A Never Ending Journey of Faith
by Peggy Ann Stroman
This book is dedicated to the
Loving Memory of My Parents
Benjamin & Mary Carpenter Sr.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost I thank Our Heavenly Father for sending His Son, Jesus to die in my place, taking the punishment that I rightfully deserved. I also thank Him, because it was through His unending Mercy and His unconditional love that I was drawn into salvation. I am eternally grateful to the Lord for inspiring me to write these stirring accounts of His faithfulness in my life.

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Preface

“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us.”

Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)

The writing of this book was a major undertaking for me. I had never written anything other than letters to family, friends and acquaintances. If the recipients of those letters were to be completely honest, they’d have to admit that my grammar and spelling left a lot to be desired. In regards to my literary talent, I’ve never considered myself gifted in this area. So for me to even consider taking on this awesome task of writing a book, it took a lot of coaxing.

Without the prompting and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, I never would have attempted to write this book. It also took the encouragement of my husband and the motivation of a friend and published author, who has gone on to be with the Lord. It also took the confirmation of a countless number of people, who had heard the numerous stories of our experiences as followers of Jesus Christ.

Mind you, I was not easily convinced. It took years and as soon as I started writing, several questions flooded my mind. How do I accomplish such a task? Where do I start? And Who would really be interested?

I thank God for my husband. He has always been God’s chosen vessel to guide, direct and encourage me to bloom wherever I’m planted, and to strive to attain the goal of the high calling in Christ Jesus. As I was feeling a bit overwhelmed, his advice to me was to write as if I were writing a letter to
someone. That was my answer. Letter writing has always come easy to me and I’m always writing to someone. Since I needed a pretend audience, I decided to write with Daisy, Nellie and Jean Walter in mind. These three sisters live on a farm in a little town in Pennsylvania. They hold a special place in my heart.
Introduction

“Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name.”
Malachi 3:16 (NASB)

Joe and I have been walking with the Lord for more than three decades, and for years we earnestly thought that our experiences were no different from the experiences of other Christians. Over the years and across the miles, as we felt led to share our testimonies and experiences in the Lord, the responses were always the same. “You should write a book.” Some would say that our lives were exciting. Others would say, “You guys truly live by faith.” We never thought that we were experiencing anything unusual. We were merely listening to God and responding in obedience.

We learned early in our Christian walk that delayed obedience is disobedience. Whenever the Lord directed us to do something, to go somewhere or to speak to someone, we’d try to respond immediately. But of course, there were those times that we failed to respond and were appropriately disciplined by our loving Heavenly Father. Scripture clearly states that, “if you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.” (Hebrews 12:8 NIV) Jesus said, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.” (Revelation 3:19 NASB)

One thing we did notice was that whenever we responded in obedience to the Lord, the results were always
significant. A definite change was evident, either in our lives or in the lives of others. In many instances, we witnessed the power of God! Situations and circumstances were supernaturally changed! Obedience is crucial. Scripture clearly states that, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.” (2 Corinthians 10:5, 6 NASB) In essence, we can bring down the strongholds of the enemy when our obedience is complete.

This book is actually a written account of many of the experiences that we’ve had in walking with Jesus and obeying His voice for more than 30 years. God has been so faithful to us. Even when we lacked faith, He remained faithful because He could not deny Himself. (2 Timothy 2:13 NASB) My heart’s desire is that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be glorified through this book. I also desire that it might, in some way, encourage believers in their faith, and also reach those who have not yet come into the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
Chapter 1

“I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Thy doings; I muse on the work of Thy hands.”
Psalms 143:5 (NASB)

Thirty years of experiences are indelibly etched in my memory, but not at the tip of my pen. You don’t ever forget seeing creative miracles: food multiplying, crooked limbs straightening, paralyzed bodies healed and a bank robber getting saved. My perplexing dilemma is the question of...Where do I begin? In all my Bible training, I learned one important lesson about speaking and writing: you can never go wrong if you start with Jesus and end with Jesus. So that’s the answer to my quandary. Of course! It’s so simple. Just start with JESUS!

In retrospect, as I look back over my life, before I met Jesus and accepted Him as my Lord and Savior, I was on a self-destructive path. I am so thankful that God is slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He loved me with an everlasting love and continued to draw me with lovingkindness, even in my rebellion. “...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) Perhaps it would be better if I first shared a little of our backgrounds so that you can appreciate the transforming power of God that has been at work in our lives over these past years.

I’m sure you’ve heard the old saying, that “opposites attract”. Well, Joe and I are perfect examples. We’re no more alike than night and day. Our personalities are distinctly different and so are our backgrounds. Joe grew up in a single parented home in New York City. His father abandoned him
when he was ten. I, on the other hand, grew up in a small rural community on Long Island in a home where both parents were present.

In the late 1930’s, my parents bought property on Long Island. A few years later, they started building their dream house with hopes of eventually moving out of the city and into the country. If they were alive today, they’d be shocked to see all the land development with very few traces of country life. However, during those early years, Eastern Long Island very much resembled the country. There were no sidewalks or street lights, no running water or flush toilets. We had an outhouse in the backyard.

I remember the frightening experience of sitting in the outhouse and watching bugs crawl all around me: spiders, ants, beetles and crickets. Just imagine, no electricity. Once you close the door, you’re in the dark with the exception of an occasional ray of sunlight piercing through a crack in the door. It’s amazing what we remember and the lasting impressions that those experiences leave on our minds.

In speaking of country life, I must not forget the animals. In those days, most of the homesteaders in the area had farm animals. We had goats, chickens, rabbits, dogs, cats and the usual house pets; tropical fish, white mice, guinea pigs and hamsters. But mind you, we never had all these animals at the same time.

I am often reminiscent of my growing up years and as I recall, life was wonderful. I had such a loving family. I am the youngest of five children. My closest sibling is eleven years older. It grieves me to think of the state of “the family” today, with absentee parents. It only makes me realize and appreciate how blessed we were to have devoted parents, who were not only present, but also actively involved in our lives.
We regularly attended an Anglican Church within walking distance from our home. If you were to ask me what church services were like, my answer could be summed up in three words: boring, smells and bells. I can recall it as if it were yesterday. I vividly remember the smell of incense from the altar and the sound of the altar boy ringing a bell. It was all so boring. But what did I know. I had no relationship with God.

I thought that my religious church attendance would merit my entrance into heaven when I die. After all, I was a good person! How sadly mistaken I was. And even more grievous was the fact that in all my years of church attendance, from a child to young adulthood, I never knew that I could have a personal relationship with the Living God. I don’t remember anyone ever sharing the simplicity of the Gospel with me. I didn’t know that I could receive the FREE gift of Eternal life by repenting of my sins and believing in my heart that Jesus died for my sins, was buried and rose on the third day according to the Scriptures. I had no understanding of Salvation.

As a teenager, I remember someone once asked me if I was saved. I thought to myself, “What is he talking about?” Mind you, in my narrow and very limited understanding of God and His Word, I didn’t think I had anything to worry about. God and I had an understanding. I didn’t bother Him unless I was in trouble, but little did I know that without Him, trouble was inevitable.

It astounds me that a child can start off as an innocent babe, raised in a good home and end up making all the wrong decisions as a young adult. I was one such individual. I lived a comparatively sheltered life, growing up. I was never exposed to the fast pace and worldly lifestyles of some of the youth my age. My parents made sure of that. In my growing up years, as long as I was under their roof, I never challenged my parents’
authority, nor did I ever test the limits of their restrictions, as kids do today. I could always sense their love. It was evident that their restrictions were only for my protection and safety. However, I didn’t realize it until I came to the Lord many years later.

As a teenager, I focused on academic achievements and extracurricular sports activities. Learning never came easy for me, but with much perseverance, prayer and hard work, at eighteen I graduated from high school with honors. After graduation, I entered Nursing School.

It was at this point that I began to experience an independence and freedom that were all so new to me. I was exposed to and tempted by, all that the world had to offer. Mind you, I had no relationship with God, other than to call on Him to bail me out of trouble. I had no power to resist sin and I failed miserably in all my feeble attempts at being the good moral person that I thought I should be.

At the age of 20, my nursing education was abruptly interrupted. I was pregnant. You must keep in mind, in the 60’s the attitude toward unwed pregnancies was not as accepting as it is today. Since marriage was out of the question, what was I to do? How could I tell my parents? Suddenly, my whole world seemed to come crashing down around me. I felt like such a disappointment to those I cared most about. I had failed to live up to the moral standard by which I had been raised. The guilt of such failure was overwhelming. I waited as long as I could before breaking the news to my parents. It angered my Dad and nearly broke my mother’s heart. She cried for days. To this day, I remember her words to me. “You are not keeping this baby.”

I was placed in a home for unwed mothers. During the months that I was in the home, my Mom and Dad would frequently visit me. During each of their visits, they would take
me out to one of the local restaurants for either a late lunch or an early dinner. I looked forward to their visits because I never experienced any condemnation from them, only love. But their love was uncompromising. They gave me no options. I had to give my baby up for adoption.

I feel, it’s important that you know this about me. I have always had such a love for children, especially babies. Whenever I had to babysit for someone, I would often daydream about being a mother and raising my own children. Of course, marriage was always a part of my imaginary dream world. However, I was now facing the consequences of the indiscriminate choices that I had made.

It was quite a traumatic experience to finally have a baby of my own and not be able to keep it. But I realized that I was too immature to take on the responsibility of raising a child. My Mom advised me not to see my baby when it was born. I agreed with her counsel, because if I ever saw that precious little face, it would have been even more difficult to give her up. When I gave birth to a healthy little girl, I was determined to follow through with my decision not to see her, but I had no idea how much my decision would tear at my heart.

It was the policy of the Home that after delivery and a brief hospital stay, mother and baby were transferred back to the Home for one week before being released. The Home had a beautiful nursery. The mothers were allowed to visit and feed their infants at designated times during the day. Well, all the girls in the Home came to me, trying to convince me to see my baby by telling me how beautiful she was. I was already wounded and that was like putting a knife in the wound and twisting it. With much grief, I signed the adoption papers hoping that my little girl would be placed in a good home.
My pregnancy and my being in a home for unwed mothers was kept a secret for years. With the exception of my two sisters, no one knew where I was. Family members and friends thought that I was away at school. When I returned home, I found myself pretending that everything was fine when in reality I felt like an emotional shipwreck.

We often wish we could turn the clocks back and start all over, especially when what we’ve done has had such a devastating effect on those we love. The reality of the heartache that I caused my parents was overwhelming at times. Fighting depression and despair, my guilt-ridden conscience caused me to constantly seek ways to make it up to my parents. In my attempt to win favor with my mother, I returned to Nursing School and after graduating we went on a three week tour of Europe. It was my Mom’s life long dream to travel abroad.

We were suppose to visit ten countries that summer. However, because of the air strikes in France, we were only able to visit nine countries: England, Belgium, Holland, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Just imagine, being in nine different countries and unfamiliar with their languages and their currencies. We, of course, encountered difficulties in communicating whenever my Mom and I ventured off the tourist route. However, being in such a foreign environment drew us closer and forced us to depend upon one another. During that trip, a close bond developed between my Mom and I, which far exceeded the relationship we had before my pregnancy.

After returning home from the trip, I met Joe through an unusual sequence of events. It’s so amazing how it all began. I bought a cuckoo clock while in Switzerland and had it shipped to my home address. The package, which was insured, arrived several weeks later, damaged. Apparently, it broke in the
shipping. I was so disappointed. I had been anxiously awaiting its arrival, so that I could hang it on the wall as a memento to remind me of our trip. As I thought through my dilemma, I decided not to return it, fearing that the same thing could happen again. It could easily break in the shipping. When I shared my misfortune with my oldest sister, Leo, she suggested that I take the clock to Greenwich Village in New York City. She was attending New York University in the Village and knew of a Swiss clock repairman there.

We chose a date and decided to make a day of it. Leo and I took an early train into the city and then a subway train downtown to Greenwich Village. After dropping the clock off at the repair shop, we walked a couple of blocks through Washington Square Park to the New York University Campus. This was my first time in the Village and I was overwhelmed by the sights. Remember, this was in the late 60’s during the Vietnam War. Characteristics of this time period were blatantly visible in the Village: free love, beatniks, flower children, LSD, marijuana, long hair, bell bottoms and the scent of incense and oils drifting in the air from the doorways of the head shops. As we walked through Washington Square Park, I stood out like a sore thumb. I stood out not only because I dressed like a hick from the country, but also because I stared at the sights, like most typical “out-of-towners”.

Leo took me to the university cafeteria for lunch. While we were eating, a handsome young man, who was a student at the university, came over to our table. Since Leo was deep in conversation with another student, he sat down next to me and introduced himself. “My name’s Joe. What’s yours?” He was intriguingly different from any man I had met. He was impulsive, exciting and quite romantic. I was impressed with his intellect and fascinated with his long hair and manner of
speaking. Little did I know that he was to be my future husband. However, the path we chose from that first introduction to our matrimonial vows, turned out to be a tempestuous journey.
Chapter 2

“A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, is God in His holy habitation.”
Psalm 68:5 (NASB)

I think it would be helpful at this point if I shared a little bit of Joe’s background and the one event that changed the course of his life. Joe grew up in New York City. At the age of ten, he came home from school earlier than his older brother and sister. On this particular day, when he came home, his mother was on the phone crying. She called him to the phone and said, “Your father wants to talk to you.” With the excitement of a ten-year old, he answered the phone, oblivious to his mother’s tears. He then heard words that didn’t really make sense to him. Dad was leaving. He was not coming home. His father said, “Now you’re the man of the house.” Those words echoed in Joe’s little ears. He stood there speechless with the phone to his ear and his eyes filling up with tears. Then, his father hurriedly said, “I must go. I have to catch a plane. I love you, my boy.” The phone became silent and that ten-year old little boy stood there in total confusion.

What a nightmare for a child, to have a father who has always been there, and without any warning to suddenly walk out of his life! It came as a total shock. Being so young, Joe struggled to comprehend what it meant to be a man. His father’s parting words, “Now you’re the man of the house”, registered even deeper as the days passed. The tears were replaced with some distorted idea that now he was a man. The pain of not having his father was replaced with his own youthful fantasy.
With resentment and anger in his heart, Joe began to chart his own course. From early childhood through his young adult years, Joe felt obligated and was determined to fulfill his father’s command to be a man. However, without God in his life, Joe was obviously heading down a dead end street.

Of course, Joe wasn’t the only one affected by his father leaving. Joe’s mother was now a single parent and had the full responsibility of supporting three children. She was a God-fearing woman and insisted on her family going to church. In his father’s absence, Joe’s church involvement helped to fill the void in his life. Joe, like many children who are separated from a parent, was vulnerable and open to a relationship that would replace his father. So often that replacement comes all too easy, especially when the new person is an individual highly respected by other adults as well as your mother. Such a figure came into Joe’s life. It was his Pastor.

For the next seven years without his realizing it, the Pastor became the model for Joe’s manhood. In fact, as so often is the case, we create heroes out of men, trying to replace the reality of the frail and sinful people that surround us. Yet, God in His wisdom did not allow Joe to build an idol in the form of a man. In the eyes of a confused child who was trying aimlessly to become a man, his Pastor had become more than God intended. What made matters worse was Joe’s concept of God and his Pastor were blurred in his childish eyes. In his confused mind, the two were the same.

One day, while in his early teens, Joe came to a rude awakening. He suddenly became aware that his Pastor was a sinner in need of God’s Grace and forgiveness. It was a crushing blow and again his life changed its course. Joe now sat in church listening to the man he had once idolized. With each sermon, he grew colder, not only toward his Pastor, but also toward God.
As time passed, he turned away from God and in his anger he
struck out at God and those who believed in Him.

Joe had his own philosophy and his own standards. He
viewed God as a crutch for those who were weak and a vehicle
that men used to take money from the unsuspecting. In his eyes,
the Bible was all a myth. He felt as though he had all the
answers and wouldn’t listen to anyone. His empty search for
happiness apart from God lead him down many painful and
immoral alleys, even to the point of murdering his own children.
Joe was 18 years old when his first born son was aborted and
flushed down the toilet. There were four other faceless children
that he never saw. All aborted!

He had become the godless man that cared only for
himself. He robbed mothers of their daughters, husbands of their
wives and others who cared for him he used. His life became far
worse than that of his Pastor and his father. The apostle Paul
speaks of people such as this in his letter to the Romans. Those
who suppress the truth in unrighteousness and professing to be
wise they became fools, for they have exchanged the truth of
God for a lie. (Romans 1:18-32)

Joe’s painful journey lead him in an attempt to destroy
his own life. He was a promising student in New York
University doing “A” work. Then one afternoon, in the depths of
depression, he sat on the edge of his bed in his dormitory room
and repeatedly slashed his arm with a razor blade. Yet, even
after the doctor used 80 stitches to repair the damage that he
inflicted on his arm, he was still not ready to respond to God’s
call. Nor was he ready to part with his sinful lifestyle. The
emptiness in his life was beginning to take its toll. It was at this
point that I came into Joe’s life, or shall I say, he came into
mine.
If you recall, I was at the point of sharing how we met when I digressed a bit to fill in the missing pieces of Joe’s life. Remember, the setting was in the New York University cafeteria. It was lunchtime. Joe sat down next to me and introduced himself. At this point, I knew nothing of Joe’s background, but truthfully speaking, I didn’t care. We were together no more than an hour and I was already smitten. I was mesmerized by his charm and captivated by his philosophical ideas. I was literally swept off my feet. After that first meeting, every chance I got, I’d drive 68 miles into the city, just to see him. However, without the power to resist sin, I was once again facing the consequences of my wrong choices. We thought we had all the bases covered by using protection, but it didn’t work. I was once again pregnant!

Scripture unequivocally states that, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, and the end of joy may be grief.” (Proverbs 14:12,13). It doesn’t matter whether we act out of ignorance or out of rebellion. When we fail to follow God’s instructions, which are clearly defined in His Word, we end up on a self-destructive path and in the hands of our enemy, the devil. He goes by several names but his modus operandi is always the same; he’s a thief out to rob, steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). He tries to discredit God and His Word by propagating lies. He has convinced many people that there are many roads that all lead to God. Wrong!

There is only one way and that is through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man comes to the Father except through Him. (John 14:6) The devil has also propagated a lie that the Bible has errors and is merely a compilation of the writings of men. Quite the contrary, the Bible which is the Word of God is pure, inerrant and the only standard
for living. It instructs us how to walk in this dark and sinful world, amidst such a perverse generation and not be defiled by it.

I remember once hearing someone describe the Bible as the “Manufacturer’s Handbook for Life”. God, who created us and loves us, left us a manual. This manual is His Word, a compilation of love letters, with explicit instructions on how to live in this world. In this “Manufacturer’s Handbook for Life”, God not only gives us the “how to”, but He also gives us promises. He promises us a future and a hope. When He spoke through Jeremiah the prophet, He said that He has a plan for our lives. God will reveal those plans when we seek Him and search for Him with all our heart. (Jeremiah 29:11-13) It’s our choice. God created us with a free will. We are not puppets! We can either choose to believe God and follow His instructions or choose to go our own way. However, once the choice is made, we will certainly have to face the consequences of all of our wrong choices. When we take matters into our own hands as Joe and I did, the end is DEATH. “...for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it.” (Matthew 7:13)

When I found out that I was pregnant, I panicked and stooped so low in my desperation that I ended the life of our unborn child. The world calls it ABORTION, but God calls it MURDER. Adding to the guilt of my first failure, I was now a murderer. At that point, I would do anything not to hurt my parents again. Little did I know that my biggest offense was to God. I had caused such pain in the heart of our Heavenly Father by snuffing out the life of one of His precious little ones.

To make matters worse, Joe and I decided to move into an apartment together. I had an idealistic, fairy tale dream of living happily ever after in wedded bliss. On the contrary,
marriage was certainly not on Joe’s agenda. He had a distorted concept of marriage and was diabolically opposed to it. Joe viewed marriage as a vehicle that was often used to destroy men. I couldn’t convince him that it was absurd to think that way. We’d argue about it until I was blue in the face. Joe was opinionated and very stubborn. He had a head that was harder than a flint stone. I learned very early in our relationship that there was no budging him from his fixed view on certain subjects and marriage was one of them.

Since marriage was out of the question, I settled for whatever crumbs that dropped from the table. We moved into a dilapidated basement apartment in Brooklyn. It needed a lot of work, but it was ours. Days turned into weeks and weeks into months of knocking out walls, replacing walls, sanding and painting, until it was finally habitable. We lived together in that apartment for three years. However, instead of getting better, our relationship deteriorated.

One day, I came to the rude awakening that Joe was sexually involved with several other women. When he wasn’t with me, he was with them. I was shattered! At that time, he was managing a nightclub and didn’t get home until wee hours of the morning. It was difficult for me to determine whether he was working or out gallivanting. I refused to play the part of a private investigator, constantly calling the club to check up on him. I thought it was a blessing when the nightclub closed down. At this point, he had already quit school and got a job driving a yellow cab. I was increasingly dissatisfied with my personal life and very discontent with working in city hospitals. I changed jobs three times that year and ended up doing private duty nursing. The void in my life was becoming more and more apparent to me. At the same time, Joe was also experiencing an emptiness in his life.
In competition with all the other women in Joe’s life, I focused my efforts on constantly trying to win his affections. One day, I came up with what I thought was a brilliant idea. Perhaps if we traveled together, we’d then grow closer. After all, it worked for my Mom and I. So I planned one trip after another. I’d sign on to a private duty case only long enough to earn enough money so that we could take another trip. It didn’t matter where. Wherever Joe wanted to go, I’d foot the bill.

We traveled to California in search of his father on one trip. It was the first time either of us had ever been across the United States. We decided to take our time driving across. We took a southern route across and returned home by a northern route. On that same trip, we drove down the east coast of Mexico, as far as Mexico City and then drove up the west coast to California. We camped in a tent all the way across the United States. However, for our own safety we stayed in hotels once we were in Mexico. On another trip, we drove down to Florida and flew to the Bahamas. Our trips were often spontaneous and impulsive. We thought nothing of hopping in the car and tromping up to Canada. Then, there were the trips to the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania, to Vermont and New Hampshire. Not to mention our many trips down to South Carolina to visit Joe’s grandmother, when she was alive.

Three years passed quite rapidly and in spite of all the travel and time spent together, our relationship remained the same. I was once again grabbing at straws. Little did I realize that I was trying to buy Joe’s love. While I was becoming blatantly aware of the void in my life, Joe was also experiencing an emptiness that he could not fill.
Chapter 3

“He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear, and will trust in the LORD.”

Psalms 40:2, 3 (NASB)

On Christmas Day in 1971, God made the emptiness in Joe’s life quite evident to him. Traditionally, I would always spend Christmas time with my family. My sisters and brothers and their children would all gather together at Mom and Dad’s house on Long Island. It was a special time for me, a family time, a time to love and a time to be loved. It was traditional that the first thing on the agenda was an early dinner: honey-baked ham, turkey, chicken, candied yams, collard greens, salad, brown fried rice and white rice with gravy. For dessert, my sister Joan would bake her renowned butter pound cake and the specialties of the house were Mom’s blueberry and sweet potato pies. Occasionally, a store-bought apple pie was added to the menu.

I can picture it as if it were yesterday. All of us squeezed around the over-sized ping pong table that Dad made and my aging grandmother yelling out, “the last part that jumps over the fence is mine!” (referring to the tail of the turkey). After dinner, we’d exchange gifts. Then after the oohs and ahs over what we received, the adults would settle back in a comfortable chair, eagerly awaiting the annual star-studded performance of all the grandchildren.
What a show! The grandchildren ranged from toddler to teen. They did skits and songs, lipsinking to Motown records and entirely impromptu. We looked forward to their performance each year. I was so sorry that Joe had to work and couldn’t be with me.

For Joe, this Christmas turned out to be different from any other. God was orchestrating the events that initiated a stirring in Joe’s heart and ultimately changed his life. Actually, it all started Christmas Eve. After picking up a few fares in Brooklyn, Joe headed into Manhattan with his cab, where he knew he could make some money. It was mass chaos in the streets, over one hundred automobile accidents, and the hustle and bustle of last-minute shoppers running to and fro, and panicking in the process. All the earmarks of commercialism and the Lord was opening Joe’s eyes to see the reality of it all. It was so unsettling. Joe began to recall his childhood growing up. He was always in church on Christmas Eve.

This Christmas Eve was so different. While cruising the streets, Joe picked up an elderly woman who hailed his taxi cab. She was quite distraught because she didn’t have a ticket to get into one of the largest cathedrals in Manhattan. She explained to Joe that she regularly attended services there, but didn’t realize that she had to have a ticket for the Christmas Eve service. Even though Joe did quite well in tips, at the close of his day he went home with unsettled emotions. The night seemed to pass quickly.

It was now Christmas Day. While still in Brooklyn, before picking up the taxi cab for work, Joe stopped off at the home of a man, a stranger that he picked up in his cab the night before. Joe was inquisitively drawn to this man. In the short time that they spent together in the cab, Joe was amazed to see the love that this man had for his wife and children. He spoke of
his family so endearingly. Joe found out that this struggling young Black man who lived in the ghetto, had spent all of his money to pay the cab fare and to buy gifts for his wife and children. If nothing else, he wanted Christmas to be a special day for his family. It was out of curiosity that Joe accepted the man’s invitation for dinner.

When he arrived in their home, he was overwhelmed by the love that he felt. They didn’t have much, but they were willing to share what little they had. Joe was overwhelmed by the gamut of emotions that he was experiencing. By the time dinner was served, he just couldn’t eat. He was feasting on the love. He left their home with a stirring in his heart. It was God who was at work stirring his emotions. Joe then went to pick up his cab from the dispatcher, but for some reason he just couldn’t work. In an attempt to recapture the love that he had experienced in the home of that young Black man, Joe drove his cab up to the Bronx to see his mother. However, he was very restless, so he left his Mom and drove out to his sister’s apartment in Brooklyn, passing a countless number of potential fares along the way. He stayed at his sister’s place for a little while, but it was still not what he was looking for, so he left there. He parked the cab on a side street in Brooklyn and picked up our car. From Brooklyn he went to Manhattan, to a party in the Village.

By nightfall, Joe’s emptiness became more and more apparent to him. He tried to disguise the pain and fill the emptiness with all the old methods that had worked in the past, but that night, nothing worked. Alcohol, drugs, and immorality only made his emptiness more evident. He felt like an empty shell filled with anger and selfishness. He had hurt and abused all those who had cared for him. For the first time, the painful reality of his life was exposed in full view and he didn’t like
what he saw. Late that night while the party was still going on, Joe stood out on the balcony of his friend’s apartment. His buddy, Glenn, asked him if he still had the cab. Joe said yes, realizing that on the most lucrative day in the year he hadn’t made any money. Glenn said “Joe, you better get that cab back before you lose your job.”

On his way back to Brooklyn to pick up the cab, Joe was driving across the Brooklyn Bridge in his car when the Lord spoke to him. These are the words that were impressed upon his heart, “God is Love!” Then like a flood, truth filled his heart and he immediately understood the Cross. He was overwhelmed by the revelation of God’s love for him. He realized that God was there in all his painful times, constantly calling him to a different life, a fulfilled life, an abundant life, a life of peace.

It seemed like several minutes had passed when in reality it was only seconds of flashbacks, flashbacks from his childhood, joyful times when he was in church singing in the choir with those who loved Jesus. Things that were deeply hidden in his heart were now open. The Lord reminded Joe that when he was a child, he desired to be a preacher. It wasn’t just a desire; it was a calling, and God was still calling him. The love that he felt at that moment was overwhelming. Mind you, all this happened within minutes while Joe was driving across the Brooklyn Bridge. With tears in his eyes, Joe came to the awesome revelation that he had finally found the love he had so desperately been searching for. At that moment, he committed his life to Christ. In the short time that it took him to drive across the bridge, Joe’s life was transformed by the power of God and radically changed. Joe’s conversion reminds me of the Apostle Paul’s Damascus Road experience as it is recorded in the Book of Acts. (Acts 9:1-22)
Joe arose early that next morning to drive out to Long Island. Filled with excitement, he now had a zeal for God that was unbelievable. I knew that he was coming and I was anxiously awaiting his arrival. We had been apart for only three days and I was already missing him. Since Joe had to work the holiday weekend, we had previously agreed that he would drive me out to my parent's home a few days before Christmas, then come to pick me up the day after Christmas. Everything was going as we had planned. All the while I hadn’t the slightest inkling that the Joe that was coming to get me was not the same Joe that brought me out to Long Island three days before.

As soon as I saw him drive into the driveway of my parent’s home, I ran to the front door. He greeted me as if we hadn’t seen each other for a long time. Right away, I sensed that something was different. I just couldn’t put my finger on it. After greeting me, Joe went looking for my Dad. That puzzled me! Why did he want to find my Dad? I was suddenly filled with mixed emotions. Being aware of Joe’s impulsive nature, I was apprehensive and curious. I recall how he would often leave me hanging, not knowing what he was going to do next.

After briefly speaking with my Dad, Joe entered through the side door of the house, leading into the pantry. I was standing there getting food out of the refrigerator for dinner. I thought we’d eat before heading back to Brooklyn. Now, it might not have been the most romantic place, but right there in the pantry, Joe kissed me and shocked me with a proposal for marriage. I had to pinch myself. Could this really be happening? I told Joe, “If this is a dream, please don’t wake me up.” He said, “Sweetheart, you’re not dreaming.” He informed me that he had already asked my Dad for my hand in marriage and my Dad consented. He then proceeded to explain what had transpired in his life in the last twenty-four hours. All I heard
was Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. What a contrast! You see, Joe used a lot of profanity—almost every other word. Now, every other word was Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, and he was not using His name in vain. Joe tried to explain that he was now following Jesus. He told me that he loved me and that the Lord showed him that I was the missing piece, to make his pizza pie complete.

I was speechless and in awe, doubting whether all this was really happening. After all, the Joe that drove me out to Long Island three days earlier was diabolically opposed to marriage and religion. When I reminded him of this, he immediately responded by saying, “I’m not talking about religion, I’m talking about a personal relationship with the Living God.” He also explained that he could no longer live in sin. I was then given an ultimatum. Either I consent to marry him and follow Jesus, or it was over. It was not even something I had to think about. My immediate response was, “Of course, I’ll marry you!” I didn’t tell Joe, but I was a little hazy on the part about following Jesus. I wasn’t too sure what that meant.

I clearly remember telling him that, “I used to read my Bible and go to church, before I met you.” I told him that he was the one that got me started drinking and going out to nightclubs. I made it sound like I was a “goodie two shoes” before I met him. I had no clue that when Joe spoke of following Jesus, he was not talking about church attendance or Bible reading. I was talking about works and he was talking about a relationship with the Living God, and not just any kind of relationship, but an intimate personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Without any understanding of what Joe was talking about, I consented to marry him and to join him on his spiritual journey. I thought to myself, “How difficult could this be? All I have to do is follow
Joe, it’ll be his job to follow Jesus.” At least that’s what I thought.

After dinner, we said our good-byes to Mom and Dad, then headed back to Brooklyn. The drive back was unusually different. I didn’t say much but Joe talked incessantly. It was almost as if he was preaching at me. I thought to myself, “Could this be Joseph Stroman speaking to me?” We had lived together for three years and I thought I knew him, but this was not the Joseph Stroman that I knew. “Who was this new person?” It was all a bit overwhelming. I had no idea what he was talking about. He told me that he had found the Father that he had lost. He proceeded to tell me that his heart was filled with joy and that the love that he had been searching for was there in Jesus Christ. He said, “There is no woman, drug or experience that could fill my emptiness. Jesus alone is the answer for the empty heart. Last night, while driving across the Brooklyn Bridge, my heart was filled with a love for Jesus and I’ll follow Him anywhere. My life is His! He’s not a myth! He’s alive! He loves me and died to offer the forgiveness and peace that can only be found in Him. My sinful past has been forgiven and I cannot return to it. Jesus has called me and nothing can stop me from following Him the rest of my life. Peggy, do you realize, it was Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead that reveals the Love of God for this world of lost sinners?”

By now, we were on the Belt Parkway, passing the Kennedy Airport exit, heading towards Brooklyn. For a few minutes, there was a piercing silence in the car. Then Joe said, “Peggy, God brought you into my life. He placed a love in your heart for me, in spite of the pain that I caused you. I’m sorry for the way I’ve treated you. Please forgive me for the pain that I have caused.” I didn’t respond. I was a little confused. It was out of character for Joe to acknowledge and take responsibility for
his shortcomings. I thought to myself, “This new person isn’t so bad after all.” We arrived home safely. By the time we parked the car, we had already discussed our wedding plans. Joe was quite emphatic about not wanting to live in sin any longer, referring to our cohabiting. So, we set the earliest possible date for our wedding, which was January 27, 1972, on my Dad’s birthday. Keep in mind, at this point, I had not yet accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.
Chapter 4

“For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?”

Consequently, they are no longer two, but one flesh.
What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”
Matthew 19:5, 6 (NASB)

I couldn’t believe it. I was getting married! It wasn’t until about a week or two after Christmas that the reality of it hit me. I had only three weeks to plan and prepare for a wedding. Three weeks to do what would ordinarily take anywhere from six months to a year. Initially, I panicked, but Joe, being the calm logical person that he is, helped me to stay focused on what was important. It didn’t take a lengthy discussion to come up with a wedding plan that we could agree upon. Basically, we both agreed that we could dispense with the big church wedding and go to City Hall.

I was never into the traditional white gown and church wedding, that most girls dream of. When it comes to expenditures, Joe and I both tend to be frugal. Personally, I could not see spending thousands of dollars for one day, that is special in itself without the fanfare. My two sisters had big weddings and I had no desire to follow in that tradition.

The date we decided on was January 27th, which fell on a Wednesday. That would mean a midweek wedding. NO PROBLEM! Truthfully speaking, I wanted to marry Joe so badly that I didn’t care where, when or how. I hadn’t the slightest clue about weddings and what they entailed. I asked Joe, “Where do we start?” Since we didn’t have the money nor
the time to have invitations printed, we purchased inexpensive wedding invitations at our local 5-and-dime store. We invited immediate family and only our closest friends. We planned to go to City Hall, then return to our apartment for a small reception. We also decided to do all the cooking ourselves. You see, we used to throw parties, inviting all of our friends. It wasn’t a problem for us to cook for a large number of people. However, my family insisted on helping with the food. My parents told us that they’d order the wedding cake from our favorite bakery on Long Island.

We began covering all the bases one by one. What shall we wear and what about the rings? Joe thought of going to a freelance jeweler in Greenwich Village to have our rings made. We didn’t want anything fancy, just plain gold matching bands. There’s one thing you should know about me. I’m a little different than most women because I don’t particularly care for diamonds, nor any of the other precious stones for that matter. The only problem, it was difficult to catch the jeweler in her shop. Since she was a freelance artist, she worked on her own schedule, often opening after midnight. We made frequent visits to the Village just to see if we could catch her.

A week had passed and I was beginning to panic. When we finally caught her in her shop, it was after midnight. We had to ring the door bell because she kept her shop door locked, which is understandable considering the hours she kept. She was an interesting looking woman, very Bohemian. After speaking with her briefly, she consented to make our rings. We then gave her a description of what we wanted, two plain wide gold bands. We left her shop with a sigh of relief, one less headache. Our only other concern was what to wear.

Since I had no desire nor inclination to wear white, I sort of jumped at the idea when Joe suggested a burgundy outfit to
represent the Blood of Jesus. Joe found a perfect burgundy velvet jacket to wear and since I sew, I decided to make an outfit to match it. We took his jacket down to several fabric stores on Delancey Street in Manhattan in hopes of finding material that would match.

We went from store to store and after the fourth store I began to get a little frustrated. I sort of lost hope of ever finding a match. Then, the very next store that we went into had a burgundy-colored velvet material that was almost the exact match. Joe immediately began to praise God. He said, “I knew it! Peggy, I knew the Lord wouldn’t let me down. I knew we’d find the material.” As we looked at the material, I tried to get a vague idea of what I was going to do with it.

I can only sew by patterns and I didn’t even have a particular design in mind. Joe suggested making a skirt with the material and buying different material to make a blouse to match his shirt. The only problem is that Joe hadn’t bought his shirt yet, so we had no idea what color material to buy. We were creating our outfits as we went along. I bought three yards of the burgundy velvet material to make a full length formal skirt. We then went looking for a shirt for Joe. Since we had the jacket with us, the task of finding a match was so much easier. Oddly enough, Joe picked out a pink shirt, which was shocking to me. It was a perfect match, but the style and color was totally different from what the old Joseph would have selected. It was apparent even in his choice of clothing that a drastic change had taken place in Joe’s life. After purchasing the shirt, we then returned to the material store. I found a beautiful dressy crepe material for my blouse which perfectly matched Joe’s shirt. I also found patterns for a formal skirt and Victorian blouse.

With only a few weeks left, I came to the harsh reality that I had better get busy sewing. I was so excited. The event of
a lifetime. I still couldn’t believe I was getting married. I finished my outfit in no time. I made a straight skirt. The blouse had puffed, full-length sleeves and a high Victorian collar with a choker made out of the burgundy velvet skirt material. Joe also made a matching bow tie out of the same skirt material. Everything was now in place and we were ready for the big day.

It was a four-week span of time from the day Joe proposed until our actual wedding day. During this time, I couldn’t help from noticing how Joe had changed. He stopped using profanity and immediately severed his relationships with all the other women in his life. His whole countenance had changed. He was filled with peace and joy. The big day finally came. It was ten o’clock in the morning. I was dressed, but still putting the finishing touches on my hair, when my family arrived in three car loads. Mom, Dad and Nana were in one car. My brother Billy along with his family in another car and my sister Joan with her family in the third car. No more than a few minutes after their arrival, Joe announced that he and I were leaving to go and get married. He told everyone that he wasn’t waiting, either they follow us or they’d be left behind. With that announcement, all I heard was little feet scurrying around. The children were running from room to room while the adults waited on line to use the bathroom. Joe meant what he said.

The next thing I knew, I was being pulled by the hand out of the apartment and up to the corner subway train station. We were off to City Hall! Can you picture it? Just imagine, a weekday morning with a procession of people, all dressed up and running to catch the subway train. It looked like a scene from an Off-Broadway play, and a comedy at that. Even funnier was the scene in City Hall.

We were all directed to go to the waiting room. The weddings were performed on a first-come, first-serve basis.
There were about two or three couples before us, who were also waiting to get married. Most of the couples were accompanied only by the two people, required by state law to witness the ceremony. We were the only ones with what seemed like an entourage. My whole family occupied most of the chairs in the waiting room.

It took about a half-hour before the judge called us into his chambers. Meanwhile, I heard a familiar voice loudly say, “I’m hungry.” Oh My goodness! How embarrassing! It was Nana, my grandmother. After loudly declaring her state of hunger to the public, she then proceeded to open her pocketbook and pulled out several napkins, spreading them on her lap. Then she pulled out a spoon, a Tupperware container of tuna salad and Saltine crackers. After praying aloud over her snack, she then asked everyone in the waiting room if they cared to join her. Thank God it wasn’t long before our names were called. Who knows what else Nana would have pulled out of her pocketbook if she were only given more time.

As soon as I heard our names called, I was suddenly overcome with nervous jitters, which were apparent only to me. We were then escorted into the judge’s chambers. The judge seemed pleasantly surprised to see the entourage of people that entered the room with us. I explained that this was my family. He smiled and then proceeded with the ceremony. Joe and I were blessed by the way in which he greeted our family and made the ceremony so personal and special. He gave what resembled a short sermon or discourse on marriage which was excellent. We were particularly blessed that God was mentioned in relationship to marriage. In those days, it wasn’t such a taboo for a government official to mention God’s name. The whole issue of the separation of Church and State was not as clearly defined as it is today. We exchanged rings and sealed our vows
with a kiss. I stood there in awe, as the judge introduced us as Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Stroman. WOW! Before leaving the judge’s chambers, my family greeted us with hugs, kisses and congratulations. We then caught the subway train back to Brooklyn.

