. But now, I wanted nothing to do with it and with the old life. I was changing, day by day; it seemed like minute by minute. God was at work in my heart and life. You see, He promises to give *anyone* who will come to Him through Jesus Christ a new heart and a new spirit within them — just like Ezekiel the prophet said in the Bible. The offer still stands today. He will take your heart of stone and give you a new heart ... one that loves Him and wants to know Him and follow Him and serve Him.

There is something I forgot to say in the last chapter. When Mr. Piper was talking to me about Bible school and all, and where I should go in Charlotte, etc., I was not only not interested in that course of action, but was *afraid* to go to the place he mentioned. “Lamb’s Chapel,” he said. “There are people there who can help you.” “Well,” I thought, “they are probably like Mr. Piper: into school and the like. I am not going there. What I’ll do is find some people who know God, people I can relate to.” “Hare Krishna’s,” I thought, “They are people who have come to know God and who have a background like me. I’m sure there is a Krishna house in Charlotte. I’ll find them and start my new life knowing God and serving God with them.”

You see, being saved did not in itself make me wise in the things of God or knowing much of anything as far as truth and error in the spiritual realm. My heart was pure in the sense that I no longer wanted to live my old life, but I did not know anything about false doctrine and the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. I only knew that I was changing within and had new interests having to do with God, and the old things and the old ways were no longer of interest to me.

Traffic in Charlotte was busy. It was around lunchtime, and an officer whose last name was Temple was directing traffic right there in the middle of a busy intersection. It was loud and congested, and he was moving his arms around, telling cars to go, stop, move, etc. "He would know where a Krishna house would be," I thought. (These are the folks you see with shaved heads, beating tambourines and asking for money at airports and elsewhere; they worship the false god, Krishna.) So I approached him in that intersection and said, "Do you know where there is a Krishna house?" "Yes, I do," he said. "Go wait on the corner. I'll be right with you." "Great," I thought. "I'm on my way; things are working out for me."

Minutes later he came over to where I was standing and said, "I'll give you a ride to the house." Fantastic! "Thank you," I said. Sgt. Temple (and I remember that was his name, because it was on the name plate officers wear above their shirt pocket) was a kind man. He began talking to me, and I could see he was genuinely interested in our conversation and in me. "Temple," I thought to myself; "God must

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be with me, because He sent me someone named Temple to help me.” And furthermore, I was going to a Krishna Temple (I thought). “Wow! Things are working out just fine.” Well, little did I know, but found out later, that when I said, “Do you know where there is a Krishna house?” (due to the noise of cars going through the intersection, and the closeness in sound between “Krishna house” and “Christian house”), he thought I had asked about a Christian house. God was watching out for me. So here I was, thinking I was going to the place I had asked about, in the hands of a man named “Temple.” “All is well,” I said to myself.

Drugs mess your mind up, and mine was more messed up than I knew, for on the way to the Christian house, and as Sgt. Temple was describing it to me, I began thinking I was going to a drug rehab place. Television shows had been made about people on drugs and how they would go to these places and try to get their lives fixed up and back on track. So, in my own mental confusion, having asked to go to a Krishna house, being personally transported by a man named Temple and actually on my way to a Christian disciple house named Shiloh (The Shiloh Ministry, I came to find out shortly, was part of Calvary Chapel in Southern California . . . more about this later.) only to start thinking I was going to a rehab organization, I started coming up with a plan.

Stories of men who had come into these places, advanced through the program, joined the leadership team, and then in some cases risen to the top to become the leader of the

place, filled my mind. That's what I thought I would do, and that's what I thought would happen to me. Sincere as I was, I was so misguided and lost in a fog of mixed-up thinking, from those years of living the way that I had.

The police radio called out for Sgt. Temple, and he had to change plans. "I'll let you off right here in front of the house," he said. "I can't go in with you, but God bless you; I've got to respond to this call for assistance," he said. By the way, he is another person I'll be looking up when I get to heaven. You see, he shared with me in the car that he knew the Lord, also. So if you know Christ, when you die, you go to heaven. I'll meet him someday and let him know what happened after he dropped me off at the Shiloh House, the one I thought was a drug rehab place, but I had originally asked for a Krishna house. My, my . . . what a wreck I had made of my life. Guess what happened that very night.

The pastor of the Shiloh House (who, by the way, is in heaven; he was later killed in an accident) was named Gary Drake. He met me at the door in answer to my knock. He later told me that his first thought when he saw me standing there was along the line of "Oh, my, this person looks terrible and may not make it in the program here." But God had other plans, for which I'm so thankful. Gary later became a dear friend and was a good pastor to me in those few months in Charlotte.

It's important to realize that this was my fourth experience with Christians. Although raised in the Catholic faith

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as a boy, I had not actually been around anyone who had been born again, but here I was in a house full of people who were following Jesus Christ, and really intent about Him, and interested in Him, and professing that He had changed their lives, as He had mine.

That evening, I attended my first Bible Study. Having never been to one in my whole life, this was very interesting to me. The room was packed out with a couple of dozen people there; most lived in the Shiloh house, but some were visitors. Pastor Gary played the guitar and sang an old gospel tune, "I'm Going to Take a Trip on the Good Old Gospel Ship." Well, this just about did me in. You see, I kept hearing the "take a trip" part of the song, thinking that he was talking about taking a trip on LSD. "Tripping," as it was called back then, was something I had now done many times since that first time when I had asked if this would turn me into one of those hippies. Almost all of the trips were bad. I'm not sure, to this day, why I ever kept taking them, but I did. So I became very edgy and nervous, thinking that this was heading in a direction I was not interested in following.

Then, something else happened that seemed so strange to me. Pastor Gary opened the Bible up to one of the pastoral epistles, as they are called, written by Paul, the apostle, to a pastor named Timothy. The intent of the epistle was that Timothy would know how to conduct himself in the church and how to deal with various problems and issues that had come up, and what the qualifications were for a pastor.

Pastor Gary went on to explain to the group that night that he was the pastor of this Shiloh House. He explained what that meant, and how he was responsible to lead the group, etc. Well, in my mixed up mind, I was sure he could read my mind. I was sure that he knew that I was not only going to go through the program, but would eventually become the leader of the group. So I was thinking that Gary was trying to “head me off at the pass,” so to speak. I became very, very nervous sitting in the study that night.

Following the study, we had a time of fellowship, sitting around and talking with one another. One of the ladies in the group, who I found out later was a member of the group and had been a Christian for some time, asked me who I was and where I was from. This was next to impossible for me to answer. My mind was such a blur; I was not able to respond. Furthermore, I had lived in so many places in just the last few years that I could not even think how to answer her.

The next morning, bright and early, we had a Bible Study. Then the group headed out to work for the day. I was asked to just remain in the house for at least two weeks — not to go outside — and was told I did not need to go to work. Pastor Gary asked me to just hang around the house and help out throughout the day.

Weeks went by quickly, and my mind was starting to clear up. One thing I knew for sure was that I was so interested in Jesus Christ now. There was nothing I wanted to do more than to serve Him with all my heart and with the rest

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of my life. I began reading the book of Revelation, and it scared me to death ... the tragedies that were going to come upon this world. "Jesus Christ is coming back," it said. "The world lies in the hand of the wicked one; use your time wisely," the Bible said. "Tell others about Jesus." How exciting this was to me, and how thrilled I was to be serving the Lord there in that Shiloh house.

Soon I heard about the Bible school back in Eugene, Oregon; for those who were interested and serious about growing in Christ, they were welcome to go back there and start in the Bible school. "I want to go, Pastor Gary." "OK" he said. "Let's work toward that goal." Funny how now I wanted to go to Bible school when, just weeks earlier, I'd had an aversion to it. You see, I was starting to grow in Christ and get a little grounded in the Word of God. My love for Jesus was growing, and my whole sense of destiny *with* Christ and *for* Christ was developing within my life.

It came out that I had once been a pilot, having that commercial rating and that multi-engine rating, and that I had experience working in politics, and so on. Well, this got back to the leaders of the Bible school in Oregon, who were just now looking into buying a small, twin-engine airplane. Well, you can see where all of this was headed. They thought, and so did I, that maybe flying for Jesus was going to take place soon.

Funny how God works in a person's life! The only thing that I thought I could do for Jesus seemed to be materializ-

ing; and the one thing I didn't want to do, i.e., go to a Bible school, now was becoming a desire in my heart. How exciting all this was!

Well, how to get to Eugene, Oregon, was the question. And, what about my dog, Bernie? Remember, hitchhiking was common in that day. And there were Shiloh houses all across the United States. In fact, at the height of the ministry, there were 60 or so.

I was given \$5, a few sandwiches, and a list of Shiloh houses. Another Bible school prospect and I stuck out our thumbs and began heading west ... oh, yes, and Bernie, also.

We would go on routes that took us to cities where there was a Shiloh house and spend the day or night at the house, shower, wash our clothes, and get a little bit to eat, and then keep heading west. How exciting those days were, and how blessed we were to pray for a car to stop and pick us up, and to pray for a meal, hoping that someone would offer us food to eat. Each step of the way was an adventure. It took a week or so to get there, but finally we saw the signs on the highway telling us that Eugene, Oregon, was not too far up ahead. What a blessing! Little did I know who I was going to meet there and the different doors of opportunity that were going to open.

CLEANING TOILETS AT 2:00 A.M. AND CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

CHAPTER SEVEN

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way.

PSALM 37:23

WHILE IT MAY SEEM SIMPLE and inconsequential to some, each and every step of the way to Oregon was *huge* for me. God was carrying me along and had put this tremendous love for Him and others in my heart, and the thought of being able to serve God was a daily blessing.

Communal living was at its very best in the Shiloh ministry. There was purity of motive; girls and boys lived in separate dorms or sections of houses. We had a common goal, and that was to do everything we could to make ourselves available to God, to find His will for our lives, and to tell others about Jesus Christ. We would work together in group labor jobs and then throw all of our earnings into a common pot. The range of jobs went from planting trees

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for Weyerhaeuser, to picking chickens out of barns late at night and putting them into cages on trucks to be delivered to slaughter houses, to trimming Christmas trees or picking strawberries, and to doing odd jobs here and there through temporary employment agencies such as Manpower, and so on.

At the heart of all we did were prayer meetings, Bible studies, street witnessing, serving one another, loving one another, and getting ourselves grounded in the study of the Bible. Our mid-week Bible studies would cover 20 chapters of the Bible. We would read those 20 chapters in the days leading up to the study, and then one of the pastors would give us a running commentary on them. What exciting times! Again, I felt that sense of destiny of just knowing, deep down inside, that I was on the track that God had for me, and that God and His will were the most important things I could do or would ever want to do. By the way, do you know that it's still that way today in my life? Now some 35 years later, the heart of life is no different than what it was when I first began to follow Jesus Christ. God truly has been ordering my steps, as the Scripture says at the start of this chapter, and what an ordering it became upon going to Oregon; and my, how it continues even to this day ... and how I look forward to His continued leading and guiding.

In addition to doing any and every group labor job that came along, the ministry had me working on the further development of my pilot's certificates. Restarting my flying

career was no small thing for me. Getting back into a small two-seater airplane with an instructor, and in a sense starting all over again, was very challenging. Then, after getting my license updated and checked by an FAA official, I was ready for my first solo flight again. “Can I do this?” I thought. It takes a clear mind and a steady hand and nerve to fly an airplane. “Lord, help me, I pray,” was prayed often. “Cleared for takeoff,” said the tower; and off I went. Around the local area I flew, thanking the Lord each second of the way; then I was cleared to land, and down I came all in one piece.

Well, I guess there *is* such a thing as a miracle: brain coming out of fog and getting reactivated. Thank you, Lord. God helped me to obtain my instrument rating, my flight instructor rating, and my ground instrument instructor rating. When I look back on all of this, I know that it was only the Lord who could have helped me make this progress. All in all, I wound up with about 600 hours of flying time.

The Shiloh ministry purchased two airplanes over time: one was a Cessna 310, and the other an Aero Commander. Both were twin engines and were used to fly different folks around in the Shiloh ministry. We would fly all over the United States, visiting the different Shiloh houses. My part in the aviation ministry was as co-pilot, serving alongside the pilot in command, who was a man named Gary. We would fly all through the Mid-west, down into Colorado, up into the Wisconsin area, down into Florida, and up and down the east coast of the United States. Can you guess

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what airport we might have stopped at on one occasion?

Waxhau's airport. It was really more of a small airfield at that time. It did not have a control tower, but, rather, a small radio system that you could call to let them know that you were going to be landing there. The folks running the radio there would not have recognized the call letters on our airplane, nor would they have recognized my voice as I called in to say we were landing.

On that day, I was the pilot in command of our Aero Commander. It was a nice landing, and we pulled up to the area near the hangar and office and brought the airplane to a stop. We opened the door, stepped out and were greeted by one or two people who worked there at JAARS. I asked, "Is Mr. Piper around?" "Oh, yes, we'll go get him," they said. My shoulder-length hair had long been cut, my beard was trimmed neatly, there was no dog named Bernie on a leash, and I was not wearing a military fatigue jacket; so it took Mr. Piper a minute or two to realize that the person here "flying for Jesus" was the same person he had met a couple of years earlier. What a moment for the both of us! We realized that the Lord had been at work. I went on to explain to him what had happened since I last saw him that February in 1973. Needless to say, it was a moment of encouragement for both of us to see what the Lord had done. Little did I know at that time the real plans or the specific plans that God had for my life — my future wife, and the wonderful calling of God to be a pastor teacher.

She did not catch my eye too much the first time I saw her, nor the second time, nor the third. But after a while, having become friends, attending Bible school classes together and working next door to each other (she in an ice cream shop and me in a sandwich deli), the love bug started nipping away at me and eventually gave me that bite that I thank God for all the time. Gayle is her name. We joke to this day about who invited whom for dinner. I claim she invited me, and she claims that I invited myself. One thing I know for sure is that the pork chops she cooked that night were unmistakably delicious. My wife is one of the best cooks I know. Her specialty is home cooking, and she does it every week in our church café, even to this day. I would also say of my wife that she is one of the best Christian women I know. She loves the Lord with all of her heart, and we serve Christ together day by day and side by side and are committed to serving Him 'til He comes for us or 'til He takes us home. We consider it a tremendous privilege to be in the ministry, and we don't take it for granted.

We fell in love — me more than she, at first. My wife came to know Jesus a few years before I did. She was in Pastor Chuck Smith's church when it was very small. To this day, whenever we see him, I can tell of his great love and fondness for her. He has known her since she was just a young girl. As of this writing, we have been married 31 years. My wife is my best counselor. She also has excellent discernment. We are a very good match for one another.

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What can I say about the value of my wife? Only God knows the depth of it. The book of Proverbs says that a virtuous wife is of great value; that's what I have in my life. One of the things that I appreciate about my wife is that she helps hold me accountable to the Lord and to myself. She also is very humble and a great example to anyone of how to take responsibility for your faults when you become aware of them. I've never known my wife to back away from the truth about herself or anyone else or anything else.

Serving the Lord is our main priority together. We realize that time is going by so quickly; and we know the Bible says to redeem the time, or to take advantage of the time you have. We are together trying to do that. The older we get, the more we recognize how little time we have left on this earth. We try to start each day together in prayer and reading the Bible. We will sit in my home office, and I'll read a chapter, and then she a chapter, then me, etc. We then end our time together with prayer. We have found that this is one of the best ways to draw close together ... by putting Christ first and seeking Him together through His Word and by prayer.

The title of this chapter is "Cleaning Toilets at 2:00 a.m. and Cleared For Takeoff." Well, the takeoff part has been shared, but let me tell you what happened as time rolled on.

The aviation ministry started to wind down, and I was asked to fill in for one of the pastors in one of the Shiloh houses. Back to NY I went; actually it was Flushing, NY, just outside of NYC. It was hard to leave Gayle. We were

not married yet, but were very much in love; it was the typical heartache and heartbreak you read and hear about. My heart was aching and breaking for her, but we realized that God was calling me to go do something at the time. It's funny how God works. He does it in such a way that there's no mistaking it's Him. That way, it's easier to give Him the credit for it. He will take a very common, normal, everyday person, give them a heavenly gift, and then allow them to use that gift for Him and for the good of His people.

Well, the gift of and calling to be a pastor was not something I had ever wanted to do or even imagined myself doing, but here I was now the pastor of this Shiloh communal house in NY. One day in Oregon, and the next day in Flushing, with a house, full of people, just like the one I had gone to in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Soon I was asked to go and fill in for another pastor up in Minneapolis. So, off I went. That particular ministry had secured a contract with a janitorial company that cleaned the international airport there. We would work the graveyard shift, cleaning every imaginable square inch of the place: the main lobby areas, in front of the ticket counters, all the concourses, the bath rooms, and so on. As hard as it was working in the middle of the night, God gave me joy in my heart. I knew that this was just where He wanted me to be at that time in my life.

It was around July of 1977 by this time, and my phone bill back to Eugene was a big one each month. The letters

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Gayle and I wrote back and forth she still has to this day. One night while working at the airport, just after midnight my time, I called and asked her to marry me. How exciting it was to talk with her and for her to say “Yes.” Soon, I would be going back to Eugene. Those days went by slowly, but they did go by; and God’s will for the future was coming into focus. Little did I know what lay ahead.

FIND A SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE, ETC.

CHAPTER EIGHT

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

EPHESIANS 4:11, 12

“WOULD YOU LIKE TO PASTOR the church in Eugene?” “Yes, I guess so,” I said. “Great, go ahead and get started,” I was told.

God had put it into my heart, when I was first saved, to do something for Him, but this had never crossed my mind. Here I was with a small office and a building that would seat about 150-200 people and a congregation about that size. This congregation was made up mostly of folks who were connected with the Shiloh ministry in Eugene. Many of the members worked for the Shiloh ministry, and many of the members were right out of the community and from the university there. What little preparation I had in the two Shiloh houses was just that — little preparation. But when God is

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at work, He gives you the faith and the strength to do whatever He puts before you. So here we went, week by week, preparing sermons and meeting during the day with people who wanted prayer and advice about what to do.

Then it happened. I started listening to taped Bible messages by Pastor Chuck Smith. I had heard about Pastor Chuck and was now hearing him teach the Bible. To this day, I listen to him; and just hearing his voice is a blessing to me. Little did I know how God would use his life and ministry to change me and guide me and help me find the call of God in my own life.

One day, listening to Pastor Chuck teach out of the book of Ephesians, Chapter 4, about how Christ has given certain gifted men to the body of Christ, and how some were evangelists and some were pastors, my heart and mind were moved. “An evangelist,” Chuck said, “is someone who is gifted to tell others about Jesus and see them saved. On the other hand, a pastor teacher is gifted by God to help those who are saved grow in their walk with God.” As I pondered these two different gifts from Christ, it was clear to me that the desire in my own heart was that of pastoring — not being an evangelist, but, rather, teaching the Bible to those who are saved. Within myself, I did not have the desire to be an evangelist, nor did I think I had that gift from God. But to *teach* the Bible ... now *that* was a different story. This is what I thought God was calling me to do.

Attending my first pastors’ conference in Twin Peaks,

California, was something I'll never forget. There weren't that many other pastors there, maybe just 50 or 100, including wives and assistants, but it seemed like a huge crowd to me. Every word that was shared by Pastor Chuck and others were like living words hitting my soul and affirming God's will for my life, teaching me about God's will and about loving Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit was just starting to explode the Calvary Chapel Movement. I can remember Pastor Chuck sitting on the edge of the platform telling us how he was the most surprised of anyone to see what the Lord had done and was doing. How the Word of God would burn in our hearts as we sat and learned from him. Pastor Chuck had come up to Eugene once or twice, and I had the chance to shake his hand and say hello; but now I was really getting to hear the Bible being taught and applied in the most practical of ways. It put a hunger in my heart to be a good pastor and to learn the Bible so I could teach my flock.

The name Charles Spurgeon kept coming up, and Matthew Henry, and G. Campbell Morgan. These men were great preachers and teachers from another era, I was told. They have commentaries and books about the Bible. "They can help me study and learn what the Bible says," I thought. What a shock I encountered. "The book of Matthew will be a good place to start teaching from," I thought. It's right in the beginning of the New Testament. So I obtained a copy of Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible and opened it

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up to the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter One. My, was I ever surprised! He spent about two pages just talking about the very first verse. He knew so much about the Bible and about Jesus; and I knew so little. “Here I am a pastor and am supposed to teach the flock God’s Word; and I hardly know anything about God,” I thought. All I knew was that Jesus Christ had changed my life, and that I loved Him with all my heart, and that my passion was to serve him in any way He wanted me to.

The more I read these commentaries, the more saddened I became. Eventually, I tried to memorize G. Campbell Morgan’s written sermons in Matthew. It was complete plagiarism. It was not very much fun trying to preach another man’s message; and yet there were all these people coming to church every Sunday, and they were looking expectantly to me to tell them about God. It was sheer misery every week trying to prepare a sermon. There was no joy or pleasure in it.