Shortly after returning back to our apartment, Joe’s Mom and several other guests arrived. We were expecting anywhere between thirty and forty guests in our small apartment. We had tables set up in the kitchen so that the food could be served buffet-style. Everything was going as planned. Family and friends pitched in to heat up the food. Once the food was heated, it was placed on the table in such a way so that everyone could help themselves. After eating, we cleared the living room floor for dancing. Adults and children, all got out on the floor and did the Mash Potatoes, the Funky Chicken, the Calypso, and the Cha-Cha. We did it all! We even twisted the night away.

We had so much fun and not a drop of alcohol was brought into the house, at Joe’s request. Just when we were about to weary ourselves out on the dance floor, someone yelled out, “When are you going to open your wedding gifts?” Joe looked at me and said, “This is as good a time as any.” As we opened each gift, we heard a crescendo of voices echoing “Ooh’s” and “Ah’s” We were overwhelmed by the love that was demonstrated through the gifts. I looked in Joe’s eyes and thought to myself, “What a wonderful day!” It truly turned out to be a marvelous celebration, topped off with the traditional cutting of the wedding cake. By now, it was getting late and some of our guests were beginning to leave, so Joe and I started cleaning up. We were abruptly stopped and, before we knew it, many hands were pitching in to clean up the mess and refrigerate the food.
After our last guest had left, we were getting undressed when we heard a knock on the door. We thought to ourselves, “Who could that be?” I was half undressed and not really presentable for guests, so I quickly ran into the bathroom. I heard Joe yell out, “Get dressed Peggy, it’s Ray Ethridge.” Ray is a friend of ours and one of the best photographers. He was unable to come earlier, but still wanted to take our pictures. I thought to myself, “No! Not now! My hair is a mess, my eyes look like I’ve been up all night and my blouse is wrinkled. This is not a good time.”

Joe insisted, so we got dressed and Ray did a whole photo shoot. To be honest with you, we’ve been married close to forty years and those photos taken on our wedding night are the best we’ve ever taken. After Ray left, Joe and I stayed awake until the wee hours of the morning, sharing with each other the moments and events of the day that touched our hearts.

The next day, we drove out to Long Island to spend a few days at my parent’s home. The old homestead was called “The Seven Pines”. Years back, my Dad planted seven pine trees while they were only seedlings. He planted a seedling for each member of the family, his five children, Mom and himself. He then erected a sign in front of the house which read, “The Seven Pines”. Whenever anyone asked us if we went anywhere on our honeymoon, Joe would always and inevitably say, “Yes, we went to the Seven Pines Estate on Long Island.” It was like staying at one of those Bed and Breakfast Inns. We had use of the entire second floor, which was a furnished two-room attic. It was quite private and very romantic. It really didn’t take much too please us, as long as we were together. It was blustery and cold that January, so we just hung around the house. After a few days, we felt completely rested and decided to go back to Brooklyn.
We returned to work. Joe drove a taxi cab and I did private duty nursing. Days turned into weeks and weeks into months. Time seemed to be rapidly passing and I was becoming more and more discontent. I had everything I had ever wanted, but there was still a void in my life. Joe on the other hand was filled with joy and excitement, especially as he talked about his new relationship with Jesus Christ. To tell you the truth, I thought he was a bit of a fanatic, reading his Bible and talking about Jesus all the time. However, I began to realize that he had something that I didn’t have.

As I look back over my life, I realize that from my early childhood, God was trying to reach me to show me that He had a better way, an abundant life, a fulfilled life. There were people that He brought into my life to plant seeds of faith in Him. My grandmother, Nana, was one of those people. Her unwavering faith in Jesus Christ and her committed life certainly affected me. In my young adult years, there was an evangelist who came to town. He exposed me to the unadulterated Word of God and the Good News of God’s Way of salvation through Jesus Christ. There was also a classmate in nursing school who seemed to relate to Jesus as her personal friend. I remember becoming jealous of that relationship. But, the vehicle that God finally used to bring me into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ was my husband, Joe.

As his wife, I was now closer to him than anyone else. I had a chance to observe him at his best, as well as at his worst. It didn’t take me long to conclude that Joe had changed. The change that I was witnessing was profoundly deep, deep down to the very core of his being. In reality, I knew that no one could change him. It had to be God! What amazed me, more than anything, was the fact that it didn’t matter what the situation or circumstances were; Joe had a peace and joy that surpassed all
understanding. With each passing day, I found myself desiring more and more to have that same peace and joy that he had. God knew this and He orchestrated the events in my life, and with His loving kindness He drew me to Himself. Scripture says, “... the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.” (1 Chronicles 28:9)

We had just celebrated our one-year wedding anniversary when my sister Joan approached us about a marriage retreat weekend. She and her husband had gone the previous year and she was so excited about how it had positively affected their marriage. She explained that the purpose of the retreat was to make good marriages better. It sparked an interest in me, so I made some phone calls and the next thing I knew we were signed up to go on the retreat that next month in New Jersey. The month seemed to fly by and in no time, we were heading out across the George Washington Bridge to New Jersey.

I was a little anxious because I had no idea of what to expect. As soon as we arrived at our destination, we were cordially greeted by several host couples. We were then ushered into what appeared to be a banquet room. There, we met about twenty other couples, all just as anxious as we were. The men were quite reserved, but the women were honest about their feelings. Most of us were a little nervous. We arrived Friday evening and after getting acquainted and a brief orientation, we checked into our rooms.

Saturday morning after breakfast, we had two workshops. We had a break for lunch, then resumed for two more sessions. We had a lengthy break for dinner, then an evening session. All the sessions were intently focused on deepening one’s love for their spouse, and improving their
marriage relationship. Each session was Christ-centered and began with prayer. The objective of the weekend was that we attain the intimacy that God intended for our marriage. The setting was specifically designed to create an atmosphere conducive to accomplishing that objective. Several weeks prior to the retreat, we received an unusual request, along with a set of directions. We were asked to leave our watches at home. It was obvious that they didn’t want us to be distracted in any way. There were no TVs, radios or clocks anywhere to be found on the premises.

Sunday’s schedule was the same as Saturday. By mid-afternoon, I was miserable and Joe was floating on cloud nine with joy unspeakable. In desperation, I cried out to God, “Please come into my life and give me what Joe has.” I asked for forgiveness for my sins, realizing that God sent His only begotten Son to die in my place and to take the penalty for my sins. I’ll always remember that day. I was sitting next to Joe in a room with twenty other couples. I had tears streaming down my cheeks. When I looked out of the window I saw in a vision, the hand of God coming out of a cloud and holding up a white dove as it flew across the sky. It was an awesome sight. In that vision, God spoke to my heart. He reassured me that He was holding me secure in the palm of His hands. At that moment, I committed my life to Him and knew that I was His child.

God answered my prayer. He not only gave me the peace and joy that Joe had, but he also filled the void in my life. He knew my past and not only loved me, He also forgave me. Though my sins were as scarlet, He made them as white as snow. (Isaiah 1:18) “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” (Psalms 103:12) I felt like I was born again, not of the flesh, but of the Spirit, a new creature in Christ Jesus. In God’s Word, we clearly see that
“...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17 KJV). Now, Joe and I were truly able to walk together as one in Christ Jesus.
Chapter 5

“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?”
Amos 3:3 (KJV)

It was the dawn of a new day. The sun had risen as it usually does, but everything seemed so different. The Lord had opened my eyes, giving me an awareness of the spiritual reality that is ever present in this physical world that we live in. It was almost as if the scales, which had blinded me for years had suddenly been lifted from my eyes. And to think, it all began on that marriage retreat weekend when I cried out to God and asked Jesus to come into my life. I made the decision to follow Jesus in spite of the fact that there were a lot of things that I didn’t understand. I had no idea that the decision I was making would have such a profound impact upon my life. The awesome reality of the new birth had penetrated to the very core of my being. I had begun to experience the transforming power of God. For the first time, Joe and I were walking together as ONE in Christ.

As I look retrospectively over the first year of our marriage, I can only imagine how frustrated and lonely Joe must have felt. He had found the Pearl of Great Price. Sadly enough, I wouldn't let him share the joy of that experience with me. Joe was often quite zealous in his attempts to share the Word of God with me, but I put up walls of opposition and resistance. However, in spite of my attitude, the Word of God accomplished what God desired because His Word does not return void. This Biblical truth can be seen in Isaiah 55:11: “So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not
return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

I remember Joe’s numerous soliloquies about the love of God revealed in and through Christ Jesus. He’d go on and on, and I’d respond by turning off my emotions and tuning him out. I once told him that I'd scream if he quoted another Bible verse to me. Yes, there was a point in my life that I actually rejected the Word of God. Sadly enough, that is often the response of many unbelievers.

In 1st Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 14, Paul identifies the unbeliever as the natural man. He goes on to say that “... A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised.” This verse is an accurate description of the way I felt before Christ came into my life. I was spiritually blind and because I didn’t understand the things of God, Joe's devotion to Christ became a major source of irritation to me. Instead of the intimacy that God intended for our marriage, I was becoming more and more distant. Walls of indifference were slowly being built up in my heart.

The marital difficulties which we were experiencing were a direct result of what the Bible describes as being unequally yoked. In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he warns those believers in Corinth, not to be bound together or unequally yoked with unbelievers, “... for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” Paul goes on to say, “Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?”(2 Corinthians 6:14, 15) Unfortunately, Joe and I didn’t have any premarital or Biblical counseling before we got married. What’s so amazing is that God now uses us to counsel couples getting married. As we impart Biblical
Principles and share God’s design for marriage, we know that their relationship will benefit from it.

*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? (Amos 3:3 NKJ)* The answer to that question is NO. We had now both surrendered our lives to Christ. We were finally walking together in unity. However, as newborn Christians, we had no concept of what God was calling us to do. All we knew was that we loved the Lord with all of our hearts. It was out of that love that we desired to serve Him. From the very beginning up until this very day, God has always used us in such natural ways and in common everyday situations.

Like most Christians, we’d often find ourselves sharing the love of God in our neighborhood, at the supermarket, in the waiting room of a doctor’s office, on our jobs and just about anywhere and everywhere. As newborns, neither of us had read through the Bible. We had a zeal for God, but very little knowledge of His Word. To this day, we thank God for keeping His reigns on us because zeal without knowledge has the potential of being a catastrophe. As a matter of fact, in the beginning, we frightened off most of our friends.

Joe was always quite enthusiastic in sharing about his personal relationship with Jesus Christ. From the very beginning, he was always steadfast and committed to serving the Lord. However, whenever he mentioned to someone that he was serving the Lord, they’d inevitably ask him if he was a minister. In the beginning, Joe was adamantly opposed to being called a minister. He had no understanding of God's calling on his life, nor did he have an understanding of the Biblical view of leadership. It wasn’t until God started to heal his damaged emotions that Joe began to accept the title of Minister. Those unresolved issues from his past relationship with his pastor affected his responses for years.
We’re so thankful for God’s patience. He is slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. It took years for God to heal the hurts in Joe's life and to resolve some of the issues that were causing him to respond inappropriately. Even to this day, Joe will be the first to admit to you that God is still exposing and working on areas of his life. As a matter of fact, the Holy Spirit is working on all of us who are committed Christians so that we will appear before Jesus without spot or wrinkle when He returns.

While still living in that little basement apartment in Brooklyn, Joe and I went out to work every day with a burning desire to share the love of Jesus with everyone we met. The Lord used our jobs as a vehicle for us to demonstrate His Love and to teach us many lessons about His Protection, His Provision, His Faithfulness, His Compassion, His Mercy and His Love. Lessons that would last us a lifetime.

When I first moved to Brooklyn before Joe and I got married, I was employed as a registered nurse on staff at Downstate Medical Center. I felt so unhappy after only working a few months. Feeling dissatisfied and unfulfilled in my work, I left there and took a position as a clinic nurse in a Neighborhood Health Center in the ghettos of Brooklyn. My work in the clinic brought me in contact with prostitutes, alcoholics and drug addicts. The expression “out of the coals and into the fire” is a perfect description of my job change.

Remember, I was the country girl that grew up in rural Long Island in the 40’s and 50’s. It wasn’t easy for me to adjust to the people and to life in the city, but I was willing to try. It didn’t take long for me to realize that I was very much out of my element. I just didn’t fit. It became even more evident to me when my heart was gripped with fear as riots broke out in the streets that summer. I worked only a few months more before
resigning from my position at the clinic. I then signed up with a Health Care Agency to do private duty nursing. As a matter of fact, I was doing private duty nursing in 1973 when I met Jesus. He not only filled the void, but changed my life and gave it meaning. Now for the first time, my life finally had direction and purpose.
Chapter 6

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”
Romans 8:28 (NASB)

Working as a private duty nurse, my case assignments brought me in contact with many different patients and their relatives. I worked in many different hospitals throughout Brooklyn, most of which were privately owned. Joe, on the other hand, was employed by a Taxi Cab Company in Brooklyn. He drove a medallion cab throughout all the five boroughs: Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan and the Bronx. These were exciting times for us. God kept setting up Divine appointments for us to demonstrate His love. As newborn Christians we didn’t know very much. We certainly weren’t able to share any profound Biblical truths. The one thing we were certain of was that Jesus is alive and He loved us. We walked and talked with Him.

The lessons that I learned while doing private duty were twofold. Sometimes there weren’t enough cases to supply all the nurses in the agency with work. While God was demonstrating His Faithfulness to provide work for me, He was also demonstrating His Compassion, His Mercy and His Love through me to those I cared for.

Of all my private duty cases, there were two cases in particular that God used to profoundly touch my heart, while we lived in Brooklyn. As years passed, I began to realize that it was truly God’s Divine appointment that brought these two patients
into my life. What’s interesting to note is that in each of these two cases I had a pressing financial need when the agency phoned me with each of these jobs. In and through these situations and circumstances, the Lord was teaching me one of many invaluable lessons about trusting in His Faithfulness. I witnessed firsthand His Provision, which is still sufficient to meet my every need, and His Timing, which is always perfect.

In the first of the two cases, the agency called me requesting that I report to a city hospital in an economically-deprived area of Brooklyn. I was assigned to care for a middle-aged woman who was in a coma after having a stroke.

Private duty nurses were quite expensive. So, we very seldom received requests to go to city hospitals. However, in this case, it was in an emergency that the patient was taken there. The family requested private nurses and she had adequate insurance coverage to pay for them. The patient's uncle and cousin would visit daily and stay at the bedside for hours at a time.

I always enjoyed listening to them speak. They were from Barbados and had such a delightful Caribbean accent. After finishing my routine nursing care, I’d try to discern whether or not the family wanted me to spend time with them and remain in the room or leave to give them some privacy.

In my nursing experience, I’ve noticed that family members often find it difficult and sometimes awkward to sit alone at the bedside of a comatose relative for any length of time. I tried to be sensitive to the needs of the relatives, as well as the patient. I made it a point to encourage the relatives to speak to their loved one. I let them know that hearing is the last sense to cease functioning when an individual is dying. Even in a coma, the person can hear up until they take their last breath. As a Christian, it encourages us to know that we can always
minister to the person in a coma not only by talking to them, but also by reading Scripture and praying with them.

Over the next three weeks, my patient’s condition began to slowly deteriorate, but during this time, the family and I drew closer and closer. It’s funny because I can remember my instructors in nursing school warning us about getting emotionally involved with our patients and their relatives, but I sensed that this relationship was all about Jesus. As the cousin and the uncle sat at the bedside watching me care for their relative, they’d listen intently as I spoke with them about the Love of God, which was revealed in Christ Jesus. In those days, we didn’t live in fear of losing our jobs if we shared the Gospel while on duty. I was on the case a month when my patient died.

Now, Joe and I didn’t have to hear an audible voice from heaven telling us to go to the funeral. It just seemed like the right thing to do. Little did we know, that our presence at that funeral spoke volumes to the family. We later had the privilege of introducing the cousin to Jesus. She received Him as her Lord and Savior. Amazingly enough, our friendship extended over a twenty-year period.

As the years passed, the aging uncle became more like a Grandpa to us, but we endearingly called him Uncle John. We also developed a close mutual relationship with the cousin. She was more like a sister to us. We watched her children grow up from their teens to young adulthood, getting married and having their own children. Joe and I remained in their lives and in close contact over the years.

We moved to Georgia, and from Georgia to California, then back to New York. We were back in New York only a few years, when Uncle John passed away. Then Sis died, who we endearingly called Bunny. Her children asked Joe to deliver the eulogy and to officiate at her funeral. At this point, Joe had
already graduated from seminary. He was an ordained minister with the credentials to officiate at weddings and funerals. What was so heart-breaking is that only a few years after Bunny’s death, her only son was tragically killed. Once again, Joe was asked to deliver the eulogy and to officiate at his funeral.

I thank God that we shared the Gospel with those individuals that God brought into our lives. We were newborn Christians when the Lord first brought this family across our path. However, they remained in our lives for many years. Who would have ever thought that when I signed on the case, that my relationship with the family would last beyond two decades to see their children’s children?

The second case was very different. This time the agency called requesting that I report to a private hospital in an affluent area of Brooklyn to care for an elderly man who was having surgery. It wasn’t unusual for me to turn a case down in order to take a few days off. However, since I desperately needed the money, I was more than willing to take the case. I worked the evening shift, so that my working hours would be the same as Joe’s.

I reported to the hospital early that day only to find out that my patient was still in the Recovery room. I didn’t have to wait very long before they rolled him into his room on a gurney. After quickly assessing his condition, I assisted with his transfer into bed. I immediately checked his vital signs, his IV and his dressing. I noted that he was conscious, but still drowsy from the anesthesia.

He was an elderly Italian gentleman and as cute as could be. Now you must understand that I have always had a soft spot in my heart for the elderly. As a matter of fact, after graduating from nursing school in 1966, my very first job was in Geriatrics caring for the elderly in a psychiatric hospital.
Shortly after positioning my patient in bed and making him as comfortable as possible, his wife, daughter and son-in-law came to visit. Nice people. I bonded with the daughter almost immediately. She was a loving and very caring individual.

During their visit, I noticed that they were speaking Italian. It prompted me to ask the daughter to tell me a little bit about her father. She immediately warned me that he was stubborn and that he may give me a difficult time. He was born in Italy and spoke Italian fluently. He understood English, but spoke very little of it. He turned out to be one of my favorite patients. I think he sensed the love that I had for him. He never gave me the difficult time that his daughter warned me about. Aware of how modest her father was, the daughter was shocked that he allowed me to give him a complete bed bath every evening.

From my very first day on the case, I established a routine. After visiting hours were over, I’d give him a bath, then a snack. Afterwards, we’d talk at great lengths about the “Good Ol’ days”. He spoke in broken English, occasionally punctuating his sentences with an Italian word here and there. He enjoyed reminiscing about times and experiences of years gone by.

I remained on the case during his entire hospital stay. He was recuperating so well from surgery that he really didn’t need me, but the family would not release me until the doctor discharged him from the hospital. By the time he was discharged, I had gotten to know the entire family quite well. His daughter and I became especially close and stayed in touch even after his discharge.

He was hospitalized twice over the next two years. The daughter would call me each time that he was hospitalized, requesting that I take care of her Dad. She said he didn’t want
anyone else to take care of him besides me. Well, let me tell you! When I heard that, I was so flattered. I desired to be a godly example in the workplace and around family and friends.

Not having any other obligations or commitments, I was able to take the case. I know it wasn’t very professional, but by this time I had started to call my patient “Pop”, and the family didn’t seem to mind. As a matter of fact, they thought it was cute. Pop’s two teenaged grandsons marveled at our relationship as they watched me care for their grandfather.

Joe and I were even invited over to their house for dinner after Pop’s second hospitalization and discharge. The entire family, Mom, Pop, daughter, son-in-law and two grandsons all lived in an old, but beautifully restored two-family house in Brooklyn. As soon as we arrived at their house for dinner, we were graciously escorted into the living room and then into the dining room. After sitting down at the table, we were lavishly fed the most delicious Italian meal beginning with anti-pasta. We had a five-course meal that was out of this world, but more important, we felt like family.

Our relationship spanned a period of twenty years. The oldest grandson went off to college, graduated, got married and later had children. Mom died first and then Pop. The daughter was diagnosed with a degenerative neurological disease and passed away years later.

It was a Divine appointment that brought these two patients and their families into our lives binding our hearts together in Christian love and friendship. To this day, these two families still hold a special place in our hearts. We have such fond memories of the precious moments that we’ve shared. Over the many years that we’ve known each other, we have had the opportunity and the privilege of sharing in joy and sorrow, and in laughter and tears.
Chapter 7

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, 
And lean not on your own understanding; 
In all your ways acknowledge Him, 
And He shall direct your path.”

Proverbs 3:5, 6 (NKJV)

While God was teaching me to trust in His Faithfulness, He was also teaching Joe some invaluable lessons. Joe was learning to listen to God’s voice and to discern His Will. As he drove through the city streets of New York, the Lord guided and directed him each night which paths to take. In his three years of driving a taxi, Joe had innumerable experiences and a countless number of passengers. In hindsight, we now realize that there were many Divine appointments which God orchestrated to bring particular individuals into Joe’s cab. Out of all the situations he encountered, there are three which stand out foremost in his mind.

Late one night, he found himself driving through the suburbs of Queens. Noticing that the streets were completely empty, he began questioning the Lord. “Lord, what are we doing out here this late? There’s no one hailing cabs in this neighborhood at this hour!” Now you must understand that this was not an unusual occurrence for Joe to carry on an audible conversation with Jesus in an empty cab.

Just as he uttered his last words, a woman came running out of the front door of a two-family house holding a child in her arms. She saw Joe’s taxi and frantically signaled for him to stop. He could tell by the expression on her face that she was
obviously overwhelmed and shocked to see a taxi at her door at such a late hour of the night.

When she got into the cab, Joe assured her that Jesus placed his cab there for her and that Jesus loves her. She requested to be taken to Jamaica Hospital. Her ailing son was suffering from an asthma attack. On the way to the hospital, Joe openly shared with her about his conversation with Jesus and how she came running out the front door of her home only seconds after he uttered his last words to the Lord.

To give some background, Joe was very young in the Lord and had not yet had any Bible teaching. In his desire to help those that the Lord brought into his cab, he wouldn’t turn the meter on. He’d charge them only 25 cents. He thought it was a way of blessing them, but in reality, he was stealing from the cab company. This gave his passengers a mixed message that Jesus was blessing them while at the same time, Joe was stealing from the cab company. “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? (James 3:11 KJV)

As Joe started reading his Bible, he began to experience what the Word of God defines as conviction. Conviction is the result of the operative work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Jesus said “… when he [The Holy Spirit] is come, he will reprove (convict) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” (John 16:8 KJV).

The New Testament was originally written in Greek with the exception of a few portions that were written in Aramaic. When we examine this passage of Scripture in John, the Greek word, which is often translated “convict” or “reprove”, literally means to convince or to prove guilty. When the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, we are convinced of our sin and were proven guilty. The purpose of conviction is to lead us to godly repentance. That’s exactly what happened to Joe. After being
convicted by the Holy Spirit, he repented of his thefts and immediately stopped robbing the company. That’s exactly what repentance is. You not only feel sorry for what you’ve done. You also stop doing it! Repentance is twofold. It involves both a change of mind about sin and a change of heart-attitude toward sin. The repentant individual has godly sorrow which leads him or her to turn away from sin. What’s so glorious is that God forgives us as soon as we repent. He promises that, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9 KJV).

Joe drove to the hospital as fast as he could. The child, who was wheezing and gasping for breath, laid clenched in his mother’s arms in the back seat of the cab. Joe arrived promptly at the hospital’s emergency room entrance. Before leaving the cab, Joe once again assured the mother that it was Jesus who placed his cab at her door just as she came running out of her house.

As Joe proceeded to drive away from the hospital, he continued his conversation with Jesus. “Lord, how neat! You had me play ambulance.” Without hesitation, the Lord quickly responded. “Now Dummy, how is she going to get home?” Well, you must understand. This didn’t in any way offend Joe to be addressed as “Dummy”. As a matter of fact, he was flattered that the Lord addressed him in such a personal way. In fact, God had once before spoken to Joe addressing him as “Dummy”.

It was during his suicide attempt, prior to his salvation. He was in a New York University dormitory watching the blood gush out as he repeatedly slashed his arm and wrist with a razor blade. These words came to him, “Dummy, you’re dying.” It caused him to come to his senses. He stopped the bleeding and got to the hospital.
For many years he thought that he heard his own voice that day, but it was actuality God trying to get his attention to save his life. Even as Christians, we sometimes confuse our own voice with God’s. However, as we mature, we learn to discern God’s voice more clearly. What’s so amazing is that God knows just how to speak to our hearts and he uses our own vernacular or dialect to do it. He may even use slang for some to get His point across to cause them to respond. Joe grew up in the South East Bronx and the Lord often uses slang to get his attention.

Now back to the emergency room of the hospital. With all the excitement, Joe got caught up in the moment and didn’t realize that mother and child had no way to get home. He slapped himself on the head and, without hesitating, he turned the cab around and parked it near the emergency room entrance.

Sometimes, we’re just like Joe. We don’t get the whole picture without a personal revelation from God. As Joe walked through the door, he briefly scanned the room and spotted both mother and child. As she looked up and recognized Joe, she seemed pleasantly surprised to see him there. He told her that Jesus sent him back to provide her with transportation back home.

The child, a darling little boy, was sitting on his mother’s lap. He was quite restless and crying frantically. While sitting with them in the emergency room waiting area, Joe offered to hold the little guy. As soon as Joe took the child in his arms, he stopped crying.

It wasn’t too long before the doctor summoned the mother to come into the treatment area. Joe followed her, carrying the child in his arms. As a matter of fact, Joe, a perfect stranger, held the little guy while the doctor gave him an injection and a breathing treatment. It’s so amazing what doors the Lord will bring you through, if you’re willing to follow Him
at any cost. Shortly after being treated, the child was discharged from the emergency room. Joe escorted them back to his cab and drove them safely home.

God is so awesome! When you think about it, God didn’t send just any taxi cab driver to that mother. He sent Joe, who has suffered with asthma all his life. As a child, he was rushed to the hospital quite often with severe asthma attacks. He was allergic to almost everything. Who would have more compassion and more understanding than someone who suffered with the same affliction? Scripture tells us that with the comfort we’ve received, we’re able to comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4).

This was Joe’s last fare for the night. After returning the taxi to the dispatcher, he drove home with an awe-inspiring sense of God’s presence. Joe learned an invaluable lesson that night. God was teaching Joe about finishing the work which he had started. Up to this point, Joe had a habitual pattern of not finishing whatever he started. This was a turning point and a whole new beginning. God was establishing new patterns in his life.

The second situation, foremost in Joe’s mind, happened just after he had picked up his taxi cab from the dispatcher. Joe had just started his route and was talking to the Lord, as he usually did. He asked Jesus, “What are we going to do today?” Joe was still in Brooklyn and no sooner than he got the words out of his mouth, a gentleman hailed him over. He wanted Joe to take him all the way into Manhattan.

Most of the time, Joe would try to stay in Brooklyn, but he was also trying to be obedient to God and remain open to His guidance and direction. Joe said, “OK! Lord, we have to go into Manhattan.” But he also said, “Lord, here’s a long fare.” As Joe started to talk to the gentleman, he didn’t respond. In all his
attempts, Joe could not strike up a conversation about anything. The gentleman sat there in the back seat without uttering a word. It didn’t take a master mind to figure out the obvious. There wasn’t going to be any conversation on this trip.

Joe drove across the Manhattan Bridge and finally into Manhattan. As he stopped at a light on Canal Street, a pan handler approached the cab. Realizing that he had only a few minutes before the traffic light would change, Joe quickly rolled his window down and gave the pan handler a quarter and a gospel tract. The pan handler immediately responded with such gratitude, saying “Thank you” and “God bless you”. As he drove off, Joe could see in his rearview mirror, that the pan handler was reading the tract.

For those of you who are not familiar with the term “pan handler”, let me explain. A “pan handler” is an individual who is either destitute or poverty stricken. He has pretty much lost everything and stands on the streets begging for money. Sadly enough, these individuals are sometimes homeless and quite often addicted to either alcohol or drugs.

During his years of driving a cab, the Lord showed Joe how to respond to the pan handlers. They needed more than just a handout. Joe would give them a quarter, which was a fair amount in those days, and a gospel tract explaining God’s love for them.

As Joe proceeded to drive uptown on 1st Avenue, all of a sudden his passenger broke the long deafening silence with a question. “Why did you do that?” Realizing the gravity of his question, Joe hesitated a few seconds to think before responding. After collecting his thoughts, Joe said, “I don’t know what brought that man to this point in his life. I just wanted to show him that the Lord still loves him. Jesus cares
about him and that’s why I did what I did.” There was a long silence.

As Joe continued driving uptown, the passenger opened up. Once again his words pierced through the deafening silence which filled the cab. He said, “I was just on that corner. I’m on my way to my third AA meeting, and I didn’t think that anyone cared. I had lost all hope.”

What a profound moment! The Lord had opened the door and prepared the gentleman’s heart to receive the Truth. No longer was there silence in the cab. As they proceeded to his destination, Joe imparted these words, “It was Jesus that brought you into my cab. You could have gotten into any cab, but God chose this one to let you know that He loves you and that there is hope for you.”

The third situation, foremost in Joe’s mind, was one in which he experienced visible evidence of God’s protection. During the three years of driving a taxi cab in New York, Joe became very much aware of the increasing number of cab drivers who were victims of theft. Joe would always ask the Lord to guide him as he drove. He’d go anywhere because he knew that God would not lead him where He was not going to protect him.

After a certain hour, a majority of the medallion cabs would not go into difficult areas, like Harlem. Joe was never the kind of person that was easily frightened. He’d go anywhere the Lord led him. Places that yellow cabs would not generally go, Joe would go because he knew that the Lord had guided him. He put his trust in the Lord and refused to live in fear.

This particular day, Joe was in the East New York area of Brooklyn. He was heading out of Brooklyn towards Manhattan when a suspicious-looking man hailed his cab. As Joe stopped, the man approached the cab on the passenger side
and proceeded to open the rear door to get in. From behind, Joe spotted a second man that he hadn’t initially seen. This second suspicious-looking man was now approaching the cab from the rear on the driver’s side. As he came close, he looked at Joe and told the other man, “No, not him.” The fellow, who had already opened the door, said “Well, why not?” The response was emphatic and without hesitation, “NO, NOT HIM!” Not knowing their intentions, Joe drove off in haste as soon as the door was shut. As he drove off, he sensed it wasn’t about the choice of a cab. Joe surmised that these men desired to do more than take a ride, but for some reason, the hearts of those men were changed. So much so that they didn’t even set foot in the cab. We know it was the Lord because He is the only one that can change the hearts and lives of men. As Joe came to the realization of the eminent danger that he had escaped, he also became more aware of God’s presence guiding and protecting him.
Chapter 8

“For Thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by what Thou hast done,
I will sing for joy at the works of Thy hands.”

Psalms 92:4 (NASB)

Two years had passed and Joe and I were now well on our journey following Jesus, which to us was an exciting adventure. Each day presented us with many new challenges and opportunities to demonstrate the love of God that is revealed in and through Christ Jesus. It didn’t matter where we were. We often found ourselves sharing Christ with customers, while waiting on a cashier’s line in the supermarket, or with passengers on the subway train, with co-workers on our jobs or with the neighbors on our block. Joe and I, having found the “Pearl of Great Price”, we just couldn’t keep it to ourselves. We couldn’t keep silent. I totally understand what Jeremiah the prophet meant when he said, “...if I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name.’ Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.” (Jeremiah 20:9, NASB)

Joe and I were quite exuberant in sharing Jesus. However, in our zeal, we scared off many of our friends. Our problem was that we had so little knowledge of God’s Word. Paul addresses this very issue in his letter to the Romans. In his description of the Jews, Paul says, “...I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.” (Romans 10:2, NABS). But God was faithful, and in spite of our blunders, there were a few friends that hung
around watching us for years. One friend was honest enough to tell us that he thought we were just going through a phase. He also told us that he was waiting for it to peter out.

Another friend, while visiting with us, shared that she was having problems sleeping at night and was battling with depression. She confessed that she was drinking a magnum bottle of wine to get to sleep every night.

The Lord impressed upon our hearts that we had a bruised lamb here. As we both reached out to hug her, she fell into our arms and burst into tears. She felt comfortable enough to open up and share that her and her husband were involved in the sexually perverted lifestyle of “wife swapping”. She was in an adulterous relationship with her best friend’s husband. What’s so perverted and sick about it is that she entered into this relationship with her girlfriend’s knowledge and permission.

When we walk contrary to God’s Commandments, there are consequences. God says “…the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23 NASB). In our friend’s case this was certainly true. Her sinful lifestyle had taken its toll. It was tearing her up. She had no peace and was unable to sleep at night. As soon as we heard her confession, we immediately thought, “JESUS is the answer!” He was the only possible solution to her perplexing problems. We didn’t know the first thing about binding up bruised lambs, but we knew Jesus did.

As newborn Christians, we had no idea how to pray with someone to receive Christ in their life. So we put the burden on her. We sent her home and told her to try Jesus. We told her to ask Jesus to put her to sleep. We explained that Jesus is not dead; He is alive. Because He is God, He can do the impossible. We then challenged her to put Him to the test.
She left and hadn’t been gone no more than ten minutes when Satan, the enemy of our souls, tried to intimidate us. The thought came to us that, “You’re really out on a limb now!”

These days, we hear so much about “spiritual warfare”. However, back then, as newborn Christians, we didn’t have a clue. We continued to believe that God could do the impossible. We didn’t care if we appeared foolish. We were proud to be fools for Jesus.

About midmorning the very next day, we received a phone call. It was our friend. She was so excited, we could hardly understand what she was saying. Straining to understand her, we heard the words, “I slept the whole night!” She repeated herself several times saying, “I didn’t drink any wine and I slept the whole night!” We were then struck with awe when we heard her say, “He’s real, Jesus is real.” Well, after that we were floating on cloud nine all day.

We hadn’t a clue about what to do next. In a sense, we felt responsible for this bruised lamb, but how could we help her to grow in her relationship with Christ? How could we teach her when we knew so very little ourselves? There was one thing we did know for certain, and that was the fact that she could not continue in sin. We confronted her in love, about her adulterous relationship with her girlfriend’s husband. We also told her that the “wife swapping” had to stop. She followed our advice and truly repented. We did our best to get her into a Bible believing church. We then trusted Jesus to care for her.

What was so ironic was that we didn’t have a home church ourselves and we were trying to find one for her. At that time, Joe was adamant about not going to church. He had so many unresolved issues from his past prohibiting him from even wanting to set foot in a church. Issues that only God could heal. There was one thing that gave me hope. Joe was just as adamant
about not getting married and God changed his heart about that. So, I continued to trust in the Lord, putting my faith in Him who is able to do the impossible.

As God continued to orchestrate Divine appointments in our lives, we began to find ourselves in more and more difficult situations and unprepared to handle them. The Lord was gradually trying to show us that we needed training. However, Joe continued to resist, as the Lord continued to nudge him towards Bible School. Joe didn’t understand and, in his limited knowledge of Scripture, he saw no evidence of Jesus ever going to Bible School or Seminary. Joe insisted that he was following Jesus, and if Jesus never went to Bible School, why should he. Well, let me tell you. It didn’t take long for the Lord to knock a hole in that argument, and He used another Divine appointment to do it.

My sister Joan suggested that Joe seek the counsel of her husband’s uncle, who we all endearingly called Uncle Frank. Uncle Frank was now in his senior years and still a very busy man. He had traveled all over the world as the Secretary of the Council of Presbyterian Churches Worldwide. He was a respected alumni, retired professor and Dean of Men at Lincoln University. He was pastoring a small Presbyterian church in Oxford, Pennsylvania when we called him asking for an appointment.

After a brief phone conversation, Uncle Frank invited us to his home, not just for a counseling appointment, but for dinner. Knowing how busy he was, we were honored that he scheduled us in so soon.

In the past, we would only see Uncle Frank and Aunt Anna occasionally at family reunions. For some odd reason, we had never really said more than a few words to each other. We didn’t know the Lord in those days, and there was also an
obvious generation gap. At family reunions, they hung out with the older relatives and we were with the young people. It’s so amazing that once you know Jesus, He bridges all the gaps.

The time came, and since it was such a lengthy drive from New York to Pennsylvania, we made arrangements to spend the night. We had never been to Uncle Frank and Aunt Anna’s home before, so we were a little nervous. We had no idea of what to expect, nor did we have any idea that this appointment would have such a profound affect upon our lives.

When we arrived at their front door, we were graciously greeted by Aunt Anna. Our stomach jitters completely disappeared as we were so warmly welcomed into their home.

Joe and I were in awe to see Uncle Frank’s collection of souvenirs from around the world. Displayed throughout the home were dishes, statues, figurines and artwork from exotic places, like the Orient, India and Africa. I personally had never seen such a collection.

Uncle Frank was an austere looking man, but very gentle in nature. He was bald with distinguishing gray hair at his temples. Aunt Anna was prim and proper. She always wore her hair up in a style very typical of the 40’s. They were a precious couple and a delight to be around. It was such a blessing to see the admiration and respect they had for one another after being married for more than fifty years.

Aunt Anna busied herself in the kitchen while Uncle Frank chatted with us about his travels. His unique experiences sparked our interest. Time flew by as we attentively listened to his every word.

Before we knew it, it was dinner time. After freshening up, Uncle Frank escorted us into the dining room, and before my eyes was the most impressive formal setting I had ever seen. You would have thought the King and Queen were coming to
dinner, but that was Aunt Anna. She had a knack of making the ordinary very elegant and special. Aunt Anna also had a unique habit of warming the dinner plates in the oven while Uncle Frank blessed the food.

We sat down to a scrumptiously delicious five-course meal. We started off with fresh fruit that Aunt Anna cut up by hand. The fruit dish was followed by soup and salad, then the main course and dessert.

Just as we finished our last bite, Joe popped the question about Jesus not having Bible training. Of course Joe took a few minutes to elaborate on his thinking. With patience and much wisdom, Uncle Frank waited for Joe to finish. Then after a brief pause, he said, “There is evidence that Jesus had rabbinical training.” Even though Uncle Frank elaborated on that point, he really didn’t have to say another word. While Uncle Frank was speaking, the Holy Spirit was confirming in Joe’s heart that he needed to go to school. As I glanced across the table and looked into Joe’s eyes, I saw tears welling up and streaming down his cheeks. From his mouth to God’s ears, Joe uttered the words, “I have to go to school!”

I sat there quietly at the table listening to this whole conversation, but when I heard Joe utter the words, “I have to go to school!” I began to panic. All sorts of questions flooded my mind. What does that mean - “I have to go to school”? What kind of school? Where? When? How will we afford it? Will we have to move? Without uttering a word, I sat there at the table perfectly calm on the outside, but an emotional wreck on the inside. It never dawned on me that God was orchestrating all this.

My problem was that I was so focused on “ME” that I didn’t see the BIG picture of what God was ultimately trying to accomplish - not only in Joe’s life, but also in mine. Mind you,
Joe and I were always praying that God would guide and direct us. Here I was face to face with the answer to our prayers and I didn’t see it. I felt as though my life had finally been neatly packaged and wrapped with a beautiful bow. It suddenly seemed as if this new turn of events was going to upset the apple cart. Little did I know that God was trying to re-establish my priorities and teach me a HUGE lesson on trusting Him. God says in His Word, “...For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,” plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

As I look back over our lives, I’ve noticed that there has always been a pattern with Joe and I. Joe has always been the trailblazer and I have followed behind in his foot steps. Joe has always been perceived as a fanatic. He’s radical. On the other hand, I’m very cautious. I don’t usually step out unless I’ve tested the water. Over the years, God has orchestrated situations in my life to increase my faith and build trust in Him. This was one such situation. Mind you, I was still a newborn at this point, a fledgling.

The conversation continued. By this time, Aunt Anna had excused herself from the table. As she puttered in the kitchen, I remained glued to my seat, trying to make sense of all that was being said. Then Joe asked Uncle Frank, “Where should I go?” Assuming that Joe had already met the requirements to get into seminary, Uncle Frank suggested that he go to I.T.C. in Atlanta, Georgia. He proceeded to tell us that he had an affiliation with the school. Joe asked, “What is I.T.C.?” Uncle Frank explained that I.T.C. stood for Interdenominational Theological Center. Joe was quite excited when he heard the name of the school. Because of the issues of his past, Joe was turned off to church denominations. He
thought that this was the school of his dreams, non-denominational.