Lectures to My Students, by Spurgeon, was another life-changing book I ran across. I can’t even remember how I got a copy of it or who told me about it, but what a blessing it was to hear about the call to ministry by God, because that’s what I was experiencing in my heart: the call by God to pastor even though I was already pastoring a church.

It seems to me that God used my sense of inadequacy to drive me to Him and to hear His voice speaking to my heart. My problem was that I really believed that God was calling

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me to be a pastor, but I did not know the first thing about the Bible. That's an exaggeration, of course, but not by much. I loved reading the Bible, and I loved hearing the Bible being taught, but I sure was not very confident that I could teach it. Yet the compelling within was unmistakable. I believed that God was calling me, just like it says in the book of Ephesians, to be a pastor teacher.

Then one day in my home office after Gayle and I had been married just a very short time, perhaps just a few months, and we had purchased a small but new home and had a couple of new cars, God spoke to my heart. He told me, "I want you to go somewhere (and it seemed to me like He was directing me to somewhere in the southwestern part of the United States) and find a small group of people and begin to study the Bible and grow in Christ." And the accompanying thought in my heart (what I sensed the Lord telling me) was that a church might very well come out of all this. Additionally, I was deeply conflicted within with the twin problems of a sense of calling and the desire to be a pastor, and with my inadequacy to be a pastor. "I've got to find out for sure if God is actually calling me into the ministry of pastoring," I thought. "If not, then I can serve God in some other way; and if, yes, He wants me to be a pastor, then that's what I will do." It seemed to me that the best way to figure out if God had called me or not was to start from scratch, so to speak. If God were calling me, then He would make it clear to me. I'll go somewhere where no one knows

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me, and I don't know anyone, and go from there. This way I would know for sure what God was doing in my life.

Having met Pastor Chuck a number of times, and having come to appreciate his wonderful teaching of the Bible, and seeing him as a mentor and someone whom I trusted and respected and believed could help me, I made an appointment to see him.

The ministry there in Costa Mesa was huge and very diverse, compared to what I had been exposed to. Sitting through services that week (while I waited for my appointment), I began observing all that was going on and all of the men on staff there. Watching these staff pastors go about their business only reinforced within my heart that I was completely inadequate to do what I believed God was calling me to do.

Two significant things happened that week: one had to do with faith and tears; the other had to do with loving counsel and direction.

Waiting for my appointment seemed like it took forever: the days seemed like years, literally. My heart was wrenched inside. I wondered if I would go crazy with all this thought of "Is God calling me to be a pastor or not?" One night (we were staying with Gayle's mother at the mobile home park), I sat in our car in the carport. "What if God is not calling me, and I'm only making this up in my mind?" I thought. "Yet, I don't think I am; but what if I am deceiving myself?" Back and forth I went. "I have to support my wife; I can't just be

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irresponsible. What am I going to do?” The tears began to flow as I cried out to the Lord to help me and to guide me. God began to minister to me and assure me that indeed He had called me. This meeting with the Lord was very powerful and very intimate. It was as if God allowed me to make contact with Him, and He with me. His presence was very real to my soul, and very comforting. The burden of confusion was starting to lift from me, and I was much more confident that pastoring was just what the Lord wanted me to do. However, now there were still questions about where and how, etc. How would I support my wife, and so on? This was my first responsibility in life.

Finally, the day came to meet Pastor Chuck in his office. Gayle and I were very happy, and yet nervous and expectant that something would come of all this. Now, it's important to remember what the Lord had put on my heart a week or so earlier in Oregon. “I'm calling you to leave where you are, (in Eugene, Oregon, pastoring the church) and go somewhere (I thought somewhere in the southwestern part of the US), find a small group of people and start studying the Bible verse by verse and grow with them in Christ (I sensed a church will probably come out of this).” I forgot to mention the verse by verse part of all this earlier in the book. But in listening to Pastor Chuck teach out of Ephesians 4 about pastor teachers, equipping the saints for the work of ministry and so on, the teaching part of that gift was explained by him as expository “verse by verse” teaching. That is compared

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with what is called “topical teaching”: picking a verse here or there and building a sermon from it. Using “verse by verse,” you take the Bible and teach it from Genesis to Revelation: just read the verses, explain the meaning of the verses, and then apply them to everyday life. He stressed the importance of teaching the *whole* counsel of God’s Word to the people, not just those parts of the Bible about which we may like to talk. This way, the people of God would be fed a balanced diet of God’s Word and would have the chance to really grow up into maturity and become well-rounded Christians. This method of verse by verse teaching would also keep the pastor from teaching his pet doctrines and force him to deal with *everything* that is in God’s Word. As Pastor Chuck has often said, “You can teach *from* the Bible, you can teach *about* the Bible, or you can *teach the Bible*.” That is, one could stand up and take a verse here or there and just teach about it. Or, one could refer to the Bible in his sermons. Or, one could open the Bible and just go through it, verse by verse, and teach those verses in their context, explaining the true meaning of them and then showing the people how these truths apply in their everyday lives.

I have to tell you that this is the thing in my own life that I love doing more than anything else. I wholeheartedly believe that this is the very best way that a pastor teacher can honor God and care for God’s people. Simply, teach the Bible simply. Stick to the Bible; go through it verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter, and book

by book. What a delight it is to me at this very time in my life. In fact, I would say to you that my love for the Bible and being able to teach it week by week is the most wonderful blessing in my life.

Well ... back to the meeting with Pastor Chuck. How kind and gracious he was with us as we sat there in front of his desk. Remember, God had spoken to my heart about what to do, but the sense of inadequacy was taking over again, and fear was at work, as well. "Can I work here at the church for you, Pastor Chuck?" I said. This would help me to learn and grow; and then I could go on from there, I thought. (I also thought it would provide me with a paycheck week by week.)

Pastor Chuck just looked at me, and through me, it seemed, and into me for what seemed like a million years. He did not say anything; he just kept looking at me. Not in a mean way, but not in a comforting way, either; but in a penetrating way. Over the years, I've come to understand that he was probably just silently praying and asking God how to answer my question. The silence in his office was deafening, as they say. "On second thought," I said, "do you know where I might find a small group of people who would be interested in studying the Bible verse by verse and growing in Christ?" "Oh, yes, I sure do," he said. You see, God was guiding me and holding me to what He had already said to me. He was not allowing my fear and sense of inadequacy to derail me from His plan to go to Visalia, California.

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Pastor Chuck began to list off a number of places where people lived who had at one time been at his church but had moved away. They missed the simple Bible teaching of his ministry and always asked him to send pastors to teach them the Word of God in simple, verse by verse method.

He mentioned the Phoenix area and the San Jose area, but nothing seemed to stir within our hearts. Then he said, “Visalia.” “Vi, what?” I said. He repeated it and explained that it was up in central California, and that we would drive right by it on Highway 99 as we drove home to Eugene. That’s all I remember from the meeting. He seemed happy, and we seemed relieved — as if something had been accomplished by talking with him. Well, something *had* been accomplished. It was the Lord directing us to our life’s location and calling and love. As of this writing we are entering into our 30th year of ministry in Visalia. (More about the ministry in the next chapters.)

We rushed back to Gayle’s mother’s and got out an atlas of California and started looking for Visalia. “There it is, Honey,” I said. “Visalia” ... a pretty name and an unusual name to us. Pastor Chuck had further encouraged us by saying, “I’ll bet if you went to Visalia and started teaching the Word of God, that a couple hundred people would come out of the woodwork, and a church might come of it all.” However, he went on to say in the most sobering tone, “It’s very hot there ... very, *very* hot.” “But if you want to cool down, you can go up into the Sequoia Mountains.” He had

been up that way many times, he told us. His family used to go up there on vacations.

Pastor Chuck scribbled the name and phone number of a couple named Jim and Valerie, who had moved from Costa Mesa to Visalia and had been asking him to send them a pastor. Atlas in hand, scribbled piece of paper in hand, excited as we could be, we prayed and said, “We think this is where the Lord is leading us.” I’ll never forget the joy of that moment and the sense of God’s leading us, and so on. This was, as we look back, nothing more than the Holy Spirit of God putting into our hearts a sense of the will of God.

We packed up and took off heading north on I-5 and then onto the 99 heading home to Eugene. Along the way, we kept talking to one another. “Do you really think we should go to Visalia and serve God?” We were asking each other what the other thought. “Yes,” was the answer we both felt in our hearts.

The sense of excitement and confidence and relief was growing by the mile. It takes about 3 1/2 hours to drive from Costa Mesa to Visalia. (By the way, over these last 30 years we have made the trip down there and back so many times that we know every bump on the road.) Finally, we saw a sign that said “Visalia/Tulare.” Well, we did not know that the bottom was about to fall out of our hearts in a moment or two.

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CHAPTER NINE

And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head."

MARK 4:26 – 28

AS WE FOLLOWED THE SIGN that had "Visalia" on it, we failed to notice the other word, "Tulare," as well. Our hearts sank, as we proceeded through the exit and onto the road it led to.

At that time, this area we were now driving through was pretty remote and desolate. I mean, there was a used-car lot on one side of the road, with a string of lights hanging between two poles. Just a few stores were scattered about here and there.

Prior to the turn onto this road, and for the last 3 1/2 hours, Gayle and I had pretty well come to the conclusion that God was leading us to move to Visalia, but when we came upon this near desolate area, thinking that this was

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Visalia, we very quickly had serious second thoughts. “Maybe God is not leading us to Visalia,” I said to her; and she agreed. But then, all of a sudden, we saw a sign that said “Visalia — 4 miles ahead,” and our hope revived. On we went, feeling more like we had for the last few hours (which, by the way, was joyous and happy at the prospect of what God was doing and how God was leading us).

The Sequoia Mall looked so good to us as we came into the south side of Visalia. It was new, modern, and looked like civilization. Today, the population is over 100,000; but when we arrived there in July of 1978, it was around 27,000.

We stopped at Lyon’s restaurant to eat. After praying over our food, a tall man with a big white beard (whom we came to know later on . . . his name was John Maynard, and he has since gone to heaven) came over and said, “Are you Christians?” Rather surprised at the question, instantly Gayle and I felt as if this man was being used by God to confirm our thoughts of coming to Visalia. “Why, yes we are,” we answered. He went on to introduce himself and then to ask where we were from, and so on. We explained that we were seeking the Lord about coming here and starting a church. Mr. Maynard instantly encouraged us to do it. He was like a big angel speaking for God, as far as we were concerned. How encouraged we were at that moment. We were *more* than encouraged: we were *thrilled*.

Driving back to Eugene and putting our house up for sale all seemed to go by so fast. In fact, our house sold and

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closed in nine days. How that happened, I have no idea; but it did. This was another encouragement for us ... that we were in the middle of God's will for our lives. Gayle and I packed up the Ryder truck (along with some help from a few friends), hitched our little four-door Toyota to the back, and I drove the truck while Gayle drove the other car.

When I looked out the window of our motel room in Red Bluff, it was 107 degrees or more outside. Having never been in hot weather like that before (except for Vietnam, many years ago; and it was humid there, not dry, like in Red Bluff), we thought we were in the twilight zone. I remember having to go to a 7-11 type store across the parking lot, and I just could not believe how hot it was. "Did we make a mistake?" I thought. "What have we gotten ourselves into?" On top of that, just before we arrived in Red Bluff, Gayle got sick to her stomach while driving the little Toyota wagon. She would pull up next to me in the left lane and gesture and mouth the words, "I'm sick."

The next day, we got up bright and early and headed for Visalia. Altogether from Eugene, it's only about 15 hours or so, but it took us two full days. Even to this day, I can remember where we parked the Ryder truck and where we stayed the first few nights in Visalia.

Looking for an apartment turned out to be a time of the Lord really helping me. Driving around Visalia, I began to become afraid. "What have I done?" I thought. "Here I am in a city where I don't know a single soul; and I have a fam-

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ily to take care of. How is this all going to work out?” It was like drowning in fear and worry. To this day (because these certain apartments are still there), I can remember driving by them, looking at them as a prospect, and sinking in fear; but the Lord spoke to my heart, “I’m going to take care of you and help you. Don’t worry.” Well, that settled me down; and from there it was just a matter of going through the paces of finding a place, and I did. 2750 West James was where we landed — a small, 800 square foot matchbox apartment that seemed like heaven to us. Again, I must say that when God is guiding you and leading you, it’s just a blessing to be where He has you, doing what He wants you to do.

“Jim, this is Bob Grenier. I’ve come here to start a Bible study, and Pastor Chuck gave me your name. Can we meet?” I said on the phone. We met and started a Thursday night study right away.

“Wendel, this is Bob Grenier. I’ve come here to start a Bible study, and Pastor Chuck Smith, etc., etc.” Wendel was the president of a newly-formed bank that has become one of the great banks here in Visalia. Wendel invited me into his office at the bank, and I began explaining why I had come to Visalia. He started beaming and smiling and telling me how I was the young man for whom they had been praying. “You have?” I said. “Yes, we have a Bible study going, but we have been praying for someone who can teach the Bible to come along and take it over for us,” he said. Furthermore, he knew a little about Calvary Chapel in

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Costa Mesa and my pastor, Chuck Smith. “Would you take the study over for me?” he asked. Well, to say I was excited was an understatement. In just a matter of a few days, we had found an apartment and had the go ahead to be involved with two Bible studies ... one from scratch and taking leadership over the other.

At Jim’s study, which had about four people attending, we met a young single mom who told us about a part-time waitress job she knew about in town. Gayle got that job. She would work while I would study all day in my bedroom, reading Matthew Henry and listening to Pastor Chuck’s tapes on the section of the Bible on which I was teaching ... James on Thursday’s at Jim and Valerie’s, and Colossians at Wendel’s ... and then First John on Sunday afternoon in a community room at a local department store. (More about that in a moment.)

Wendell’s study was held at a very nice, up-scale home; and the place was packed. There must have been 50-60 people there, as I remember. They were sitting on the floor, in chairs, on couches, on dining room chairs and on the steps of the staircase leading upstairs. They all sat there very intensely looking at me and wanting me to lead the study, which I did as best I could. I had never done this before, except in the two Shiloh houses I had pastored, but that was more on my own turf, and not with complete strangers.

Back to the inadequacy thing for a moment ... It would take me about two to three days to prepare a lesson from

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Colossians. My study would cover just a portion of the chapter, maybe eight verses or so. As I would get to the end of the verses, I would say to Wendel's group, "Well, that's it for tonight." They would say, "Oh, no, Bob. Can you keep going?" "No," I would say in response. "We will pick it up next week, where we left off tonight." You see, I had only prepared and only understood the verses I had taught them that night, and I had no idea what the next verses said or meant. I gave the *impression* that I did, but just wanted to bring the study to a close for the evening.

I was very uncomfortable and very nervous. Then I began to become very depressed and discouraged as the weeks rolled on. You see, this group that Wendel had asked me to take over started to dwindle in numbers (the other study at Jim's remained at about five to seven or so), and week by week there were fewer and fewer people who were coming to it. At first, I tried to make myself believe that it was just due to circumstances like vacations, sickness and other things that kept them from coming; but deep inside I knew that something was wrong, or so I thought. At one point, there were now only a total of three people at this study. I was one, a newcomer to the group was another, and the lady who owned the house was the third. I distinctly remember thinking that the only reason she was there was because it was her house.

"Where have all the people gone?" I thought. "What does all this mean?" I thought God had called me to Visalia and

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had opened so many doors and given me so many confirmations that Gayle and I were in His will, and so on. “What is happening?” I thought.

In the meantime, I had written Pastor Chuck and had asked for permission to use the name Calvary Chapel of Visalia as the name of our church. You see, I wanted to be associated with him and the ministry of Calvary Chapel, since that’s where God had led me and made me part of the Calvary Chapel family and philosophy of ministry. “Yes, of course, Bob,” he said; and that’s exactly what we did. The newspaper ad said “Calvary Chapel of Visalia meets every Sunday at 1:30 p.m. at Gottschalk’s Community Room for Service — Child Care Provided.” And then at the bottom of the ad, it said, “In association with Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa and Pastor Chuck Smith.”

Well, to my surprise, that group started with about 80 people who showed up right off the bat; but it, too, began to shrink week by week. I was teaching through First John. By the way, if you add up three studies a week in three different books of the Bible, for a guy who already feels inadequate and does not know much about the Bible, it’s quite a load; but it’s also a good way to begin learning about the Lord and how to follow Him and serve Him.

We also applied for and pretty quickly became a stand-alone corporation with official board members and all. So, on some levels, things were going OK; but on another — the attendance level — things weren’t that encouraging, and

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as I mentioned, were very depressing. But God helped me through it. More about that in a moment.

I forgot to mention earlier that the first home we bought in Oregon was due to my older brother loaning me the down payment. (Initially, before we met with Pastor Chuck and received direction about Visalia, we at that time only knew the Lord was leading us to move somewhere in the Southwest.) There was no way I was going to call Bill and tell him we were leaving that home, though I felt a certain obligation to do so, since he had loaned me the money. I figured the conversation would go something like this: “Bill, I’m going to move from Eugene.” “Oh, where will be you moving to, Robert?” “Well, I’m not quite sure, Bill.” “Did you say you’re moving from your new home and the church there in Eugene, but you don’t know where you’re going?” “Yes, that’s right, Bill.” You can see that it would have been a rather odd conversation, so I waited until we were actually *in* Visalia before getting in touch with him. He was and is to this day a very gracious man and has been a wonderful older brother to me. He was extremely helpful to both my mother and me after the death of our father, and together we took care of our mother until she died. I love my brother and respect him as much as I do any person I know. I wish you could know him and hear the story of *his* life.

The Scriptures at the start of this chapter (Mark 4:26 — “And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground,’ Mark 4:27 — ‘and should sleep

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by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.” Mark 4:28 — “For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.”), were used by God one day at one of my most down days. I was literally in tears there in that little apartment, wondering if I had made a mistake about all of this. I had been so *sure* God had spoken to me, and had led me to Visalia, but where were all the people? Perhaps this was going to be the answer to my question. Had God called me to be a pastor teacher? “I’ll go somewhere and start from scratch,” I’d thought, “and if He has, then it will be evident, one way or the other.” It seemed to me that it was evident that it wasn’t going to work out. But in my reading of the Bible, I ran across the passage there in Mark 4, and the Lord used that passage to tell me that my job was to faithfully teach the Word and then not to worry about it — just like the man in the story — and that just like in the story, fruit would come as time went on. “So, just do your job, Bob, and I’ll do mine,” said the Lord to my heart. “It’s *your* job to plant the seed, Bob; and it’s *My* job to bring forth the fruit.” Well, I got off my knees and wiped the tears away from my eyes with another sense of relief in my heart.

Interestingly, right after this incident with God and His encouragement from Mark 4, I found myself at another pastors’ conference down in Southern California. God spoke to me again at that meeting. Even though I had been affirmed by the Word of God from Mark 4, I still had lingering

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doubts connected to the attendance thing. “Lord, do you want me to be a pastor?” I was asking Him. And as I sat there in one of the studies, the answer came, along this line: “Yes, I do, Bob, and I don’t ever want you to bring this up to Me again. Is that clear? This is a settled matter.” Well, from that moment, I have never looked back or doubted the calling from God to the ministry. Oh, yes, there have been times over these 30 years in Visalia that I’ve wanted to resign due to one problem or another, but I’ve never had a doubt about my calling.

Something I have learned over the years in ministry is that there are true and false measurements for success. True success is not measured by attendance, facilities or finances: that is, having all three as signs of being successful. We had none of them at the start, and we have all of them now; but they are not the measurement for success. I believe that the true measurement is, first of all, being faithful to whatever God has called you to. And secondly, that you walk in love and show the love of the Spirit; and that as a pastor, you stick to the Word of God, no matter what is happening around you. Keep teaching and preaching the Word of God, and do it in love and in humility and for the honor and the glory of God. Work hard, be diligent, do your best, and commit the rest to God. That’s the kind of thing that is supported in Scripture, and I believe will be rewarded by God while we are down here on this earth and when we get to heaven, also. (See First Corinthians 4, Galatians 5, Second

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Timothy 4, Matthew 6, Acts 2 and 3, First John 2, First Peter 5, and First Corinthians 3.)

God used all the heartache and heartbreak of low attendance to work in my life and heart to further confirm me in my calling, to give me the sense that I am in this until God calls me out of it, that I'm moving forward, no matter what, and that I'll serve Him, no matter how things go. God was helping me to grow, to trust Him, to rely upon Him and to be committed to Him and to His glory. I've also come to believe, as Pastor Chuck has said so many times, "God can't work *through* you until He first works *in* you." Well, that was sure happening, and the hand of God and the work of God were now starting to unfold in Visalia. What a blessing the Lord was bringing!