Oddly enough, the school’s name was only the hook that the Lord used to get Joe to start making plans. Uncle Frank offered to make a few calls of inquiry, but Joe declined. Joe was determined not to use a person to open doors or having someone influence a person’s decisions. He had yet to learn that God places people strategically to bring about His purpose. Esther is a perfect example of this in Scripture. She was raised up, and attained royalty to save the Jewish nation.

The next day Uncle Frank and Aunt Anna drove us all around. They took us to Lincoln University, then to the little church in Oxford where he pastored. It was a quaint little church with historic architecture, typical of that area of Pennsylvania.

After a delightful drive, we returned to the house. Aunt Anna scurried into the kitchen and hustled up one of the most appetizing lunches. She topped it off with a bowl of her delicious freshly cut fruit.

Joe and I always disliked having to eat and run, but we had a long drive ahead of us. So shortly after expressing our gratitude and giving hugs and kisses, we got into the car and drove back to Brooklyn. The drive home was quiet. We had very little conversation as we mulled over in our minds all that had transpired in the last two days. Joe had to battle traffic coming into New York, which wore us both out. We arrived home exhausted. As our day had finally come to a close, we both agreed that we had a lot to think about.
Chapter 9

“For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.”
Jeremiah 29:11, 12 (NASB)

Before leaving Pennsylvania, Joe remembered to get the telephone number of the Administration Office of I.T.C. from Uncle Frank. However, he hesitated in calling them right away. He first wanted to see if there was a Seminary in the New York area.

Without any delay, Joe did his research and found New York Theological Seminary. He phoned them as soon as he could to inquire about their requirements and their curriculum. He panicked when he heard that the students were required to go into the prisons.

Now, I’ll have to digress a bit, to give you an understanding of why the sudden panic. In high school, Joe was involved in street gangs. In those days, it was a part of the life of most teenagers who grew up in the South East Bronx. Joe knew guys who were in prison for murder. He was afraid that he would meet up with them. So, the very mention of prison scared him off from going to that particular school. Amazingly enough, a few years later, God placed Joe in Prison Ministry. That ministry became one of Joe’s most treasured works for the Lord. It sometimes takes us awhile to yield, but when we do, it’s awesome what God can do in and through us.
Joe then called I.T.C. only to find out that it was a graduate school and their entrance requirement was a Bachelor’s Degree. When Joe informed them that he had only a few college credits towards his Bachelor’s Degree, they suggested that he call Morris Brown College. Their campuses were almost adjoining one another. Joe followed their suggestion and called the Administration Office of Morris Brown College. After explaining his situation, his call was transferred to the Admissions Office. They assured him that they would mail him an application. Joe felt good after getting off the phone. He felt as though he was headed in the right direction. The ball was in motion. Joe was now planning to first complete the requirements for his Bachelor’s Degree, and then go on to Seminary.

With hopeful expectations, we anxiously waited for the daily mail delivery. When the college application finally came, Joe didn’t waste any time filling it out. Without hesitation, he got a copy of his transcripts from New York University. However, we had to wait until payday to send the application fee. At this point, we were getting excited about the possible move. Yes, I was excited, but I must admit that I was also a little nervous. I was fearful of working as a nurse in an entirely different state.

I was plagued by all sorts of questions. “Will I need a Georgia state nursing license?” “What are the state laws for nurses in Georgia?” I was only aware of New York state laws. “What about hospital procedures?” Realizing that in the same state each hospital has its own standard procedures. “What would I be facing in Georgia?” I was quite apprehensive about going to an entirely different state, a state that I had never been in before. “Will I be able to handle the responsibilities?”

As I internalized my anxieties, it began to affect me. Occasionally, I’d experience stomach cramps and pains for no
reason. I had no other choice, but to turn to the Lord. All the while, He was trying to get through to me on the whole issue of TRUST. Was I going to trust Him with this move? That’s IF, we had to move. We weren’t even certain yet. Would I trust Him with my nursing wherever He took me? All I had to do was to recall the countless number of times in my nursing career in which God was there with wisdom, guidance and strength to handle the impossible. He’s always been there for me. How could I doubt Him now?

It took about a month before we received a reply from the college. As Joe ripped open the envelope, I stood there beside him with my hands over my mouth waiting to hear the news. Holding my breath, I stood there speechless for a moment, just waiting. Without saying a word, Joe’s expression and gestures spoke volumes. They had rejected his application and refused his admittance to the college. “But why?”, I asked. “It’s because of my transcripts.” Joe answered. Joe’s transcripts were full of incompletes and F’s, with a few A’s.

During the three years that he attended classes at New York University, Joe would change his major every time he got bored. There was also his suicide attempt that interrupted his education. His grades were indicative of his erratic and impulsive choices. During this particular time in his life, Joe had no purpose. He was confused and empty.

Immediately after receiving the letter, Joe phoned the Registrar’s office, attempting to set up an appointment, but they refused to even see him. Joe was convinced that if they personally met with him, perhaps then they would give him a chance. So, he made reservations to fly down to Atlanta and charged it on our credit card not knowing how we were going to pay for it.
This was one of the many situations in which God demonstrated His Provision and His Faithfulness. It was God’s divinely appointed time for us go to Atlanta, and He provided for it. He gave me a private-duty nursing case that paid for the entire airfare for both of us, round trip. What was so amazing is that when I received my pay check, it was made out for the exact amount of the airfare, to the penny. Hallelujah! God is so good!

Joe then wrote a letter to the Registrar’s Office telling them that he was coming down to Atlanta and that he would call for an appointment as soon as he got there. We already had a place to stay. It was not by coincidence that a friend of the family lived within walking distance of Morris Brown College. He had a prestigious and highly esteemed position and was affiliated with the college. We made the necessary arrangements to stay with him. We decided to take a week off from work. We were hoping that this would give us enough time to take care of all of our business. We also decided that it would be advisable to rent a car for that week.

With great anticipation, we were looking forward to taking this trip. The day finally came and we were on our way. After a smooth flight, the plane taxied into the Atlanta airport only a few minutes after our scheduled arrival time. We went directly to the Baggage Claim area to get our luggage. We then picked up the car from the rental office, and drove to our friend’s house.

When we arrived at the house, we were greeted by the housekeeper, who so graciously welcomed us. She was a short, stout middle-aged African American woman with beautifully tinted gray hair. From what we could initially see, the house was impeccable. It was Traditional Early American in style and very beautiful. The housekeeper showed us to our room and informed
us at what time lunch and dinner would be served. She was very personable and we found out later that she was a very good cook. She was the one that gave us our first introduction to “Good Ole” Southern hospitality. When we inquired where our friend was, the housekeeper informed us that he was there in the house in his office. She also informed us that he had just received an urgent phone call, which required his immediate attention.

Not long after that, our friend exited his office and gave us the warmest hug. When Joe informed him of the difficulties, he offered to call the President of the college. Aware of his influential position, Joe knew that he was inferring that he could pull a few strings by calling the right individuals.

Now, if you recall, Uncle Frank also offered to make a few calls of inquiry, but Joe refused his offer. Well, here we were again, around the same mountain, with Joe politely declining the offer because he didn’t want anyone influencing the outcome.

After getting settled in, Joe was able to make that important phone call to the Registrar’s Office for an appointment. However, much to his dismay, the Registrar refused to see him. What was so disconcerting is that she still said no, even after Joe pleaded with her and explained that he flew down to Atlanta just to speak with someone. He then tried to convince her that if he could personally meet with her, perhaps she’d reconsider his application. Her response was cold and impertinent. “I’m sorry that you made such a long trip, but I told you when you phoned me, ‘No appointment’.”

When Joe told me what the Registrar said, I found myself battling with the Enemy. The thoughts that filled my mind almost had me convinced that we were on a wild goose chase, and that we had come all the way down to Atlanta for
nothing. Feeling a little discouraged, I began to pray. God not only gave me victory over the Enemy, He also flooded me with such peace. That was it! I decided to continue to put my trust in the Lord. I held on to His promises. I knew that He would guide and direct us because He is faithful to do what He said He would do. “For such is God, Our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death.” (Psalms 48:14 NASB).

Joe found himself battling with discouragement when his request for an appointment with the Registrar was denied. He then humbled himself and asked our friend for any help that he could give. He immediately picked up the phone and called the President of Morris Brown College. Much to our surprise, the President cleared his schedule to see Joe that next morning.

The time for his appointment had come. While driving over to the college, Joe prayed that the Lord would give him favor if this was His will. When he entered the office, he gave his name to the receptionist and stated that he had an appointment to see the President. Wouldn’t you know, the Registrar’s desk was within ear shot of the receptionist. Joe had never seen her before, so he didn’t know who she was. I’m sure she recognized Joe’s name as she had spoken to him twice, once from New York and again yesterday. I wish I could have seen the expression on her face when she realized that Joe had an appointment with the President.

Joe had to wait only a few minutes before he was ushered into the President’s private office. After a brief introduction, the President sat down at his desk. He listened intently as Joe shared his aspirations and his desire to attend school at Morris Brown College. During a brief pause in their dialogue, the President glanced down at his desk to examined Joe’s transcripts. I assume that the President was getting an entirely different message after talking to Joe than the message
that the transcripts communicated. It was obvious that Joe had changed since his NYU days.

Joe’s life had been transformed by the power of God. The evidence of that transformation had become increasingly more evident to everyone. The President was obviously impressed. He concluded their time together by saying, “Certainly we want you here as a student!” He apparently saw that Joe’s transcripts were indicative of an individual who was confused in his focus. However, the A’s showed him that Joe had the capability. Before Joe left his office, the President phoned the Registrar, asking not only for Joe’s application, but for all the applications that she had rejected that year. He concluded that there could be many more students like Joe, who needed a second chance. He wanted to review their applications to allow them an opportunity to continue their education.

Joe left the President’s Office with such an awesome sense of accomplishment. He knew it was God. It was obvious that the Lord had gone before him, opening doors that men tried to shut. The Scripture which comes to mind is recorded in Revelation 3:8, "I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name." Joe learned an invaluable lesson that day, that God sometimes uses influential people to fulfill His plan and purpose for our lives.

This experience brought us to a whole new awareness of how short-sighted we are. Without Divine revelation, we can’t even perceive of the “Big Picture”. God says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8,9).
It’s so remarkable to think that when the Lord brought us down to Atlanta, He had a much larger plan than we ever thought. He wanted to give a countless number of individuals the educational opportunities that they might have otherwise been denied. Despite their past, God was now giving them a second chance. I was in awe when I heard of all that had transpired between the President and Joe. It confirmed in my heart that, yes, it was the Lord who lead us to come down to Atlanta at this time. We weren’t on a wild goose chase!

Through every situation that God was bringing us through, He was teaching us to discern His voice. One early and very important lesson that we learned was the fact that God doesn’t speak contrary to His Word. That meant that we had to really know His Word.

At this point, I wasn’t ready to tackle the Old Testament, so I pretty much stayed in the New Testament. I read the Gospel of John over and over and over. I loved John. Joe kept telling me, “Peggy there’s more to the New Testament than John, and there’s more to the Bible than the New Testament.”

Once Joe digested all that had happened, he realized that the President had just accepted his application. It was now July, and in September, he would be a matriculated student at Morris Brown College. WOW! We both started thinking, “What do we do next?” Joe, being the logical thinker that he is, he started planning our next steps. First to find an apartment, then a job for me. We had already discussed my working. I had no problem with being the sole support of our little family so that Joe could finish school. We were both of one mind and purpose. Our goal was for Joe to complete his training to fulfill God’s call on his life. By going to school full time, Joe would be able to complete the requirements for his Bachelor’s Degree in a little over two
years, then off to graduate school. By not having to work, Joe would be able to give his full attention to his studies.

Since Joe’s appointment with the President was finished before noon, we had the rest of the day to at least start looking for an apartment. But we had no idea, where to start. Joe did remember seeing an apartment complex adjacent to the Morris Brown campus.

We drove over to the campus. As we circled the block, we saw a sign posted in front of the apartments, which read, "Friendship Baptist Apartments". It was a fairly large complex with modern three-story apartment buildings. From all external appearances, the apartments seemed to be very nice. Some of the apartments had balconies with glass sliding doors. The grounds were neatly landscaped with shrubs and bushes. We searched, but didn’t see a rental office on the premises, so we got the attention of the first tenant that crossed our path. When we inquired about renting an apartment, we were directed to a Realtor that handled all the rentals. Without wasting any time, we quickly drove over to his office only a few blocks away.

Upon entering the office, a gentleman greeted us with a Southern drawl asking, “How may I help you?” Joe spoke up and said, “I’m moving down from New York to go to school and I need an apartment for my wife and I.” The gentleman informed us that we qualified for a one-bedroom apartment, but there was none available. Whenever Joe found himself in a situation like this, in which he had need, he’d always quote James 4:2-3: “You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

After a quick self-examination of his motives, Joe brought his need before the Lord. He then proceeded to ask the gentleman if he had any other apartments that were available.
He said, “Yes, one two-bedroom apartment, but you don’t qualify.” Joe then asked, “What does it take to qualify?” He said, “If you have an illness, like asthma.” Without hesitating, Joe spoke up and said, “I am an asthmatic! I’ve had asthma all my life.” The Realtor then said, “If you can bring evidence of that, you can have the apartment.” Joe said, “No problem, Mount Sinai Hospital has all of my records”.

In my mind, I was perceiving this to be a bigger problem than Joe ever imagined. As a nurse, I realized how long it takes to get a copy of someone’s medical records, if you’re requesting them from another hospital in the same city. Here we were in another state. I thought to myself, “By the time we get Joe’s medical records, the apartment will have already been rented.” I never even considered the possibility of God’s Divine intervention. Well, that’s exactly what happened. God intervened.

Joe phoned Mount Sinai Hospital once and only once. Now let me ask you, what is the law of probability in this case? What are the possibilities of Joe reaching the person he needed to talk to in Medical records on the first try? Well, it happened. Joe spoke to the person who physically put her hands on his record while they were speaking, and was able to send a copy that same day. There is no other way to explain it. God intervened. The Realtor was amazed at how quickly Joe was able to get his medical records sent to him. Joe, of course, gave all the glory to God.

After giving us an application to fill out, the Realtor offered to show us the apartment. Our hearts were filled with excitement. It was all happening so fast. As he drove off leading the way, we followed him in our car. Before we knew it, we were at the apartment complex. After parking our cars, we got out and followed the Realtor up a flight of stairs to the first
apartment on the landing. While he was unlocking the door, I thought to myself, “This is good. I don’t really want to be on the ground floor.” It seemed like it was taking him forever to open the door when in reality it was only a few seconds. Needless to say, we were quite anxious to see what our new home would look like.

As we walked through the front door, our mouths dropped open. WOW! Before our eyes was a large living room with double sliding glass doors which led out to a balcony. From the balcony, we had the most awesome view of the city skyline of downtown Atlanta. We thought to ourselves, “What did we do to deserve this?” It looked like the “Ritz” in comparison to our dilapidated “fixed-up” basement apartment back home.

The apartment was beautiful and fairly new. It had two nice-sized bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen, and a dinette area off the living room. The walls appeared to have been freshly painted and the vinyl-tiled floors had a beautiful sheen. I did all I could do to restrain my emotions when the Realtor informed us that the apartment also had central air. What more could we have asked for? Much to our surprise, in talking to the Realtor, we found out that these were low-income apartments. They were certainly much nicer than the average low-income apartments in New York.

The marvelous view of the city skyline of Downtown Atlanta, which could be seen from the balcony, gave Joe a sense of comfort. You see, Joe was one of those city dwellers who loved New York City and regretted having to leave. As he viewed the tall buildings silhouetting the skyline, it reminded him of Manhattan.

We left the apartment overwhelmed by God’s provision. We drove back to where we were staying, praising God for all that He had allowed us to accomplished. Mind you, this was
only our second day in Atlanta. It reminds me of what Jesus said; “The things impossible with men are possible with God.” (Luke 18:24 NASB)
Chapter 10

“The mind of a man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.”
Proverbs 16:9 (NASB)

After a good night’s sleep, we woke up early the next morning excited about what God was going to do. Before making any plans, Joe and I prayed together. We asked the Lord for guidance and direction, as well as protection. It was, and still is, the desire of our hearts to walk in God’s perfect will, but we certainly need His guidance to do that.

After prayer, we quickly ate breakfast, and then checked the Yellow Pages. We were looking for the closest hospital, geographically-speaking, for me to work in. Using a local map, we found Grady Hospital in downtown Atlanta. However, in spite of it being very close to where we would be living, I decided not to even consider it when I found out that it was a county hospital. I knew that county hospitals were often understaffed. This being my first out of state job, I didn’t want the frustration, nor the pressure of working with an insufficient number of employees, and double the workload.

As I continued to browse through the Yellow Pages, another hospital caught my eye. It was a private hospital listed as Holy Family Hospital. I later found out that they were in the process of changing their name to Southwest Community Hospital.

Thank God that we purchased a street map of Atlanta before we left New York because we certainly needed it. I also thank God that Joe taught me how to read a map on one of our
many road trips across the United States. I immediately referred to the map to find the hospital’s location. I spotted a direct route which would probably take me thirty minutes to get to the work. That’s if I chose to work there, and if they chose to hire me.

Before making any other plans for the day, the first thing on our agenda was to go to Holy Family Hospital. It was very easy to find. In taking the most direct route, it took us little to no time to get there. As we were nearing the hospital, I could see the building in the distance. It was quite modern. We parked the car in the visitor’s parking lot.

As we walked through the front entrance, I thought to myself, “This seems like a nice place to work.” I inquired at the front desk, where the Nursing Office was. A volunteer worker, a real “Southern Belle” with the most charming Southern accent, directed us where to go. We found the office, and since the door was open, we walked right in. It was God’s perfect timing.

We caught the Director of Nursing just as she was leaving her office. She introduced herself and asked if I’d like to sit down. I don’t know why I was nervous. I had only come to inquire about job opportunities.

As she began questioning me about my job experiences, I became increasingly aware that this had turned into a job interview. I didn’t have my résumé with me. However, the Director seemed quite impressed with my work record. When she informed me that a New York State nursing license has reciprocity in Georgia, I had to restrain myself from jumping and shouting. It meant that I didn’t have to go through all the red tape of acquiring a Georgia State nurse’s license. I can’t begin to tell you how relieved I was to hear that bit of information.

The Director proceeded to tell me that there was a day position available on the Medical floor. What amazed me is that right then and there, she actually welcomed me on staff. When
she quoted the salary that I’d be earning, it was much less than what nurses earned in New York. However, I had to take into consideration that the cost of living was also much lower in the South, than it was in the North. I made a quick decision and accepted the job.

I explained that I wouldn’t be moving until the end of the next month. Even though the Director seemed anxious about me taking the position, she wasn’t disconcerted by the fact that I couldn’t start right away. Her only request was that I send her my résumé and a copy of my New York State nurse’s license. Then much to my surprise, she assured me that she would hold the position for me. She told me that I could start working whenever I wanted.

She informed me that, according to hospital policy, all new employees were required to go through orientation classes. This didn’t come as a surprise to me. I knew that most health-related facilities require that their employees go through a period of orientation. The length of the orientation depends upon the hospital and the employee’s job title. I was told that the registered and practical nurses at Holy Family were required to go through four weeks of orientation, which was fine with me.

As the Director and I concluded our time together, she requested that I contact her as soon as I moved. WOW! My head was spinning. Things were really moving fast. Joe’s application was accepted by the college, we had an apartment, and I now had a job. Praise the Lord! All of our needs were met, and the most important business had already been taken care of. The only other thing we were waiting for was Joe’s medical records from Mount Sinai Hospital, and actually we really didn’t have to wait that long. His records came in the mail the next day.

We got the rental approval for the two-bedroom apartment. However, we were not in a position to immediately
take on this new financial responsibility. We didn’t have the month’s security and one month’s rent. When we shared our dilemma with our friend, he offered to lend us the money. We assured him that with the Lord’s help, we would be able to pay him back within a month. Joe said that he would hustle, putting in long hours driving a taxi. I also committed myself to work on whatever private duty cases I could get, taking off only one day a week. We rested in the fact that it was the Lord who brought us this far, and He wasn’t going to forsake us now.

Once we paid the rental fee, we were suddenly confronted with the reality of having to move. I had only moved once in my life - from Long Island to Brooklyn, but this move was bigger than anything I had ever experienced. As I contemplated the whole process of moving, I began to realize that pulling up roots wasn’t going to be easy. As I was becoming a bit overwhelmed, I had to literally harness my racing thoughts.

When we realized that we were soon going to be residents of Atlanta, we decided to spend our remaining days getting acquainted with our new hometown. Like a flash, the thought came to both of us, “Why not take a guided tour?” The next day, we signed up on a sight-seeing tour, which took us to Stone Mountain, Martin Luther King’s grave site, the Governor’s mansion and Underground Atlanta. The tour also took us pass the home of the ball player Hank Aaron, Atlanta University and Georgia Tech. We went from Buttermilk Bottom to Buckhead, from the poor to the very rich. We drove through downtown Atlanta and stopped off at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, which at the time was a phenomenal example of modern architecture. We were quite impressed with the tour and excited about moving to Atlanta.
Chapter 11

“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

Colossians 3:23, 24 (NASB)

The days passed so quickly. Before we knew it, we were on a plane flying back to New York. It didn’t take us long to settle back into the work mode. Joe started working longer hours, and the Lord blessed me with a lengthy private duty case. I was assigned to a patient in Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn.

If you recall, it was unusual to have a private-duty case in a city hospital. Well, it was more unusual for me to be assigned to a patient in a county hospital. The patient to whom I was assigned had been struck by a city bus while crossing the street. The ambulance brought her to the closest hospital which was Kings County Hospital. As a result of a severe head injury, she was in a coma the first three days of her hospitalization. In making inquiries about her background, I found out from her family that she was a widow with a son and daughter in their early twenties. Her children didn’t want their mother to be left alone, so they arranged for private-duty nurses around the clock. I took the evening shift, as usual.

As soon as my patient came out of the coma and started speaking, I noticed that she had a foreign accent. Upon inquiry, I found out from the children that she was born in Italy. I felt quite comfortable having had the involvement that I did with Pop and his family, who were also Italian. It was amazing how
rapidly she recovered, but not so shocking because her children were constantly praying for her.

I couldn’t imagine what it was like for her children to be so young and all alone. Their father was deceased, and there were no other living relatives in New York. This must have been an earth-shattering experience to have their mom hit by a bus, and critically injured. I was impressed seeing how they took responsibility for their mom’s care with such love and devotion. Throughout my nursing career, I’ve always made it a point to watch and take note of my patient’s reaction to their visitors. It was quite evident that my patient had a beautiful relationship with her children. They appeared to be very close.

My patient made remarkable progress. However, as a result of her head injury, an area of the brain was damaged. It caused a delay in her motor skills, and a significant weakness on the entire left side of her body. After several weeks of physical therapy, she finally learned how to walk with a walker. As her discharge date was finally approaching, the doctor met with her children. He told them, “She should not be left alone right now because of her disability and her limitations.” The children were quite perplexed because neither the son nor daughter could afford to take any more time off from work.

The day before my patient’s discharge, the children approached me asking if I would take care of their Mom at home for three to four weeks. I jumped at the opportunity. I only had a month before we’d be moving, and this appeared to be the perfect case. They really didn’t need a registered nurse. They could have gotten by with a home health aid, and saved a lot of money. When I discussed it with them, they insisted that they wanted me to take care of their Mom.

It wasn’t a problem for me to take care of her. She was a real “Sweetie”, and we got along so well together. However, this
meant that I had to change my working hours. During the entire time that I did private-duty nursing, I always worked the evening shift. However, the children only needed someone during the day, while they were working. They didn’t live too far from us. When I weighed the positives, I agreed that this was the best possible option. I’d be in a relaxed private home environment, close to where I live, and the pay was exceptional. So, I agreed to come to their home, and take care of their Mom. It was an easy job. All I had to do was to assist her with her activities of daily living and prepare breakfast and lunch. Over the weeks that we were together, we became very close. She was a sensitive and compassionate woman, very easy to please. The days seemed to pass so quickly. We spent hours talking, sharing our deepest heartfelt emotions and past experiences with one another.

During the entire time that I was on this case, I was also dealing with a major transition that would be taking place in my life. Yes, to me the move to Atlanta was a major transition. In four weeks, I would be leaving my family, my Mom and Dad, my sisters and brothers, and the place in which I grew up. You must understand. I’m the type of person that’s quite content with the traditional and the familiar. Transitions, as well as the unfamiliar, make me a little nervous. I’m also quite sentimental and very emotional. In this whole process of preparing to move, it was very difficult for me to decide what to keep and what to get rid of. We had a very small car. So whatever couldn’t fit had to be left behind.

Our apartment was filled with a lot of memorabilia, to which we were both emotionally and sentimentally attached. The furniture was secondhand. We bought it from a family that lived in Tudor City, an exclusive and ritzy area of Manhattan. It was in good condition, but we really didn’t need to save it. Since
we couldn’t part with it, we decided to store the sofa and two swivel chairs in my parent’s house on Long Island. We also stored the piano that a patient gave me and Joe’s conga drum, along with many other keepsakes and mementos. Thank God, my parents had plenty of room to store our most treasured possessions.

The only piece of furniture that we were planning to take with us was our platform bed, which was made by a friend. What was so amazing is that we met a couple a few months prior only to find out that they were also moving to Atlanta the same time we were. They had hired a moving van and offered to transport our bed. God’s provision is awesome. The only other things we were taking, besides our clothing, were our linen, towels, dishes, cooking utensils and pots and pans.

It was so difficult to dismantle everything in the apartment. It took us three years to renovate, decorate and redecorate to get it looking just right. Now, here we were, taking it all apart. Our apartment no longer resembled the home that we loved. Mind you, since I had changed my working hours, I was home alone in the evening while Joe was working. It was an emotional experience, going to work everyday and trying to function normally in the midst of so much disruption.

During this same time, while we were working and dismantling the apartment, we were also visiting as many friends as we could to inform them of our imminent move. It was difficult to say good-bye to many of our friends, not knowing whether or not they’d stay in touch. We also said our good-byes to Joe’s family. His mother lived in the Bronx, his brother in Manhattan and his sister in Brooklyn. It was an emotional time for me.
It wasn’t easy to close this chapter of my life. Even though we had only a month to prepare for this move, the process was gradual.

The last week seemed cataclysmic. I knew that the only one who could get me through this was Jesus. As I kept my mind focused on Him, He kept me in perfect peace.

I’m sure there are those who have moved many times in their lives. They would probably say that moving to Atlanta is not a “Big Deal”. This was my first move out of state, and for me, it was a “Big Deal”! However, throughout the whole process, the Lord reassured me that He would never leave me, nor forsake me. What a comfort!

The day and hour came. My case ended and Joe dropped off his last fare. Before we knew it, the time had come for us to leave our apartment. The movers packed up all of our furniture, and we followed the van out to my parent’s home on Long Island. We spent the weekend with them, and on Monday morning, with tears and long embraces we said goodbye.

My Mom and Dad promised that they would come down to visit us, as soon as we got settled. That promise somewhat eased the pain of leaving them. We jumped into our car, which was packed to the gills. Without looking back, we quickly drove off and headed for our new home.
Chapter 12

“Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.”

Isaiah 43:19 (KJV)

Moving to Atlanta was the turn of a page, and the beginning of a new chapter in our lives. To this day, I still have such sweet fragrant memories of all that the Lord allowed us to experience during the three years that we resided there. However, more than thirty years have gone by since then, and the details of those experiences are only vague memories. This is where I have to give God all the glory and praise for His provision.

In 1992, we had a painful and grievous blow to our family. My Mom was suddenly taken from us. During a brief hospitalization, she had a massive heart attack and went on to be with the Lord. Shortly after her death, as I was sorting through her belongings, I found a large stack of letters in their original envelopes. They were categorized according to the year that they were written. As I looked more closely to examine them, I thought to myself, “That handwriting looks awfully familiar!” It was my handwriting! Much to my surprise, my Mom had neatly bundled, and saved all of my letters, that I had written to her while I was away.

I was so excited about what God was doing in our lives. I used to write to my parents ten-and twelve-page letters every week, and sometimes twice a week, with detailed descriptions of our experiences. You must understand, I am the youngest
child in a close-knit family. This was my first time being completely away from my family for any length of time. The letters and phone calls were my life line. The steady stream of letters helped to bridge the gap in our separation. However, as my life got busier, I could only write every two weeks, and sometimes only once a month. I truly praise and thank God for leading my Mom to save all my letters so that I can now fill in the details as I share this part of my life story with you.

The lengthy drive down to Atlanta took a few days. Prior to leaving, we went to the office of the Automobile Club of America to get road maps. With their help, we were able to plan our trip, schedule our stops and staying in inexpensive motels along the way. When we arrived in Atlanta, we drove directly to our friend’s house, where we had arranged to stay until we could move into our apartment. It took only a day or two before all the paperwork was finalized, and we could move in.

It was obvious that God had given us favor. Everything went so smoothly. We moved in on Friday, and Joe started school on Monday. As soon as I could, I phoned the Nursing Office of Holy Family Hospital. First of all, I wanted to see if the position which was promised to me was still available. Secondly, I wanted to inform them that I would be available to start work the following week. Joe and I agreed that it would be better for me to take a week off before starting my new job, especially since this was a major transition for me. The week off would give me time to acclimate myself to our new home.

Initially, I found myself battling with anxious thoughts of not getting the job. However, as soon as I dialed the hospital, God flooded me with such peace; a peace that only He can give. The Bible speaks of a peace that surpasses all understanding. That is exactly what I was experiencing. When I spoke with the Director of Nurses, she assured me that my position, as charge
nurse of the Medical Surgical floor, was still available. She also confirmed the fact that I could start working the following week.

This was a uniquely different experience for me, caring for medical and surgical patients on the same floor. In my limited nursing experience, I had never worked in a hospital in which the medical and surgical patients were combined on the same floor. All the hospitals I had worked in, separated the patients on two different floors: a Medical floor and a Surgical floor. As a matter of preference, I chose to always work on Medical floors. The only time I had ever worked on a Surgical floor was as a student in Nursing School. It was a part of my clinical rotation schedule.

In speaking to the Nursing Director, she also informed me that I would occasionally have to take charge of Pediatrics. “Oh, no!” When I heard this, I started to panic. The last time I worked on Pediatrics was in Nursing School. It was also a part of our clinical rotation. I will never forget what turned me off to Pediatrics. I had to give an injection to an infant. As my instructor stood over me, I stood there motionless with the needle in one hand and the baby’s tiny little buttock in the other. Tears were streaming down my cheeks. I kept saying, “I can’t do it, I can’t do it, I can not do this!”

I remember my instructor telling me that if I didn’t do it, she would fail me. Well, that was just the motivation I needed to get me moving. However, I vowed to myself that once I finished Nursing School, I would never work in Pediatrics ever again. I couldn’t handle it. It tore me up, seeing a child ill or suffering with pain. My biggest problem was that the treatments sometimes seemed worse than the illness. Well, never say never!

Here I was years later being confronted once again with caring for sick children in Pediatrics. I had no choice. This was
the hospital I wanted to work in, and this was the only position available to me. Right then I decided to put my trust in the Lord. I knew that He was the Only One who could enable me to accomplish even the impossible. After all, I had His promised that, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13 NASB) Like those who are listed in the Hall of Faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, in my weakness, I too, could be made strong. (Hebrews 11:34 NASB)

The day had finally come for us to move into our apartment. As we crossed over the threshold and proceeded to walk through the empty rooms, we were in awe of God’s bountiful blessings. Here we were with a two-bedroom apartment and a balcony with the most magnificent view of downtown Atlanta. We didn’t have any furniture, but who cared. As long as we had each other and a roof over our heads, we were fine. Besides, we did own a bed!

We immediately phoned the couple that brought our bed down in their moving van. Amazingly enough, they were so anxious to get us settle that they brought our bed over to us that same day. We were so happy to see familiar faces in a strange land. They only stayed a few minutes, however, before leaving, the husband helped Joe assemble our bed. It was a queen-size platform bed with a foam mattress. We were now pretty much set. All we needed was food.

As soon as our friends left, Joe and I jumped in our car and drove to the nearest supermarket, which we found on our last visit. Not being familiar with the area, we made a wrong turn. However, after circling the block we found it, “Piggly Wiggly”. As soon as we spotted the sign, Joe and I simultaneously said, “What a name!” That was only the beginning.
We had to get used to a whole new chain of supermarkets and department stores. Names we had never heard of. We were accustomed to MACY’S, A&S and Alexander’s. Well, no longer! Atlanta’s biggest department store chains were Davidson’s and Rich’s. As for the supermarkets up North in the 70’s, we were used to Bohacks, Big Apple, Hills, A&P and Walbaums, which is still in existence, but in Atlanta the supermarkets had names like: Win Dixie, Kroger, Food Giant, Big Star and of course, Piggly Wiggly. The names alone took some getting use to.

It was getting late. So we quickly dashed around the store putting only the bare necessities in our shopping cart. We realized that the money in our pocket had to last us. It would probably be weeks before I got a paycheck.

As soon as we completed our grocery shopping, we then returned to our new home and rustled up a quick meal. Mind you, we didn’t have any furniture other than the bed. We ate our meals sitting on the bed, holding our plates on our laps.

We slept well and woke up the next morning eager to explore our new surroundings.

I forgot to mention that we owned bikes. We bought them while we were living in Brooklyn. All the parks in New York were closed to motorist on the weekends. They were open only to pedestrians, who were either walking, jogging, roller-skating or biking. On our weekends off, we would often go bike riding. Our bikes were unique. They could be folded and stored in a closet. We brought them down to Atlanta with us, and we were certainly glad that we did.

Eager to explore the area, we hopped on our bikes and headed towards the outskirts of downtown Atlanta. We found a beautiful park, which was on the sightseeing tour route not far from where we lived. It had a zoo. It also had a historic pictorial
reproduction of the Civil war battle which was fought in Atlanta. The reproduction was a life-size mural covering the entire wall. It resembled a theater in the round. The park was beautifully shaded with huge magnolia trees. Scattered throughout the park were picnic tables and benches. Joe and I immediately saw this as a perfect place for us to escape to on our days off. With excitement and enthusiasm, we started planning picnics and weekend visits. Mind you, we had no idea what our schedules would be like, but we made plans anyway.

Sunday morning quickly rolled around. With all of Joe’s issues and misconceptions of ministers and churches, we did not attend church on a regular basis. We were ignorant of the fact that God’s Word admonishes us not to forsake the assembling together as some have. *(Hebrews 10:24, 25)* So, on the first Sunday in our apartment, we simply read our Bibles and rested the whole day. That afternoon, we heard a knock on our door.

Much to our surprise, standing there at the door was a neighbor that we met when we first moved in. She was holding in her hands two home-cooked barbecue spare-rib dinners. The plates were huge, and the portions were enormous. As we stood there in awe, we asked her, “What did we do to deserve this?” Without hesitating, she quickly responded by saying, “I like you! And this is what ‘Good Ole’ Southern hospitality is all about.” After only a brief conversation, I thought to myself, “This is someone I could be friends with.”

Her name was Linda. She was young, vivacious and personable. She had a gorgeous dog. A female Irish Setter that she named “Setter”.

As we sampled a little bit of everything on our plates, it didn’t take us long to come to the conclusion that Linda’s culinary talents were extraordinary. Her ribs were out of this world. They were tender and juicy. Just the way we like them. It
was a prize-winning meal. In addition to the ribs, our plates contained enormous portions of candied yams, collard greens and cornbread. If this was a sample of what living in the South was going to be like, Joe and I both said, “We can do this!”

The day we had anxiously been waiting for finally came. It was Joe’s first day of school. It was registration day. Classes had not yet started. Joe would be meeting his advisor, the department heads and his professors. He’d be filling out all the paperwork for his school loan and orientating himself to the campus. Since we lived across the street from the college, it took Joe only five minutes to get to his classes. He could actually wake up in the morning as late as seven thirty and get to school in time for his eight o’clock class.

After filling out all of his paperwork, Joe met with his advisor, Dr. Blakley who was also the Department Head and professor of Religion. Joe had a double major, Philosophy and Religion.

As Joe was choosing his courses, Dr. Blakley advised him not to take two religion courses in the same semester. He warned Joe that it would be very difficult. Not taking heed to his counsel, Joe signed up for World Religions, and The Bible in Life and Practice. He felt as though he could probably handle it, since he was only taking three courses.

He took a total of nine credits his first semester. The following semester he knew that he’d have a much heavier workload. Instead of trying to fit it in next semester with four other courses, Joe thought that he’d be better off completing his requirements his first semester. What Joe didn’t realize is that Dr. Blakely knew the curriculum. He knew what would be expected of Joe and the difficulties he’d encounter, so he advised him accordingly. In addition to the two Religion courses, Joe also took Introduction to Anthropology. Joe knew
that it wasn’t going to be easy, but he also knew that he had inside help. Jesus was his helper, and the sustainer of his life.

Joe had classes scheduled Monday through Friday. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays he was in school only half a day. The other half of the day he would go to the library to study. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, he had a class in the morning and another one in the afternoon. Even though Joe was not a newcomer to college life, he had quite a few adjustments to make when he came to Morris Brown College.

After coming from a multi-racial, multi-cultural, cosmopolitan city, like New York, it was an adjustment to come to a predominately Black city and to an all Black college. There were no Caucasian students at Morris Brown during the time that Joe was there. With the exception of two White professors, all the rest of the instructors were Black. The two White professors were Joe’s advisors, Dr. Blakley being one of them. Joe and I have always looked at the world and likened it to a garden with multi-colored flowers. We both prefer a multi-racial setting. The students at New York University were a cross section of the world, multi-racial and multi-cultural.

Not only was the campus an adjustment. The city also took some adjusting to. In Atlanta, African-Americans were in the majority. They held the high paying jobs. They were the doctors, lawyers and architects. When I first walked into Holy Family Hospital, I didn’t see one White doctor. The entire hospital was predominately Black with a handful of White employees. For me it was a culture shock. Why do I say “culture shock”? Because, for me, growing up on Long Island in the 50’s and 60’s, it was the complete opposite.

I lived in a small community of African-American and West-Indian residents. However, once I started school, I was suddenly thrusted into a predominately White world, White
teachers, White students and White friends. I also remember being in the hospital overnight to have my tonsils taken out as a child. With the exception of one or two custodians, and maybe one or two nursing assistants, there were no Black employees in the hospital.

As a child, I took Ballet from a renowned European dance instructor. With the exception of my niece and I, all of the students and the instructors were White. I remember an incident in which a student refused to hold my hand in a dance routine. She said she didn’t want to touch me because I was Black.

I also remember in Elementary school going to a friend’s house for lunch. She was White and lived within walking distance of the school. Of course, we had our parents permission, but I couldn’t understand why she would always sneak me in the back door. We arrived early one day. Her mother wasn’t home. Her grandmother, whom I had never seen before, confronted us. In a condescending manner, she asked her granddaughter, “What’s that ‘nigger’ doing in this house.” At that moment, my friend’s mother walked through the front door apologizing for being late. She then ushered us into the kitchen and fixed us lunch.

It hurt, being called a ‘nigger’. I was young and had never personally been exposed to racial slurs. The pain of it all actually took my appetite away. I only ate a few bites of my sandwich and returned to school.

There were always isolated incidents like this throughout my life. I learned early to adjust and make concessions. I even tried to assimilate. However, there were always those prejudice individuals reminding me that I was different, and not accepted. As I was planning my High School class schedule with the Guidance counselor, he directed me towards non-academic courses. I didn’t understand. I wanted to be a nurse
just like my big sister, and I knew that academic courses were required to get into Nursing School. However, the Guidance counselor tried to convince me that I wouldn’t be able to achieve the academic level required for Nursing. He told me that I’d be better off working as a cook or housekeeper.