THE MAIN THING IS TO KEEP THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING

CHAPTER TEN

... looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

HEBREWS 12:2

Then Jesus said to them, "Come after Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

MARK 1:17

AS YOU CAN SEE from the above verses, they both point to Jesus Christ and encourage us to look to Him and to follow Him. In other words, Jesus is to be the focus of our lives and ministries. Looking to Jesus was what we were doing, and the ministry started to grow. I'm not sure where I first heard about "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing," but I sure like it; and I believe in it. I really do believe that Biblical Christianity can be summed up in that

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statement. You see, “the main thing” about Christianity and the Bible is, you guessed it, Jesus Christ: knowing Him and following Him. He *is* the main thing, and the main thing then is to *keep* Him, Jesus Christ, the main thing. I am constantly reminded by the Bible that the focus of my life and of my ministry, my teaching, preaching, service, thoughts, conversations, goals, projects, and so on, is to keep Jesus central. This is what the early church did. This is what the Bible is all about. It’s about Jesus Christ, telling us who He is, and what He has done for us, and what He will do if we come to Him for salvation, and what He will do in our lives as we follow Him and serve Him, and what He will do in the future. It tells us that Jesus is going to appear once again, to come for His church in the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 5:9 — “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”), and then to return with His church to rule and to reign upon the earth for 1000 years.

The Bible also teaches us that once we get to heaven, the focus there will be upon the Lord Jesus Christ. (Revelation 4:11 — “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”) Jesus is our wonderful and glorious Savior, the Lamb of God who has redeemed us and has paid for our sins and given us eternal life with Him in glory, and it will take Him eternity to unfold the riches of His grace toward us. Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away

the sins of the world: He is indeed the focus of the Bible. What a focus to have in life! How or why would we get into something else? That's what this chapter is about. I sure hope it will help you keep your focus on Jesus Christ.

With Christ as the focus and the Holy Spirit leading us and giving us faith through the Word of God and vision, we were plowing ahead with one idea for ministry after another. Soon, everything was starting to grow. The 1:30 p.m. Sunday meeting was now being held on Sunday mornings at the local YMCA, and pretty soon we had to go to multiple services. The Bible studies were growing, lots of people were attending, and excitement was everywhere as the hand of God was clearly upon us.

Listening to tapes by Pastor Chuck and reading some recommended commentaries, I was starting to feel a little more confident in my ministry. Not only were people attending, but people were getting saved, and people were wanting to be taught the Word of God. This expository teaching was new to our area, and people were being fed and finding growth in their lives and in their walks with God. I would often hear people say to me, "I've learned more being here at Calvary Chapel in six months that I have in ten years in my other church."

Jesus said that if we abide in Him, we will bring forth fruit in our lives (John 15), and abiding in Him is something that happens as we study the Bible and let the Holy Spirit teach us and empower us. God's Word is all about

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Jesus, and it's laid out in a fashion, chapter by chapter, that explains God's plan from Genesis to Revelation. I'm convinced that it's this simple approach to the Bible, and this simple dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and the simple application of the Bible in our lives, that helps us to grow, and, in fact, changes our lives, making us more like Christ. I've found out over the years that this approach of keeping "the main thing the main thing" has indeed been most fruitful and blessed in my life and ministry. Pastor Chuck Smith has modeled for us the concept of "we simply try and teach the Bible simply."

Many blessings came in our ministry. God opened the door for us to go on a local radio station that reaches many parts of the entire Central Valley of California. We are still on the radio with four airings a day: 4:30 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 9:30 p.m., and once on Sunday. This has been a tremendous way to get the Word of God out to many thousands and thousands of people on a daily basis. Hardly a few days go by where I don't meet someone who tells me they listen to and enjoy the radio ministry called "Grace for Today."

We started reaching out into the Philippines and into Mexico, sending huge teams of 120 or more, including doctors, nurses, drama teams, Bible teachers for conferences, and the like. The fruit was mushrooming. A third Sunday morning service was added to the schedule. Wow! The Lord was truly doing His part, and we were simply doing ours.

Praise the Lord! He is so faithful. Hundreds of people were now attending the church. The parking lots were always filled up, and chairs needed to be added. It's been said before, and my, how I agree, that one of the most dangerous times in a minister's life are those times of apparent success and victory. I've come to believe that saying.

We invited Pastor Chuck to come up and do some out-reach ministry about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We held these meetings at the local convention center. One time, we had 1,800 or more people show up. Pastor Greg Laurie (Harvest Christian Fellowship, in Riverside, CA) came up and held a number of meetings here, and hundreds and hundreds of people attended, with many coming to know Christ. Mike MacIntosh (Horizon Christian Fellowship, in San Diego, CA), whom I'd come to know, came up; and we held a crusade that reached into every area of the community. Out of Pastor Mike's ministry, we not only held our first Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, but have had one for over 20 years now, and they have borne much fruit. An explosion of God's love and grace was taking place here. We started adding staff, renting office space, and making an impact in the community.

It was around September of 1991 that I began studying the book of Romans, which led to both a revival and a revolution of sorts within our church body. I wound up spending 132 Sunday mornings in Romans, and it's one of those things that I never want to go through again; but I'm glad I

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did it. It was my desire to really master this profound book of the Bible, and I was determined to really understand it as well as I could. I purchased commentaries on Romans and started digging in.

Well, I was not even through with the first chapter when I started reading about Calvinists and Arminians. I had heard about these two different systems of theology before, but had never really looked into them too much. You see, up until that time, I had, as mentioned in the start this chapter, simply been looking to the Lord, following Him, and keeping Him “the main thing.” But that started to change, slowly but surely. I became very enticed by all of these books and arguments about the great mysteries of God and His Word, i.e., the sovereignty of God, the free will of man, the way that God saves sinners, the doctrine of election and predestination, and so on. Up until that time, I simply taught about them as they came up in my verse by verse teaching, saying what it said in the verse, and then moving on to the next verse, and verses, etc., never getting too hung up or overemphasizing any one doctrine in the Bible. Nor did I get too hung up on the thought of how one reconciles these seemingly irreconcilable truths in the Bible.

Well, pretty soon I became mentally and intellectually enthralled with all these books and ideas about all of these doctrines. You see, I did not realize what was happening to me, but I was ever so slowly moving away from keeping “the main thing the main thing,” and I was now moving toward

these different systems of theology — systematic theology, as it's called. This began to take the place of Jesus Christ in my life, and my, how exciting it was. I felt like I had been born again — again. I wished that everyone could know what I was apparently coming to know and understand.

The slowdown of blessings in the church weren't overnight, but rather so slowly that I didn't see it. It's been said that if a pilot takes off from LA and is flying to Honolulu, it won't make much difference right off the bat if he is off just one or two degrees on the compass. It looks like he is still heading in the right direction; and he is, for the most part; but after awhile, that one or two degrees of difference will cause him to miss the airport where he wanted to land. Well, it's that way with Jesus, as well. It's not *His* fault that we miss Him; it's *ours*. He has given us His Word to set us apart to Him and to help us grow in the grace and the knowledge of God. However, if we start substituting systematic theologies for God's Word and begin to depend on our own wisdom and the wisdom of others instead of the Holy Spirit, we will miss Christ Himself. At least, I can say that this is what happened to me. I can't say what may happen to others, but I do know, first hand in my own life and ministry, that things grew steadily cold and still, almost to a complete stop in our ministry. It grew icy cold at Calvary Chapel in Visalia. In fact, we even changed the name of our church to Immanuel Christian Fellowship for a short period of time. I thought this would allow us to make room for a

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system of theology that was becoming so important to me.

God does work all things together for the good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28), and He was needing to do that for us then, because things were not very good. The poor sheep at church were being confused and troubled, and many of them left the church. We lost the sense of wonder and joy at the work of the Holy Spirit. Most of our time seemed to be spent talking about this doctrinal view, or that doctrinal view, and which was more correct, and which one was in error. Serving the Lord seemed to disappear, and trying to figure out these doctrines was “the main thing” now. Doctrinal views had replaced simply knowing Jesus Christ and following Him. But, as mentioned, God can work all of these things out for our good; and He did, and He is doing so even today and will do so in the future.

The Bible warns us against the sins of pride and arrogance and tells us that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. First Corinthians 8:1 — “Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” “Puffs up.” What a strange sounding term, but I know it well. It means to inflate, to cause to swell up, to make proud, to bear oneself loftily, to be proud. Yes, I know it well, because that’s what happened to me. And what destructive fruit it brought. My pride took its toll on many relationships that had been forged over the years by the Lord and brought lots of ministry to a screeching halt. Fortunately, they (relationships and ministries)

have been recovered now; but back then, it was so painful. My doctrinal views were putting distance between people rather than encouraging unity in Christ.

The true grace of God is evidenced by love: love to God, and love to man. Whenever we see that fruit, we can be sure we are on track; and whenever that fruit is not there, we ought to pause and give some thought to the focus of our lives. Jesus is the truth, and Jesus is the embodiment of love. The truth of Christ and the love of God are the main interests of God for man. They ought to be *our* main interests, as well.

As mentioned earlier in the book, God is faithful, and He was faithful to bring me back into that simple relationship of abiding with Him. I'd like to tell you about that in the next chapter; but first, let me say this. If you were to ask me, "Bob, are you a Calvinist or an Arminian?" I would say that as I teach verse by verse through the Bible, when there is a verse that supports the Calvinistic view, i.e., the sovereignty of God, then I teach it that way. You see, God is sovereign, and the Bible makes that very clear from Genesis to Revelation. And likewise, when I am dealing with a verse that supports the Arminian viewpoint, i.e., the responsibility of man, then I teach it that way. Again, the Bible teaches that man is responsible from Genesis to Revelation. Now back to the question, "What are you, Bob, a Calvinist or an Arminian?" What I really am and want to be is a Christian who takes the whole counsel of God and teaches the balance of Scripture that deals with both the sovereignty of God and

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the responsibility of man. This is one of the blessings of teaching through the whole Bible, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and book by book. You are fed *all* the truths from God's Word, you get the *whole* counsel of God and thus the balance that is found in Scripture. God is gracious and will save any man who repents and puts his faith in Jesus Christ. God is neither a Calvinist *nor* an Arminian. He is the living, loving, gracious, saving, redeeming and forgiving God who has sent His Son into the world to die for each and everyone's sins. How I thank Him that He died for me and that He drew me through His goodness to repent of my sins. And I love Him, because He first loved me. What a relief to get back to simply looking to Jesus Christ and following Him.

What happened next is only another testimony to the wonderful faithfulness and love of God. How I thank Him that, even though I lost my focus, He didn't lose His for me. I'd like to tell you how things unfolded in our ministry in Visalia.