When I told my parents, my Mom hit the roof. She had gone through this with my brother and sisters. It was obvious that these educators had bought into the lie that we as Black people were an inferior race. Well, my Mom fought it and won her case. I then took on the burden of proving to the Administration, my Guidance counsel and the school that I could excel. Through High School, I maintained a high academic average while also participating in extra curricula activities. I was on the junior and varsity teams, playing softball, basketball and field hockey. I also lead the gym classes as a member of the Girls Leader’s Club. I was a member of the Spanish Club and an active member of the Future Nurses of America. In my senior year, I was inducted into the National Honor Society. I was determined to show them all that I was capable of achieving academically.

Since more African-American families were moving out to Long Island from the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan, by the time I got to Junior High, there were more Black students in my school. However, I found the city kids to be much different than us country kids. I managed to make one or two friends, but most of the Black kids didn’t understand me. My parents were stricter than theirs. They could do things and go places that were out of the question for me to even consider. When they saw me with my White friends, they’d call me an “OREO cookie”, which was a slur, inferring that I was black on the outside and white on the inside.
I finished high school and once again I was thrust into a predominately White environment in Nursing School. Out of twenty three students, I was the only Black in my class. It didn’t phase me in the least because it was what I was accustomed to most of my life. As a matter of fact, at this point, I was more comfortable around White people than I was around my own race. Now, there is definitely something wrong with that picture! But it explains why living in Atlanta was a culture shock. I had never been around so many Black people in all my life. We were now living in the center of five college campuses, Moorehouse, Spellman, Clark, Morris Brown and Atlanta University. There were no Caucasian students on any of these campuses. It didn’t matter where I went, whether it was to the Post Office, supermarket or the bank - everyone was Black. For me, it was a “culture shock”, and that’s the only way I can describe it.
Chapter 13

“Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord?
Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises,
working wonders?”
Exodus 15:11 (NASB)

The days were flying by so quickly. Looking back, I now realize why the Lord made our transition so swift and easy. There were so many miraculous works that God wanted to do in our lives. There was no time to waste.

Joe had already completed his first week of school. He didn’t have any problems adjusting to the academic routine, in spite of the fact that he had been out of school for quite awhile. He was much older than most of the students. He was even older than some of his professors.

Joe’s first days of school were past history, and it was now my turn. My first day of orientation at Holy Family Hospital had finally come. I woke up early with butterflies in my stomach nervous about how the day would unfold. I was a little apprehensive, but eager to start working.

As soon as I got out of the shower, I could smell the aroma of breakfast cooking. Much to my surprise, Joe rose up early to prepare my breakfast. He was spoiling me, and it made me feel so special.

Before leaving the apartment, Joe and I had prayer together. Then, I rushed out of the house desiring not to be late my first day of work. I took the same direct route that I was familiar with. Amazingly enough, it took me only fifteen minutes to get to the hospital. Leaving home at six thirty was
certainly to my advantage. There were absolutely no cars on the road that early in the morning. I had to be at the hospital at seven, however orientation classes didn’t start until eight o’clock.

The class was very small. There were only five of us: two registered nurses (including myself) and three practical nurses. Right from the start, we all got along very well. We were actually looking forward to spending the next four weeks of orientation together.

As I sat in the classes learning hospital policies and procedures, as well as the state requirements for nurses, I was flabbergasted to see how advanced the hospitals were in Atlanta. I had a preconceived idea that the South was lagging behind in everything in comparison to the North. Well, I was dead wrong! As a registered nurse back in the early 70’s, I was legally permitted to do procedures in Atlanta that only doctors did in New York. I learned a lot in orientation, but one of my biggest lessons was that the South wasn’t as far behind as I thought.

The four weeks of orientation went by very quickly. Before I knew it, I was on the Medical Surgical floor and functioning to my full capacity. As it turned out, I only had to take charge of the floor two days a week when the assigned charge nurse was off. I was otherwise filling the position of assistant charge nurse, which was fine with me.

Basically, I’m not the kind of person that likes being in charge of things. The esteemed position of authority is always accompanied by responsibilities and headaches. I’d rather have the position of being second-in-command. But much to my dismay, being second in command didn’t change the fact that I still had to take charge of Pediatrics occasionally. My hopes were that it would be on less occasions, not more.
Since my workdays were always very full and my workload heavy, I came home exhausted every night. My days off varied from week to week. It was very rare that I’d have two consecutive days off. I really didn’t mind having to split up my days off. Whenever Joe and I wanted to do something special or if we were expecting house guests from out of town, I could always put in a request, and get a three-day weekend off.

As time went on, Joe’s schedule became more and more hectic. His professors were working him to death. The reading assignments were unbelievable. Not to mention the four term papers that were due before the end of the month and several exams that he had to study for. There’s no way he could have survived taking the two religion courses with a full course load of twelve to eighteen credits.

If you remember, Dr. Blakley warned Joe that his class, Religion in Life and Practice, was not at all easy. Dr. Blakley required a lot of work, and those students, who couldn’t keep up, eventually dropped out. He started out in September with thirty students, and by the end of the semester there were only seven students left in his class, Joe being one of them. It was difficult. However, after long hours of study, Joe got a 97 on his first exam. He received the highest grade in the class, but it took blood, sweat and tears to get that grade.

In addition to his many hours of study, Joe chose to take on the responsibility of cooking dinner on the days that I had to work. He also did the laundry and kept the apartment clean. He got up early every morning to fix my breakfast and prepare my lunch. We would always have morning prayer together, and since it was still dark, he would walk me to the car. I was so appreciative of everything that he did. Joe was so grateful that I was working to put him through school, that he did everything to make my work load lighter.
The time came for me to get my first paycheck. If it wasn’t for my parents and Joe’s dad sending us money, we would have never made it to that first payday. I received a good sum of money. It was enough to put some aside for the rent and then go looking for furniture. We were getting tired of eating, sleeping and studying on the bed, but we were grateful that at least we had a bed!

We went looking in several of the Furniture Salvage Warehouses. They sold new furniture at a discount. The furniture came from stores that had gone bankrupt or from factory over runs and unclaimed freight.

Well, if I may. I’d like to brag a bit about God’s Provision. We caught the bargain of the year, a huge luxurious new sofa for only one hundred twenty dollars and two matching arm chairs for only sixty dollars. The material was very similar to a crush velvet sort of an olive green, which was all the go in the 60’s and 70’s. It was a give-away. As a matter of fact, we saw a similar sofa in the department store selling for three hundred dollars and one arm chair for one hundred dollars. God is so good. Right then and there, while we were still in the furniture warehouse, Joe and I had what we used to call a “glory fit”, praising and thanking God.

I got paid every two weeks. With the next check, we were able to put aside the full amount for the rent and go shopping for a dining room table. Of course, we went right back to the Furniture Salvage Warehouse. Once again, the Lord blessed us - this time, with a beautiful round dark walnut table and a set of matching captain’s chair. Just what we had always dreamed of, but doubted whether we would ever own it.

We were set. We could now lounge around in the living room on our new sofa and eat our meals on our beautiful new
dining room table. Now, we could even invite guest over for dinner, or lunch, or even breakfast.

One day while on campus, Joe met a brilliant young man by the name of Oscar Hill. He was not only a Christian, but a walking Bible concordance. He had a phenomenal mind and was able to instantly recall Bible facts and cross references of Scripture.

As we look back, it is now obvious to us that this was another one of God’s Divine appointments, bringing Oscar into Joe’s life at this particular time. They were a divinely appointed match. The two of them got along exceptionally well and became the best of friends.

One day after class, Oscar asked Joe if they could study the Bible together. In spite of Joe’s hectic schedule, he said, “Sure.” They agreed to meet on Friday nights in our home. Joe has such vivid memories of their first meeting, almost as if it happened yesterday. Thank God we now had a dining room table because that’s where they did their studying.

As they sat there at the table, they prayed asking the Holy Spirit to guide and direct them in their study. They were then led to Psalm 37. As they began to read this familiar Psalm, they stopped at verse one. “A Psalm of David. Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.” Someone asked, “What does ‘fret’ mean?” Joe grabbed Webster’s Dictionary. Mind you, at this point, neither of them were into the original languages that the Bible was written in. (Hebrew in the Old Testament and Greek in the New Testament, with the exception of those portions of Scripture that are in Aramaic.)

As they searched out the English definition, the Holy Spirit led them into a study on the one word “fret” for three hours. By the time ten o’clock rolled around, they both agreed
that they had enough for one night. Sitting there in awe, they knew that God had begun to open their minds to the depth of His Word.

I walked out of the bedroom and into the dining area at the close of their study. I could sense their excitement. With great anticipation, they were eagerly looking forward to the next Friday.

Seven o’clock was the hour that they had agreed upon to meet. However, Oscar was so anxious that he showed up at our door almost half an hour earlier. But that was OK! Joe didn’t mind starting early. They were in the middle of their study when they heard a knock on the door. It was our next door neighbor, not Linda. This was another neighbor, an older woman. She came to borrow some sugar. However, instead of leaving after I gave her the sugar, she sat down on the sofa uninvited. A few minutes had gone by and as she sat there watching Joe and Oscar, she interrupted their study and inquisitively asked, “What are you doing?” Joe explained that they were studying the Scripture. Before they knew it, she was up from the sofa and sitting beside them at the table. She sat there perfectly quiet and intently listening as Joe and Oscar discussed what God was revealing to them.

At the end of the evening, she asked, “Do you do this every Friday?” In unison, they both said, “Yes.” She then asked, “Do you mind if I come back, and bring some friends along?” Oscar and Joe looked at each other and agreed, “No, we don’t mind?” Little did we know that this would be the beginning of the Friday night Bible studies which eventually out grew our living room.

That next week, our neighbor showed up at the door with two of her friends, who turned out to be choir members from her church. At this point, I realized that this Bible study was
something that I needed to be involved in. The next week, three more choir members joined us.

Word of the Bible Study began to spread like wildfire. It spread throughout all five college campuses. Students started coming from Moorehouse, Spellman, Clark, Morris Brown and Atlanta University. What was so incredible is that after a few months students started coming from I.T.C. Yes, I.T.C., Interdenominational Theological Center, where Joe wanted to go to school.

It was glorious to see what God was doing. We actually had seminary students, coming to our little Bible study. What was so miraculous is that the Lord was drawing each and every person. Not once did we ever advertise or send out fliers. It was all by word of mouth.

Mind you, we had fifteen to twenty-five people in attendance each Friday with only a sofa, two armchairs and four dining room chairs. If you were to visit our Bible study on any given Friday night, you would find wall-to-wall people in our living room with absolutely no floor space. Since most of our neighbor’s friends were in their senior years, they had first grabs on the sofa and chairs. Thank God, the students didn’t mind sitting on the floor.

As more people joined us, the focus of the Bible studies gradually began to change. Joe felt a burden to disciple the students. This burden was obviously from the Lord. Where else would he have gotten this idea?

We were still fairly young in the Lord and had never been discipled ourselves. Oscar attended the studies and was very supportive, but he did not want to teach. So, at this point, the Bible studies were being taught solely by Joe. He used his Reference Study Bible to teach. The studies in his Bible covered
the basics about Salvation and living a victorious Christian life in Christ.

It was awesome. Students were getting saved, and filled with the Holy Spirit. At the same time, Joe and I were growing and maturing in the Lord.
Chapter 14

“Make me know Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; For Thee I wait all the day.”

Psalm 25:4, 5 (NASB)

In our personal study of God’s Word, we became blatantly aware of our responsibility as Christians. We could no longer justify not going to church. The tenth chapter and twenty-fifth verse of Paul’s letter to the Hebrews, only confirmed that we are not to forsake gathering together. We realized that we needed to be with the rest of the Family of God, who were gathering on Sundays. The Lord also showed us that our gathering together for Bible study was not a substitute for Church. We then began sampling some of the local churches. The problem, at that time, was that we had no idea how to choose a church.

Mind you, Atlanta was no different than anywhere else. There were as many cults in Atlanta as there are any place else. Wouldn’t you know! Out of the hundreds of Christian churches in Atlanta, we ended up in a cult. Fortunately, as quick as we got into it, God moved us out, just that quick.

Because of who He is, God will not allow His children to fall into a pit and get swallowed up in the mire. The cult was Unity also known as Unity School of Christianity. The reason why I was such easy prey was because as long as I can remember, my mother had always subscribed to their literature. As a child, I read “Wee Wisdom”. For years, my Mom read
their daily devotional, “Daily Word”. Now don’t get it confused with the Christian devotional, “Daily Bread”.

Since my Mom was such a faithful subscriber and supporter of the Unity School of Christianity, they would always send her free literature. So when we found a Unity Church in Atlanta, I thought that we had found “THE Church”.

I remember the first time we walked through the door. Joe and I were very impressed. The congregation was integrated, which was unusual. The people were all very loving and exceptionally friendly.

Here we were in a cult and didn’t know it. At this point, we couldn’t identify a biblically-correct and doctrinally-sound church if we had to. However, we found it strange that there were no crosses anywhere in the building. There was only a mural of a tree in front where most churches have an altar. Joe and I really began to question when they had what was suppose to be Communion, but there were no elements. There was no bread or wafers and no grape juice or wine. Nothing! It was supposed to be a spiritual experience.

I thank God for the Holy Spirit because He points out error. He alerted us to the fact that they were not teaching the TRUTH. We didn’t waste any time in getting out of there. After doing some research, we found out that Unity School of Christianity is a mind science cult. The one thing that distinguishes any cult from orthodox Christianity is the deity of Jesus Christ. We have to ask ourselves, “What do they say about the Godhead?”

Unity School of Christianity with its appealing publications has deceptively lured in many innocent uninformed Christians. Like most cults, they quote the Bible where it suits their purpose and usually out of context. Unity denies that Jesus is God. Instead, they insist that He was merely a man who had
within Himself “the Christ Consciousness” or “the perfect Christ idea”. They believe that Christ is a state of perfection in every person. They don’t believe in the Trinity, but they do believe in reincarnation. They assert that Jesus had lived many times before and was in search of his own salvation. Their teaching is pure heresy. They believe that Jesus did not die as a sacrifice for anyone’s sins. They also believe that Jesus did not rise physically and will not return to earth in a physical body. They clearly teach that there is no evil, no devil, no sin, no sickness, no poverty, no literal heaven or hell and no death. (One simply moves to a different body until enlightenment). They believe people are saved by recognizing that each person is as much a Son of God as Jesus is. Hogwash!

My Bible says “…if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” (Romans 10:9 NASB) “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8 NASB)

We learned a huge lesson from our experience with the Unity church. This was a hands-on experience with the enemy of our souls. He is cunning and deceptive. The doctrinal beliefs of Unity were not blatantly obvious to us as we sat through many of their services. We walked away from this experience realizing that as Christians we really have to know the Word of God and have a clear understanding of what it teaches so that we can easily detect anything that is contrary.

With school, Bible study and housework, Joe was doing exceptionally well in handling it all. As for me, I’d come home, eat dinner and crash. On some nights, you could find me in bed as early as eight o’clock. Although, there were some nights that
I felt energized, but they were rare and far in between. On those nights that I really felt good, Joe and I would either go to the mall and window shop or take a drive and eat out. I worked hard, but I enjoyed it.

I’m the kind of person that hates to ride my employees. So, rather than to keep after them when they didn’t do their work, I would pick up the slack which wasn’t good. It wasn’t good for them, and it certainly wasn’t good for me.

I made it a habit of always being accessible to my patients and my staff. To be accessible, one has to be out there, so I was rarely found at the nurses’ desk. I would stay out there on the floor answering the call lights and doing what ever needed to be done. The problem with that is I had all my charting and a stack of paper work waiting for me at the end of the day.

Even though charting and accurate documentation are very important, I had always considered myself as a bedside nurse, not a pencil pusher. I would often frustrate myself trying to be out on the floor and at the same time trying to handle my responsibilities at the desk. I suppose that it was out of my love for people that my love for bedside nursing was birthed. Sadly enough, as the years passed and my nursing experiences increased, I found myself further and further away from the bedside.

The combination of Medicine and Surgery was challenging. Most of the surgical patients on my floor were orthopedic cases, which deals with the bones. We had so many patients in traction that it became second nature for me to set up the traction equipment and add the weights. Most of our medical patients were diagnosed with either diabetes or heart disease. However, occasionally we would have a patient admitted with gastric problems or a neurological disease.
I remember one very interesting case. It was a textbook anomaly. The patient was a twenty-seven year old woman named Barbara. She was a wife and mother of two daughters. She was the founder of a leading dance company in Atlanta and a renowned choreographer. Here she was on my floor in a private room on strict isolation and very sick. We all, including the doctors, had to put on a mask, gown and gloves before having any contact with her.

What was so puzzling is that the doctors didn’t know what was wrong with her. Mind you, she had five specialists, some of the best doctors in Atlanta. Her body was rapidly deteriorating before our eyes. She had fluid in her lungs and swelling in all of her extremities. She was listless and so weak that she couldn’t walk, much less dance. Her skin was turning dark and starting to ulcerate in areas. She had elevated temperatures and a loss of appetite. She was scarcely eating, which resulted in a significant weight loss.

The doctors were quite perplexed. By process of elimination, they were trying to rule out what they thought was the problem. She had had every test imaginable. She was receiving continuous IV therapy with large doses of antibiotics, but none of the treatment was successful. We were losing her. She was gradually slipping away. The doctors had lost hope. With all of their medical knowledge and all of their prescription drugs and modern technology, it had not brought about their desired outcome.

The day came when the doctors gave the written order to discontinue all tests, all IV’s, and all medications. It was a solemn time for all of us on the floor that day. Those of us who got to know Barbara loved her, but we all had to face reality. She was dying. In spite of her suffering, she always had such a wonderful attitude and disposition. Since she was one of my
patients, I took the responsibility of discontinuing her IV’s. As I walked down the long corridor to her room, I thought to myself, “She’s going to die without knowing Jesus.” Realizing that I could lose my job for witnessing to a patient, I had to quickly make a decision. By the time I reached Barbara’s room at the end of the hallway, I had already decided. If I lost my job, it would be well worth it. After all, we’re talking about the possibility of a soul being eternally lost.

As I stood at Barbara’s door, I said a silent prayer while putting on my gown, mask and gloves. I walked into her room with the most cheerful attitude that I could muster up under the circumstances. As I shut off the IV and removed the needle from her arm, I began to share the “Good News”.

I don’t recall my exact words, but I do remember telling her that she could have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I told her that Jesus wasn’t dead. He is very much alive. I also told her that, “Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. That means what He did yesterday, He can do for you today. He can save you and He can heal you.” I paused briefly only to give her a chance to digest what I had said. I then told her that, “Salvation is a free gift. All you have to do is to admit that you are a sinner, ask for God’s forgiveness, and ask Jesus to come into your life. What you’re actually asking for is some inside help. You want Jesus to come in and take control of your life.”

I went on to explain that she didn’t need me. I told her that she could pray and ask Jesus herself, but I suggested that she also ask Him to heal her. I explained that, “He is God. He can heal, but He is also sovereign, and it’s up to Him whether or not He will heal you.” After saying everything that I felt the Lord was prompting me to say, I then excused myself and walked out of the room.
I received two patients back from the operating room. I took their vital signs and checked their dressings. Then, made rounds to check up on my other patients. I gave a bedpan to one patient, a back rub to another, and before I knew it, an hour had passed.

I quickly went back to check on Barbara. When I got to the door of her room, I put on a gown, mask and gloves faster than I had ever done it before. I was so anxious to see what Barbara’s response was to all that I had shared. As soon as I walked into her room, I heard her exclaim, “Girl, I did it! I invited Jesus into my life.”

Well! Let me tell you, I had a “glory fit”, praising and thanking God. After stomping and twirling around a bit, I then explained to her that all of Heaven is rejoicing over her decision. The Bible says so. “I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” (Luke 15:7 NASB) That wasn’t all. By the end of the day, we noticed that Barbara’s skin was getting more of its natural color back, and by the end of the week, she was totally healed. Even the doctors acknowledged that it was a miracle.

Several months after her discharge from the hospital, Barbara danced on stage at a festival in a large park in downtown Atlanta. Joe and I sat there in tears as we watched her perform. She did an inspirational dance to the tune of “Amazing Grace”. It was so miraculous how God had raised her up from a bed of affliction to dance for Him.

I took ballet for years, so I could really appreciate Barbara’s talent. She was a phenomenal dancer. Many hearts were touched that day as they watched her dance. Barbara’s healing affirmed in me that Jesus is indeed the same yesterday,
today and forever, and He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. (Ephesians 3:20)
Chapter 15

“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.”
Matthew 18:11 (NASB)

Of the three years that we spent in Atlanta, we thought that our first year was absolutely incredible. But let me tell you, the second year was even more exciting. If I were to give these next couple of chapters a title, the heading would be “Ever Increasing Faith”. God was increasing our faith by what He was doing in and through us. Our faith began to soar as we witnessed God’s mighty power and His miraculous works.

Everything was going along smoothly, but I was beginning to feel a little guilty because Joe was handling so much. Just when I thought that his platter was full enough, Joe added on another responsibility. Mind you, he was already handling school, Bible study and housework. He was doing exceptionally well, getting straight A’s. Now, he was taking on the added responsibility of tutoring students and also assisting Dr. Blakley in the Religion Department.

The tutoring job was a paid position offered to him at Dr. Blakley’s recommendation. Joe accepted the position realizing that he could use the extra money to buy handouts and written materials for the Friday night Bible studies. Of course, with this new position as Dr. Blakley’s assistant, Joe had some juggling to do to fit everything in. With God’s help, he was able to handle it all quite well.

One thing I learned about Joe is that he works well under pressure. I tried to help out by doing all the cooking on my days off. I even made it a point to cook all of his favorite dishes.
After all, he did a tremendous job in spoiling me. It was now time to reciprocate, and besides, it was a way of demonstrating my love.

My co-workers were so envious whenever I would brag about all that Joe did to help out with the housework. I was especially appreciative of the fact that he kept my uniforms sparkling white. Most of the women that I worked with had to rush home from work, cook for their family, then clean house and do laundry. All I had to do was to come home, eat dinner and crash. If that’s not being spoiled, I don’t know what is.

Since our weekdays were so busy, we made it a point to only accept dinner invitations on weekends, but not just any weekend. It had to be a weekend that I had off, and Joe wasn’t working on a research paper.

We were home relaxing one evening when much to our surprise, we received a phone call from Barbara inviting us to her house for dinner. It was an answer to my prayers. I had given her our address and telephone number the day she was discharged from the hospital hoping that she would stay in touch.

The day of our dinner date with Barbara and her family had finally come. We found her address without any difficulty. Mind you, I hadn’t seen Barbara since her discharge. So, needless to say, I was quite excited about seeing her again. After all, it’s not everyday that you get to see someone miraculously healed right before your eyes, a walking miracle.

Barbara met us at the door with her two little daughters standing there beside her. Excitement filled the air as we stood there for a while, hugging and kissing one another.

We were then escorted into the living room, where we met her husband, Allen, and a young girl named Joann. After chatting a few minutes, we were then invited into the dining
room to eat. Our conversation over dinner was not only refreshing, but spiritually uplifting. Allen sat there quietly as Barbara went on about Jesus.

It always blesses us to be around “Newborn Baby” Christians. They have such zeal and enthusiasm, especially when they talk about their relationship with Jesus.

As Joe and I joined in the conversation, we shared our testimony about the grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As we were sharing, we noticed that Joann was sitting there motionless. She was literally hanging on to our every word. After dinner was over, she excused herself from the table to get herself ready to go out on a date. After she left, Barbara explained what the circumstances were that brought Joann to live with them. Before we knew it, an hour had passed. Not wanting to wear out our welcome, we decided not to stay too much longer. We said our “good-byes” and as we drove away, Joe and I commented that it was such a delightful evening.

Less than a week had gone by when we received a phone call from Joann. Joe answered the phone, and as he intently listened, he noticed that there was a hesitancy in her voice. Joe brushed it off, thinking, “Oh well! She doesn’t really know me that well.” Then after a brief pause, Joann told Joe that there was someone she wanted us to meet. The words that followed are still fresh in our memory, even to this day. She said, “He robbed a bank, and I want you to talk to him.” By this time, I had gotten on the phone. We both stood there motionless with fixed expressions frozen on our faces, expressions of utter shock. Neither of us could believe what we were hearing, so we asked her to repeat what she had said. In hearing it a second time, we realized the urgency and seriousness of the matter.
We immediately made arrangements for them to come over. As soon as we got off the phone, Joe and I dropped to our knees. Let me tell you, this is the kind of prayer need that brings you to the floor, prostrate before the Lord. But wouldn’t you know, this was also a perfect time for the Enemy to attack us. He tried to paralyze us emotionally with panic and feelings of inadequacy, but we cried out to the Lord, who is our present help in times of trouble. We cried out, “Lord, help us. We don’t know what to do. You're bringing this bank robber here. Please guide us.”

While in prayer, our entire beings were flooded with such peace - a peace that surpasses all understanding. Within seconds, we went from panic mode to serenity. It was then that we realized, that this was just another one of God’s divine appointments. We also realized that He had EVERYTHING under control. It became obvious to us that He was bringing this bank robber to us, so that we could minister to him. Well, let me tell you, we got up off our knees thinking, “We’re ready! Bring him on!” In reality, this was still a totally new experience for us having a bank robber in our home. There were no road maps for this part of our spiritual journey. We had to totally depend upon the Lord. We had no idea, what to say to him. We had to put our faith and trust in Jesus to guide our thoughts and our words. After all, the Scripture does say that, “When they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak.” (Matthew 10:19 NASB)

About half an hour later, we heard a knock on the door. It was Joann and with her was a young man named Emory. Could this be the bank robber? He was a tall rather good-looking young man. He wasn't at all what I had imagined.
Instead of the “rough’n tough” stereotype of a bank robber that I had expected, Emory had such an innocent youthful look.

We invited them in. As we began to talk, Emory was a little hesitant to confess his wrongdoing at first. After all, we were total strangers to him. However, it didn’t take long before he felt comfortable enough to share his entire story. He explained that he was in a financial bind. He was only twenty-four years old and the sole support of his mother’s household. He said that he had no intentions of robbing a bank, but the thought came into his head, and he was unable to resist the impulse.

As we attentively listened to Emory tell his story, we could see that Satan had played very serious games with his mind. We know that’s where the battle always is. As believers, we can understand why we need to follow Peter’s instruction to “gird up our mind for action and keep sober in spirit, fixing our hope completely on the grace to be bought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ”. (1 Peter 1:13 NASB).

Then there are those, like Emory, who don’t know the Lord and are lead captive by the enemy of our souls. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, clearly points out that when you don’t know God, you are the devil’s slave. (Galatians 4:7, 8) However, when you are born again you are no longer the devil’s slave, but a son and an heir of God.

As heirs we have the right to call God the Father “Abba” or “Daddy”. Isn’t it overwhelming to think that we as born-again believers can now call our Heavenly Father, “Daddy”? You can’t get more intimate, nor more personal than that.

As we sat there in silence, listening and trying to make sense of it all, our initial thought was, “We must convince him to turn himself in.” Well, as Emory continued to tell us his story, his very next words relieved our minds. He told us that the police caught him, and he was out on bail awaiting trial. In
hearing this, Joe and I simultaneously gave a sigh of relief. Emory also shared with us that he felt bad for what he had done and for hurting his family, the people he loved.

After listening to his full story, the Lord lead us to minister to him and Joann. For the next two and a half hours, we shared with them about God’s love and His plan of salvation. We didn’t know a whole lot, but we did know how important it was to share John 3:16 with them. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

We explained that Jesus died in their place to take the punishment that they deserve. “For all have sinned, and the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in and through Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:23 NASB). We also explained the consequences of sin.

We felt that it was important for Emory to understand that in committing this crime, he may very well have to serve time. Emory then admitted that he didn’t care about his punishment. He just wanted to feel God’s forgiveness.

At this point, it was obvious to us that Emory was ready to commit his life to Christ. It is still so vivid in my memory, seeing Emory and Joann get down on their knees right there in our living room in front of our sofa. They joined us in prayer inviting Jesus into their lives as their Lord and Savior.

We asked the Lord to forgive Emory and to deliver him from the bonds of Satan in Jesus’ name. We also asked the Lord to cleanse his body and to touch him in a special way. When Emory got up off his knees, we could see the tears trickling down his cheeks. When we asked him how he felt, he said, “Good, I feel so much better.” He also said that he felt a chill go through his body as we prayed for him.
Then as we glanced at Joann, we could see that she too had tears streaming down her cheeks. Yes, the Lord had also touched her. She too invited Jesus into her life.

All of Heaven was once again rejoicing over these two souls, who were snatched out of the grips of the devil and brought into the Kingdom of God. They were brought out of the realm of darkness and into God’s glorious light. Hallelujah! That’s something to shout about! As Joann and Emory left our apartment, we thought to ourselves, “WOW! To think that the Lord used us as His instruments to bring two more into the Kingdom.”

Two or three weeks had gone by. When Joe checked our mailbox, he was pleasantly surprised to have receive a letter from Emory. Joe’s attention was immediately drawn to the return address on the envelope, which read, “Fulton County Correctional Facility, Atlanta, GA”. In his letter, Emory shared that he had lead several inmates to the Lord. However, there was one inmate that was a tough guy and wouldn’t budge from his atheistic view of Jesus and the Bible. In the letter, Emory said, “Joe, if you could only come and talk to this guy, I know that he’d receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior.”

It was Saturday afternoon, and since it was too late in the day to try to get into the prison, Joe decided to try after church service the next day. We were still sampling churches, but we had narrowed our options down to the Morris Brown Chapel on campus and Mt. Paran Church of God. Since Morris Brown Chapel was only a five-minute walk from our apartment, we decided to go to their service in the morning, then drive over to the Fulton County prison. Everything went as planned. The chapel service ended at twelve noon. Immediately after the service, we walked back to our apartment complex. We then jumped into our car and headed over to the prison.
As we drove into the parking lot of the prison, my stomach felt a little jittery. It is so much like me to experience anxiety when I don’t know what to expect. I had never been this close to a prison and believe me, the parking lot was close enough. As Joe and I walked up to the building, we noticed that there were long lines of people. As I looked more closely, I saw mothers and fathers, women with children, some were girlfriends and some were wives. I stood back while Joe went forward to inquire at the front desk.

The police officer at the desk asked Joe, “Who do you want to see?” As soon as Joe gave the name of the young man, the officer abruptly asked, “Are you family?” Joe said, “No.” Joe then quickly pulled out the letter from Emory. He showed it to the officer, pointing to the part where Emory requested Joe’s visit. After reading that portion of the letter, the officer asked Joe, “Are you a minister?” Joe said, “No.” At this point, Joe realized that some of the prison’s restrictions may prohibit him from entering. He was not a family member, nor did he have the credentials of a minister which were needed to gain entrance. However, we had one thing in our favor. We had a personal relationship with the all powerful, all knowing and everywhere present God, who is able to do the impossible. He did it before and He can do it again. At that moment, Joe had a flashback of the Lord opening the doors for him to get into school. It caused his faith to take a giant leap. After reading Emory’s letter, the officer paused a few seconds seeming to collect his thoughts. He then told Joe to come back after the family visiting hours were over. Since we had a few hours to wait, we decided to go home and get something to eat. After grabbing a quick bite, Joe and I prayed together. We fervently prayed that God would open the prison doors and set the captives free. Yes, free from the bondage of sin.
Joe returned to the prison, but alone this time. I stayed home praying. When he walked up to the front desk, he noticed that this wasn’t the same officer he had spoken to earlier. Joe proceeded to explain his situation. The officer emphatically said, “I’m sorry, you’re not family, and you’re not clergy...” Before even finishing his statement, the officer was called away from the window to receive a phone call. Several minutes passed as Joe patiently waited for him to return. Then came a divinely appointed moment. The first officer that told Joe to come back after visiting hours suddenly walked over to the window. Seeing that Joe was standing there and not being helped, he said, “Are you still here? Who do you want to see?” Joe responded very quickly and gave him the two names: Emory and the name of the young man. The officer immediately scribbled something on a pass and gave it to Joe.

Joe was then lead through a long corridor which resembled a tunnel with a series of locked gates. Joe isn’t easily frightened, but he still remembers how scary it was to walk down that dimly lit corridor. All you could hear was the deafening echo of clanging gates and dangling keys. Joe was then escorted to a small room at the end of the corridor. He was a little nervous, not knowing what to expect. If you remember, Joe never wanted to go into the prisons. It was that whole street gang thing.

God had now opened the doors, and Joe was able to get in the prison. What’s so awesome about God is that when He opens a door, He does it BIG TIME!

The small room that Joe was escorted to was the same room that is reserved for lawyers to speak with their clients. The room had a small desk and a few chairs. There is usually a partition between the inmate and the visitor. Not so in this room. There were no partitions - nothing to obstruct physical contact.
Then, to top it off, they brought both prisoners to Joe: the young man and Emory. Isn’t God good? This was more than Joe had hoped for.

God had apparently softened this young man’s heart. He was no longer the tough guy that Emory described. He did have a few questions, but not beyond Joe’s ability to answer. After answering his questions, Joe then shared the Gospel that Christ died for our sins, was buried and raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Jesus is alive and no matter what he had done He can wipe the slate clean. The Word says, “Come now, and let us reason together” says the Lord, “Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18 NASB)

God had obviously prepared this young man’s heart. He was ready to receive Jesus into his life. Emory quietly sat there listening as Joe shared. It came to that time when Joe asked the young man if he wanted to give his life to Christ. He said yes. In the solitude of that little room, the young man held Joe and Emory’s hand. Joe then lead him in a prayer, first confessing that he was a sinner, then asking for forgiveness and inviting Jesus into his life as his Lord and Savior. After prayer, they sat there for a few minutes in utter amazement at what the Lord had done. As the prison guard took the young man and Emory away, Joe stood there speechless.

Joe walked back down that long dimly lit corridor, only this time, with not as much anxiety. As he approached the front desk, the thought came to him, “Who’s going to disciple those guys?” When he handed back the pass, he asked, “How can I get back in?” By this time, the officer who was pulled away to the phone, was now back at the window. In response to Joe’s question the officer replied, “How did you get in in the first
place?” Joe pointed to the other officer and said, “He gave me a pass.” The officer then told Joe, “Since you’re not family and you’re not clergy, the only way that I know is to speak to the Head Chaplain.” Joe then asked, “Where is he?” The officer said, “He has an office in the court building downtown.”

The officer was very abrupt. In haste, he gave Joe the chaplain’s name, but no other information. Seeing that the officer wasn’t at all amicable, Joe didn't question him any further. When he left the prison that day, there was a burning desire within his heart and a determination to return to disciple those young men.
Chapter 16

“I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”

Revelation 3:8 (NASB)

Joe was sure of one thing! He knew that God was the only one that could open closed doors and make a way where there was “no way”. Through the mouth of Isaiah the prophet, God said, “...I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (Isaiah 43:19KJV) Joe brought this whole matter regarding getting back into the prison to the Lord.

He decided to go downtown the next day in between classes. However, he would only have a few minutes to spare. Since I had the car, Joe had to ride his bike. The court building was only one or two miles away from the campus, but Joe had no idea whether or not the chaplain would be in his office. If he was there, the next question was, would he have time to see Joe?

He sensed very strongly that the Lord was leading him to go, so he peddled downtown to the court building. Without any difficulty, he found Chaplain Hager’s office. Amazingly enough, not only was Chaplain Hager in his office, but he took the time to speak with Joe. You have to ask yourself: what are the chances of the circumstances falling into place as they did? Joe quickly shared with Chaplain Hager the sequence of events that brought him into the prison. He also shared his desire to disciple the two young men that he led to the Lord.

After listening to all that Joe had to say, Chaplain Hager asked, “Where are these two men located?” Joe said, “2 East.”
Chaplain Hager then said, “I have a volunteer chaplain on that Walk. It’s up to him if he will let you go in with him. I have no objections.”

Chaplain Hager then gave Joe the name and phone number of the volunteer chaplain. Joe left the chaplain’s office with such hopeful anticipation of what the Lord was going to do. He quickly peddled back to the campus just in time for his next class.

Joe didn’t waste any time. Right after class, he phoned James Pooser, the volunteer chaplain. Joe explained the circumstances which lead up to his calling. He also told him that Chaplain Hager had given his approval for Joe to accompany him on his Walk if it was OK with him. Mind you, Joe had no credentials. After hearing Joe’s story, Brother Pooser said, “Praise God. The Lord has sent me a Timothy!” Joe had no idea what he was talking about.

For you to understand and fully appreciate what God was doing here, I must give a little of Brother Pooser’s history. Brother Pooser had been called to serve God in his youth. However, he gave God a long list of what he needed before he could serve Him. Years passed and God was faithful. He gave Brother Pooser all that he asked for, but Brother Pooser neglected to follow through with his part. Then years later, while in his fifties, Brother Pooser had a sudden heart attack. He was critically ill. As he laid there in his hospital bed, he had a flashback of his life. The Lord reminded him of all his requests and the promises he had made. He had the beautiful wife that he asked for, the children, a luxurious home and good job working for the airlines. He even had the availability to travel anywhere in the world free. He had everything he asked for.

While lying there on his sick bed, he promised the Lord once again that he would faithfully serve Him. As soon as he
was discharged from the hospital, he volunteered as a chaplain in the prisons.

It wasn’t easy. While he was ministering, he had to often catch his breath. For quite a while, he suffered with chest pains and shortness of breath. But in spite of the difficulties, he remained faithful to his promise, never missing his scheduled rounds in the prison.

Brother Pooser ministered in that Fulton County Correctional Facility and on the same Walk for several years. In severe pain only days before Joe’s phone call, Brother Pooser cried out to the Lord, “God I’ll remain faithful, but could you, please send me some help?”

This reminds me of David, the psalmist, when he cried out to the Lord, “Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! Thou hast relieved me in my distress; be gracious to me and hear my prayer.” (Psalm 4:1 NASB) What blesses me is that God’s character is unchanging. We can trust in His faithfulness even when we are faithless. Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, writes, “If we are faithless, He [God] remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.” God answered Brother Pooser’s prayer, and sent him the Timothy that he asked for.

Joe’s phone call was what I call a “Divine Connection”, which brought Brother Pooser and Joe together. They got off the phone with the understanding that Joe would be accompanying Brother Pooser on his Walk in the prison once a week on Thursday nights. It happened to be the only night that Joe had available. However, he still had to do some juggling to fit it into his schedule. He had school, tutoring, assistant teaching, Bible study, housework and now prison ministry. It was already more than I could handle. My head was spinning just thinking about it.
Thursday night came. Joe and Brother Pooser arrived at the prison early so that they could meet and have prayer together. They hit it off very well right from the beginning. Brother Pooser was a medium-built, middle-aged, dark-skinned man. He had a very gentle nature, not at all aggressive or forceful. After praying together, Joe and Brother Pooser were searched by the prison guards and then given chaplain’s badges. They were not allowed to bring anything into the prison except their Bibles. After a thorough search, they were escorted through that dimly-lit corridor that Joe had walked through before with those same deafening sounds of the clanging gates echoing in their ears.

As they were walking together, Brother Pooser explained what their responsibilities were. Joe found out that the volunteer chaplains were responsible for ministering to the inmate’s personal needs, as well as their spiritual needs. They tried to help alleviate some of the inmate’s concerns by making phone calls for them.

When they reached the end of the corridor, Joe followed Brother Pooser to his Walk. In his mind, Joe pictured the term “Walk” to be similar to the prison catwalks one sees in some of the Hollywood movies. Because of all the images, he had in his mind, the Fulton County Correctional Facility in Atlanta was a little different than Joe had expected. The Walk was a long corridor or hallway about four feet wide with a row of prison cells on one side and a solid brick wall on the opposite side. The brick wall had TVs mounted on it and a few small windows high up on the wall.

The prison cells were overcrowded with limited space. Each cell had at least ten inmates, bunk beds and a stainless steel sink and commode visible to everyone. There was absolutely no privacy. The TVs were blasting, and the air was
densely filled with cigarette smoke. The ventilation was minimal. Joe being an asthmatic and Brother Pooser with his heart condition found it difficult to breath at times. Joe and Brother Pooser had to shout to be heard over the many conversations, the cursing, the TVs blasting and the loud music. To this day, Joe attributes his loud preaching, back to his days in the prison where he learned to preach above a cacophony of loud noises.