A TRIP TO THE POLICE STATION

CHAPTER ELEVEN

For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

ACTS 20:27

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men . . .

1 PETER 2:15

THE WORD OF GOD is food for our souls and our spiritual development in Christ. Taking in God's Word in its entirety will work toward making you a well-rounded Christian. I've seen over the years that the pastor and the church that will simply commit themselves to going through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation will find that God's Word will keep them from going down rabbit trails that can derail them from the main purpose of God, which is to know Him, to love Him, and then to share that love with others as servants of Jesus Christ. As Peter said in the Scripture at the start of this chapter, "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." What a blessing it is to serve

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the Lord by serving those around us in the communities and cities where we live.

In the midst of my straying into systematic theologies, the Lord was faithful to keep working in my life and directing me. One day, it was in my heart to reach out into our community and start a police chaplains' ministry. (This idea had actually come from a seed planted there by the example of Pastor Mike MacIntosh.)

Perspective can really change your life, and mine was certainly affected the first time I climbed into the passenger side of a police car to ride along for a shift. I saw our city through a different lens, from a different angle. I'm so happy that over 15 years ago, I went along on that first ride-a-long. I had to meet with the police chief, who at that time was Chief Bruce McDermott. He listened patiently and encouragingly as I shared my ideas with him about starting an active chaplains' program.

There had been a few pastors over the years who had worked in this area and laid a foundation for what was to come, but it really took off under Chief McDermott's leadership.

We sought out several other pastors in the community, and together we started the Visalia Police Department's Chaplains' Corps. I'm so glad for the relationships that have come about at the police department, and I'm honored to be involved with them as a volunteer police chaplain. They are a great group of men and women who put their lives on the

line each time they go on duty, and even off duty sometimes.

Being a volunteer police chaplain has had a profound effect upon me, and it has allowed me to meet countless numbers of people that I would otherwise have not had the good fortune to meet; and the doors of ministry that have opened up to us here in Visalia are thrilling.

Jesus Christ went about doing good. We are told in Acts 10:38 “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” And as Peter said in his first letter, quoted at the start of this chapter, it’s God’s will for us to do good to others, and that this is one of the ways we can silence the ignorance of foolish men. This has been a great opportunity to do just that and continues even to this day. Through works of compassion and love, God is often able to reach people who are blind to who He is.

We are told in the Bible that Satan has successfully blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. Second Corinthians 4:4 states: “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.” But Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

We can go out and about in our day-to-day lives, seeking to be led by the Spirit, and doing good, and letting the light

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of Jesus Christ affect people through our good deeds. We have been blessed here at Calvary Chapel Visalia to see this in action over the years. How exciting to know that you have God with you (or, rather, to say that *you* are with *God*), and that He wants to reach people with the truth, and that serving Him and others is one of the greatest possible witnesses you can have.

I almost forgot to tell you how the Lord got me back into that uncomplicated relationship with Him. It was actually something very basic and yet very powerful. It was not theological argument, or reading a book on the subjects, but rather seeing the love of God in and through my fellow pastors at a pastors' conference. You see, my pursuit of systematic theology had, as mentioned, begun to put distance, at least in my own heart, from others I had known from way back to that first pastors' conference I mentioned at Twin Peaks.

This particular annual Calvary Chapel Pastors' Conference was being held in San Diego and was focused on the theme of the Holy Spirit. The story is simple. I showed up at the conference and was deeply impacted by two things. One was the love of God in my fellow pastors who were so humble, kind, and gentle toward me; and secondly, how God was using so many of these pastors who were not as wise in the things of God as I was. Of course, I'm being tongue in cheek about that last comment. You see, my pride had actually made me think that way. And yet, here I was seeing pas-

tors and hearing about them and the great exploits for God that were being accomplished in their lives; I could not deny the facts as I saw them. These two things were really used by God to help me get my focus back.

This witness of love and the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through the lives of many people just turned my heart, very quietly, back to seeking the Lord in the simplicity of what I had known previously for many years. What a relief it was to get back into that loving relationship with Jesus Christ! Just as Christ has stated about abiding in Him and bearing fruit, I have personally witnessed it over these years.

It was not too long after this pastors' conference, in fact I think it was about a year later, that we began working on having a Franklin Graham Festival here in Visalia. The festival brought 40,000 people together over a long weekend to hear the gospel. The next year, Greg Laurie was kind enough to bring a Harvest Crusade here, and we had another 40,000 people attend. I can connect the dots in my own mind and heart with how all this happened. It happened because of God's grace and the leading of the Holy Spirit in the simplicity of knowing Jesus (not a system of theology). Jesus is responsible for the fruit He brings in and through our lives. *He* is the one who has appointed fruit to occur in our lives. John 15:16 states, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you

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ask the Father in My name He may give you.” Well, I could go on and on, and will do so in the next chapter, about the blessings of the Lord.

I almost forgot to tell you about *another* huge blessing of God in the ministry here. It happened during this time of shifting focus, which again is a testimony to the Lord helping us. We were able to buy 12.7 acres of land and build our church offices there. A little later, we built our first sanctuary and classrooms for the children. Since then, we have had to expand the parking lot and expand the sanctuary and add more classrooms. I keep mentioning the Lord and His faithfulness, because that’s exactly Who is responsible for all these blessings. One thing that I’ve seen in the Bible is that God will not abandon you. Oh, yes, another blessing is that we took our name back ... Calvary Chapel Visalia; and just recently, we have started plans to build another sanctuary in the not too distant future.

Perhaps you have lost your focus. Maybe your loss of focus came about through something different than what happened to me; but may I encourage you to just look to Jesus Christ like you used to do. Listen to what He says in Revelation 2:1-8:

2:1 “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

2:2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and

that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

2:3 “and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.

2:4 “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

2:5 “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent.

2:6 “But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

2:7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

You can see from these verses that it’s possible to be very sincere, yet to be losing your first love with Christ. He is concerned about that, because He loves you very much and misses you and wants you to be back in fellowship with Him. He also gives us the remedy for our loss of love for Him. He says several things: One, to remember from where you have fallen. In other words, give some thought to what it used to be like with you and the Lord. Bring it

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to your mind ... that's what it means to remember. Then, to repent, or to change your mind, your way of thinking, and let it change the way you are living. "Turn around" is the idea. Head back toward Jesus. He is not far away from you right now. Next he says to repeat your first works: that is, to start doing now what you used to do when you first met Christ. Be like you used to be.

May God bless you as you take His Word to heart. I can assure you that you will find Him. He is waiting for you right now. Will you go back to Him? I pray that you will.

A PROMISE FROM GOD THAT INCLUDES HUMILITY AND HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

CHAPTER TWELVE

*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,
that He may exalt you in due time.*

1 PETER 5:6

*So he called his ten servants, delivered to them ten minas, and
said to them, "Do business till I come."*

LUKE 19:13

GOD'S WORD AS LISTED ABOVE really pulls two important principles together. One has to do with humility, and the other with the blessing of God.

Going back a bit to the Lord's bringing of fruit once again in our ministry: I was sitting in one of our Sunday morning services, just enjoying the way God's Spirit was working on that morning and had been working over the last period of time, when the Lord spoke to my heart in a very clear manner. He told me, "I'm going to continue to bless, and I want you to walk in humility." You see, I had sat in that very same

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chair on many Sunday mornings, wondering if God was ever going to bring that sense of wonder and joy back into our congregation and its ministry. Well, it was starting to happen, and I could see it and sense it within myself. How kind of the Lord to speak to me in that way; and, of course, that is what He has been doing now over these many years. He has been blessing.

I forget many of the things God has said to me, but He reminds me of them from time to time, and I appreciate it and need it. In the Old Testament, God would speak to His people, and then later He would remind them of what He had said to them. Take Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for example. God spoke to each of these men, telling them of the covenant He was making or had made, and would then speak to them again, going over what He had said, reminding them of what He had told them earlier. How thankful I am to be reminded by the Lord from time to time of those things that He has spoken to my heart. Of course, God speaks to me *each* and every day when I read the Bible. He speaks to me when I'm preparing a sermon to teach the congregation. He speaks to me when I have the opportunity to go to a conference and listen to a fellow pastor expound the Word of God to us.

What a blessing to have the Lord speak to us; and what a blessing to see the Lord not only speak to me, but to see Him actually carrying out those things that He has said He would do. It's my prayer that God will help me walk in

humility before Him and to simply keep busy about the work of serving Him and doing those things He has called me to do.

My wife, Gayle, and I are both excited about this period in our lives and ministry. We feel like these are the best years of our ministry, and the days ahead are days of promise and hope that God's Word will bring forth abundant and lasting fruit. It's our prayer to occupy until the Lord comes for us and to be busy about our Father's business.

I don't know how long I'll live, or when Jesus will come back for me, or how long I'll be able to minister here at Calvary Chapel, but I do know that I count being a pastor as the single greatest blessing a man could have in his life. With all my heart, based on what the Bible says, I know that being a pastor teacher is indeed a gift of God, given by Jesus Christ to the body of Christ. My love for the Bible has soared over the years, and especially in these last few years. It's alive, and it's life giving. It's God's precious Word. How I love to teach it. What a blessing it is to teach it! How I thank the Holy Spirit of God, who opens it up to me day by day and week by week to share it with God's people. I could teach it for hours, if they would let me get away with it; but it has to be just one service at a time. Pastor Chuck Smith has always set the example for me in the Word of God. To this day, I listen to Pastor Chuck teach the Bible. What an example you are, Pastor Chuck! Thank you so much.

I believe it was Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher,

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who in speaking about the Word of God and the ministry, said something like this: “If I could not go to heaven when I die, but had to be in some state for eternity, let it be like I find myself so often, there in the pulpit with the Word of God, teaching it and preaching the truth about Jesus Christ.” I can say a hearty “Amen!” to that. It’s the greatest joy and delight in my life. I thank God for making my life a miracle. “Lord, Your grace shows that you can take a common and very normal man and save him, and then call him to serve You and bless his ministry. I love you, Jesus. Thank You.”

Only God knows what lies ahead. I *do* know that what lies behind is the clear and unmistakable hand of God in my life . . . His grace, comfort, guidance, provision, forgiveness, power, fruit, and blessing. “Lord, You alone know the future. My prayer is that You would help me to be faithful to You in whatever You have for me, for my wife, and for the ministry here. We love you, Lord God.”