On his first visit, Joe observed Brother Pooser as he went from one cell to another, until all the inmates were seen. As they gradually worked their way down the hall, Joe found himself in front of Emory and the young man’s cell. They were totally shocked to see Joe. They lovingly grabbed hold of him as he put his hands through the bars. He tried to embrace them the best he could, but the bars limited their physical contact. Joe had a chance to share a few choice nuggets of Truths from the Bible. He left the prison that night with a deep sense of gratitude, thanking God for opening up the prison doors to him.

When Joe returned home on Thursday nights, he would spend hours on the phone relaying messages for the inmates. The messages were often requests to see a lawyer, for a girlfriend to bring cigarettes, or to tell a mom and dad that their son was being transferred out to another prison. The messages varied from week to week. By relaying these messages for the prisoners, it opened up a door to share the Gospel with them.

The only unpleasant or distasteful thing is that Joe came home each week smelling like a smoke factory. He reeked with the odor of stale cigarette smoke. It was on his skin, in his hair, and it permeated through his clothing. What a stench!

Week after week, as Joe would go into the prison, he noticed that his ministry to the inmates’ spiritual needs was increasing. They wanted mini-sermons and prayers. Joe loved it.
He always said that those guys in prison are real - no pretense and no nonsense. If they wanted to hear you, they would tell you, and if they didn’t, they would tell you that too. At times, he would find himself a little out of his league with questions he couldn’t answer, but through that, God confirmed in Joe his need to get more training.

One day, we received a letter from the young man that Joe had lead to the Lord with Emory. He had been transferred out to a work camp in south Georgia. Thank God, he put his return address on the envelope. Since Joe would no longer be able to disciple him, the Lord placed it upon my heart to maintain a correspondence with him to encourage him in the Lord. In my first letter to him, I tried not only to encourage him, but to stress the importance of prayer and daily Bible reading. Little did I know that this was going to be the first of many letters to many prisoners in several states. It was also the first of many letters, encouraging those in the body of Christ. God doesn’t always tell us how He plans to use us. He sometimes, gradually introduces us to His Will.

The young man and I corresponded back and forth several times, but one day, we received a very disturbing letter from him. He had seriously injured his arm and was not receiving the proper medical attention. Instead, he said he was thrown in the hole. After reading this, Joe and I looked at each other questioning, “What is the hole?” Reading between the lines, it didn’t sound good. Joe and I quickly discussed the situation. Without wasting any time we wrote him back, asking, “When are visiting hours? Because we’re coming down to see you.” About two weeks later we received his response, pleading that we come.

That very next weekend, Joe and I drove down to south Georgia. It took us about an hour to get to the area and another
thirty minutes to find the work camp. Joe and I cringed as we drove into the yard, which was fenced in with barbed wire. At the extreme corner of the property stood a dilapidated old house, and not far from that was a very small building that resembled an outhouse. There were a few shade trees and chairs scattered around the yard.

The prisoners looked grubby and dirty. The prison guards paced the yard carrying rifles. The prisoners were Black and all the guards were White. We found out that this was a chain gang. They took these prisoners, chained at the leg, to work on the railroads and highways doing repairs and clean up.

It certainly was an eye opener for Joe and I. Truthfully speaking, I didn’t think places like this still existed, and remember this was back in the 70’s.

We asked for the young man that we came to visit. As the guard responded with a thick southern drawl, we realized that we were in the deep South. Oh my goodness! Joe and I realized that we better not make waves here. We were so far away from civilization, tucked away here in the woods. We could suddenly disappear, and nobody would know where we were. Tell me that something like that hasn’t happened before?

Shortly after making our request to see the prisoner, the guard led the young man over to us. It grieved me to see the condition of his hand. It was extremely swollen, and his wrist was slightly deformed. Not bringing any attention to what I was doing, I quickly examined his hand and wrist. He was experiencing a great deal of pain, and limited mobility. The deformity alone was indicative of a fracture.

He explained to us that he told the guards that he had fallen down and hurt his arm. When he started complaining of severe pain, the guards threw him in the hole, assuming that he was trying to get out of work.
If I didn’t see it with my own two eyes, I wouldn’t believe it. The hole was an actual hole in the ground approximately four-feet wide and about ten-feet deep. The prisoners were thrown in the hole as a disciplinary measure. Archaic, if you ask me! There was one toilet on the premises, and that was in the outhouse. It was the small building that I spotted when we first drove up.

We were in a real dilemma here, not knowing what to do and not wanting to cause more problems for the young man after we left. We stood there in a remote area of the yard laying hands on him and praying. We asked the Lord for favor with the authorities and for wisdom in approaching them. Let me tell you, God is so awesome. He immediately answered our prayers.

Joe humbly approached the authorities telling them that his wife is a nurse, and that the young man appears to have a broken bone. They assured us that they would take him to the doctor on Monday. We had to trust that they would keep their word. Mind you, we were trusting God not man. As the visiting hours were coming to an end, we said our good-byes, embracing one another. We left that dreadful place with a heaviness on our hearts. We drove home almost the whole hour in silence, utterly shocked at what we had seen. When we got home, we assured ourselves that Jesus loves this young man more than we do, and He will take care of His sheep.

About a week later, we received a letter from the young man thanking us for what we had done. He told us that he was taken to the doctor that Monday. The doctor took X-rays and put his arm in a cast. When I wrote him back, I explained how much Jesus loves him, and that we really didn’t do anything. Jesus did it all. God is the only one who can touch a man’s heart. I know without a shadow of doubt that He touched the authorities and placed compassion in their hearts that day. We drove down to
South Georgia several times to see him and to follow up on his spiritual growth. When we couldn’t visit, I would always write.
Chapter 17

“You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name. He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen.”

Deuteronomy 10:20, 21 (NASB)

When we first moved down to Atlanta, we realized that things were going to be a little tight financially. We knew that we would be living on only one salary, which was fine. The extra money that Joe was now making, only helped out with the ministry’s needs. He purchased Bibles for the prison and literature for the Bible studies. However, despite our financial lack, we never had a need that God didn’t supply. He blessed us tremendously. Whenever the cupboards were bare, and the funds in our bank account were low, the Lord would place it upon someone’s heart to give us a monetary gift. The gifts came, not only from family and friends, but sometimes from total strangers. God was constantly showing us that He was “Jehovah Jireh”, our Provider.

In one of my letters to my Mom, I told her that, “We counted on being poor when we moved down to Atlanta and that was OK because we needed to cut back and lose some weight. Much to our surprise, things are working out quite the opposite. We are quite prosperous and our waistlines are beginning to show it.” If I might add, not only did our waistlines show it, but our apartment was beginning to look like one of the homes of the rich and famous.
We bought a beautiful area rug and coffee table for the living room. The pattern on the rug was Native American in style, and a perfect shade of green to match the sofa. Our neighbor, Linda gave us a roll-away bed for our guest bedroom.

Linda also made arrangements for us to get a desk and swivel chair. Her boyfriend owned a business, and he was getting rid of a huge office desk from his store. As soon as Linda told us about it, we made arrangements to go over and see it. It was beautiful and in perfect condition. We didn’t even have to concern ourselves about moving it. Linda’s boyfriend arranged to have it delivered the next day. We put it in front of the window in our guest bedroom. I was so glad that Joe now had a proper place to study, instead of the dining room table.

The Lord was moving by His Spirit in a mighty way in the Friday night Bible studies. Students were getting saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. Mind you, our Bible study by this time had become more like an old fashion Holy Ghost prayer meeting and church service.

We had a time of singing. One of our absolutely favorite choruses was, “This joy that I have, the world didn’t give it to me. The world didn’t give it, and the world can’t take it away.” from one of Shirley Caesar's albums. Let me tell you, we had a hand-clapping, foot-stomping good time, with that song! After singing, we would have a time of prayer, followed by Bible study, but it wasn’t one of your conventional Bible studies. Joe, as he still does, would preach and teach.

One night, the Dean of Men from Morris Brown College came. Much to our surprise, on that night he gave his life to the Lord. We were all surprised because we thought that he was already saved. We were all astonished, especially the students who knew him. Right there in our living room, he stood up before all of us confessing that he pastored a church and
preached for ten years, but didn’t know Jesus as his personal Savior. What was so puzzling is that he was still pastoring a church in Atlanta and at the same time filling the position of Dean. All along, he didn’t know Jesus. He most likely knew of Him, but he never knew Him personally until that night. Joe and I were overwhelmed that he made a public confession, totally unsolicited.

Joe simply lifted up the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his teachings. As a result, many student were drawn to Him. Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” (John 12:32 KJV) Jesus was indicating the kind of death by which He was to die. However, we can apply these words to our lives, especially when we are ministering to others. If we lift up Christ’s death and resurrection, in simplicity and truth, then He will draw all men to Himself.

If you recall, Joe still didn’t have any Bible school training at this point, but, he knew the importance of lifting up Jesus. Many of the students, who were being drawn to the Bible study, were also being drawn to Christ. We were witnessing such phenomenal growth.

It was becoming increasingly more obvious to us that we definitely needed more space. Joe and I brought this need before the Lord daily in our personal prayers, and we left it there. We never really spoke to anyone about it. We had so much faith and trust in the Lord. We knew that if He wanted us to have more space, He would provide it without us using every conceivable method to work it out ourselves.

Meanwhile, the Lord placed it upon our hearts to offer the students a meal before Bible study. Joe and I were in total agreement on this matter. However, we had no idea how we were going to accomplish this task. What we did know was that the Lord would not call us to do anything that He couldn’t
accomplish through us. If He hadn’t already prepared us for the job, then He was most likely going to prepare us on the job. The business world calls it “on-the-job training”. Either way, we were ready for the challenge. Joe’s plate was already full and running over, so I assumed the responsibility of cooking for the Bible study.

Now, in order for you to appreciate what God was doing here, I must share a key fact that I neglected to share earlier. When Joe and I got married, I didn’t know how to cook. My Mom taught me how to knit, sew and keep house; everything, but cooking. Believe it or not, Joe was the one who taught me how to cook. However, up to this point, my cooking was limited to serving just the two of us. Now I would be cooking for fifteen to twenty-five young adults, and believe me, it was a challenge. The Lord not only taught me how to shop, but what to cook and how much to cook.

Joe and I would shop on Wednesdays after I came home from work. We would always make sure that we shopped for the Friday night Bible study first before buying food for ourselves. That way, we always had enough money to feed the students. We would buy our groceries with whatever money that was left over. We didn’t have a lot, but there was always enough.

Thursday night was my cooking night. I planned the meals according to what was on sale that week. If chickens were on sale, then that’s what was on the menu. Sometimes we would have ham steaks or pork chop, then other times we would have fish or ground beef with either rice or mashed potatoes. We bought boxes and boxes of instant mashed potatoes. They were easy to make, and they would spread to feed a large crowd. For vegetables, we would have string beans or collard greens, whichever was the least expensive.
We never had hamburgers or Hamburger Helper meals. We figured that the students had enough of those kind of meals in the cafeterias on campus. With the Lord’s help, we wanted to provide something better. I did all of my cooking during the hours that Joe was ministering in the prison. Then, as soon as I came home from work on Fridays, I’d start warming the food just in case someone came early.

When we first announced that we would be serving meals before Bible study, we had an overwhelming response. We didn’t realize it, but several students had late afternoon classes on Fridays. They were missing dinner in order to get to Bible study on time.

Everyone was so excited about coming early, not only to eat, but also to fellowship. This was one of the few times that many of the students from the various campuses got a chance to fellowship with one another.

It was a joyous time in the Lord. As some of the students started to grab hold of the whole idea of witnessing and evangelizing, they would bring their unsaved friends with them. Some would stay for Bible study, and others would eat and run. That was OK because the Lord was being glorified in everything we did. When many of the unsaved students came to eat, they noticed that the atmosphere was so different. They had no idea why it was different, but we knew that it was the sweet presence of the Lord. It made all the difference in the world.

One Friday night after Bible study, one of the seminary students from I.T.C. handed Joe a sealed envelope. In spite of his curiosity, Joe stuck the envelope in his pocket choosing not to open it until everyone had gone home. Several of the students had a weekly habit of lingering around for an hour or two after Bible study was over. So, we knew that it would be awhile before we could see what was in the envelope.
Ordinarily, after everyone left, it was a part of our usual routine to clean the kitchen and straighten up the house. Since we used paper plates, paper cups and plastic eating utensils, we had only the pots and pans to clean. This particular night, we didn’t lift a finger to clean anything. We were to anxious to see what was in the envelope.

As soon as the last person left, Joe quickly pulled the envelope out of his pocket and ripped it open. Enclosed was a very generous monetary gift. We were totally flabbergasted. Since most of the students were just barely making it financially, we were shocked to receive such a large some of money from a student. Joe and I prayerfully considered buying some kind of machine to print up the Bible studies.

Praise the Lord! God is so good! He not only hears our prayers, but He also guides and directs us. He also provides for all of our needs according to His riches in glory. As we were looking through the newspaper, we found an advertisement for a used mimeograph machine. We immediately went to check it out. Much to our surprise, it was not only in excellent condition, but also within our means to pay for it. We were so excited. We now owned a mimeograph machine. We could print up our weekly Bible studies and have handouts for each student.

On Monday evenings, we would spend time in prayer, seeking the Lord about the Bible study. Joe’s Study Bible had a countless number of topical studies, but we needed to know the desire of God’s heart for His children. After seeking the Lord, He would always confirm which study He wanted Joe to teach. The confirmations came through a variety of different sources. There were times that the confirmation would come through a student, who would call asking a question about a Scripture. It would be on the exact subject that Joe was planning to cover. Other times, the confirmation would come through a devotional
reading, a letter or a message shared, either on the radio or TV. One time, the Lord confirmed the study through a letter I received from the young man in the work camp in South Georgia. In his letter to me, he quoted the same Scripture which was the main text for the Bible study that week.

The studies were foundational. They covered the deity of Jesus Christ, the Nature and work of the Holy Spirit, Salvation, prayer and discipleship, among others. Many of the students, who had been raised in the Church had only a superficial or experiential relationship with God. They had never come to know the person of Jesus Christ, nor could they discern His will. They had no understanding of His love and steadfastness.

I found it to be one of the shortcomings of even some mainline denominational churches. Their church programs focused on educating the children in Bible facts, instead of bringing them to a real encounter with the Living God and a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Sunday School curriculums make an attempt to keep the children busy with Bible learning activities in order to keep them from getting bored.

Don’t get me wrong! Bible activities and games are good, but children need to understand that they don’t have to fill every moment with activity. They need to have a personal experience with the Living God. They need to be able to come before Him and sit quietly in His presence. Instead of entertaining the children with skits that only deal with moral and ethical issues, the Sunday School teachers need to help the children develop a living faith that expects God to move in their lives.

Like adults, children also need to understand biblical doctrines as it relates to their own Christian experience. The teacher should also prepare and equip the child to serve the Lord
in some capacity as an expression of their love for God. The teacher must be very cautious when getting the children involved with doing good works. They have to be careful not to give the impression of a merit and work-centered righteousness. If the Sunday School teachers had the perspective of equipping and preparing the children biblically for tomorrow's leadership, then the ignorance and confusion that we were seeing in some of our college students would be non-existent.

The Lord placed a love in our hearts for all of our students. We loved the older men and women who attended our studies, as well as all the young people. We tried to avail ourselves to them. I remember Joe making an announcement one Friday night. He told the students that they could call us at any hour if they needed us. He remembered the vow he made to the Lord many years ago. Since we weren’t going to have any children, he vowed to take the Lord’s children at any hour. Now I need to digress a bit to explain why we weren’t going to have any children.

As a newborn Christian and without any biblical counsel, Joe chose to have a vasectomy after almost losing a nephew from an asthma attack. He assumed that if he had a child, it would suffer with asthma. So he took matters into his own hands. He was also dealing with the unpleasant memories of his childhood. He suffered terribly with asthma. In ignorance, he made the decision to have the vasectomy. This decision grieved me for many years. It subconsciously affected me to the point that I would totally ignore Joe whenever he had an asthma attack. I guess, I blamed his asthma for us not being able to have children. When in reality, it wasn’t Joe’s asthma that was the cause. It was Joe’s rash and impulsive decision that prevented us from having children.
I realize now how the enemy of our souls fed into my emotions, making me feel justified in responding the way I did. It took years for God to replace the resentment and bitterness with forgiveness, love and mercy. I didn’t have to go for counseling. God did a work in me. In prayer one day, the Holy Spirit convicted me of my unforgiveness. In the privacy of my prayer closet, He exposed my behavior. You see, I had such compassion and mercy for every hurting and ailing individual that crossed my path, but whenever my husband got sick, I had a deaf ear to his cries for help. I repented, and the Lord empowered me to change my attitude and my behavior. Joe has also asked for God’s forgiveness for taking matters into his own hands and for making decisions which were contrary to God’s commands. Whether we like it or not, God has commanded us to be fruitful and to multiply.

It wasn’t long after Joe made the announcement that we started to get calls at all hours. Several students asked if they could post our phone number on the campus. Joe agreed, and we printed fliers which read, “PRAYER HOTLINE”, with our phone number. I can truthfully say that no one ever abused the hotline number. We would always answer, “Praise the Lord! Prayer Hotline, can I help you?” Whenever someone called, they always had a pressing prayer need. We started to even get calls from people we didn’t know from off campus.

One night the phone rang at about three o'clock in the morning. It was a student in crisis. He was suicidal. Thank God, Joe, being a survivor of a suicide attempt, was able to talk sense into this young man. Joe lead him to the Lord and was able to follow up on him as he started coming to the Friday night Bible studies.

Joe never stopped to think how much he was piling up on his plate. He just kept piling one responsibility on top of
another. God truly gets all the glory because He strengthened and equipped Joe to handle it all.
Chapter 18

“Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee.”
Jeremiah 32:17 (NASB)

Our apartment became the meeting place on weekends, as well as on Friday nights. I felt such a sense of fulfillment in working with the college students. Without realizing it, I was gradually becoming more and more involved in ministry. I was now cooking for the students in addition to keeping up with the prison correspondence and prayer hotline. Yet at the same time, I was feeling such an overwhelming sense of discontentment with my job at the hospital. I was particularly disturbed about the frequency of my rotation to Pediatrics.

When I was hired, I was told that I would occasionally have to rotate to Pediatrics. I didn’t particularly like the idea, but I was willing to accept it. After all, “occasional” to me, meant now and then. However, due to staffing problems, I ended up on Pediatrics for weeks and months at a time.

As if that wasn’t enough, when we admitted a three-year old little boy, who had swallowed lye, it was like adding coals to the fire, especially with my aversion to working with sick children. Lye, being such a caustic chemical, eroded the lining of the little guy’s esophagus. With such massive damaged to his esophagus, the little fellow couldn’t eat or drink anything. It tore me up to see him suffer. I realized that it would be an on-going
process keeping his esophagus dilated and functioning as he grows older.

My discontentment wasn’t only because of the Pediatric rotation schedule. The work-load was increasing, and the staffing was inadequate. I was overwhelmed by the patients’ needs and frustrated by the insufficient help. Then one day, to top it all, with my own eye I witnessed the overt activity of the devil. I clearly remember it as if it were yesterday.

I was on the Medical Surgical floor at the nurse’s desk, transcribing the doctor’s orders when I heard a scream coming from a patient’s room midway down the hallway. I ran to the room as quickly as I could. I abruptly halted when I got to the door of the room where I thought I heard the scream. I stood there in the doorway, motionless and totally shocked by what I saw. The heavy metal hospital bed was about three or four inches off the floor. Never before had I ever seen anything like this. It took me only seconds to quickly assess the situation. It had to be the work of the prince of the power of the air. With that thought in mind, and without changing the volume or pitch of my voice, I uttered the most powerful name that I know. No louder than a whisper I said, “JESUS.” The bed then suddenly crashed to the floor.

I know that there are Christians who think that they have to scream at the devil in order to get results, but it doesn’t really matter whether we are loud or soft spoken. It’s not a matter of the volume of your voice. It’s a matter of authority. In verse one of the ninth chapter of Luke, we see that Jesus gave the twelve disciples authority over all the demons and to heal the sick. Likewise, in chapter 10 of Luke, when the seventy returned whom Jesus sent out, He told them that He had given them authority over all the powers of darkness. Mind you, this was long before Pentecost.
At Pentecost, the believers were indwelt with the Holy Spirit and endowed with power.

As believers, we should be cognizant of the fact that the very same authority which was delegated to the Twelve and the Seventy has been delegated to us. We also have a choice. We can either exercise that authority or allow the enemy to walk all over us and oppress us.

I know this all sounds so bizarre, a hospital bed levitating, but it really happened! The truth of the matter is that I wasn’t the only one who witnessed it. The patient in the bed and the patient in the next bed saw the same thing I did, and they were hysterical.

I phoned the Maintenance Department, requesting that they send someone to check the bed. When the maintenance man came, I reported what had happened. He laughed, and looked at me as if I was crazy. However, as he examined the bed, he was quite bewildered to see that the metal bed frame was unusually bent. It was quite noticeable. Before leaving, the maintenance man said that he would bring another bed to the floor to replace the damaged one.

After he left, I stood there in the room between the two beds trying to calm both patients down. Before I knew it, I was sharing the Gospel. I explained that there is no power on earth that is greater than God. I also explained that there is power in the name of Jesus. Demons tremble at the very mention of His name. Once again, I didn’t care about losing my job for witnessing.

I proceeded to tell them that when you are a born-again believer, you then have the authority to cast out demons. As I was sharing, I couldn’t help but notice that the patient in the next bed was punctuating my statements with “Amen” and “Praise the Lord”. I asked her if she was a Believer. She said,
“Yes.” I then affirmed, “Praise God! You’re a Christian.” However, as I glanced at the patient in the bed that levitated, she appeared to be distracted and preoccupied. Her mind seemed to be in the clouds. Of course, I realized what a traumatic experience this was. I asked if she wanted prayer, and she shook her head no. I accepted her decision, but I personally couldn’t understand why she didn’t want prayer.

To tell you the truth, this whole incident was so extraordinary that I couldn’t stop thinking about it all day. As it remained foremost in my thoughts throughout the day, I continued to pray for the two patients in the room. I specifically prayed that the Lord would use the Christian to minister to the woman in the next bed. When we are unable to witness or minister to an individual, we can always pray that the Lord will send someone else.

As I was getting more and more discontent with my job, I found myself dreading to go to work everyday. I was very unhappy. I finally decided to resign, and it had nothing to do with my experience with the demonic I had been complaining to Joe about my job for months. However, it wasn’t until Joe advised me to leave that I decided to take definite steps. He suggested that perhaps I’d enjoy doing private-duty nursing again. He also suggested that I talk it over with my Mom. She affirmed what Joe had said.

Days later, I handed in my resignation. What was so interesting is that I was hired by Holy Family Hospital, and by the time I resigned, the name of the hospital had changed to Southwest Community. What was so amazing is that as the name had changed, the atmosphere and climate in the hospital also changed.

It didn’t take long before word had spread of my leaving. The doctors soon got wind of it, and I was offered a job in one
of the doctor’s offices. Boy! Oh boy, did that ever sound appealing!

This particular doctor wanted to send me to college to become a physician’s assistant. His specialty was Obstetrics and Gynecology. It wasn’t one of my favorites, but it sounded like a marvelous opportunity for advancement. The only hold-up was that he had to verify it with his partner, who was in Hawaii on vacation at the time.

I thank God for hold-ups and delays. In this particular case, it gave me time to hear from God and to seek the counsel of others. Just because a door opens, it doesn’t mean that God wants us to walk through it.

I was initially swayed by the glamorous image of working in a doctor’s office. However, after listening to the counsel of others, I realized that, as a physician’s assistant, I would have a lot of responsibilities and a heavy workload. I would have to run back and forth from the office to the hospital visiting and examining patients. I know many people would enjoy that type of work. However, as I took a realistic look, I could see that this job was not for me. I expressed my appreciation for being considered, but I would not be taking the position.

Within that same week, I received another offer from a patient. He was an engineer for the state of Georgia, a brilliant man. In speaking with this gentleman, I found out that he had a Ph.D. in Horology from a University in Geneva, Switzerland.

As he shared this with me, he obviously noticed the mystified look on my face. It was a dead give-away that I did not know what he was talking about when he told me that he had a Ph.D. in Horology. He then informed me that Horology was the study of time or the science of measuring time. When he heard that I was leaving, he offered to get me a job working for
the state. I would be working with mentally-challenged children, supervising and giving medication. “Thank you, but no thank you.” I didn’t sense that this was the direction the Lord was leading me in. As I was prayerfully waiting on the Lord for guidance and direction, I sensed that He was leading me in the direction of private-duty nursing.

I had given the Nursing administration three weeks notice. During that time, I was stretched and tested. It seemed as if everything that could happen, happened! This confirmed that I needed to leave. As the charge nurse, I was responsible for those employees who worked under my supervision. I had at least one, and sometimes two practical nurses that worked with me. When I made out the daily assignments, most often I would assign them to either dispense the medications or to do the patient’s treatments.

On this one particular day, the nurse who was dispensing medicines came to me tearful and in a state of panic. I asked her, “What happened?” She said, “I’ve done it. I’m probably going to lose my license.” I very calmly asked again, “What happened?” Stuttering a bit, she blurted out, “I… I… I gave a patient the wrong medicine.” I initially responded by saying, “Are you sure?” She said, “Yes. Look, here’s his medicine. That means I must have given him someone else’s.”

I tried to calm her down, and at the same time asking, “Who’s the patient, and what medicine did you give him?” All the while I was thinking that we will have to make out an incident report, and contact his doctor. I was a bit shaken when I found out that she gave the patient someone else’s heart medication.
This was a very serious matter, especially since the patient didn’t have any heart problems. Then I asked her if she actually saw him take the medicine. She said, “Yes. I saw him put it in his mouth.”

As we stood their in an isolated corner of the nurse’s station, I took hold of her hands and said, “let’s pray.”

Before going to check the patient, I lifted my voice to God loud enough that only she could hear. I asked for God’s unmerited favor. I pleaded with the Lord that He would intervene in this situation. Then grabbing a stethoscope and blood pressure cuff, we quickly ran to the patient’s room. I was embarrassed to tell him what had happened. When I explained that the nurse gave him the wrong medication, he proceeded to tell us that he didn’t take it. I said, “But the nurse told me that she saw you put it in your mouth.” He said, “I did, but I spit it out right away because it dawned on me, that it wasn’t the medicine that I had been taking every day.” I told him that I was so glad that he did.

God answered my prayers in a remarkable way, that day. As a result of this whole incident, the nurse was so much more receptive to hearing God’s plan of salvation. As I shared more of God’s Word with her, she opened her heart to Jesus.

This reminds me of another incident in which the Lord proved Himself faithful. I was driving to work one morning. As I was approaching a traffic light, I gradually put my foot down on the brake pedal in an attempt to stop the car. However, I couldn’t stop. Without any warning, the brake pedal went down to the floor of the car. Thank God I was close to the hospital and there was no traffic at that hour of the morning. I drove straight through the red light, coasting until I got to the hospital parking lot. By easing up on the accelerator and using the hand brake, I was able to slowly roll into a parking space. Before turning the
car off, I tried to pump the brakes, but the pedal remained in a fixed position down on the floor. I got out of the car a little shaken realizing that I could have been killed.

I was running a little late, so I didn’t have time to call Joe to tell him what happened. As I thought about Joe’s schedule, I realized that I wouldn’t be able to reach him all day if I didn’t try right then. I also realized that the time it would take me to make the phone call I would definitely be late for work. I had no other choice! I had to put my faith and trust in the Lord. I had no idea how He was going to intervene in this situation, but I knew that somehow He would.

“In my distress, I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry for help before Him came into His ears” (Psalms 18:6 NASB)

This was the very cry of my heart which is so appropriately express by the psalmist David. I was also comforted by the fact that God is a present help in times of trouble. With that very thought in mind, I went into the hospital and onto my floor. While receiving the night nurse’s report, I realized that my problem with the brakes had become a distraction. However, once I started my day, I was so preoccupied with my work that I forgot all about the problem.

After work, without lingering around, I immediately went to my car. I opened the car door and sat in the drivers’ seat. It actually took a few seconds before it suddenly hit me. “I don’t have any brakes!” Up until that point, I had completely forgotten about the problem. In anticipation of the drive home, I started to get very nervous. However, I felt prompted to make the attempt.

I knew that there would be a lot more traffic on the road at this hour, so I would have to be extremely cautious. Much to
my surprise, the brake pedal was tight when I tested it before driving off. It was almost as if a mechanic had worked on it. I cautiously drove home totally amazed at what the Lord had done. There was no question in my mind. It had to be God. There was no other explanation for it.

I was in between paychecks and didn’t have the money to fix the brakes. Believe it or not, the brakes remained tight until the day that I received my next paycheck. Now, how awesome is that?

I’ll never forget that payday! I drove home after work, and as I was pulling into the parking lot of our apartment complex, the brake pedal went down to the floor of the car again, but this time we had the money to fixed it. We utilized the free service of our automobile club to have the car towed to our mechanic. Yes! Yes! Yes! The Lord did indeed prove Himself faithful once again.

As my time at Southwest Community Hospital was soon coming to an end, I thought about leaving something behind, but what could I leave? Then as clear as day, it came to me to leave some of my artwork behind. Since the walls on Pediatrics were so bare, I decided to paint several colorful Walt Disney characters. Mind you, at this point, I hadn’t picked up a paint brush in years, but I realized that God had given me this talent, and I needed to use it. I thank God that I brought my paints down with me to Atlanta.

Since I had so little time to accomplish this task, I dashed out to one of Atlanta’s largest arts and craft stores to buy some canvas. As soon as I returned home, I immediately went to my drawing board and sketched out six Disney characters. I utilized every spare moment I had to work on the paintings. I made the characters large and colorful. The paintings looked complete without frames, so that’s the way I presented them.
I brought all six paintings to work a couple of days before my last day at the hospital. The nursing supervisor was so excited. As she raved about them, she said, “I didn’t know you had such talent.”

She took all six paintings and had them framed. She then hung them in the hallway on the Pediatric wing. Wow! What a difference a frame can make. Everyone commented how the paintings really brightened up the Pediatric ward. The Lord used this to get me started painting again.

It never ceases to amaze me how God uses a situation to profoundly change our lives. It is like a small seed that is planted, and then sprouts into something magnificent. That seed can be a gift, a talent, or even an interest in something. Once that seed grows and bears fruit, there is no telling how far it will reach, and how many hearts will be touched bringing glory to God.

After seeing my paintings, one of the nurses asked me if I’d be interested in doing arts and crafts with patients in a nursing home. She worked part-time as a supervisor in the home. Surprisingly enough, the nursing home was within walking distance of our apartment. She explained that it would be volunteer work because they didn’t have enough money in the budget to pay a recreational or occupational therapist. I didn’t really have time to discuss the matter, so I told her that I would give her a call.

As soon as I got home, I discussed it with Joe. He said, “You know Peggy, you’re going to have more time now that you will be doing private duty. You may enjoy volunteering in the nursing home.” I then thought to myself, “Peggy, you love arts and crafts, and you adore the elderly. It’s a perfect match.”

I then lifted it up before the Lord. I sensed that He was giving me a green light. However, I proceeded with caution.
I called my co-worker and told her that I was interested. I also told her that I wanted to wait until I was assigned to a case and see what my schedule would be like. Up to this point, I had only made inquiries. I had not yet signed up with a nurse’s registry.

Also, before committing myself, I first wanted to see what the nursing home was like. I especially wanted to meet the patients that I would be working with. I asked my co-worker if I could visit the home while she was on duty. She agreed that it would be a good idea.

My mom and dad were coming down to visit us, so I took off two weeks in between jobs. I wanted to be home during their visit. I called my co-worker and scheduled a visit to the nursing home before my parents came. I planned the visit on a weekend so that Joe could go with me.

The nursing home was not at all what I had expected. It was a large old house. The walls were knocked out, opening up the rooms to make wards. The building itself was showing signs of deterioration. However, the patients appeared to be clean and well-cared for, but like many nursing homes, the stench of urinary incontinence filled the air.

Joe and I went around the ward greeting the patients. Most of them were elderly and sitting up in wheel chairs. Others who were bedridden had various health problems and medical needs. There were a few younger patients who were physically deformed and mentally-challenged.

There was such a melancholy mood that prevailed throughout the home. Our hearts went out to these people. Right then and there, we committed ourselves to try to make a difference. We asked the Lord to use us as His instruments to bring peace and joy to the home. Notice I said “we”. Yes, Joe also wanted to be a part of this ministry to the patients.
Before leaving, we asked if we would be restricted from sharing anything religious. I hesitated, not really wanting to hear her answer, thinking she’d say no. Much to our surprise, she told us that we had the liberty to do whatever we wanted. Oh, boy! On the way home, our minds started reeling with ideas. Joe said, “I can read the Bible to the patients.” I also suggested that we bring in a cassette tape recorder and play gospel music. We can even have a sing-a-long. I also thought of a few seasonal craft projects that we could do. We were getting more and more excited as we talked about it. Never once did I consider that this was just one more responsibility that Joe was piling up on his plate. At this point, I was too excited to think about it. Little did I know that this was the beginning of a ministry that God used to touch the hearts of the elderly not only in Atlanta, but also in New York many years later.
Chapter 19

“And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience…”

Colossians 3:12 (NASB)

The day had come for my mom and dad to arrive in Atlanta. I was so excited. I couldn’t wait for them to see how the Lord had blessed us with such a beautiful apartment. Looking back, I realize how we used to rave about our old dilapidated apartment in Brooklyn. When my parents saw it, they could not see what we were raving about. Now here we were in Atlanta, once again raving about this apartment. So you can just imagine what they were thinking. They probably thought that we raved about everything. They probably didn't know what to expect. That’s why I couldn’t wait for them to see it for themselves.

Since my mom and dad had been traveling by bus, I didn’t make any plans for the first day of their visit. I knew that they’d probably be exhausted. However, since they would only be spending one week with us, I tried to fit in as much as possible. In planning their itinerary, I put some of the more important sites on the top of the list, places that we felt they must see. Of course, Stone Mountain, Underground Atlanta, Martin Luther King’s home and grave site were on the top of the list. It was also an absolute must that they sample some of that “Good Ol’ Southern cuisine at one of Atlanta’s “down home” country restaurants.

Joe had classes all day, so I drove downtown to pick my mom and dad up at the bus station. After taking one look at them, I could see that they were exhausted, but it didn’t change
their response to me. They were so glad to see me. We stood there for a while in the bus station, hugging and kissing one another. Since we lived only minutes away from downtown, it didn’t take me long to drive back to the apartment.

When they walked through the front door, by the looks on their faces, I could see that they were overwhelmed by the beauty of our apartment. They were especially in awe over the panoramic view of downtown Atlanta from our balcony.

We were concerned about their comfort during their visit, so we gave them our bedroom which, if you remember, had a queen-size bed. We slept in the guest bedroom.

Joe came home and we had a wonderful reunion. However, the reunion was cut short because it was the night of Joe’s prison ministry. The next day was Friday, and I couldn’t wait for them to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit during our worship and Bible study. I also wanted them to meet the students.

We had such a wonderful visit, but the week flew by so quickly. Surprisingly enough, we were able to fit in all the sites that I wanted them to see. They were able to experience it all.

They were so impressed with Atlanta, with Joe’s teaching and with the response of the students. They went back to New York well assured of the fact that God had His hand firmly upon our lives.

After Mom and Dad left, I took off a few more days to regroup. I then signed up with a nursing registry. After checking my credentials and references, they assigned me to a case.

My biggest problem was that I had not yet familiarized myself with all the roads and highways. Finding my way around was one of my biggest challenges for months. As long as I wanted to work, the registry kept me busy. However, there were
times that I would turn cases down, when Joe and I wanted to go somewhere or do something special.

My cases varied. Sometimes, I was called to go to a private home, and other times I was called to go to a hospital to take care of a patient. Most of my hospital cases were post-operative patients. Whether they had complications or not, my job was to nurse them back to health after surgery. The patients that I cared for in their homes were most often diagnosed with either a chronic illness or a terminal disease.

Of all the patients that I took care of while doing private duty in Atlanta, there were two that remain foremost in my mind. I would like to tell you about them, especially since God used these experiences to work His perfect work in me.

The first of the two cases was quite disturbing and very frustrating. When the registry initially called me, they asked me if I would mind working the evening shift. Well, I didn’t particularly like the idea of getting home at eleven thirty or twelve midnight. Although, when they told me that it was more or less a babysitting job taking care of not one, but two elderly patients, I then gave it a second thought. It meant that I would be making twice as much money taking care of an elderly husband and his wife. The way it was explained to me it seemed like a piece of cake. All I had to do was to serve them their dinner, give them their medication, and get them ready for bed. I thought to myself, “How difficult could that be?”

What was so interesting is that the husband was the founder and owner of one of the largest chain of department stores in Atlanta. Believe me when I tell you, they were very very rich. They lived in a penthouse apartment in one of the richest areas of Atlanta. Being aware of some of the racial problems in the South, I was a little apprehensive and skeptical.
about this case. However, out of a financial need, I decided to take the job.

The couple had the same three nurses around the clock for years. One of the nurses was taking the week off. I would be filling in for her.

Without much difficulty, I found the building. It was a locked building and beautifully designed. The door man was expecting me, so I didn’t have any problem getting in. I took the elevator up to their penthouse apartment. With butterflies in my stomach, I rang the door bell. A middle-aged stout Black woman answered the door. She was dressed in a black uniform with a white apron. I assumed that she was the maid. I should have taken notice that she seemed quite surprised to see me. I came to my own conclusions when I saw her look of amazement. I assumed that she didn’t know that the regular nurse was taking a week off. I found out later, that I was wrong. She did know. She was just shocked that the registry sent a Black nurse.

I praised God for her openness. We were able to speak frankly and affirm one another. She explained that the husband was prejudice, but the wife was a real sweetheart. They had never had anything other than White nurses. I didn’t mind being the only Black nurse. After all, this wasn’t the first time that I had experienced a situation like this. My concern was that I didn’t want it to cause any problems.

I walked past the foyer after speaking with the maid. After taking only a quick glimpse of the apartment, I could see that it was the epitome of affluence and wealth. I was fascinated with their collection of antiques. I walked into the living room, and as my eyes quickly scanned the room, I saw the wife sitting there in an easy chair.

I introduced myself and explained that I would be replacing her regular nurse for a couple of days. She was
congenial, warm and friendly. After spending a few minutes with her, I then went into the bedroom to meet her husband.

I didn’t even get a chance to introduce myself before he was ordering me back into the kitchen, where he said I belonged. WOW! That was hard to swallow. I thought to myself, “How can I take care of this man when he thinks I belong in the kitchen.”

Well, dinner time came, and he allowed me to help him to the table. However, when I offered him his medicine, he asked, “Who are you?” I told him that I was a nurse. Before I could explain any further, he blurted out, “You’re not a nurse. Go back into the kitchen.” His wife tried to talk sense into him. However, he had a form of dementia, and there was no reasoning with him.

The real problem came when I tried to bathe him and get him ready for bed. He not only called me a “nigger”, but a little bit of everything else. This not only disturbed me, but also frustrated me. I called the registry and explained what was going on. They told me to just hang in there and to do whatever I could. In essence, they were not removing me from the case.

When the night nurse came in, I shared with her what had happened. She smiled, and said, “Don’t let it bother you. Just do what you can.” She suggested that I pour his evening medicine, and place it next to his dinner plate before he comes to the table. She said, “Perhaps he’ll take it, if it’s not associated with you giving it. If he doesn’t take it, then I’ll give it to him when I come in at night. As far as the bath is concerned, he gets bathed every morning. That will have to suffice. Take my word for it. I’ve been taking care of them for years.”

I followed her suggestion, and it worked. I watched him take his medicine. As long as I wasn’t giving it to him, he would take it. His wife was the complete opposite. She was so
delightful that she made coming to work a pleasure. We had such wonderful conversations about her life and travels. Despite my frustration, the Lord taught me how to be tolerant of another person’s ignorance and that I can’t always run away and hide. He also taught me patience and perseverance.

The other case that I wanted to tell you about was completely different. The Lord taught me an entirely different lesson in this case. He taught me how to demonstrate His love by going the extra mile. After having my previous experience, I was a little hesitant. I was sort of “gun shy” when I realized that I would once again have to go into the home of a Caucasian patient. At that point, I felt as though the hospital was a safer place to be. Despite this, the Lord was trying to show me that just because of one rotten apple, I shouldn’t cast aside the whole bushel.

The registry informed me that the patient was a thirty-eight year old woman, with an inoperable brain tumor. She was paralyzed on one side of her body and unable to speak. She was incontinent of both bladder and bowel. She required total care, meaning that she could not do anything for herself. She had to be bathed and fed. When she suddenly got worse, the doctor requested private-duty nurses.

I happened to be the first nurse on the case. What was so sad is that she had a ten-year old little boy. Her husband was a long-distance truck driver, which required him to be away quite a bit.

When I drove up to the house, I thought to myself, “If the outside looks this bad, I wonder what the inside looks like?” I knocked on the front door, and the husband answered. He was a barrel-bellied man and not very well groomed. He was wearing a sleeveless T-shirt and pajama bottoms. He was quite courteous and didn’t seem to have a problem with my color.
As I walked through the front door, I said to myself, “Oh my goodness!” The house was one large mass of clutter. There were dirty dishes piled up in the sink. The counter tops had pots, pans and dishes containing left-over food. It was my worst nightmare! The floors were filthy, and the foul odor in the air sickened me to my stomach. Mind you, this was going to be my working environment. Being the meticulous person that I am, the very sight and condition of this house sent me into a tailspin.

Through it all, the Lord ministered to me and gave me understanding. As the wife’s condition got worse, and the husband was on the road, the house became even worse. It could happen! After getting over my initial shock, I began to realize why the Lord sent me here. What a mission field! Right then and there, I committed myself to do whatever it would take to get the house in order. Just the same, my first responsibility was the patient.

During my first week on the job, I established a routine for myself. Each morning after the son went to school, and the husband off to work, I would feed and bathe my patient. Between breakfast and lunch, I tackled one room at a time, but only a portion of a room. It was too overwhelming to tackle the whole room, so my approach was to take on a portion at a time.

None of the other nurses had the burden that I did, so I couldn’t expect them to do more than patient care. However, as I cleaned the house, I expected them to help maintain it. I praise God that they were willing to do at least that much.

For lunch, I would get my patient out of bed and into her recliner. After lunch, I would let her rest while I did some more cleaning. Believe me when I tell you, it took me a month before the house started looking like something.

I was on the job about two months when the husband informed me that he would be going out on a long distance run.
It meant that he would be gone several days, so I would have to get the little guy off to school. Even though it was not part of my job description, I consented to do it because the Lord was calling me to go the extra mile. So, I changed my routine a bit. As soon as I arrived in the morning, I would first check my patient, and then make sure the little guy was up. I would quickly fix his breakfast, and while he was eating, I would fix his lunch.

As soon as I got him off to school, I fed and bathed my patient. After getting her dressed, I would do passive range of motion exercises and then let her rest. I did most of the house work while she was resting. This included washing the dishes, dusting and mopping the floors. By lunch time, I was ready to take a break. After feeding her, I would get her out of bed and into her recliner. Then, it was time for me to take a break and eat my lunch.

Most often, I utilized the afternoons to finish my chores. It was a perfect time to do the laundry. Before I knew it, it was time for the little guy to come home from school. After he changed his clothes, I would offer him a snack and help him with his homework. That pretty much completed my daily routine. The funny thing about it is that when you’re busy, you don’t realize that time is flying by. The days and months passed so quickly.

Things got a little complicated when the husband took in a live-in housekeeper and her daughter. She was an alcoholic. As time went on, her emotional problems became blatantly obvious. During this same time, my patient’s condition had worsened, and the husband was away more than he was at home. When my patient drifted into a semicomatose state, the doctor ordered a nasal gastric tube. It made it so much easier for me to feed her through the tube. However, at this point, she
required a lot more nursing care. In addition to what I was doing for her before, I now had to schedule in gastric-tube feedings. I also had to turn her every two hours, so that she wouldn’t develop pressure sores on the bony prominences of her body.

When the housekeeper came, I thought that I would be relieved of all of my housekeeping duties. However, the woman was so dysfunctional that I not only had to show her what to do, but I also had to help her. I found myself extremely frustrated. I wanted to ignite a little spark under her bottom. All she wanted to do was to sit around watching Soap Operas all afternoon. Dirty dishes were piling up in the sink, and the clutter was once again accumulating. Taking into consideration her emotional state, I tried to motivate her without condemning her. She was quite compliant and easy to work with.

I was able to share the Lord with her. However, because of her damaged emotions and her painful past, she was hesitant in making a commitment. To my surprise, I got a lot further with her little nine-year old daughter. She received Christ as her personal Savior. What was so wonderful is that her mom allowed her to spend the weekend with me. She also gave me permission to take her daughter to church.

When I brought her home, much too my surprise, the children in my apartment complex all stared at this beautiful blonde-haired little girl. It was a little embarrassing, but then it dawned on me. My goodness! In attending all Black schools, they hadn’t seen many White children up close. I could only imagine what she was experiencing spending the night in a Black person’s home in a totally Black community.

The weekend turned out exceptionally well. When it was time for me to take her home, she didn’t want to leave.

As time passed, my patient’s relatives came to visit from out of state. In conversing with them, I learned a lot. I found out
that my patient was raised in a Christian home. She had given her life to the Lord at an early age. I asked the family if it would be all right to read Scripture to her. They replied, “By all means.”

I explained to the relatives that hearing is the last sense to cease functioning. I told them, “Don’t be discouraged if she doesn’t respond, she hears you.” I encouraged them to speak to her. I also suggested that they read to her.

Within a matter of weeks, she slipped into a coma and died. My time there had come to an end. It was the longest time that I had ever been on any one case. I prayed that I had done all that the Lord desired me to do in demonstrating His love by going the extra mile.

I had even tried to share the Gospel with my patient’s son, but the little guy was always so distracted. He always seemed to have a hard time paying attention and listening to what I had to say. So, I prayed that God would continue to draw him into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
“Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.”

Matthew 22:9 (NASB)

In the sixth chapter and the ninth verse of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he admonishes us not to grow weary in doing good. In spite of this, our bodies sometimes grow weary while going the extra mile in our human frailty—and doing all that we feel the Lord is requiring of us.

With the last case that I was on, I began to grow weary. The combination of the nursing home ministry, cooking for the students, doing the housekeeping and patient care took its toll on me. I was exhausted. So after my patient’s death, I decided to take some time off, before taking on another case.

After taking a week off, I was assigned to another case. Only this time, my case was in the county hospital. The case was a routine post-operative cholecystectomy, which is a big fancy medical term for the surgical removal of the gall bladder.

The hospital was located in the heart of downtown Atlanta. I worked the evening shift, which was the only shift available to me at the time. Joe took me to work and picked me up at eleven o’clock because he didn’t particularly like the idea of me walking to my car alone late at night. The hospital’s location was not in the safest area of downtown Atlanta.

This one particular night, I was half an hour late. After giving the report to my relief nurse, we stood there in the hallway outside the patient’s room chatting. When I realized what time it was, and that Joe was outside waiting for me, I ran...
to the elevator as fast as I could. Like a flash, I dashed through the lobby and out the front door of the hospital. I immediately spotted Joe parked right in front of the hospital. He was standing outside leaning on the car. I humbly approached him apologizing for being so late. He assured me, “Sweetheart, it’s all right!”

While we were standing by our car in front of the hospital, a White man, who seemed to come out of nowhere, stumbled over to us. We could see that he was so intoxicated. He could hardly stand up. His breath and body reeked of alcohol. His left arm was amputated just above the elbow.

Now if I were to describe him, I would say that he typified what you would imagine a homeless person would look like. As he got close to us, he turned to Joe and asked him for a cigarette. Joe reached into his pocket and pulled out whatever change he had. Without even looking at it, he quickly handed it to the man, but the man handed it back to Joe, and said, “I want you to help me. I'm an alcoholic.”

Joe responded by saying, “The only person that can help you is Jesus Christ. You have to accept Him as your Savior, and commit your life to Him.”

Well, right there on the sidewalk in front of the hospital, the man grabbed Joe and me and cried like a baby. He said, “Please help me! Please pray with me. I don't even have a place to sleep tonight, and I'm hungry.” When we offered to bring him home to stay with us, he said, “No, I can't go home with you. I'm dirty. I haven't had a bath, and I can't impose.”

It didn't take much coaxing to persuade him to come home with us. Joe and I felt very strongly that the Lord was leading us to help this man. Otherwise, we would have never in our right mind have invited a total stranger into our home, that smelled as bad as this man did. I was reminded of Jesus words,
“It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”
(Mark 2:17 NASB)

Joe opened the car door and he stumbled into the back seat of our car. All the way home, I kept thinking, “What a stench!” At this point, I couldn’t determine which was worse the stale smell of alcohol or the body odor. All I knew was that the whole interior of the car was beginning to reek with a stench that would sicken anyone.

To initiate conversation, Joe asked, “What’s your name?” With slurred speech, he said, “Purvis.”

As we drove home, he cried the entire time. He asked us, “How did I find you good people? Why are you doing this for me?” Just as he uttered those last word, we pulled up into the parking lot of our apartment complex.

We helped him up the stairs. As soon as we got into the apartment, he said that he wanted all of us to get on our knees and pray that the Lord would touch his soul. Before praying, Joe shared the Gospel and explained that Jesus took all the punishment that he deserved upon Himself.

“He died in your place, so that you might have eternal life. Purvis, God has a marvelous plan for your life. All you have to do is surrender. Give Him complete control of your life. Repent, turn from the way you have been living and allow God to transform you.”

Without any hesitation, Purvis stumbled down onto his knees in our living room in front of the sofa.

What’s so amazing is that as I look back, I realize that our sofa became an altar to a countless number of people. We found ourselves kneeling down beside Purvis, just as we had done with so many others. We then prayed with Purvis as he invited Jesus into his life as his personal Savior. We also prayed
that he would be delivered from alcoholism. Then the most amazing thing happened. Purvis rose to his feet absolutely sober! At first, we couldn’t believe it. As we talked with him, we noticed that his speech was no longer slurred. There was an obvious physical difference. He was all aglow. He said, “I feel cleansed.” He also shared that he felt like a heavy burden was lifted from his shoulders. He then asked if he could use the bathroom.

We watched him walk into the bathroom without stumbling and as straight as an arrow. God had miraculously sobered him up, but the stench was still as strong as ever. Purvis had been drinking for so many years. He smelt as if the scent of alcohol was exuding through the pores of his skin.

We once again affirmed the invitation that we extended to him to spend the night. Just think about it. Isn't it totally inconceivable that we invited a stranger off the street to spend the night? It had to be the Lord or we were absolutely crazy!

We gave him a towel, wash cloth, a pair of Joe’s pajamas and a complete change of clothes. After he showered, we took his old clothes. We made every effort to seal in the odor by double bagging them in plastic bags. We then put them outside.

With all the excitement, I almost forgot that he told us he was hungry. I quickly heated up some food that I had in the refrigerator from the night before. However, realizing that the presentation of a meal makes all the difference in the world, I arranged the food in such a way that it looked like a platter fit for a king. We stayed up talking for a while, then prepared the bed for him in our guest bedroom. He was so appreciative of everything.

As soon as he went to bed, I took out my strongest room deodorizer and started spraying. Well, I sprayed and sprayed and
sprayed. I sprayed so much that Joe almost had an asthma attack. I created a whole new scent of stale alcohol and floral bouquet. Believe me, it wasn’t too pleasant.

We woke up the next morning praising God for what He had done. Purvis' face was still all aglow. He questioned us, “Where did we meet?” Evidently, he was so intoxicated that he didn't remember where he was when he met us. We tried to fill in the details with what little information we had. It seemed to satisfy his curiosity. Assuming that he was as hungry as we were, I prepared a big breakfast. I cooked eggs, bacon and biscuits. As Purvis devoured every morsel, I realized that my assumption was correct. He was as hungry as we were.

After breakfast, Joe told Purvis that he could stay with us until he got on his feet. He graciously thanked us, but declined Joe’s offer. He said that he had things to do. He asked Joe to drive him downtown.

After having our morning devotion together, Purvis hugged us both. Joe then drove him downtown. Before he left, we assured him that he was always welcome in our home.

When Joe returned home, he told me that as they were getting into the car, he found a Vodka bottle. It had evidently fallen out of Purvis' pocket the night before. When Joe showed Purvis the bottle, he said, “Get rid of it. Throw it away. I won't be needing it any more.” What was so marvelous is that Purvis would drop in every now and then, and he was always sober.

When he was hospitalized with pneumonia, we were the first to be called. We rushed over with toiletries and pajamas. He was so grateful and appreciative that we were there for him. We told him that God gets all the glory. We explained that if it wasn’t for Jesus in our lives, we wouldn’t be doing what we’re doing. I know that it is only through Christ Jesus that we are able to impart the love and mercy, that has been imparted to us.
Joe said, “Purvis, God’s Word clearly teaches that when we minister to your needs we are ministering to the Lord.”

In Matthew’s account of the Gospel, Jesus said, “‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink' And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’” (Matthew 25:35-40 NASB)
"And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon His name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His name is exalted."
Isaiah 12:4 (KJV)

With each passing day, the Lord confirmed in my heart that I was indeed walking in His perfect will in choosing to do private duty nursing at this time. It was awesome. I had begun to experience the presence of the Lord in such a profound way as He guided and directed me with each case. He would speak to my heart. As I obeyed His voice and followed His leading, the results were phenomenal.

To give you an example, I was assigned to a case in a private psychiatric hospital. Now I’m very much aware that the very thought of working in a psychiatric hospital would cause apprehension and fear in some people. With me, it was quite the opposite. I was very comfortable in that kind of setting. You see, I graduated from a New York State Hospital School of Nursing. At that time, all the state hospitals in New York were psychiatric institutions.

For the entire three years of my nurse's training, I lived in the student dormitories, which were on the grounds of the state hospital. Those patients, who could be trusted and were not locked up behind bars or on locked wards, used to clean our bedrooms. They also served us our meals in the cafeteria. By the time I reached my senior year, I had grown so accustomed to being around psychiatric patients day in and day out.
As a student, I had no difficulty at all in acclimating to the psychiatric rotation schedule. As part of our rotation, we were required to work with severely disturbed patients. It never phased me in the least whenever I had to work on a locked ward even with the criminally insane. As a matter of fact, after graduation, I worked as a psychiatric nurse in the state hospital for several years.

Now for the first time in years, I would once again be working in a psychiatric setting. The only difference was that the interior décor of a private hospital is so much more pleasant than that of a state hospital. I was a little nervous, but not because I hadn't worked in psychiatry in a while. I was nervous about this being a first time experience. It was my first time working in this hospital, and my first time with this patient.

The patient, to whom I had been assigned, was a fifty-five year old woman who was admitted to the hospital for a drug overdose with a history of alcoholism. When I signed on the case, my patient's condition was quite stable, requiring minimal nursing care. However, in reading her medical report, I found out that she was first admitted to a general hospital in critical condition. As her condition improved, she was then transferred to the drug and alcohol detoxification unit of this private psychiatric hospital.

I could definitely see that the Lord had his hand upon this woman's life. The toxic effects from a drug overdose are often damaging to the brain. In this case, the Lord was merciful. Her brain functions were all normal.

My patient was ambulatory and able to care of her own personal needs. My only responsibility was to give her medication and to supervise her care. Since she was on suicide precautions, I made it a point not to leave her alone for any length of time.
It was only my second day on the case. After my patient had finished her lunch, I was prompted to check her vital signs, blood pressure, pulse and respirations. Mind you, at the time, I didn't know if this was the prompting of the Lord or just a thought that popped into my head. It puzzled me because my patient didn't appear to be in any difficulty, nor was it time to check her vital signs. I followed my inclination just the same and checked her blood pressure, pulse and respirations.

It never ceases to amaze me how the Lord sometimes speaks to us by impressing a thought upon our minds. At the time, we may not even realize that it is Him until we act upon it. Then when we see the results, it only confirms that it is Him. Only an omniscient, omnipotent, infinitely wise God could orchestrate every detail and work out such a Divine plan. What's so awesome about it is that He uses us finite human beings to accomplish and fulfill His infinite plan and purpose.

As I stood there at my patient's bedside with the blood pressure cuff and stethoscope in my hand, she looked at me with a raised eyebrow as if to say, "It's not time to take my blood pressure. Why are you taking it?" Convinced that I was reading her inquisitive expression correctly, I chimed in with an explanation. I told her that, "We can never be too careful. I just want to check your vital signs to make sure everything is all right."

She was quite compliant. I took her blood pressure first. It was significantly low, which concerned me. I then took her pulse, which was weak and irregular. Her skin was a little cool, but her color was good.

I didn't understand it, but I felt prompted to call the doctor. Since she had no other symptoms, I could have waited to observe her for a few more minutes, but I didn't. I immediately called the attending physician, who was also the chief of staff.
To my amazement, he was in the building. I was also surprised that he responded so quickly to my call.

By the time he arrived in my patient's room, she was already showing the beginning signs of a myocardial infarction, which is the fancy medical term for a heart attack. She began to complain of a crushing heavy weight-like chest pain while the doctor was examining her. At this point, her breathing appeared to be slightly labored, and she complained of nausea. However, before I could even reach for a basin, she began to vomit. The doctor and I, both noticed that she was beginning to sweat profusely. When I touched her skin, it was cold and clammy. After taking her vital signs, the doctor called for the emergency medical crash cart. I stood aside as the medical team rushed in to assist the doctor. He immediately started an IV and began to administer medication intravenously.

It was an awesome experience. Of course, God knew what was happening to my patient's body. What was so amazing is that He alerted me, prior to any visible signs or symptoms. Even the doctor was in awe. He praised me for my astute observations. He said, "You are an excellent nurse."

I couldn't keep silent, nor could I accept the praise that belonged to God. So I said, "Thank you, but it wasn't me. The Lord alerted me before she showed any visible signs or symptoms. All the glory goes to Jesus."

Well, he looked at me kind of strange, as if to say, "Whatever." He then said, "I'm glad that we caught this in the beginning, thanks to you." He didn't get it! If he did, he would be thanking God, not me.

This was one of many incidences in which the Lord guided and directed me in the care of my patient. There were times that He would warn me of a potential medication error. Other times He would give me instant recall of a medical fact,
which I had forgotten that was vital in sustaining the life of my patient. Upon several occasions, the Lord gave me insight and showed me how to approach difficult patients to bring about a desired result. He gave me a heightened awareness of my patient's unspoken needs. He also gave me insightful ways to meet those needs. It didn't take me long to realize that Jesus not only made a difference in my life, He also made a difference in my nursing career. I went from being a mediocre nurse to one that was sought after.

This particular doctor was so impressed with my work that he offered me a job on staff at the hospital. He not only told me what a good nurse I was, he also told the entire staff of doctors and nurses. The nurses started asking me, "What did you do, that impressed him so much?" They informed me that this particular doctor was a very critical and a strict administrator. He never gives a compliment unless it's well deserved.

Of course, I realized that this was a perfect opportunity to lift up Jesus. Several of the nurses gathered around me waiting for an answer. I realized that they were most likely expecting a different answer than the one I was about to give. I paused a little while, giving thought to what I was going to say. I then told them that, “All the glory goes to God. He alerted me before my patient manifested any signs or symptoms of a heart attack. I merely followed the Lord's leading and called the doctor. The rest is history.”

Wouldn't you know, as soon as I mentioned God, I got these strange looks, looks of disbelief. Everyone was silent, but one nurse spoke up and said, “So that's it?” I responded and said, “Yes, that's it!”

Upon leaving work that day, I realized that God allowed me to be praised in this situation that I might glorify Him. While driving home from work, I couldn't stop praising the Lord. As I
thought through the events of the day, I realized that I had learned another invaluable lesson from this experience: it is always better to step out in faith. When you feel prompted to do something that won't bring harm to yourself or others and will ultimately glorify God, you should respond in obedience. Mind you, we may not understand why God is requesting us to respond in a certain way. But didn't Solomon, the wisest man in the world, advise us to, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding,” (Proverbs 3:5 NASB)?

I also learned that when we humble ourselves before the Lord, He will exalt us. In Matthew 23:12, Jesus said, “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.” This same message is communicated to us through James, the brother of Jesus. In the fourth chapter and the tenth verse of his epistle, James commands us to “Humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift us up.” (KJV) Peter also commands us, in the fifth chapter and sixth verse of his first epistle, to “Humble ourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt us in due time.” (KJV)

It is such a blessing to look at these last two passages in James and First Peter in the original language. In both epistles, the Greek word which is translated "humble" is not only a command, but it is also in the passive voice. This means that the subject is the recipient of the action. In other words, we are being humbled. Our responsibility is to surrender and submit to God, then He will humble and exalt us.

You see why it's important to search out the original languages. Now don't panic. You don't necessarily have to learn these languages. With the programs that are now available on computer, anyone can do scholarly Biblical research.
There was one other private duty case in which the Lord demonstrated to me that He is truly trustworthy. I walked away from this experience realizing how incapable I was. The Lord not only strengthened me, but also enabled me to accomplish an overwhelming task.

In the past, the nursing registry had always assigned me to one patient. That is, with the exception of the one time that I was called upon to care for the husband and wife. Now, this was another unusual assignment for me. I was called upon to fill the position of head nurse of a surgical floor for one night on the 11PM-to-7AM shift in a private general hospital. I desperately needed the money and thought to myself, “How difficult could it be?” After all, from twelve midnight to six in the morning, most of the patients are sleeping. At least that's what I thought!

Realizing that I would be out on the roads at such a late hour of the night, Joe insisted on taking me to work. Without giving it a second thought, I welcomed the thought of being chauffeured, especially since I was totally unfamiliar with the area of Atlanta in which the hospital was located.

On the way to the hospital, my nervousness manifested itself in non-stop chatter. My stomach felt like a volcano was about to erupt. I was quite nervous about taking charge of a floor in a hospital that I had never been in before.

The responsibility frightened me, but I kept telling myself, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” However, after quoting this scripture several times, I still wasn't completely convinced that I could do this, but I was determined to give it a try. I was comforted by the fact that I would have the assistance of a practical nurse, who knew the patients and the floor.
I arrived at the hospital and reported to my assigned floor half an hour early. I wanted to familiarize myself with the floor and to meet the staff as they arrived. As soon as I introduced myself to the evening charge nurse, she informed me that the practical nurse, who was supposed to be working with me, called in sick. I thought to myself, “Oh, no! Not this night of all nights.”

Just as I started to panic, the Lord filled me with an overwhelming sense of peace. Of course, the devil immediately tried to rob that peace when I heard the evening charge nurse say to me, “You can't do this. You must have more help.”

Needless to say, I found her statements to be quite intimidating. I assumed that she knew what she was talking about. After all, as a full-time charge nurse on this floor, she was certainly more familiar than I was with the patients and the care that they required.

After uttering those two statements, she proceeded to pick up the phone to call the nursing supervisor. As I was standing right beside her in the nurse’s station, I heard her explain my situation and plead my case. Much to my dismay, on this particular night, the hospital was extremely short of staff. The supervisor apologized for not being able to send me any help.

This reminded me of when God called Gideon to deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. In the seventh chapter of Judges, we see how God reduced Gideon's army from 22,000 to only 300 men. By reducing the army to 300 men, God alone would receive the glory. Having to face an army as numerous as locusts, Israel couldn't boast that their own power had delivered them. In Isaiah 42:8, God declares, “I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.”
With only a few minutes to spare before my shift began, I sat down at the desk in the nurses’ station preparing myself to receive the report from the evening charge nurse. When I was told that I would only have two nursing assistants and myself, I realized that, like Gideon, I was facing overwhelming circumstances. Just as Gideon’s army was reduced, my staff was also reduced, so that God would receive all the glory.

This was one of those situations which called for ever increasing faith. The way I saw it, I had no other option, but to put my faith and trust in God’s faithfulness. It taught me in a very real way that God was to be my ever present help in time of trouble. He wanted me to know that He could enable me to do the seemingly impossible.

As I recall, many of the lessons that Joe and I learned on our spiritual journey were learned as we stepped out in faith, accepting the challenges that the Lord led us to. Just think about it. If you stay in the boat, you’ll never know if God is going to enable you to walk on the water. First of all, you must know that it is God who is calling you, then be certain of what He is calling you to do. If you’re not sure, don’t move until you have heard from Him. Now, He may not explain His reasons, nor give us answers to the multitude of questions we may have. That’s where our faith comes in. Once we have heard His voice, we must respond in obedience. If necessary, seek the counsel of a mature brother or sister in the Lord. God being the omnipotent God that He is, He knows your every thought and the intentions of your heart. He often confirms His word to you, and sometimes in a way that we least expect, but He never speaks, nor leads us contrary to His Word (the Bible).

I sat there stunned as the charge nurse gave the report on each patient, their diagnosis, nursing care plan and treatment. As I sat their listening, I was confronted with a harsh reality. I was
the only licensed professional on the floor that night, which meant that I had the sole responsibility of keeping track of all the IVs, medications and treatments. What made matters worse was that I had ten patients scheduled for surgery in the morning, and out of that ten, five were scheduled for eye surgery.

It was my responsibility to check the operating room schedule to see when to pre-medicate those who were going to surgery. In addition to giving all the pre-operative injections, I also had to administer eye drops every fifteen minutes to dilate the pupils of each of the patients scheduled for eye surgery, not to mention all my other duties. I had IVs, vital signs and dressings to check on all the post-operative patients on the floor.

I can just imagine how fearful Gideon must have been knowing that he would have to face the Midianites, the Amalekites and all the sons of the east which were as numerous as locust and as the sand on the seashore. But, God spoke to Gideon and told him that when he goes down to their camp that he would be strengthened.

Like Gideon, I too was strengthened to meet the challenge that I was facing. God is truly awesome. He gave me such peace. I committed my work to Him and rested in the assurance that He had everything under control. I had no idea how I was going to get through the night, but there was one thing that I was sure of. I didn’t have to go through it alone. God never promised that we wouldn’t have difficulties in this life, but He did promise to give us a peace that surpasses all understanding, strength for each day and light along the way.

I got through the night, but the morning was the busiest morning that I had ever experienced. As soon as I finished putting drops in the eyes of all five patients, the fifteen minutes were up, and it was time to start all over again. When the charge nurse for the day shift came in, I was literally running from one
end of the hall to the other. She stood there in awe when I explained that I was sent by the nursing registry, and I was the only nurse on duty. She said, “I don’t know how you did it!”

I told her that God gets all the glory, because I couldn’t have done it without Him. She sat there shaking her head in disbelief as I gave her the report on each patient. Let me tell you, I walked away from this experience realizing how incapable I was, and how the Lord not only strengthened me, but also enabled me to accomplish an overwhelming task.
Chapter 22

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”.

Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)

Have you ever been on a train or bus that seemed to be traveling so fast you could barely identify the details in the scenery and the buildings just seemed to whiz by? Well, time seemed to be passing just that fast. Very much like those buildings, the minutes, hours, days and months were passing so quickly. However, my involvement in ministry was increasing at a much slower pace in comparison to how time was whizzing by. As a matter of fact, my involvement in ministry was such a gradual process that I never realized how much I was undertaking. I would so often look at Joe with amazement seeing how much he was handling. He never stopped to think about how much he was piling up on his plate. Now here I was, doing the very same thing, but truthfully speaking, I enjoyed every minute of it.

Next to our ministry to the students, my prison correspondence was my favorite ministry. To think, it initially began with my letters to Emory, while he was in prison. Little did I know that my correspondence to prisoners would continue. It spanned over decades as Joe’s involvement in prison ministry continued, not only in Atlanta, but also in California and New York. I was always in awe to see how God was using my letters to disciple and encourage those inmates who had responded to
the Gospel and made a profession of faith during Joe’s weekly visits.

As my involvement in ministry increased, I was able to adapt my work schedule accordingly. That’s what I liked most about private-duty nursing. It gave me the flexibility and the liberty to work whenever I wanted to. I worked week days with weekends off. However, there were some exceptions. Whenever we needed a little extra money, I would work an extra weekend or two.

During our entire stay in Atlanta, Friday night was always the designated night for Bible study. It was the one night in the week that Joe and I stayed up late. The students who lingered around after Bible study fellowshipping with one another would not leave until twelve or one o’clock in the morning. Most of the time we didn’t mind, but there were those times that Joe had to literally throw the students out. They just didn’t know when to go home. As our lives were getting busier and busier, we looked forward to the weekends and especially Saturday mornings when we could sleep in.

On this one particular Saturday morning, I was awakened out of a deep sleep by the sound of Joe’s voice calling my name. I was so sleepy I could barely open my eyes. I squinted to see the clock. Quickly glancing at the little hand, I nearly had a fit. It was only six o’clock in the morning. I thought to myself, “This better be good! Why is he waking me up at this hour?”

I then mustered up enough energy to raise myself up out of bed. Trying very hard not to have an attitude, I inquisitively asked, “What happened?”

Joe proceeded to tell me that the Lord woke him up and impressed upon his heart to give Barbara one dollar. If you remember, she was the dancer that was miraculously healed.
There wasn’t much that I could say. How can you challenge someone who claims to have heard from God, unless it’s contrary to what God has already spoken in His written Word? There is the possibility that the person did in fact hear from God, but what if it wasn’t God’s voice that he heard?

If God is not speaking to us, what we hear can be one of two voices. The most familiar voice is our own which comes from a reservoir of thoughts and feelings from within us. The other voice is that of our arch enemy, the devil. He is the most deceptive of all. Scripture tells us that he speaks from his own nature. He is a liar, and the father of lies (John 8:44). He is also cunning. What is sometimes so confusing is that when either God or the devil speaks to us, it sometimes sounds like our own voice. If such is the case, let the Scripture be your measuring rod to discern the Truth. There is one thing we can be sure of. God is not a God of confusion, (1 Corinthians 14:33). We must also keep in mind what Jesus said, in His parable of the Good Shepherd, “The sheep follow him because they know his voice. And a stranger they simply will not follow.” (John 10:4, 5.

At this point, I wasn’t sure of what Joe heard, so I decided to wait and see what the outcome would be. Meanwhile, I suggested to Joe that he call Barbara. “The worst thing that could happen is that she’ll scream at you for calling her so early.”

As Joe proceeded to make the phone call, a thought came to my mind. “If God calls us to do something, it will bring Him honor and glory.”

Now to tell you the truth, this whole situation was quite perplexing to me. I was at a loss. There was no logical conclusion that I could draw from it. Just as I began to question, “How is this going to bring honor and glory to Jesus?”, another scripture came to mind. I felt as though God was speaking to me
the very same words that He spoke to the prophet Isaiah, when
He said, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are
your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are
higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways,
and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8, 9 KJV)

Anxiously anticipating what Barbara’s response would
be, I stood there fidgeting nervously while Joe made the phone
call. Oddly enough, Barbara was up early. Just as I had
expected, she did scream. But much to my surprise, her scream
was with exhilaration, and not displeasure. From where I was
standing, I could hear the resounding joy and excitement in her
voice, as Joe explained why he was calling. The reverberating
sound of her voice, as she started praising the Lord, was so loud
it was almost deafening. Then I heard her say that she would be
right over. Before even hearing any of the details, I could sense
that this was a “God-glorifying moment”.

The distance between Barbara’s house and our apartment
was a little more than a “hop skip and a jump” away. However,
since there was very little traffic on the roads that early in the
morning, Barbara was able to make it over to our place in less
than twenty minutes.

I was in awe, as I heard Barbara explain why she needed
the dollar. She wanted to send a Bible to her friend Chris, who
was signing herself back into the hospital.

Chris was suffering from clinical depression, and
Barbara wanted to get a Bible into her hands before she went to
the hospital. Barbara had already purchased the Bible, but she
didn’t have enough money to mail it to Tennessee, where Chris
lived. Only God knew how important the timing was. The Bible
had to be mailed out that same day, so that Chris would receive
it before she was hospitalized and the dollar from Joe was just
what she needed.
It never ceases to amaze me how God chooses to use us finite mortal human beings to fulfill His Divine plan and purpose. All we have to do is to respond in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Throughout this book, you will hear me say that “delayed obedience is disobedience”. It’s a lesson that I learned, early in my Christian walk. In the medical field, I saw how timing was so important. A delayed response to a critical emergency could cost someone their life.

Have you ever thought about God’s Divine appointments? He works out a perfect plan to cross the paths of two or more individuals at a particular time and place. Have you ever thought of what would happen if God led you to be at a particular place, at a particular time to meet someone, but for some reason you didn’t show up only to find out that you would have been the last witness to that individual before a fatal accident took their life?

If you sense that God is calling you to go someplace or to do something, it is far better to step out in faith than to disobey, and be sorry. God may not be calling you to accomplish an extraordinary task, like going to the Amazon jungle to be a member of a Bible-translating team. But, He may be calling you to make a phone call to someone who is sick and shut in. He may even be calling you to send a note of encouragement to a brother or sister who’s going through a difficult time. Whatever God is calling you to do, be obedient! Oswald Chambers once said that “Intellectual darkness comes through ignorance. Spiritual darkness comes because of something we don’t intend to obey.”

The Bible arrived just in time so that Chris could take it to the hospital with her. Unlike this case, we don’t often get to see how crucial our obedience is. Sometimes, we get to see right away, but then there are also those times that we never get to see
how God has used us. In those times, we just have to trust Him, realizing that in whatever we do, if we do it to glorify Him, He will use it.

Can you imagine how excited we were to find out that Chris not only took the Bible to the hospital with her, but she read it every day? To this day, Chris still testifies how the Word of God ministered to her. It began to heal her wounded spirit and damaged emotions. The most renown and medically-acclaimed psychiatrists never could have done what God did. “The things impossible with men are possible with God.” (Luke 18:27)

When Chris was discharged from the hospital, she came to Atlanta. Without our knowing it, she visited our Bible study one Friday night. We had never met Chris, so it was impossible for us to know who she was, especially since we had so many new students visiting each week. We didn’t find out until a week later when Barbara called, informing us of Chris’ visit.

We were quite disappointed that we missed her. We had been diligently lifting her up in prayer from the very day that Barbara mailed the Bible to her. We were only involved in a small way in mailing the Bible. The thought of ever meeting her had never really entered my mind. I began to get excited. I couldn’t wait for Friday night to come hoping that Chris would come back again.

After a very busy week, Friday night had finally rolled around. My heart was filled with excitement. With great expectations of what the Lord was going to do, I eagerly waited for the students to arrive. Those who regularly attended the Bible studies, all knew that we kept the door unlocked on Friday nights during the Bible study. As I went to unlock the door for the first students to arrive, excitement welled up within me
when I heard a knock. I thought to myself, “Could it be Chris?” No, as soon as I opened the door I could see, it wasn’t her.

Not deviating from our regular routine, we first served dinner. As it was getting close to the time for Bible study to start, we urged the students to quickly finish eating. Just as we were mingling and talking with some of the students, a young girl walked through the door. A face that was unfamiliar. Could this be Chris?

The Bible studies had been meeting for several months, and by now, we had implemented a practice of greeting each person with a hug who crossed over our threshold. After hugging the young girl, I inquisitively asked, “Are you Chris?”

She was very meek and soft spoken. As soon as she uttered the word yes, I grabbed her a second time and gave her the biggest hug. Without thinking I blurted out, “You’re the one we’ve been praying for.”

As I took a second look at her, my heart sunk. I had never seen such gloom hovering over an individual as I did that day that I met Chris. One needed only to look into her eyes to see that she was emotionally battered and scarred. She told us that she had been searching for God. That night, God not only spoke to her, but He touched her, and she experienced His love in a profound way. God also spoke to us very clearly that night. He told us, “Just love Chris. Don’t pry, and don’t try to fix anything. Just love her.” Well, that seemed easy enough.

Chris was a precious and easy to love individual. Since loving her was our only assignment from God, we sought ways to demonstrate His love towards her. As she began to open up to us, we found out that, two weeks prior to receiving the Bible in the mail, Chris had completely given up. As a single parent with a one-year old daughter, Chris felt as though she was failing at
being a mother. In the depths of depression, she tried to take her life. She was hospitalized and treated for clinical depression.

Shortly after her release, Chris slipped back into depression. She then voluntarily readmitted herself into the hospital. However, this hospitalization was different. She received the Bible just before being hospitalized. Even though she didn’t know very much about the Bible, she read it and it was helping her. She read Psalm 40 over and over.

While in the hospital, they kept asking her what she was going to do when she got out. She kept telling them, “I’m going to find God.”

After her release she came to Atlanta, which was a familiar place to her. She was a graduate of Spellman College.

Chris felt like a failure as a mother, so she left her baby with family in Tennessee and came to Atlanta. However, after coming to Bible study a few times, she began to feel guilty about leaving her daughter, so she returned home to get her.

I’ll never forget the night that Chris brought her daughter to Bible study. The child had a congenital deformity. She had an internally rotated hip causing the foot to be turned inward. In speaking with Chris, we learned that the doctors suggested a brace to straighten the leg, and if that didn’t work, surgery was the next option.

Joe asked Chris if he could pray for the child. She agreed. Every eye in the room was focused on this precious child as Joe took her into his arms and prayed for her. It was an awesome experience for all of us as we watched that child’s leg straighten right before our eyes! We realized that we were witnessing a miracle. We all started praising and glorifying God. Some of us cried, some screamed and some dropped to their knees, but we all realized that we were in the presence of Almighty God.
Chapter 23

“...For it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak, for it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”
Matthew 10:19, 20 (NASB)

Having seen the miraculous and awesome power of God at work in our midst, our faith began to soar and rise to new heights. We now approached the new challenges in our lives with an entirely different attitude. There was a popular phrase during that time, which became our motto: “God said it, we believe it, and that settles it.” As we were learning about God’s power to heal the sick, we were also learning about His sovereignty.

There were fundamental principles that became fixed in our minds from the very beginning. We learned that Jesus is the Master, He is the King of kings and Sovereign Lord, which means He can do what He wants, when He wants, and for whom He wants. In understanding His sovereignty, I could never make demands of God as some do. Of course, I do make my petitions known to Him, but I leave it there, trusting that His will shall be fulfilled in and through my life as I continue to walk in obedience.

We had been living in Atlanta a little over a year when we returned to New York to attend Joe’s sister’s wedding. At the wedding we met a friend of Joe’s mom, whose name was Beatrice. Little did we know that this was a “Divine Connection” that would initiate a series of events that would confirm God’s calling upon Joe’s life.
Beatrice lived in Manhattan. When she found out that we were living in Atlanta, she told us that she was from Tate, Georgia. Her parents were still living there.

She invited us to Homecoming at her parents’ church. In briefly speaking with her, we found out that this was an annual event. It was a reunion for many who had grown up in Tate, and as adults, moved away to other parts of the country.

Beatrice proceeded to tell us what to expect if we came. The day’s events would begin with Sunday morning service and end with a covered dish or carry in meal. She subtly dropped us the hint that she would be attending. She tried her best to convince us to come. She wanted us to meet her family. We had no idea what was on our calendar for that particular Sunday, so we didn’t make any promises.

We really didn’t think much about it until the day before the event. We received a phone call from Beatrice. She had just arrived in Tate. Once again, she invited us to the Homecoming. We felt privileged to be invited, so we accepted her invitation. Beatrice then gave us directions to the church.

That next morning, we woke up early excited about how our day would unfold. Before this, we had never heard of Tate, Georgia and had no idea where it was. Come to find out, Tate is a very small town, known years ago for its marble mines. It was about an hour’s drive north of Atlanta.

Our drive to Tate was quite enjoyable. It took us through the scenic hills of north Georgia. After leaving the main highway, we ended up on roads which led us to what appeared to be the middle of nowhere. We were certainly in the country.

Beatrice’s directions were excellent. Without any difficulty, we found the church. It was a small, old country Baptist church, which looked like it had been standing since the Civil War. As we walked into the church, Beatrice spotted us
and immediately came over to greet us. With a grin from ear to ear, she exclaimed, “I’m so glad that you made it.”