Just a final note here about the present and the future: One thing that I’m very encouraged by is the fact that prayer in our church and in our city is taking place now, more than it ever has. When I look at our society and our own community and the direction in which they are going, I realize that only God can make a difference for the future. Only God can truly change societies by changing the people within those societies — that is, causing them to be born again by turning to Jesus Christ to be saved. I know that prayer is effective, and the Bible is full of accounts of revival and

renewal that have taken place. Whenever God's people have gotten into the Word of God and turned to God through prayer, God has moved and brought the needed change.

As of this writing, we are having our fifth community-wide prayer meeting. These meetings have been held quarterly over the last thirteen months with an average attendance of 1,000 or more at each meeting. Imagine that! 1,000 people coming to a prayer meeting! We started with about nine churches pulling together, then 15, then 22, and now there are around 30 or so, with some being para-church organizations. Different pastors in the community are asked to lead the meetings and to do so as they are led by the Lord.

What we do is pray for one hour, with worship sprinkled throughout our time together. The pastor who leads the evening of prayer will ask about four other pastors to join with him in directing us to pray. They pick the subjects that God has put on their hearts, and they then encourage us from the Word of God. We break up into small groups of four or five and pray for several minutes about the assigned topic. Then we worship in song and are directed by the next pastor to another subject.

Imagine if every city in America would have a prayer meeting and ask God to work and save our communities! It's incredible to think what could happen. There have been many moves of God like this back down through history, and we are praying that He will move again in this day and in this hour. We may never see a powerful city-wide change

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take place, but, then again, we also *may*. God could do it. And from what I know of history, whenever the Lord has moved in a powerful way, you can find prayer as a part of it all. Who knows? By the time this book is printed and you read it, many thousands of lives may have been changed right here in Visalia, California. I sure pray that it happens.

When you see a life changed by God, it's a sample of what He could do to an entire community. In our own church, we are learning about fasting and praying. We are praying that we become a church that prays. We are having more and more prayer meetings throughout each month.

I do want to thank Pastor Mike MacIntosh for his example and his encouragement to fast and pray. He has graciously invited us and included us in prayer meetings with his congregation and many others across the United States and around the world, with live connections via the internet, in real time.

Both Gayle and I are going for the finish line with Christ. Regardless of what the future holds (i.e., a great revival, a renewal in our city), we know that He is at work.

Hebrews 12:2 — "... looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

PEOPLE I WOULD LIKE TO MENTION

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, And He adds no sorrow with it.

PROVERBS 10:22

MY SON, ROBERT — If it had not been for his tireless requests for me to do this book, I'm sure I would never have done it. Thank you, Robert, for being the person you are and the person you are becoming. It's a deep delight and joy for your mother and me to watch you grow and develop. Our lives would not be what they are without you. We love you, Robert, and respect you and thank God for the heart that he has given you. We are grateful that, through you, we have a beautiful daughter-in-law, DiDi, and that we are now a part of her family (Philip and Suzette), as well.

GREG AND SUSIE DOWDS — We are so thankful for your love and friendship. We wish everyone had someone in their lives like we do the two of you. If friends could be

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defined by example, people would only need to look at you, and they would see what true and genuine friends are. Not only have we personally benefited from your friendship, but the ministry here at Calvary Chapel owes so much to you both through the Lord Jesus Christ and His work in you. Thank you, Greg and Susie. God has many rewards stored up for you in heaven.

DON McCLURE — Don, you probably don't know how God has used you over the years, and especially in our early years here at Calvary Chapel; but I know, because I've been on the receiving end all these years. God has used you to help shape the ministry, and you continue to be an example to us of what it means to know the Lord and show His love to others. Thank you, Don. Can I add a word of thanks to your wife, Jean, as well? She has been here with you many times. Thank you, Jean.

GREG LAURIE — Greg, God has used you in so many lives, ours included. Over the years, the entire City of Visalia has been enriched by your ministry. We appreciate the balance God has put into your life and ministry. Thank you for sharing Jesus Christ with us over these many years.

RAUL RIES — Raul, you have been a quiet encouragement to me over all the years of ministry here in Visalia. Your willingness to come alongside and minister by example and by word is forever in our minds and hearts. Thank you for your kindness, especially during the difficult years. May God bless you and Sharon.

PEOPLE I WOULD LIKE TO MENTION

MIKE MACINTOSH — You are in the most special category I can think of, and that is the love of God. If there is one thing that defines you to me, it's the love of Jesus Christ. Your constant example of His love has brought needed refreshment to me so many times. Thank you, also, for encouraging by example. Mike, you are the great encourager to so many. I love you, Mike.

DAVID ROSALES — David, you are a man of God, and one who has been a clear example of how a pastor ought to pastor. Just look at the fruit that God has brought through you and Marie over these years! Thank you for your friendship and for always being there when I've needed to talk to someone. Your listening ear and heart have been of tremendous comfort so many times. Thank you.

MY GROUP OF FRIENDS: Lance Cook, Pancho Juarez, Ray Jaramillo, Jimmy Orate, Lloyd Pulley, John Snoderly, Gary Ruff, Randy Walls, John Millhouse and all their wives — If a man had one or two friends in his life, he would be fortunate. I have an overflowing handful. God has allowed Gayle and me to have you as "our friends." What a treasure indeed! Proverbs 18:24 states, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Thank you, my brothers and sisters in Christ.

JIM JARRETT — Jim, I don't think there is anyone who knows me like you do and still likes me. Thank you for your friendship over the years. It's such a comfort just

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to be with you and hang out together. May God continue to bless you, Jim.

JIM SOUZA AND MIKE BUFORD — These two men have been with me in the trenches, under fire, and during the times of great blessing. Loyalty and integrity mark you both. Thank you for your years of service in the ministry with me on staff. May any pastor be as blessed as I have been by the two of you.

MY WIFE, GAYLE — I wanted to just mention her one more time. She does not know that this is in this book, so it will be a surprise to her; but Gayle, thank you for being my wife, and thank you for helping me through these many years of marriage and ministry. Thank you for allowing me to ask you every Sunday after church on the way home, “Well, how did you like the message today?” I’m not sure how a wife can endure that over these 31 years, but you have. I wish I could start over in our marriage and be a better husband than I’ve been. I pray that I will love you in whatever years we have, as Christ has loved the church and has given Himself for her. May God help me to be that to you. Our ministry here in Visalia is just that: it’s OUR ministry, given to us by Jesus Christ and of great value in both of our eyes and lives. It is what it is because of your being my wife. Thank you.

THE VERY QUIET PEOPLE AT CHURCH — There are so many of you. We never get to talk. Time does not allow it, and life is just that way; but how many hundreds

PEOPLE I WOULD LIKE TO MENTION

and hundreds of people there have been over these years for whom I would like to thank God. It's been my blessing to minister to you. So many of you have stuck with me through so many years, especially in the early years; and you have hung in there with your pastor as he has grown and matured. Thank you so much.

THE CHURCH KNOWN AS CALVARY CHAPEL VISALIA — As we go into our 30th year of ministry, there is no way I could even remember all the people Gayle and I have known and still know. I always say that “it's good people who make a good church.” Well, there sure are a lot of good people at Calvary Chapel Visalia. There have been, there are now, and I'm sure there will be many more that the Lord will bring here. Together, we have watched and are watching the Lord at work ... the Holy Spirit of God, working through the Word of God, in the people of God. How true it is. Thank you, each and every one who has ever considered Calvary Chapel Visalia their home church.

MY BROTHER, BILL GRENIER — Bill, thank you for being my big brother — my only brother. Thank you for all that you have ever done for me and my family. Most of all, thank you for helping to take care of our mother the way you did. I love you, Bill.

LESSONS I WOULD LIKE TO PASS ON TO OTHERS

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ.*

EPHESIANS 1:2

Step out in faith

We hear this term used a lot, and it's always used in the context of doing something for the Lord. It *really* means to follow the leading of the Lord. Give it a try. You never know what the Lord might be up to. If you think that God is leading you to do something, then do it.

Coming to Visalia was a step of faith, and there have been so *many* steps of faith over the years. I believe that God will put a desire within your heart to do something, and He will also begin opening doors that encourage you to move forward. Desire and circumstance . . . and then the most important ingredient: the Word of God. It seems to me that any time the Lord is truly leading you to do something, He is

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going to use His Word to get it accomplished. Therefore, look for Him to direct you through the Word of God.

The desire in your heart, the door that God opens, and the direction He gives you through His Word ... look for these three things, and then go for it. Go for whatever the Lord is leading you to do.

Psalm 37:4 – “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.”

1 Corinthians 16:9 – “For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”

Genesis 35:1 – “Then God said to Jacob, ‘Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.’”

Be yourself

I remember this well. Don McClure said it to us once in a leadership meeting. It’s something that I’ve tried to encourage others with all the time. Be yourself. It’s hard to be yourself when you don’t really know who you are yet. And that is often the case when a person is just starting out in their life and ministry. We are unsure of so many things. It’s good to have mentors and models around us, examples to follow and model ourselves after. How I thank the Lord for all the men and women He has placed in my life. However, at the end of the day, you have to trust that God has made you the unique person that you are and that He

wants to use you as that unique person.

I would especially encourage young pastors to never listen to another message or read another commentary before they read the Bible themselves and ask the Holy Spirit what He is saying to them through the text they are studying. Don't try to copy anyone else. Avoid it as much as possible. God made you, and He has a purpose in mind. Don't thwart that purpose by trying to emulate someone you respect and admire. Take the truth and the example of others to heart, and tell those things, but do it through your own individual personality.

1 Corinthians 4:7 – “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?”

1 Corinthians 15:10 – “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

Walk in love and serve others

These are the simple things that are really the great things in life. These are the things that Jesus demonstrated as He walked upon this earth; and these are the things that you find as you read the Bible and study it and observe the godly men and women in it. I've seen these things over and over again in men and women I've known personally over these last 35 years of life. This kind of living is the true kind of

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living that God has for His people. The Holy Spirit of God wants to work through us in these ways. “Lord, help me to walk in love and to be a servant.”

Ephesians 5:2 – “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.”

Galatians 5:13 – “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

God can't work through you until He has first worked in you

I've heard Pastor Chuck Smith say this so many times. And every time it happens to me, I'm reminded of how true it is. We go along in our day-to-day lives, walking with the Lord and serving Him, and then all of a sudden we fall into a trial, a time of tribulation and testing. God is at work in us. It's never easy or pleasant; in fact, it's *always* very difficult — but the end of it is better than the start of it. In spite of the hardships that a trial brings, God has a plan; and He is at work through that trial. His goal is that we would be more like Him. How wonderful is that work that God will do in us. Then, we are able to share that with others. God has been shaping us and conforming us into His image, causing us to be partakers of His holiness. We can speak with personal knowledge of the Lord and His ways. We have more compassion, and our focus is clearer and simpler.