Since we were early and service hadn’t started yet, Beatrice took us around to meet her parents, a cousin and some friends. They were very humble, and not at all pretentious.

It was a Black congregation, which wasn’t surprising. I remembered that we were in the South. When you get this far outside of the city of Atlanta, you most likely wouldn’t find integrated congregations, especially back then. The people in the congregation were all very friendly. They welcomed us with open arms. This was a special event, and the church was packed.

After a good old-fashion foot-stomping time of worship, a former Tate resident preached a soul-stirring sermon. Then everybody and his brother had a chance to say something. Joe even got up and said a few words, which was a bit of a shock to me. In listening to the testimonies and comments, many were reminiscent of their childhood growing up in the church. I could see that the life of the community had always centered around the church. In fact, there was no community life apart from the church. We were there for hours listening to everyone share.

The banquet, which followed made it worth the wait. There’s nothing like good, old-fashioned Southern home cooking. We had candied yams, collard green, green beans, turnip greens, butter beans, baked macaroni and cheese, mashed potatoes, potato salad, cornbread, biscuits, stuffing, turkey, ham and the best fried chicken we had ever tasted. They had every kind of desert imaginable from pecan pie, sweet potato pie and lemon meringue pie to peach cobbler and banana pudding, only to name a few. As far as the South is concerned, you can always find sweet tea on the beverage menu. And they pronounce it, “sway-eet tay” with a southern drawl. Then of course, there was lemonade and pop (which is what us northerners call soda).
Nothing fancy, but everything was absolutely DE-LICIOUS! We ate so much we could hardly move from our seats.

In talking with Beatrice, we found out more about the history of Tate. All the property in Tate was owned by the Tate family and the Georgia Marble Company (all Caucasians). She told us that Blacks were not allowed to ever buy or own property. The Tate family also owned all the church buildings. However, the various denominations were allowed to use the buildings free of charge. There were ongoing racial issues that surfaced occasionally.

The little Baptist church that we were in had received a bomb threat a few months prior. The local authorities stationed a sheriff in his car at the entrance of the parking lot to guard the church. Despite the threat to blow up the church, nothing happened.

Beatrice didn’t know how it all started, but she heard that it involved a Black man who was dating a white girl. He used to take her to the little church after everyone had gone home. No one really knew how he got into the locked church, nor what he did after he got in. Just the same, the white town folks were quite disturbed by this. No one knows who made the threat, but it certainly caused havoc and racial tension. Several of the White and Black citizens of Tate had a shoot out, leaving a couple of people seriously injured. To be honest with you, this disturbing bit of information almost put a damper on the wonderful time I was having. However, all in all, it was a good day, but it was getting late.

Realizing that we had a long drive back to Atlanta, we started making our rounds, saying our good-byes to everyone. We were just about to leave the church when the Pastor approached Joe, asking him if he would come back to preach on Youth Sunday. Mind you, up to this point, the Pastor was
surrounded by so many visitors that we hadn’t had a chance to say as much as two words to him. So needless to say, we were in a state of shock. This was so surprising and quite unexpected. How did he know that Joe had a calling upon his life to be a minister?

I thought to myself, either Beatrice told him, what little she knew about Joe, or the Pastor had heard from God. We found out that the latter was true. When Joe made those few brief comments during the service, the Lord prompted the Pastor to ask Joe to preach. Sensing God’s leading, Joe accepted the invitation. Mind you, this would be Joe’s very first time preaching in the pulpit of a church.

The Pastor, Rev. Davie never asked Joe a single question until the day before he was scheduled to preach. He called us to get some background information, so that he could include it in his introduction of Joe. It was then, that Rev. Davie found out Joe’s church affiliation growing up. However, he had no idea that this was Joe’s first sermon. Of course, Joe told him, but it never really registered.

We both woke up early that morning with excitement, anxiously anticipating what God might do and how He was going to use Joe. Joe spent the week in prayer and in God’s Word. However, when I questioned him about his message, his response caused me to be alarmed. Joe told me that he purposely didn’t prepare a sermon because he wanted to depend totally upon the Holy Spirit.

Well, I knew very little about sermon preparation, but somehow, his answer didn’t sit right with me. In my limited understanding, I thought that your total dependence upon the Holy Spirit was a continuous process. The process would include your study, your preparation and your delivery of the
message. But Joe’s head had always been harder than a flint stone, and once his mind was set, there was no changing him.

We left Atlanta in the early morning to get to church on time. The trip took us a little over an hour. We both spent the entire time praying. As we approached Tate, we were greeted by the beauty of its rolling green hills and the mountains which surrounded the little town. We arrived at the church early. There was only one other car in the parking lot, which most likely was the Pastor’s car. As soon as we entered the church, Rev. Davie met us at the door and greeted us with a big hug.

Now, up until ten minutes before he was suppose to preach, Joe had no idea what he was going to preach about. He was truly depending totally upon the Holy Spirit. Let me tell you, God was faithful. As Scripture says, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He can not deny Himself.” (2 Timothy 2:13) Just before the service started, the Pastor asked Joe if he would like to go into his office alone to pray. God knows our heart’s desire. He knew that Joe was eagerly waiting for the opportunity to be alone with Him before he had to preach.

Joe entered the Pastor’s office, and as soon as he closed the door, he fell to his knees. He began to fervently seek the Lord. For a split second, his eye fell upon a thin cardboard paper fan with the picture of Jesus on the front, standing at a door knocking. Below the picture was the Scripture from Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him.” When Joe came out of the office, I could see that his face was all aglow. When I asked him what happened, he said that the Lord gave him a verse.

Joe preached for two hours straight, starting with that one verse. Not once did he repeat himself. In closing the service, the Pastor summed up the sermon and gave an altar call. The
response of the congregation was overwhelming. After the service, several of the Sunday school teachers came up to Joe with amazement. They said that Joe’s message was the same as the theme for Vacation Bible School. He actually summed up what they were teaching all week. Unbelievable!

This was Joe’s first sermon, long before seminary and long before he learned all of those “ologies”: eschatology, soteriology, ecclesiology, etc., etc., etc. Joe depended upon the Holy Spirit, and as I said before, God was faithful. Doesn’t God’s word tell us that those who put their trust in Him, will not be ashamed? “...For it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak, for it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.” (Matthew 10:19, 20 NASB)

As the months passed, we frequently drove up to Tate to visit Beatrice’s family and the members of that little Baptist Church. Just think, it was through God’s Divine Connection that these precious people of Tate, Georgia were brought into our lives. Pastor Davie was especially dear to us. When we first met him, we assumed that he lived in Tate. Come to find out, he lived in Atlanta and not too far from us.

It didn’t take long before he became our closest friend and advisor. He adopted us as his “spiritual children”. One day, he told us the story of how he always thought that he would be getting married. He asked the Lord to send him a wife and children. As the years passed and God hadn’t sent him a wife or children, he then asked the Lord to send spiritual children. So now that he was approaching his fifties, he felt as though the Lord had really answered his prayers in bringing us into his life.

Pastor Davie became endearingly known to us as “Papa” Davie. He was always there for us with an understanding ear and sound biblical counsel. It was our relationship with Papa Davie that started the healing process in Joe. God used Papa
Davie’s Christ-like example to replace Joe’s shattered image of a man of God. That shattered and faulty image was imprinted on Joe’s mind in his youth by his Pastor.

Not until we were older in the Lord did we realize to what magnitude Papa Davie had impacted our lives. He was a minister whose life was totally devoted to the Lord. His uncompromising and unwavering faith made him a pillar in the church. He was gentle and sensitive to the needs of others. He also had a humility that we had not seen in other ministers. God would often manifest the gifts of healing in and through his ministry.

We were so blessed to have been able to sit at his table for hours listening to the stories of his experiences with the Lord. Not only was Papa Davie a spiritual giant, he was also a culinary marvel. He would invite us over many times, whipping up dinners that very few women could top.

I vividly remember the very first time that Joe and I went to his house. His house was so complete. It was spotless and tastefully decorated. We assumed that he was married. We expected a wife to pop out of the kitchen. I remember inquisitively asking, “Do you lived in this big house alone?” To this day, Joe and I can still remember his response. He said, “Yes, just me and Jesus.” He also added that, he and the Lord have a good time together. It was quite evident that the Spirit of the living God filled his home. I could sense it, as soon as you entered through the front door.

It is such a blessing when godly examples are placed before us that we might imitate them as they imitate Christ. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, we see Paul’s exhortation to the Believers. He said, “Be imitators or followers of me, just as I also am of Christ.” The only problem with imitating someone is that you better know for sure that they are walking in obedience to God’s
Word. That means, you must know the Word of God for yourself. There’s no other way to determine whether an individual is walking in a manner worthy of being imitated. The Word of God is our only measuring rod that differentiates truth from error.

As I began to reflect upon this part of our spiritual journey, I realized that God was moving mightily by His Spirit. This was a pivotal point in both of our lives. God was healing some deep wounds in Joe. He was also destroying Joe’s false images of leadership by bringing a God-fearing man into his life. At the same time, God was teaching me how to identify godly leadership.
Chapter 24

“And He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and two fishes, and looking up to heaven, He blessed, and broke, and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.”

Matthew 14:19-21 (KJV)

Day by day and week by week, our faith was ever increasing. In addition to seeing the manifestation of God’s miraculous power, there was yet another spark which caused my faith to soar. That spark was ignited when I read a true story about a little Italian woman, who took God at His Word. I’m not really an avid reader, but I couldn’t put this book down. It recorded the many miracles that this woman witnessed, on her spiritual journey with Jesus over the years.

There was one incident that stood out in my mind. The woman’s husband was a fireman. One day he called from work to tell her that he was bringing several firemen home for dinner. They were poor, and didn’t have very much. Mama took out a handful of spaghetti and a few meatballs. It was all she had.

She then reached for her Bible, and quickly turned to the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. With the spaghetti in one hand, and the Bible in the other, she held the open Bible high above her head and said, “Hey God, You did it here for them, now do it for me. Thank you.”
She then took out a large pot, and filled it with water. After boiling the water, she threw in the little bit of spaghetti that she had. She also cooked up some sauce, and threw in those few meatballs.

As the firemen filed in through the door, there were so many of them that they filled the table. As soon as they were seated, Mama served her spaghetti and meatballs. What was so amazing is that not only was there enough to go around, they had second helpings, and there were left overs for dinner the next night. I can’t tell you how long that lesson stayed with me, that God can do the impossible. Nothing is too difficult for Him.

Now it came to the time that my faith was put to the test. We were going to the Morris Brown Chapel pretty regularly for their Sunday mornings services. One Sunday after service, the minister asked Joe if he would preach the following week. WOW! We were amazed that yet another door was opening for ministry. However, we realized that we must be cautious. We cannot assume that it’s God’s will for us to go through every door of opportunity, that opens to us. Just because the Lord doesn’t stop us from doing something, doesn’t mean that He wants us to continue. In this case, we both sensed that this was the Lord.

The next Sunday rolled around, and after seeking God the whole week, Joe preached a powerful sermon. This was the first time that God used Joe prophetically. At the conclusion of his message, Joe gave an altar call. He requested that those who were in need of salvation, come forward. When no one responded, he then asked those to come forward who needed a touch from God. Many came forward, and knelt at the altar, including me. It was astounding to see how God manifested His Presence with the gifts of the Spirit, as Joe laid hands and prayed for each individual. It was an emotional moment, some
wept, some received the fullness of the Spirit, and many started worshipping and praising the Lord. God was glorified and we were all truly blessed.

At the close of the service, about ten of the students who regularly attend our Friday night Bible study, gathered around Joe. Then out of the blue, I heard Joe ask them if they were hungry. They all piped in, and in unison, they all said, “Yes.” What shocked me most was that Joe invited them all to our apartment to eat. I thought to myself, “What could he be thinking?”

I began to panic, realizing that here we have, ten hungry students, who could eat us out of house and home. All we had was one small roast beef, two cans of string beans, and a box of instant mash potatoes. We even had an extra mouth to feed. We were temporarily housing a Christian young man, who was a construction worker. He could eat that small roast beef by himself. I thought to myself. “That small roast beef could barely feed the three of us. But now we have ten additional people coming to dinner”. If this was a test, I’m already thinking that I failed it. Then I remembered the book that I read.

My focus immediately switched from my lack to God, who is all sufficient. The Scripture that came to mind is Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever.” That means, what He did for His disciples in multiplying the loaves and fishes, He can do for me. He can also do, what He did for that little Italian Mama.

I went into the kitchen, praying the entire time. I mixed the whole box of instant potatoes, then I emptied the two cans of string beans into a pot and seasoned them. The biggest challenge was that teeny little roast beef. It seemed to shrink even more after it was cooked. But I was determined to believe God for a
miracle. Either He was going to make the roast larger or their appetites smaller.

As I stood there in the kitchen with the roast on the cutting board, and the knife in my hand, I began to fervently pray that God would spread the food to feed our little multitude. He did just that! My eyes began to well up with tears. As I sliced, and sliced, and sliced, I saw that the roast was multiplying! By now all of the students had arrived, and were in the living room.

In my excitement I called out to Joe and the young man, who was living with us. When they didn’t immediately respond as I had expected, I then stuck my head out of the kitchen. I motioned with my hand, beckoning them to come. As they approached me, they saw the tears in my eyes and asked, “What’s the matter?”

I showed them the huge mound of sliced roast beef which I had already placed on a platter. Then I showed them the remaining portion yet to be sliced. They both realized how small the roast was, before I started slicing it. Seeing the amount that was left, we all agreed that we were witnessing a miracle. There were thirteen of us that feasted that afternoon, and believe it or not we had left overs for the next day. This wasn’t the first time, and I’m sure it wouldn’t be the last time that God would demonstrate His faithfulness to us.

Even though Joe was asked to preach occasionally at the college chapel, he never neglected his other responsibilities. May I remind you, in addition to the prison ministry, Joe was also accompanying me into the Nursing Home once a week. He was very diligent in ministering to the spiritual needs of the residents. He also assisted me with the various art and craft projects. On one occasion he taught some of the residents how to macramé. Yes, macramé! And even more surprising, Joe can
sow, do counted cross stitch and make latch hook rugs. A man of many talents, and that’s not to mention what a great cook he is.

In spite of all that we were both involved in, our primary focus was the Friday night Bible study. As the Lord was continuously adding to the number, we were literally running out of room. What was so remarkable is that those in attendance weren’t just college students. We now had people from all walks of life, and all ages, children, teenagers, young adults and grandparents. Each week as we exalted the Lord, and magnified His Holy Name, He would always manifest His Presence in a magnificent and powerful way. We actually witnessed the Word of God coming to life. We experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the manifestation of spiritual gifts.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul gives explicit instructions regarding the use of spiritual gifts. In verse four and five, he tells us that, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administration but the same Lord.” In verse six, he tells us that, “There are diversities of operation, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” Then before listing all the gifts, Paul tells us that “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” After listing the gifts, he explicitly states that, it is according to God’s will that the spiritual gifts are distributed to each individual, but it is one and the same Spirit that works all things. The bottom line is that it is according to the Will of God how, and through whom the gifts are manifested. Our responsibility is to know God’s Word completely, and to study it thoroughly so that we do not step outside of His will. I thank God for His Word which is our only guide to the Truth.

Even though we were very busy, our schedules remained basically the same. On Thursday nights while Joe was
ministering in the prison, I would be home preparing the meal for the Friday night Bible study. On an average, we would have ten to fifteen people coming to dinner. There is one particular dinner that stands out foremost in my mind even to this day. It was easy to decide what would be on the menu. I’d simply cook whatever we bought on sale that week.

This particular week we bought a ham on sale. I decided to have mashed potatoes and string beans along with it. Whenever we caught a sale we would always stock up on canned string beans and instant mashed potatoes. So it was only a matter of going to the cupboard after we had shopped for the meat. But to add variety to the menu, I would sometimes cook collard greens and brown fried rice. This particular Thursday night I baked the ham and tossed a couple cans of string beans in a pot with seasoning. I waited until only minutes before dinner to mix the instant mashed potatoes so that they would be hot. Mind you, we didn’t have microwave ovens in those days.

The next day after work, I rushed home to prepare for Bible study. Only minutes before dinner, I had this overwhelming thought that the ham wasn’t going to be enough. Remember, I had already seen how God fed our little multitude with a small roast beef. But this was different. I felt prompted to cook the few pieces of chicken that we had in the refrigerator. When I approached Joe with the idea, he almost hit the roof. He tried his best to convince me that the ham was certainly enough. But for some reason, I wasn’t easily convinced. Rather than keep arguing over the matter, Joe conceded. He told me to go ahead and cook the chicken. So I did. Everything else was ready to be served. Since there was so little chicken, I decided to put it aside, and only serve it when the ham ran out. Little did I know that the Lord had another purpose for me cooking the chicken.
It wasn’t long before the students started filing in one by one, and hungrier than ever. As most of the students had already arrived I was surprised to see that there was enough ham to go around. Just as I was feeling a bit perplexed, a new student walked through the door. I immediately welcomed him in, and offered him dinner. He asked me what I was serving. I responded by only saying, “Ham.” He exclaimed, “I don’t eat ham. I’m a Muslim.” As I heard those words I felt a quickening in my spirit. It suddenly became very clear to me, why I was led to cook the chicken.

Well, let me tell you, I almost had a glory fit, but I remained calm. I told the young man how much Jesus loved him. I also explained how the Lord had me make chicken just for him. He stood there with a puzzled look upon his face, as I led him into the kitchen, and showed him the chicken that I had prepared and set aside.

How amazing! It was God, prompting me to cook the chicken. But I thought it was because there wasn’t going to be enough ham. God knew that He was bringing a Muslim to our apartment that night for a divine appointment. Just as Paul said, “...now I know in part, but then I will know fully...” (1 Corinthians 13:12) I couldn’t see the full picture. God had a plan for that young man that night. All I saw was the need to cook chicken, and I was obedient. That night God used my obedience to demonstrate His love, and to touch that young man’s life.
Chapter 25

“Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”

Luke 10:19,20 (NASB)

Our journey of faith brought us through territory that was totally foreign to us. We would sometimes find ourselves on an uncharted course. But it didn’t matter, whether we were facing a new adventure or a seemingly impossible challenge. We knew that we could stand on God’s promises. He promised never to leave us or forsake us. We also knew that He would keep us in perfect peace, if we kept our minds stayed on Him.

My one encounter with the demonic, seeing the hospital bed levitating, was enough for me. I was hoping not to ever have another incident like that ever again! However, I found out that in the South, there were those whose involvement in the occult opened them up to the supernatural realm of the powers of darkness. In defining the occult, it is anything dealing with the demonic or supernatural realm of darkness.

It includes practices such as magic, astrology, physic readings, telekinesis, communicating with the dead, witchcraft, sorcery and the use of divination and incantations. The list goes on and on. All of which are strictly forbidden by God (See Leviticus 19:31; Leviticus 20:6, 27, Deuteronomy 18:9-14).

When I worked on staff in the hospital, I remember hearing some of my co-workers talk about their “other life”, suggesting reincarnation. There were also those who dabbled
with horoscopes and astrology. What was so sad is that many of them were members of churches and some even sang in the choir. However, they were either ignorant of what God’s Word teaches on this subject, or they were walking in rebellion to God’s revealed truth. With the prevalence of this kind of spiritual climate, we knew that the inevitable would probably happen. At one time or another, we would probably have to face some form of spiritual darkness again. This came sooner than we had expected.

One day, Oscar came to us quite distressed. If you recall, Oscar was Joe’s original Bible study partner. Oscar shared with us that he hadn’t been able to sleep nights. When Joe questioned why, he was hesitant to answer. After a brief pause, Oscar blurted out, “I’ve been seeing things.”

Joe immediately asked, “What things?”

Oscar not only shared with us that he saw demons. He also shared some of his nightmares and a few of his harrowing experiences. Joe then tried to solicit more information from Oscar about the history of the house. Oscar explained that he only recently came to live with his grandmother, who was the original owner of the house. As he continued to share more of his family history, it was obvious that he was embarrassed to tell us about his grandmother’s involvement with the occult.

While Oscar was giving us the background information about his family, the Lord was not only giving Joe discernment, but also wisdom and understanding. It didn’t take long before we began to realize why Oscar was experiencing such oppression and torment. With her involvement in the occult, Oscar’s grandmother had never dedicated her life, nor her house to the Lord. Mind you, she was a member of a Christian church, but that shouldn’t have surprised us.
Didn’t Jesus speak about this in His parable of the wheat and the tares? He said the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but the enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat. When the wheat sprang up and bore grain, the tares became evident also. Now when the slaves asked if they should go and gather up the tares. The sower said “No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may up root the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘first gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn’” (Matthew 13:24-30)

So, we can expect to find wheat and tares, believers and unbelievers not only in some of the pews, but also in some of the church pulpits. Why do I say that we can expect to find unbelievers in some of the pulpit? Because Jesus said, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you...’" (Matthew 7:22, 23 NASB) In these verses, we see someone with a prophetic gift, a deliverance ministry and the evidence of miracles, but Jesus said unequivocally, “I never knew you.”

Sensing that we were being lead by the Holy Spirit, Joe and I accompanied Oscar back to his grandmother’s house. Before even leaving our apartment, Joe told Oscar that he wanted to present the Gospel to his grandmother. After all, the Gospel is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16). Joe also told Oscar that with his grandmother’s permission, he wanted to pray through the entire house, pleading the blood of Jesus over each and every area that the devil had gained access.
Now, let me tell you. As we drove over to the house, I was suddenly hit with the reality that we would soon be going into a spiritually dark home. I shuddered to think of what we might face. After all, we could be walking into one of the devil’s playgrounds. I was suddenly gripped with fear as several frightening possibilities crossed my mind.

It didn’t take long before I began to realize that the devil was playing havoc with my mind. Isn’t that where the battle always begins? I immediately began to counter-attack those thoughts with the Word of God. Isn’t that how Jesus handled the devil, when He was being tempted in the wilderness? He quoted the Word of God, “It is written.” (Luke 4:1-13) We certainly have to know the Word of God in order to quote it. We also have to know it, so that we can discern and identify when the devil is misquoting it or quoting it out of context as he did with Jesus.

As I began to think about Scripture, the Holy Spirit started flooding my mind with one verse after another.

“... greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

“Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you.” (Luke 10:19)

“And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.” (Matthew 10:7)
“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:10-17)

I’m telling you, no doctor could have ordered better medicine than the Word of God. All my fears were dispelled instantly. I already had the full armor of God on, so I was well protected. I just had to secure my sword, which is the Word of God.

When we arrived at the house, we prayed together before getting out of the car. We then followed Oscar to the front door. As we walked through the door, we could see that the inside of the house wasn’t much different from the outside. It was an old house which appeared to have been neglected over the years. The roof was in need of repairs, and the shutters were coming off, not to mention all the work that needed to be done on the
inside. From the hallway, I could view a few of the rooms. They were all very dark and gloomy.

As I looked at the mounds of clutter in the house, I tried to picture in my mind what Oscar’s grandmother would be like. Just as Oscar escorted us into the living room, his grandmother entered the room. She was a stout dark-skinned woman with a subservient demeanor. She reminded me of an individual who had been emotionally battered and scarred.

She welcomed us into her home, and after a few social amenities, Joe directed the conversation to the Lord. She didn’t say much, she just listened. Then when Joe had her undivided attention, he led right into the Gospel.

Joe shared that, “Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He was buried and He was raised on the third day. He then appeared to the twelve disciples. After that He appeared to more than five hundred.” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Joe also told her that “Jesus is alive and ‘if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.’” (Romans 10:9) When Joe asked her if she would like to receive Jesus, she said, “Yes.”

I was so excited, I almost couldn’t contain myself. It took great effort to keep my composure and remain calm. Before praying a prayer of salvation with her, Joe addressed her involvement with the occult. He explained that the practices of the occult are an abomination to God. He elaborated on how any form of spiritual darkness is offensive to the Lord. It also defiles our relationship with Him. Surprisingly enough, she was open to the truth. She not only received what Joe was sharing, but wholeheartedly agreed to have Joe pray through the house. It was God! What an awesome moment to see the Holy Spirit at work bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.
Before proceeding any further, Joe first bound and silenced every demon that could possibly be present. He also pleaded the Blood of Jesus over every stronghold of the enemy in the house. He then led Oscar’s grandmother in a prayer of salvation and deliverance. After the prayer, we all proceeded to go through the house praying. Knowing that he had authority over all the powers of the enemy in the name of Jesus, Joe commanded the devil and his demons to leave in His name.

We actually experienced the “grand exit” of a dark presence. Joe immediately invited the Lord to come in and inhabit the place. Amazingly enough, grandma’s whole countenance began to change as the peace of God filled the house. Mind you, other than the dark gloomy presence that hovered over each room, we did not see any physical evidence of her involvement in the occult. No jewelry, no relics or statues were seen. Just because it wasn’t visible, didn’t mean that it wasn’t there. So, as Joe prayed, he asked the Lord to reveal anything that was offensive to Him.

I’m reminded of the Scripture in Deuteronomy 23, where God gives instructions to His children before they go out as an army against their enemy. In verse 9, He instructs the children of Israel to keep themselves from every evil thing. Then in verse 14, He says, “Since the Lord your God is in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemy before you, therefore your camp must be holy; and He must not see anything indecent among you lest He turn away from you.”

These instructions are not only relevant, but also applicable to us today. We fight spiritual battles against the enemy of our souls everyday. If we want the Lord to deliver us and defeat our enemy, we have an inescapable obligation to “clean house”. We must get rid of those things that are unholy and offensive to the Lord. It is imperative that we do so. Mind
you, there are those of us who have never been involved with the occult and have never brought those types of items into our homes. However, we might possibly have brought in music, videos, DVDs or literature that is unacceptable to the Holy God that we serve.

If you have allowed the impurities of the world to be brought into your home, all you have to do is to pray. Ask the Lord to reveal those things that He wants you to get rid of. Confess that you want to be clean and pure before Him. Let Him know that you don’t want anything indecent in your home. Then, prayerfully go through your house, room by room, taking a careful look in every room. Would Jesus find anything that shouldn’t be there? Go through the closets, drawers, even the attic and crawl spaces. Re-evaluate the TV shows and video tapes that you watch. Don’t let the world’s rating system be your guide. **REMEMBER!** You’re seeking after what would be pleasing to the Lord. Be sure to go through the books and magazines that may have been on your shelves for years.

After praying through the entire house, Joe asked Oscar to lead us outside. Joe then walked around the perimeter of the property, pleading the blood of Jesus over all the borders. As we were walking back into the house, Joe began to share the word of God with Oscar’s grandmother. He took her to the Gospel of John and explained what it meant “to be born again.” He also explained that both prayer and the reading of God’s Word are daily essentials in our spiritual growth.

Since it is so important, he elaborated on the subject of prayer. He explained that prayer is simply talking to God and listening to His response. He urged her to take time during her day not only to talk to Jesus, but also to listen to Him. He also cautioned her that, “God does not speak contrary to His word. In other words, He is not going to tell you anything that hasn’t
already been written in His word. Otherwise, how would we know that it was God? The Bible is our barometer and measuring rod. It is our standard by which we can measure all things and determine what is true or false. The word of God also clearly defines what God views as indecent or unholy.”

Joe then emphasized the importance, and the necessity of getting rid of those things that would be offensive to the Lord. We could not determine whether or not she understood all that Joe was sharing, but we do know that she willingly received it. From the very first time that we came into the house, she had been quite compliant. Before leaving, we all held hands and Joe lead us in a powerfully anointed prayer. When Joe and I lifted our heads up from prayer, we noticed that the room was brighter, as if it had been freshly painted. What an awesome experience to see God bring an individual out of the kingdom of darkness into His glorious light. We were equally blessed to find out that Oscar slept peacefully from that night on.
“Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.”

Colossians 1:12, 13 (NASB)

As I recall, there were two other experiences with the demonic that stand out foremost in my mind. Mind you, even at this point, we were by no means authorities on the demonic and deliverance. As a matter of fact, we knew nothing, except the fact that God’s word is true, and that as Christians, we have authority over all the powers of darkness.

We were actually in a good place. Because we knew so little, we had to put our total faith and trust in the Lord. We had to depend totally upon the Holy Spirit for discernment and wisdom. I’m sure you’ll agree that’s a good place to be, totally dependent. The Scripture which comes to mind is the word which was spoken by the angel to Zechariah for Zerubbabel, “...Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of hosts.”(Zechariah 4:6)

The two experiences were isolated incidents occurring in entirely different settings. One incident happened in a church that we were visiting. It was a Pentecostal church, which was not too far from where we lived.

One of our Bible study students told us about the church. Since it was an all Black congregation, we thought we would slip into the church unnoticed and blend in with the crowd.
Wrong! Several heads turned our way as we eased into the pew just in time to hear the Pastor’s opening prayer.

Worship was a unique experience. There were about twenty people in the choir, who were accompanied by an organ, electric and base guitars, drums and several tambourines. The tambourines were played by choir members and several people in the congregation. It was quite an experience for me. Remember, I came from a quiet Anglican (Church of England) background.

I had gone to a Pentecostal church only once before as a child with my grandmother. The music certainly wasn’t as loud as it was in this church. The people in the choir and in the congregation began to shout and scream as the music reached a crescendo. Some were speaking in tongues, but without the interpretation that first Corinthians fourteen speaks of. In witnessing this, I could see how this could cause confusion, which will happen when the gifts are not operating according to Scripture. I had to remember that I had come to receive from the Lord and not to judge.

Then, all of a sudden, just as the Pastor stood up to deliver his sermon, a young woman ran up to the front of the church. As soon as she got close to the altar, she fell to the floor. Now I had seen the students drop to the floor under the power of the Holy Spirit as Joe laid hands on them and prayed. So in my mind, this wasn’t an unusual occurrence. But what was unusual is that while she was down on the floor, her body stiffened, and her feet started kicking with a strange and eerie methodical beat. As a nurse, I immediately assessed that she wasn’t having a seizure.

The Pastor stood there with the most disconcerting look on his face. Then to my amazement, I saw Joe jump up out of his seat and in haste, he ran to the young woman. Before I could
collect my thoughts to logically reason what was going on, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Cyrus, one of our Bible study students. He also ran to the front of the church where the young woman was lying.

As Joe and Cyrus proceeded to pray for the young woman, the Pastor stood there in the pulpit, speechless. It didn’t take long for them to discern that she was demon-possessed. Just as they both started to take authority, and to bind the demons, the most hair raising demonic voice came from within her. The voice said, “She’s mine and I’m not giving her up.”

I will never forget the sound of that voice. It was a man’s voice, an eerie, deep baritone. What an experience! You could hear a pin drop in the church as Joe and Cyrus bound the demons and cast them out in the name of Jesus.

They never asked the demons their names, nor did they ask how many there were. They simply quoted Scripture and took authority over the prince of the powers of darkness. They commanded, “Come out, come out in the name of Jesus.” After only a few minutes, she was released. The peace of the Lord came over her. She laid there for a few seconds. Then Joe and Cyrus helped her to her feet.

Not wanting to lose any time, they both ministered to her. One shared the Gospel, and the other one led her in a prayer of salvation and complete deliverance. They both realized that if this young woman didn’t receive Jesus, then she might end up in a worse state than she was before.

In the twelfth chapter of Matthew, Jesus describes a similar situation. “When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits
more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation." (Matthew 12:43-45)

What was so surprising is that no one from the church participated in that young woman’s deliverance. This was another one of God’s Divine appointments that brought us to that church as first time visitors on the same day that He brought Cyrus to visit.

The other experience happened in our apartment on a Friday night after Bible study. One of our students brought her roommate as a guest hoping to expose her to the Truth. I noticed that through the entire teaching, her mind seemed to be preoccupied. She was present, but not really listening.

At the close of the night, they remained after all the other student had gone home. After taking one close look at our visitor, we could see it in her eyes that she was a troubled youth. She had no peace.

In questioning her about her relationship with the Lord, she didn’t really give us an answer. Joe then proceeded to ask her, “Would you mind if I prayed for you?”

As soon as she agreed to prayer, Joe immediately laid hands on her forehead. He bound Satan and silenced every voice that was speaking to her. I kept silent and I thought to myself, “That was a little presumptuous of him to think that she was hearing voices speak to her.” However, by now I knew better. I knew to sit tight and wait to see what the outcome would be.

After a brief pause, Joe then told her that she had to make a choice. He said, “Choose Jesus and live!”

Then after another pause, Joe asked her, “Do you choose Jesus?”
Much to my amazement she said, “Yes.” Joe then led her in a prayer of salvation and deliverance.

We found out later that this young girl had invited Satan into her life. She said, “Everyone says that the devil is so big and bad. I wanted to see what he would do, but from that day on I started hearing voices. One of the voices was trying to lead me to God, but as long as I was hearing other voices, I couldn’t make a decision. Then, when you prayed for me, all the voices were silent, and I knew I had to make a decision. I knew it was the decision that would get me out of this torment.”

After hearing this, Joe had her pray a prayer renouncing all involvement with Satan and asking the Lord’s forgiveness for her sins. Joe pleaded the Blood of Jesus over her mind, her heart and her soul. I embraced her, and she wept in my arms as Joe continued to minister to her.

Much like this young girl, today there are many troubled teen and young adults who are being tormented by the devil. They too have embraced the demonic as if it were all a game. It has had horrendous effects globally and especially upon the morals of our society. The answer is still the same. It’s Jesus. He is the only answer for the world today.

We had a few other experiences, but not significant enough to mention. I don’t want to focus any unnecessary attention upon the subject of the demonic, unless it serves a purpose in teaching.

I have noticed that some of the teachings on the demonic are so disproportionate. There are specialized ministries that deal only with the demonic and deliverance.

If we look at Jesus’ earthly ministry, it was never disproportionate. He dealt with every aspect of the fallen nature of man and the affects of sin on the world. He never specialized in anything other than demonstrating the love and compassion
of the Father for a dying humanity. In demonstrating that love, He healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons, fed the hungry and forgave the sinner.

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, in chapter four, he warns of the coming apostasy. He says, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons”.

There are ministries that elevate the devil, and attribute to him more power than he has. They also name more spirits than the Bible has ever identified. As a matter of fact, some of the spirits that have been named are in fact clearly identified in Galatians 5:19-21 as the “works of the flesh”.

“No the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Mind you, in dealing with the works of the flesh, it takes an entirely different approach than working with the demonic. The demonic has to be cast out. The flesh has to be crucified. Once we have crucified the flesh, we must purpose in our hearts to live by the Spirit and also walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:24, 25) You can be up all night trying to cast out a demon and not get any results when you are in fact dealing with a work of the flesh.

Yes, I believe that there are cases of demonic possession. In such cases, there is a need for deliverance, but I do not believe a Christian can be possessed. Oppressed yes, but not possessed. Every born-again believer is the temple of the Living
God indwelt with the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will NEVER share His temple with a demon.

So often the Scriptures that are used for the view of the demonic possession of Christians are taken out of context. I would have to agree with most of our well-known apologists, who say that a Scripture taken out of context is a pretext.
Chapter 27

“Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth, nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the Lord, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you.”

Exodus 34:10 (NASB)

With each new experience, God was affirming in us the inerrancy of His word. As we walked through these experiences and witnessed the miraculous, God was not only increasing our faith. He was also inscribing His word upon our hearts.

We didn’t fully comprehend it, but as God was manifesting His Presence in our midst. We were being transformed. Not to mention how God was changing our Bible study students. They were grabbing hold of God’s word and running with it.

As the students began to grasp the fact that they were ambassadors for Christ, they began to live exemplary lives. They were demonstrating moral purity and brotherly love in their daily lives.

The Holy Spirit was moving in such a profound and awesome way in all of the Bible studies. Joe continued to prayerfully seek the Lord each week to confirm his teachings. His desire was to be in God’s perfect will.

As I recall, it was during Lent when the entire Body of Christ is usually preparing for the celebration of Jesus’ Resurrection. Joe was seeking the Lord as he usually does for Bible study, when God impressed upon his mind the words
“foot washing”. It puzzled him. He had no idea what it meant or whether it was in fact the Lord speaking to him. Then as he thought about it, he came to the conclusion that the devil certainly would not be telling him to have a foot washing.

A foot washing is a humbling experience, and the devil wants us to exalt ourselves. Joe also canceled out the idea that it was his own voice speaking to him because washing someone’s feet is the last thing he wanted to do. After running the gamut of logical conclusions, Joe began to inquire of the Lord, “Am I to have a foot washing?”

When he didn’t get a response, Joe decided not to do anything—other than to wait upon the Lord. Then in less than a week, his answer came.

As Joe was making his rounds in the prison with Brother Pooser, an inmate got his attention, and called him over so that he could speak with Joe privately. Then out of the blue, the inmate asked, “When are you going to have a foot washing?”

Joe stood there speechless, astounded by what he had just heard. He had never mentioned the subject of foot washing to anyone, last of all the prisoners. Joe knew that this was not a coincidence, but a confirmation of what God wanted him to do.

Joe drove home from the prison that night knowing that he had heard from the Lord. By the time he arrived home and spoke to me, he had already settled it in his heart that he was going to hold a foot washing on Good Friday.

The next question was, how is a foot washing done? Neither of us had a clue. All we knew was that we were going to step out in faith and do what God was calling us to do. We felt very much assured that He would instruct us as He had done in various new situations many times before.

I had no hang-ups about washing someone’s feet. After all, as long as I had been a nurse, it had always been a part of the
patient’s bath. But I sensed that this was going to be very different.

As the days were passing by so quickly, Joe and I began to seek the Lord about how He wanted us to do the foot washing. We read the Biblical account of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet over and over trying to get a sense of how we were to do this (John 13:5-20).

It didn’t take long before we came to the conclusion that we had to trust the Lord with Good Friday. In addition to purchasing a few basins and asking everyone to bring a towel, the most important responsibility that the Lord placed upon our hearts was to fast and pray for this special meeting. We also came to the realization that, with or without the foot washing, Good Friday was special in itself. It was a time of remembering Jesus’ painful death on the cross for our salvation, and celebrating His Resurrection on Sunday. It is the highest Holy Day on the Christian calendar. As Paul said, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.” (1 Corinthians 15:17)

The cross secures what the resurrection assures. It secures our salvation and it assures us of the glorious hope of eternal life.

We announced the foot washing for two consecutive weeks. When Good Friday finally came, we were quite surprised to have fifteen people in attendance, especially since most of the students had gone home for the holidays. Our neighbor came with several of the choir members from her church. There were only a few students in attendance, who lived locally.

Just before starting, I arranged the chairs in a circle, and Joe filled the basins with cold water. When I inquisitively asked, “Why cold water?” He said, “They didn’t have hot running
water in Biblical times.” Mind you, this was a first time experience for all of us.

Many of the senior citizens shared about their childhood experiences. How they watched the adults during a Foot Washing service and wanted to participate, but were told that they were too young. They were so grateful that at last they were able to participate in a foot washing.

It was a solemn time. After Joe opened in prayer, we then had a glorious time of praise and worship. Each one of us took turns leading in a song. We all joined in singing contemporary choruses, old hymns and Negro spirituals. We had an awesome time as God inhabited the praises of His people.

Before washing one another’s feet, Joe expounded upon the foot washing passage in John 13. At the conclusion of his teaching, Joe reread the words that Jesus spoke after washing His disciples feet. “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.” (John 13:14, 15)

After hearing Jesus’ words, there was no doubt in any of our minds that we were in fact following His example in washing one another’s feet. As Joe placed basins down on the floor in front of several people, He requested that the men wash only the men’s feet and the women wash only the women.

Joe also made a statement that not only touched my heart, but got me thinking. He said, “When you are kneeling before your brother or sister and washing their feet, pray for them because you don’t know what path God may be calling them to walk on. Some may not even be here on this earth this time next year.” He also reminded us that when we do it to the least of these our brethren, we are doing it unto the Lord. So, as
we washed our brother’s or sister’s feet, we were ministering to Jesus.

Our neighbor was sitting next to me, and as soon as her feet touched the water, she screamed out, “It’s cold.”