God is the potter; we are the clay. May the Lord help us to embrace the trials that come along, knowing that God has a purpose in mind through them. He will comfort us so that we can then share that same comfort with others who need comfort.

Philippians 2:13 – “... for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

1 Thessalonians 2:13 – “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”

Use your time wisely, because it flies by

My, my, how time flies by! I always heard that, when I was growing up, but now I know how true it is. In fact (and many of you may know this like I do) time seems to be going by faster than ever, the older I get.

My wife and I are excited about using our time for God's will in our lives. We recognize that each and every day we have the potential to be used by God, and that we are storing up treasures in heaven, hour by hour.

Not only does time go by quickly, but the world around us is in such need. The days are indeed evil, and increasingly so as we draw closer to the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. What an effort Satan is making to diminish and remove the truth from our world. How *needy* people are to hear the truth

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that will set them free! May the Lord help us all to put it into high gear and cross the finish line at full speed.

James 4:14 – “... whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.”

Ephesians 5:16 – “... redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

Pray and keep praying

Jesus knows what’s best for us, and He tells us that it’s important to pray, especially when things are difficult — not only during *hard* times, but *anytime*, and *daily*, and every chance we get. Pray, and keep praying. I like to say that “no prayer is ever wasted on the ears of God.” He is listening, and He uses prayer to accomplish His will in our lives and in this world.

The older I get, the more I realize how important it is to pray and to encourage our church body to pray. This is one of my main goals as a pastor, and that is to get the church to pray, because I know, based on what Jesus said, that prayer is effective and beneficial.

Just these past two months, we have been praying for the Lord to give our church body an enormous financial gift to help us end the year on a very positive note. We have been praying specifically for this enormous amount of money to be given by the Lord. As we approached the end of the year, I was saying to the Lord, “Lord, we only have a few days

left before the year is over. Would you please bless us with a financial gift?” Yesterday after the services, my administrator called to say that we finished the month with a very strong month’s worth of giving. And, he said, “Pastor Bob, there is this other check in the offering for \$100,000.” Immediately, I thought to myself that God had led us to pray very specifically, and that we need to pray more specifically for other things that He puts on our hearts. Why? Because God hears prayer, and He answers prayer that is according to His will. And that, of course, is the purpose of prayer: to find His will and to see His will accomplished here on earth as it is in heaven. The purpose of prayer is not to get *my* will done, but to find *His*. May God help us to pray to our Father in heaven.

Luke 18:1 – “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart ...”

God is gracious and forgiving

God has been so kind to show us in His Word who He is and what He is like ... and then He demonstrates that to us on an individual basis, as we have need in our lives. His grace and His forgiveness — they are without end.

To be gracious means to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior, to favor, to be merciful; and to forgive means to let go, to send away. God comes to us in His kindness and forgives us as we confess our sins to Him. God is not mad at us. God is not who we have sadly made Him out to be. He

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is wonderfully merciful and wonderfully kind and loving. He forgives, and it is over and done with. He does not even remember our sins and our iniquities.

Exodus 33:19 – “Then He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’”

1 Peter 2:3 – “... if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

Psalms 130:4 – “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.”

Don't think God is finished with you because you have failed

You think God is finished with you when you find yourself failing Him, through sin. How discouraging it can be. Yet, it's not true. God is *not* finished with you. He is not only the God of a second chance, but a third, a fourth, a fifth and so on. Whatever our need is (and even though we may have created that need ourselves) we can come to our Father in heaven and find in Him His love and mercy toward us.

Don't ever think for a moment that God can't use you once again just because you have failed. Look at what He did with the apostle Peter. Peter denied the Lord, not once, but three times. And who did God use as the first preacher in the early church? He used the man who had failed Him. This tells us

that God will take a man, or a woman, and put them back into His service, if they will but come to Him, be restored and be renewed by Him. Mercy and forgiveness belong to God, and He freely gives them to those who need it.

Daniel 9:9 – “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.”

Trust the Holy Spirit, not yourself and your own wits and power

This is one of the very main themes and truths in Scripture. Whoever said that, “God helps those who help themselves,” has never read the Bible. God wants us to trust in Him, not in ourselves. As you read the Bible, you see the accounts of men and women who *did* trust in themselves. They left God out of their lives. Then we have the many stories of those who put their trust in God and sought His power in their lives. God calls us to come to Him, put our confidence in Him and seek His power and help. He will not let you down. He may not work in the way or in the time frame that you have in mind, but He will surely work and do *marvelous* works. He promises to do so. God will help you if you let Him, but He can’t, if you won’t let Him. May He help us all to trust Him and to seek the power of His love in our lives.

Psalms 115:11 – “You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield.”

Psalms 118:8 – “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.”

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Proverbs 3:5 – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.”

Isaiah 26:4 – “Trust in the Lord forever, for in YAH, the Lord, is everlasting strength.”

Be faithful in the little things

I’m as excited today about serving the Lord as I was when we first came to Visalia 30 years ago. The opportunities to share His love and His Word are all around us. In fact, the need is greater now than it has *ever* been. When I consider the open doors that God has given us, I’m amazed at them. Often I will think back to the very first days, the days of small things — of little things — and compare them with today.

Whatever God has you doing, do it unto Him. I think you will find that one thing leads to another, and that God will take you from little things to larger things — but He expects you to be faithful in the small things, and He will bless you if you are faithful.

Having lived here for so long, it’s hard to not be constantly reminded of how God has worked over these last three decades. Every time I drive somewhere, I’ll see a place, a building, something that reminds me of the past and of ways that the Lord worked in those days. So, be faithful now. Only God knows what He has in the future. By the way, I love even the smallest thing that God does, from seeing a broken door fixed at the church building, to the pavement getting repaved, to seeing thousands of people come out to

an event, and so on. It doesn't really matter if it's a small thing or a big thing, as long as it's the *Lord's* thing. Being faithful and blooming where you're planted is important in the way God works. May He help us to be faithful.

Luke 16:10 – “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.”

God uses people to reach other people

The Scripture below, of Philip finding his brother Nathanael and bringing him to Jesus, is a picture of how God works. God works through people.

In writing this book and reflecting back over my life, it's clear to me that the Lord used many people to help me come to know Him and to grow in Christ. And God is still doing that today in my life. What an amazing thing, that we can be used by God to help someone else with that which is the most important thing in life, i.e., their soul and its eternal well being.

If you are available, God will use you. He does not need people with great ability, although He will use them, also; but He is looking for people who are simply available. I can remember the first time I ever heard a pastor say that “God is looking for people who are available — not people of great *ability*, but *availability*.” I was so relieved, because I knew I did not have much ability, but I knew that I *could* be available. Are you available to God today? Would you make yourself

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available to Him? God will take your life and use it to help others know of His grace, His love and His mercy in Jesus Christ. May God take our lives and use them for His glory.

John 1:45 – “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’”

I could go on and on...

But, I won't. It's been a pleasure to write this book, and I pray that it has been helpful to you in some way. Your story is no less a blessing than mine. May God take your life and bless it as He has mine. You and I may never meet on this earth, but I pray that we do in heaven. I would like to meet you there. It would be a great blessing to me to find out that, somehow, the Lord used this book to encourage you. Please look me up in heaven. It will be my pleasure to meet you. And, in the meantime, may God richly bless your life as He has mine.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

MARK 8:36

WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT PART of this book? It's found in the next few sentences. First, however, a definition of important and importance: It means of much or great significance or consequence, mattering much, prominent. With those thoughts in mind, let me say that two things are ultimately important in this world. First of all, your soul and its eternal destiny are right up there next to the other and greatest truth of what's important — that is, God's love for you, for your soul.

The problem that we have about these important matters is called “sin,” and the solution to the problem is called “grace.” We who are important to God are indeed sinners; the Bible makes that very clear. Romans 3:23 tells us, “...

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for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” God has and is the solution to our problem of sin. The Father and the Son have together provided the way to solve our problem. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

When man brings himself, a sinner, to God the Father, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the problem is solved. The Bible calls it “being saved.” Problem gone. Hebrews 8:12 assures us, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

The Holy Spirit of God is who leads the sinner to Jesus and then causes that person to become a brand new creature in Jesus Christ. The result is as God says in Isaiah 1:18. “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

I’m praying for you right now, even though I may not (and probably don’t) know you. Nevertheless, I am praying that you will realize how much God loves you and what He has provided for you and for your sins. Would you let Him change you?

If you will do as David said in Psalm 55:16, “As for me, I will call upon God, and the LORD shall save me.”

Thank you for reading these words. May God richly bless you.

Bob's thrilling testimony is of a spiritually blind man who now sees, a man crippled by sin who now walks; it is a powerful and indisputable witness that the power of Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Pastor Chuck Smith, Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, CA

What happened to Bob Grenier was nothing short of a miracle. However, it's also a common miracle. You see, the life changing grace, mercy, and love of God are not just for some people, but for anyone who will allow Jesus Christ to take over their life. That is what happened to Bob — and it could happen to you, or to someone you know. Can you imagine what your life will be like 35 years from now? Neither could Bob, when he first heard about God from a complete stranger. "A Common Miracle" explains, in interesting detail, how God worked miraculously to bring Bob from the depth of despair, into a fruitful and meaningful life with a bright future. Follow the ways that God led Bob, and how God used His Word and a number of people to bring about this miraculous change and blessed life. May you be the next "Common Miracle."

"I strongly encourage you to pick up this book and reflect on his story ... and transformation."

Bob Carden, Chief of Police, Visalia, CA

"This book is a must-read — for all seekers of truth."

Mike MacIntosh, Horizon Christian Fellowship, San Diego, CA

"I hope that this book finds its way into the hands of many who feel useless, lost and confused in their journey. May they find, as Bob points out, that 'Jesus is the main thing.'"

Pastor Don McClure, Calvary Way Ministries, Corona del Mar, CA



Pastor Bob Grenier has been saved and in full time Christian ministry since 1973. Calvary Chapel Visalia started in July of 1978, with Pastor Grenier and two couples who were interested in studying the Bible. Right from the start, Bob adopted a simple, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book teaching method (following Pastor Chuck Smith's example), taking the people straight through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Trusting in the Holy Spirit to guide, empower and lead, Bob and his wife, Gayle, are excited about what God is doing and what He will do in the days to come.

To learn more about Pastor Bob and the ministry of Calvary Chapel Visalia, please visit our web site at: www.CalvaryChapelVisalia.com