As Joe explained that they didn’t have hot water in Biblical times, I watched her ease one foot then the other into the cold water. After only a few minutes, I heard her break forth in praise, “Thank you, Jesus, Thank you, Jesus, Thank you Jesus.”

As tears began to stream down both of her cheeks, she continued to express words of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. It didn’t take long before all of us began to realize that something was happening here. Then almost knocking the basin over, she stood up and loudly proclaimed that Jesus healed her.

Well, I joined in with everyone else praising the Lord. Truthfully speaking, I had no idea that she even needed a healing. Come to find out, she suffered from crippling arthritis and had excruciating pains in her hands and feet. She testified to all of us that God healed her as soon as she put her feet in the cold water. Mind you, no one laid hands on her or even prayed for her. God instantly and miraculously healed her.

That week, the news of her healing spread like wild fire among the students. Those who were returning from the holiday break, also heard. What’s still so vivid in my mind about this whole experience is that man had absolutely nothing to do with it, so God received all the glory.

There was yet another time that will forever stand out in our minds. Remember, we had already seen a bank robber get saved, an alcoholic instantly sober up, a twisted leg straightened, arthritic feet healed and food multiplied, but this was beyond our expectations. We had the privilege of witnessing the most
awesome miracle as God manifested His wonder-working power in our midst. It all began with a phone call from a friend.

When I worked at Holy Family hospital, I became very close friends with one of the few Caucasian workers in the hospital. She was a Christian, whose life beautifully demonstrated her love for the Lord. She was an older woman and a nursing assistant who was nearing her retirement.

She was so delightful to be with. When I was in charge of the floor, I’d always schedule our lunch breaks together because we always enjoyed such sweet fellowship during our times together, whether we were at the hospital or visiting one another in our homes. We remained close friends even after I left the hospital.

She phoned us one day asking for a favor. She requested that Joe and I go and share the Gospel with a patient that had recently been discharged from the hospital. She proceeded to explain that he was her patient up until the time of his discharge. While she did get to share the Gospel with him, she didn’t think that he received it. She felt that her color was a hindrance to him receiving anything that she said.

My friend had such a burden for this young man, who was a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the neck down. When I asked what happened to her patient, I was taken back a bit to find out that he was shot in the back. I questioned her about the shooting, but she didn’t really know any of the details. During the entire conversation, Joe and I could hear a pleading in her voice. She felt that if her color was an issue, then it is possible that he would receive from us. Before ending our conversation, she gave us his name, address and phone number.

Realizing the seriousness of this young man’s condition, Joe sensed an urgency to go and see him right away. The only problem is that we had to wait for a couple of the students to
come over. It was Saturday, and we had previously made arrangements to go to the movies with the students to see the first public showing of the Christian movie, “The Hiding Place”. The movie was about a Christian family in Europe who hid the Jews during Hitler's reign of terror. We were really looking forward to seeing it with the students. However, we made our decision realizing that sharing the Gospel with this young man was much more important than going to see a Christian film.

Joe decided that when the students arrived, he would explain our situation, and suggest that they go to the movies without us. While waiting for the students to arrive, Joe phoned the young man’s home. We were given the OK to come and visit that same afternoon. We later found out that it was the young man’s caretaker who answered the phone, and gave us the OK.

Joe and I were in prayer when all three students arrived at our door to go to the movies. After inviting them in, Joe immediately began to explain why we couldn’t go with them. We were a little taken back by their response. We never expected that they would be so adamant about going with us! Joe didn’t think that it was a good idea. He explained that the young man, whose name was Johnny, had just been released from the hospital and he had never met us. We had no idea what we would be facing. Besides, it just didn’t seem appropriate for five strangers to storm into a sick person’s home with less than an hour’s notice.

Even after Joe gave, what I thought was the most convincing reason why they shouldn’t accompany us, the three students insisted that they go. Still doubtful whether he should bring them, in frustration, Joe threw up his hands and said, “Let’s just pray first because I don’t know about this.”
Then as we all held hands in a circle, Joe lead us in prayer. As he began to seek the Lord for guidance and direction, the Holy Spirit filled the room. All of our knees were buckling, and all three students fell to the floor. We were all experiencing the awesome presence of God. After a season of prayer, Joe stood there speechless. Then after a long pause, he said, “Let’s go. You’re all going.”

All five of us piled into our little car, Joe and I in the front and the three students in the back. Johnny lived in a low-economic area of Atlanta about ten minutes from our apartment. We were all filled with excitement and with expectations of what God was going to do.

While driving to Johnny’s home, we all noticed the magnificent cloud formations in the sky. To tell you the truth, it looked like a scene from Cecil B. DeMille’s movie “The Ten Commandments”. It reminded me of the scene when the Red Sea parted for the children of Israel to cross over. It was spectacular! There’s no other way to describe it. We all started praising God. While looking at the magnificence of those luminous cloud formations, Joe and I sensed that God was going to do something extraordinary as He did in parting the Red Sea.

When we arrived at the apartment complex, we found Johnny’s apartment without any difficulty. After knocking only once, someone opened the door. Joe explained that we came to visit Johnny.

We entered with such excitement while trying to keep our composure so that we wouldn’t overwhelm anyone. We were all restraining ourselves from any emotional outburst. We were mindful that this could possibly cause confusion in this situation.

The gentleman who was Johnny’s caretaker led us into a large bedroom at the end of a long hallway. There in the bed laid
the frail, thin, motionless body of the young man named Johnny. Upon entering the room, Joe immediately walked over to the bed and introduced himself. “Hi Johnny, my name is Joe.”

Joe then explained that the nurse who took care of him in the hospital requested that we come and visit him.

Amazingly enough, he didn’t seem at all disturbed by this parade of strangers coming into his room single file and standing around his bed. The four of us stood there praying silently as the conversation led right into Joe sharing the Gospel. When Joe questioned Johnny about his salvation, we were surprised to hear him tell Joe that he asked Jesus to come into his heart after his nurse shared with him. Joe shared several Scriptures with him to give him the assurance of his salvation. Joe also shared some fundamental truths that would help Johnny in his spiritual growth.

After sharing all that the Lord had placed upon Joe’s heart, he then asked Johnny if he could pray for him. Joe explained that Jesus is the “Great Physician”. He is our “Healer”. Johnny nodded his head as if to say yes.

Joe always carried his little vial of oil with him that he purchased from the Christian book store. He took the vial out of his pocket and placed some oil on Johnny’s forehead as he quoted the passage in James 4, verses 14 and 15, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins they will be forgiven him.”

Then after briefly explaining the sovereignty of God, Joe proceeded to pray for Johnny to be healed.
Once again, we experienced the awesome presence of God, and just like before, our knees buckled. When Joe completed his prayer, he asked Johnny, “Do you feel anything?”

I’ll never forget his response and what happened after that. Johnny said, “I feel like a dead tree trunk coming to life.” We all stood there in shock as we watched his once-paralyzed limbs move. Yes, move! He was even able to sit up on the edge of his bed moving his arms and legs. We were all in awe, thanking and praising God for what He had done and for allowing us to witness it. Let me tell you, as we drove home, the car was bouncing along the road. We were all jumping in our seats, praising and thanking God. How do you ever forget something like that? You don’t!
Chapter 28

“And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus”.
Philippians 4:19 (NASB)

It was such a tremendous blessing to have the privilege of witnessing such remarkable spiritual growth in the lives of our Bible study students. As we were growing spiritually, the Lord was also adding to our numbers. We soon outgrew our living room.

Every Friday night, we were faced with the problem of overcrowding. When it got to the point that we barely had standing room, Joe and I began to fervently seek the Lord for a solution. And don’t you know, that when you call upon the Lord, He answers. Just as He said to Jeremiah the prophet, “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3) The very fact that we are to call upon the Lord is reaffirmed several times in Scripture. The verse that always ministers to me is found in Psalms, when God not only speaks through David, but to David and says, “Call upon Me in the days of trouble and I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.” (Psalm 50:15)

The truth of the matter is that God, in fact, does answer prayer. However, His timing is not our timing, but He is never late. His answer may not come when we want or in the way we expect, but He does answer. His answer could be, “Yes”, “No” or “Wait”. And if He calls us to wait, we must realize that,
“Indeed, none of those who wait for Thee will be ashamed…”
(Psalm 25:3)

The one thing we can be assured of is that God is not only working out the situation. He is also working His perfect work in and through us as we wait on Him. However, I must warn you—anytime you are called upon to wait, you will be tempted to work things out in the flesh as Sarah did in giving Hagar, her maid, to her husband Abraham. (Genesis 16:1-16). When going through the waiting process, we must learn to cease striving and know that He is God. If we just stand still and wait upon Him, we will see the salvation of the Lord.

To our amazement, God’s answer came quickly. The following week after Bible study, a student pulled Joe aside to speak with him privately. He proceeded to ask Joe’s permission to speak to the Dean of Men at Moorehouse College about using the Moorehouse Chapel for our Bible study. Joe stood there speechless for a while, before giving his permission. During that brief speechless moment several thoughts rushed through Joe’s mind: “Could it be that God was going to open the door for us to meet only a few blocks away, on the campus of one of Atlanta’s most prestigious colleges? Not to mention that the Moorehouse Chapel was where Martin Luther King Jr. once preached. WOW!”

By the next week, we had our answer. “Yes.” We received permission to use the Moorehouse Chapel for our weekly Bible study and free of any charges. That’s God!

The Scripture which comes to mind is in Revelation chapter 3, verse 8. When Jesus spoke to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, He said, “I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied
My name.” This is the same word that was given to us when the Lord opened the prison doors for Joe.

We decided to wait another week before moving to the Moorehouse Chapel, so that we could inform everyone of the changes. However, even though we would be moving, Joe and I felt the Lord leading us to continue with the fellowship meals at our apartment an hour before the study.

This worked out better than we thought. After everyone finished eating, we actually had a procession of people singing gospel songs as we walked from our apartment to the Moorehouse campus each week. We of course drew the attention of many bystanders in the streets, as well as those driving by. We even had some who were inquisitive enough to join us.

God gets all the glory! We didn’t plan any of it! As long as we lifted Jesus up, He continued to draw men unto Himself. He continued to use us as long as we remained yielded, humble and willing vessels.

As always, God inhabits the praises of His children. He was so faithful to us. He filled that little chapel with His presence each week, just as He had filled our apartment. As God manifested His presence, students were getting saved, delivered and healed.

When we walked into that chapel for the first time, we realized that God was not only fulfilling His promise to supply our needs. He was also once again affirming His word in our hearts.

Just as God was moving so mightily in our lives, the enemy was right there with his bag of tricks trying to tempt us. This time Joe was his target. The devil tried to discredit Joe’s moral character and his integrity by bringing the most voluptuous young lady across his path. Believe me when I tell
you! The way this young woman was built it was enough to turn anyone’s head. I had never seen a woman with dimensions like hers.

Her apartment was along the path that Joe took everyday walking to and from school. Joe vowed to God that he would never commit adultery. Battling with lust, Joe found himself looking for this woman as he’d pass her apartment everyday. The Holy Spirit immediately began to convict him of sin, reminding him of what Jesus said in His sermon on the Mount. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27, 28)

With a repentant heart, Joe desired to please the Lord. He confessed his sin to God and asked for forgiveness. The Lord spoke to him, giving him precise directions. He told Joe to take another path to and from school. The instructions were simple, but as he obeyed, God removed the woman from his sight, and he never saw her again, but that wasn’t the end of his confession. The Lord led Joe to confess his sin to me for accountability so that I could pray for him. I didn’t say anything when he shared it with me, but I did experience a gamut of emotions.

I felt as though he had betrayed God and me, his wife. But I quickly put my feelings in check and began to seriously pray for my husband. I realized that I wasn’t fighting against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers of darkness and spiritual wickedness.

What was so amazing is that I would often see this young woman. I witnessed how the Lord removed Joe from seeing her whenever she passed our apartment. I would see her, but Joe never saw her again.
This experience clearly demonstrates Paul’s exhortation to the church in Corinth. He told them that “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.” God provided a way of escape for Joe, and in his obedience, he was able to walk in victory.
Chapter 29

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.”
Psalm 32:8 (NASB)

In addition to handling the numerous responsibilities of ministry, Joe was also carrying a full academic course load. As he was drawing close to the end of his second year at Morris Brown College, he considered getting a summer job to help with the finances. When he shared his intentions with me, I agreed that it would be a good idea, especially since he didn’t have any classes scheduled during the months of June, July and August.

I was opposed to him working during the school year because a job could be a distraction to his studies. It was by God’s grace that he was handling the many facets of ministry, as well as his studies. A job would have been too much, particularly because he had been out of school for so many years.

As we discussed it, Joe settled it in his mind. He was definitely going to get a job. As he thought about it, a flood of unanswered questions instantly filled his head, “Where can I get a job? What kind of work can I do? And who’s going to hire me?”

After Joe shared his concerns with me, we both decides to lay it all at the feet of Jesus. The words that God spoke to David personally ministered to us when He said, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.” (Psalm 32:8)
We agreed to just wait upon the Lord. There really wasn’t much else that we could do. Of course, there were the options of running in ten million directions and knocking on hundreds of doors, which are often a waste of time. But let me tell you, God is faithful to His promises. Didn’t He tell us that He would counsel and teach us which way to go? Well, we purposely didn’t mentioned our plans to anyone so that when the answer came, we would know that it was God. We didn’t have to wait very long. The answer came quickly and in a way that we least expected.

Joe was approached by his advisor, Dr. Blakely, only a couple of weeks before the end of the semester. He informed Joe of a job opportunity. Now, how timely is that? Of course, we know that God’s timing is always perfect! After giving Joe a brief job description, Dr. Blakely advised him to call and make an appointment. If chosen for the job, Joe would be working with the mentally-challenged as an instructor. Now, I must inform you that Joe has had various jobs in his life, from being an assistant teacher, a salesman and driving a taxi to a settlement clerk in the stock exchange on Wall Street. With all that experience this would still be his very first experience working with the mentally challenged.

Sensing that he didn’t have a moment to lose, Joe followed Dr. Blakely’s advice and phoned the Director of the Douglasville Training Center for the Mentally Retarded to schedule an appointment. He was amazed to see how the Lord had gone before him. We know that it is God, who opens the doors of opportunity in our lives. However, it may often look like human intervention. Sometimes He uses human vessels, and sometimes He does it supernaturally. This time, He used Dr. Blakely not only to open the door, but to put in a good word for Joe.
Joe went for the interview, and come to find out, the director of the training center was a minister. It astonished Joe that after only a brief interview, he was offered the job. He was given two weeks to think it over to either give his acceptance or decline.

Not being absolutely certain whether or not he should take the job, Joe began to doubt. He was certain that the Lord opened the door for the interview, but he wasn’t completely sure that the Lord wanted him to take the position. Joe fervently prayed for an answer. It puzzled him that God seemed to be silent on this matter. Earnestly seeking to be in God’s perfect will, Joe decided to set himself apart unto God with prayer and fasting.

The first Scripture that the Holy Spirit led Joe to was Matthew 26:63, “But Jesus kept silent.” Even in looking at the context of this particular verse, Joe was unable to get any clarity. The setting of this verse was after Jesus’ betrayal. He was brought before Caiaphas, the high priest, to be questioned, but Jesus kept silent. More perplexed than ever, Joe continued to fast and pray.

I remember phoning him from work on my lunch hour to ask if the Lord spoke to him yet. When he quoted the Scripture verse that the Lord gave him, I questioned, “Are you sure?”

It was a bit unsettling. I knew that God would never play guessing games with His children. I also knew that whenever we have a problem hearing from God, the fault never lies with Him. Most often it’s our listening skills that need fine tuning. Realizing this, I told Joe to ask again. “In your persistency, perhaps you’ll get an answer.”

After an hour, I phoned Joe again to ask if he heard from the Lord. Joe quoted yet another scripture, that made less sense than the previous one. “But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that
Pilot marveled.” (Mark 15:5) I suggested to Joe that he ask the Lord, “What does this mean?”

After a brief time of prayer, the Lord spoke to Joe. He told Joe that He had already spoken to him and called him twice by name concerning the mentally challenged. Then in a split second, the Holy Spirit brought back to Joe’s remembrance the two occasions in which the Lord called him by his name, “Joseph” and “Joe”. It all became instantly clear. All of a sudden, Joe understood that God was calling him to work with the mentally challenged. However, because the two situations were isolated and seemingly unrelated, Joe never realized that God was revealing His will through them. Joe was so excited that he had finally heard from God. He couldn’t wait for me to get home from work so that he could tell me.

No sooner than I could get through the door, Joe was there to greet me. He went on and on and on about what the Lord revealed to him. He reminded me of the two situations that I also walked through with him. The first situation involved a young man, who was staying with us, Joe and myself. It was a Sunday morning, and the three of us were visiting one of Atlanta’s many churches for the first time. In reading the bulletin, we found out that this was the church’s anniversary celebration service. It was an all Black congregation, and it looked like everyone showed up for the celebration. The church was crowded. As they welcomed the visitors, they also welcomed the guest preacher who would be delivering the sermon.

We were sitting in the front pew when the Lord spoke to Joe and gave him a message. In a silent prayer, Joe responded. He said, “Lord, if you want me to give this message, You will have to get me from this pew up to the pulpit.”
Not wanting to bring any attention to himself, Joe remained unemotional and very quiet through the entire service. Then after the guest preacher concluded his message, the Pastor stood up to the pulpit and asked if anyone had something to say. Much to our surprise, he then directed his question to Joe and the young man who was with us. “Do you have anything to say?” the Pastor asked.

I heard Joe quickly ask the young man if he had anything to say. He said, “No.”

Then it shocked me that as Joe got up out of his seat, the Pastor motioned to him beckoning him to come up to the pulpit. I was in awe seeing Joe standing up there in the pulpit preaching. Just as he uttered the words: “There is no White and no Black in Christ. We are all one!”, the oddest thing happened. A tall young Caucasian man entered the church. In the midst of this all Black congregation, he stood out “like a sore thumb”, as the expression goes.

Before stepping down, Joe presented the Gospel with such simplicity and clarity. After saying everything that the Lord placed upon his heart to say, Joe then sat down. The Pastor then got up, and as some denominations do, he stated that he was opening the doors of the church for membership. The Caucasian young man came forward, and with a thick Southern drawl, he said, “I want what he was talking about”, as he pointed to Joe. No one really paid any attention to what he said. The Pastor proceeded to pray for this young man as if he was joining the church.

After the Benediction, we were all invited downstairs for a covered dish banquet meal. As we were boxed in, we simply followed the crowd. Once we were downstairs, we could see that a great deal of preparation had been made in order to serve the meal in an orderly fashion. As we were standing near the
entrance of the room, the Caucasian young man came over to 
 Joe emphatically stating that he wanted what Joe was talking 
 about. Joe quickly surveyed the downstairs spotting an empty 
 room. He then ushered us all into that room, which was the 
 choir’s dressing room.

 Mind you, this was our first time in this building and 
 here we were overstepping the boundaries and taking over. Once 
 we were in the choir room, Joe locked the door. He asked the 
 young man his name. He said “Joe.”

 Joe then told him that his name was also Joe. When 
 asked if he knew Jesus, he said, “No.”

 Joe then explained salvation. In speaking with this young 
 man, it didn’t take long before we realized that he was mentally 
 challenged. When we asked how he found this church, he said 
 that he fell asleep on the bus. When he woke up, he got off the 
 bus and saw the church, so he went in. He actually didn’t know 
 where he was. After Joe prayed with him to receive Jesus in his 
 life, we all then joined the congregation and had a bite to eat.

 Offering to drive Joe home, we asked where he lived. He 
 not only gave us the address, but a description of his housing 
 accommodations. By his description, it sounded like he lived in 
 a group home. Since it was still early, we asked if he would like 
 to come home with us for a little while. He said, “Yes.”

 His exuberant response made it obvious that he was 
 excited about coming home with us. Little did we know that we 
 would be personally involved in Joe’s life until we left Atlanta. 
 Meeting Joe was the first of the encounters that the Lord 
 reminded my Joe of when He was calling him to work with the 
 mentally challenged.

 The other situation that the Lord reminded Joe of was 
 much different. It happened on a Sunday afternoon after church. 
 When Joe turned the TV on, a documentary on the Public
Broadcasting Channel caught his attention. It was about a man who was locked up for years in a mental hospital in England. His physical deformities restricted his mobility, so he was bound to a bed or a wheelchair. They had no way to evaluate his mental status, since he could only utter unintelligible grunts and sounds. The narrator of the documentary went on to say that he was labeled “mentally retarded”. Guess what his name was? Joseph! Yes, Joseph!

The amazing part about his story is that another patient came into Joseph’s life who also couldn’t speak, but he had an innate ability to interpret Joseph’s grunting sounds. Not only could he understand what Joseph was saying, he was also able to type out the words. Together they wrote a book that ended up being published.

It was phenomenal to watch these two individuals as they worked together. Joseph would make the oddest sounds, and the other patient would type out the interpretation. When the manuscript was brought to the attention of the hospital staff, they discovered that Joseph wasn’t retarded. The Lord used this documentary to speak to Joe about the position he was to take at the training center. Joe was so excited that God spoke to him twice and called him by name, “Joe” and “Joseph”.

Once he had heard from God, Joe didn’t waste any time. He phoned the director with his acceptance. As soon as his final exams were over, he started his new job. This was an entirely new experience for Joe, in which he was confronted with many challenges. He had to work with, and tend to the needs of those who were mentally and physically handicap. Joe found himself doing things he had never done before. He had to change diapers and colostomy bags, not to mention the various other duties that could have overwhelmed him if he didn’t have Jesus in his life.
Before being assigned to a group, Joe had to first complete orientation. During orientation, he was assigned to an instructor and given a rotation schedule working with various age groups. While working with the children, several won his heart. There was one in particular, a little eight-year old girl named April. She had many physical deformities, but the most beautiful little face. When I met her, I quickly looked beyond her frail little twisted body. All I saw was the sparkle in her eyes as she smiled. She couldn’t talk and was wheelchair-bound, but she was as smart as can be. She had an alphabet board on the front tray of her wheelchair, and she could carry on a conversation spelling out every word. She turned out to be my one and only competition as she spelled out to Joe everyday that she loved him. April also had a colostomy and was paralyzed from the waist down to her feet. For a child with so many problems, she certainly had the most cheerful disposition in spite of them.

At the completion of his orientation, Joe was assigned to the adult workshop. Even though his students were considered as adults, their mental ages were less than thirteen. After working with them only a few days, Joe knew that he had found his niche. He enjoyed his work, and it was quite evident that his students enjoyed him. He had eight students, and he bonded with each one.

Joe’s job required that he monitor the students from their pick-up to their return home. He was routinely scheduled to accompany the driver in the van on his daily runs. It was during these times that he bonded with his students.

When Joe came home from work, there was one young man that he would always talk about. His name was John Henry. He was mentally and physically challenged. John Henry couldn’t speak, but his love for the Lord was evident. Joe would
often have to bathe him because he was incontinent of bowel and bladder. It was during those personal times that Joe would speak to him about the Lord, and John Henry would get so excited, he would shake all over.

Joe was only at the training center about a month when he received notice of a mandatory responsibility. Every year the training center had what they called “Camp Week”. It was mandatory that all of the instructors participate. In questioning those who had gone before, Joe found out that it was a twenty-four hour, seven-day week responsibility. Since he was getting paid for it, Joe didn’t mind at all. However, he never gave it a second thought that he would be around and sleeping with the students for twenty-four hours.

His duties would include bathing, feeding and diaper changing. He would be doing everything he did in his eight-hour work day. However, he would not have a sixteen-hour break, nor the ability to return home. Wow! I had more of a problem with it than Joe did, especially when I heard that none of the parents would be going. But that wasn’t the end of it!

About a week before Joe was scheduled to go away to camp, he found out that they needed a registered nurse to dispense medications and administer first aid as needed. An emergency had come up, and the nurse who had volunteered couldn’t go. Now, for the life of me, I don’t know what Joe was thinking when he volunteered my services. I would be responsible for 60 handicaped children away from home at camp.

We discussed it until I was blue in the face. I gave him all the reasons why I shouldn’t do this, and he gave all the reasons why he thought I should. However, the one reason that out weighed them all was the fact that we would be able to spend time together as opposed to being separated for a week. It
could not have been a more perfect time for me to take off a week. I had just ended a private-duty case and had not committed myself to take on another one. However, since my position as the camp nurse was on a volunteer basis, I wouldn’t be getting paid. I was hoping that the little extra that Joe would be making would compensate for the week that I was taking off.

Before I knew it, I was being whisked off to camp. Since they had enough monitors and bus drivers, Joe went with me in our car. The drive was quite pleasurable. I had no idea how far it was, but it only took us about thirty minutes to get there.

Truthfully speaking, I didn’t know what to expect. I had never been to a handicap camp before. When we drove up into the parking lot, the first thing I saw was the pool. I was quite impressed. It had all sorts of ramps to take the wheelchairs down into the water. The entire camp was, of course, wheelchair accessible.

As soon as the assistant director spotted me, she came over and escorted me to the nurse’s quarters. It was quite large with a bedroom and a medication room complete with everything. Before leaving me, she handed me several large boxes of medications which belonged to the students.

After putting my suitcase away, I immediately did inventory to see if I had everything that I would need. There was a medicine cabinet with a key so that I could lock up the controlled substances.

As I sorted out the student’s medications, I was flabbergasted to see how much medicine I would have to dispense. You figure it out. I had 60 students, and each student had at least four or five medications each.

Fighting off feelings of anxiety, I organized the medications by first writing out medication cards for each medication and for each student. Realizing that I had to dispense
the 5:00PM doses within a couple of hours, I decided to pour the pills into the little medicine cups that I found in the cabinet. Thank God that there was a medicine cart on wheels with enough slots for all my medicine cups and their identifying cards. Some of the medicines had to be administered four times a day, and some of the students had to have suppositories.

My first day was extremely hectic. I had to run all over the camp trying to find the students to give them their medicine. I thought to myself, “What could Joe have been thinking, when he signed me up for this job?”

To think, I would have a week of this! I had to dispense more medicine than I had ever had to dispense on any given floor of a hospital. That wasn’t all! During the week, several of the children had seizures, and little April (my angel doll) got very sick. She suffered with high temperatures and dehydration. I had to contact her parents to take her to the hospital. To top it off, I spent only thirty minutes with Joe the whole week. Can you figure that out?

My one reason for taking on this responsibility was so that I could spend time with Joe. But when I think about it, Joe’s time away at camp was no picnic either. He had an autistic little boy that would climb into his bed every night. The only problem is that Joe would wake up each morning soaked and lying in a puddle of urine.

God used all of these experiences not only to demonstrate His love and compassion, but to teach us patience. When I felt overwhelmed and wanted so often to toss in the towel and give up, the Lord taught me how to persevere with an endurance that could only come from Him. He enabled me to accomplish the seemingly impossible.
Chapter 30

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James 1:2-4 (NASB)

Several weeks had passed after being away at camp, and just as Joe was settling back into his routine at the training center, the director called him into the office. It’s not a part of Joe’s nature to panic, but all sorts of thoughts went through his head: “Did I do something wrong? I certainly can’t afford to loose this job. Well Lord, You’re in control.”

Before he knew it, Joe found himself sitting down in the director’s office. Joe gave a sigh of relief when he realized that the director wasn’t at all displeased with his work. He just wanted to inform Joe that a position opened up in another center.

After commending Joe for his work, the director proceeded to give more details about the position. The center was located only a few miles from our apartment, and the students were higher functioning. The position looked very appealing to Joe. If he took this position, he would no longer have to travel half an hour to forty-five minutes to work. Before leaving the director’s office, Joe jotted down the address and phone number of the center.

Joe was so excited. He drove over to the center immediately after work to set up an interview. The Lord had
certainly gone before him. Here once again, God used a man to open the door. In speaking with the supervisor, Joe found out that the director had phoned the center and put in a good word for him.

After making an appointment, Joe drove home with mixed emotions. If he got this job he would be only ten minutes away from our apartment. But it meant that he would be leaving all of his students, who had grown so dear to his heart. When he told me about the possibility of a job change, I was overjoyed that he would be working closer to home. I didn’t experience the emotions that he did. Then again, I didn’t have the relationship with the students that he had. To me, this seemed to be an ideal opportunity. Joe would still be working with the mentally challenged, and the blessing is that he would be closer to home.

Joe took a day off for the interview. He arrived early as he usually does for all of his appointments. As he walked into the building, he was asked to have a seat in the waiting area, which was only a hallway lined with chairs. There were several doorways in the hall. From what Joe could see, each of the doorways lead to a workshop. As he sat there in the waiting area, he observed several people, possibly instructors, going in and out of the workshops.

Since he had a few more minutes to wait before his interview, Joe decided to read his Bible. You see with Joe, it was always a hard and fast rule to carry his Bible with him wherever he went. I’m sure people noticed that he was not only toting a Bible, but reading it. The supervisor was on time in keeping her appointment with Joe. Once again, after only a brief interview, Joe was offered the position. He accepted it right then and there.

Joe’s job entailed working with sixteen high functioning mentally-challenged students. He had to instruct and supervise
them in the workshop. The jobs varied. They counted and bagged screws, washers, nuts and bolts. They also counted and bagged sponges. As a matter of fact, the center was contracted to do piece work for some of our major companies here in the United States. The students were paid for their work, and it was Joe’s responsibility to keep track of each student’s productivity to determine their wages. Now, don’t fool yourself into thinking that they made “BIG” money. Some made only two or three dollars a week. Others made as much as five or ten dollars. But to them, it was “BIG” money!

Joe was at the center for only a short while when it was confirmed in Joe’s heart that the Lord had sent him there. Out of sixteen students, thirteen gave their lives to the Lord. Joe shared Christ with them, discipled them and prayed with them. No one ever objected because the lives of Joe’s students were being transformed. Some of the students had been disciplinary problems. However, as their lives changed, the changes were so evident that the staff and the administrators took notice. Even though it was a federally-funded facility, Joe was allowed to do whatever he wanted. This was surprising because of the whole issue of “the separation of church and state”. God certainly gets all the glory.

What was most unusual is that Joe received permission to take his students on field trips and picnics on weekends. We found out that it was a policy of the center not to allow a staff member to take any of the students anywhere. As it was told to us, the policy was instituted as the result of an incident that happened. A staff member, who took the students out on field trips, was convicted of sexually abusing one of the students. When we heard this, we knew that God had given Joe favor. We were even granted permission to use the center’s van for our
field trips. To cover ourselves, we printed up permission slips for the parents to sign whenever we went on an outing.

It was awesome to see how God was developing relationships with the administrators, with the staff, with the students and with their parents. We were so blessed. As God was moving so mightily in our lives, we sometimes felt as though we were literally on a mountaintop with Him.

Have you ever noticed that just as you’re descending from your mountaintop experience with God along comes a trial or a temptation? It’s at times like these when we are most vulnerable, that the enemy of our souls tries to lure us into doubting God’s ability. His subtle and persuasive tactics are often convincing.

Everything, and I mean everything, was going exceptionally well in our lives when all of a sudden our car broke down. Our initial thought was, “How bad could this be?”

When we took it to our mechanic, he told us that the car wasn’t worth fixing. He explained that the amount we would spend fixing it, could be used to put a down payment on a new car.

We were devastated. A million questions flooded my mind. “How would we get to work?”

Joe worked days and I worked evenings, so we both needed the car. My biggest question was, “How could we afford a new car?”

My thoughts were suddenly filled with one question after another, but no answers. Like the swinging of a pendulum, my emotions began to vacillate. Just as I was beginning to feel a little panicky, Joe suggested that we have someone take us to one of the local car dealers just to inquire about the cost of a new car. I followed his lead, and we asked a friend to drive us.
The closest dealership was about 5 miles from our apartment. When we drove into the parking lot, I took one look at all the new cars, and thought to myself, “We’ll never be able to afford this.”

Joe, on the other hand, was saying, “It doesn’t cost us anything to ask. Besides, you have not because you ask not.”

Joe was quoting his favorite Scripture, James 4:2. That’s Joe. You could always count on him to quote a Scripture in season and out.

The closest dealership was Fiat. As soon as we walked through the display room doors, a salesman approached us asking if he could help us. Joe leveled with him right from the beginning. He said, “We don’t have any money.” The salesman smiled and replied, “What can you afford?”

We quickly did the addition in our heads, subtracting our monthly expenditures from what I made doing private duty, and Joe’s salary. We were surprised that we had more to work with than we thought. As soon as we stated the amount, the salesman proceeded to show us a few cars within our price range. It was all happening so fast. Before we knew it, we were filling out the paper work to buy a new car.

After getting credit approval, we returned to the Fiat dealer the next day to pick up our car. We had a few more papers to sign and we were handed the keys. I couldn’t believe it. We were driving home in a brand new car! Just before driving off the lot, Joe jumped out of the car with his flask of anointing oil in his hand telling me that he was going to anoint the car. Before I could even grasp what was happening, Joe had the hood of the car open and was anointing the motor. He then proceeded to anoint the trunk, the tires, the bumpers, the top of the car, the doors and the windows. In his prayer, Joe dedicated our new car to the Lord asking Him to protect us as we drove it.
We left the parking lot singing praises to God at the top of our lungs, thanking Him for this gift.

Then, the strangest thing happened. We had only driven a mile when the car shut off. We steered it over to the side of the road. After failing in our attempts to get it started, we then resorted to calling the dealer. They came and towed us back to their garage. However, since it was past their operating hours, all the mechanics had gone home. It meant that we had to wait until the next day to find out what was wrong. We couldn’t understand it. The car had only four miles on the odometer, which was from the test drive.

I took off from work the next day, and Joe called a co-worker to hitch a ride. Come to find out, it was a manufacturers glitch that caused the problem. It was going to take a couple of days before we would get our car back. What a disappointment! Since I was in between cases, I took a few days off. However, Joe couldn’t afford to take any time off.

When he shared his dilemma with his supervisor, she offered to take Joe to and from work. We didn’t know it, but this was God’s Divine appointment for seed planting. During the week that Joe was being chauffeured back and forth to work, Joe was able to plant the seeds of the Gospel in his supervisor’s heart. She was the type of person that might not have ever walked through the doors of a church. Joe knew that if he planted the seeds, God would send someone to water those seeds and He would ultimately cause the increase of His Kingdom.

Towards the end of the week, when we got our car back, we realized that we weren’t inconvenienced that much. God in His faithfulness worked all things together for good (Romans 8:28). We learned an invaluable lesson. As we dedicate our lives and our possessions to God, we have to allow Him to use it in
whatever way He desires. In our case, God used our inoperable car to bring about His Divine appointment.

God’s ultimate purpose was to bring Joe’s supervisor into the knowledge of the Truth. What a person does with the Truth is up to them. God commands us to go and tell them of His love and the sacrifice He made in sending His Son. Then, we have to leave the rest to Him. What seemed like a trial in the beginning, turned out to be yet another milestone in this our never ending journey of faith.
Chapter 31

“But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

Romans 6:17, 18 (NASB)

In the beginning, when I was trying to choose the title for this book, I first thought of calling it, “Our Journey of Faith”. But then I realized that this journey of faith is, in fact, a never ending journey until we get to glory. As we travel on the path the Lord has us on, He is perfecting our faith. He is also working His perfect work in all of us who are called by His name. While on our journey, God has been fulfilling His plan and purpose for our lives. We have also had many experiences in which He has manifested His Power and demonstrated His Mercy and Grace.

I admit that the road hasn’t always been easy. However, even when we had to go through the fire to be refined as silver and tested as gold, God was purifying us in the process. God refers to the refiner’s fire several times in Scripture. In Zechariah, when the Lord addresses the problem of false prophets and shepherds, He says “I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God’ ” (Zechariah 13:9) As we look at one of David’s Psalms of exaltation, we also see that he clearly understood God’s method of refining us. In Psalm 66:10 he said,
“For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined.”

Over the past three decades, as we persevered through the fire and testings, we learned a countless number of invaluable lessons. One important lesson is that the condition of your heart will determine the course of your future. I’m, of course, speaking of the spiritual condition of your heart and your relationship with the Father through His Son, Jesus. I remember reading an entry in the Daily Bread Devotional. The writer, David Branon said, “Walking with Jesus doesn’t depend on our legs. It depends on our heart.” It couldn’t have been more appropriately stated.

God is searching for those whose hearts are wholly devoted to Him. Let’s not look at anyone else. We need to search our own hearts. But how do we know if our hearts are wholly devoted to the Lord? Obedience is key. The person whose heart is wholly devoted to the Lord is walking in obedience to God’s revealed will. By God’s revealed will, I'm referring to that which He has commanded us to do in His Word, the Bible.

“Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day.” (1 Kings 8:61). Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15)

As I said before, obedience is key. And I can’t remember who, but I once heard someone say, “Obedience is faith in action.” In our obedience, a key point that is often overlooked is the fact that we are to be slaves of Christ Jesus. We are also to be slaves of righteousness having been freed from sin (Romans 6:18). If we were to be honest, most of us would rather consider
ourselves servants instead of slaves. If not called a servant, we would rather be called an heir of the Most High, which we are.

However, if we don’t understand our relationship with the Lord, as one of a slave to his master, then we will murmur. We will murmur when God tells us to leave all our possessions and go wherever He leads. We will murmur when He tells us to go to a people that we have no desire to be with or to a place that we have no desire to go to. When you are a slave of Christ Jesus, your heart is wholly devoted to Him. Then and only then, are you eager and willing to do His will: no matter what sacrifices you will have to make.

Through our obedience we earn the title of “Heir”. Even though we are heirs already, our obedience demonstrates that we are His children and rightful heirs.

This lesson about a slave-Master relationship was imprinted upon my heart when I was called upon to pick up and leave everything and move to California. Logically speaking, it didn’t make sense to me or anyone else. Joe had not completed his education at Morris Brown College, and we didn’t have a penny in our bank account. Common sense would tell us, that we do need some money to make that kind of move from the East Coast all the way to the West Coast.

I’m the type of person who finds it very difficult to initially make transitions when I have to make any changes either in my schedule or my course of direction. However, it doesn’t usually take me long to adjust. If you give me a few minutes, God usually speaks to me and I’m OK.

All along on this journey, God had been increasing my faith from baby steps to giant leaps. Let me tell you, it was a giant leap of faith to move from Atlanta to California at the drop of a hat. Joe on the other hand has always been very radical. He just has to hear from God, and he’s off and running. He runs so
fast that it takes time for any of us to catch up with him. The amazing thing about it is that God calls upon him to do some radical things. Sometimes I’m left in the dust, so to speak, with my head spinning.

It all began when Joe read a book written by a Messianic Jew. The book was “Michael, Michael, Why Do You Hate Me?”, by Michael Esses. In this book, the author makes mention of a seminary in California called Melodyland School of Theology. The name was supposedly derived from the Scripture in Ephesians, “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord...” (Ephesians 5:19) The school was described as being a school of the prophets; a school that was trying to put Spirit-filled pastors in pulpits around the world.

What got Joe’s attention was the fact that it was a non-denominational seminary. Joe didn’t waste any time. Before he even finish reading the book, he wrote to the school requesting information. Let me tell you, we were quite impressed with how quickly they responded. Much to Joe’s surprise, he could enter into the Bachelor’s program with the credits he had from New York University and Morris Brown College.

To show you how radical Joe is, he was ready to pack up and leave the day he received the information and application. He was able to get all of his transcripts and mail in the application. He was so excited about going to this school. He was biting at the bit like a race horse at the gate before a race ready to take off.

However, I, on the other hand, was having some difficulty with just picking up and leaving. It was already July, and we would have to be in California by September to start school if Joe was accepted. That meant that I only had a month to work and save money for the trip, not to mention the cost of
tuition and books. Needless to say, my head was spinning when he first shared his plans with me.

Once again, I had more questions than answers: “How could I make enough money in a month to make such a move and then have enough for Joe to go to school? Did I have to get a California state nurse’s license? Where would we live? What hospital would I be working in?”

You would think that I had learned from our move to Atlanta. How God had opened doors and taken care of us. No, I’m ashamed to say, that here I was with the same questions and the same doubts. Wouldn’t you think that I would be able to trust God after such a history of seeing His faithfulness and His mighty power which was manifested right before my eyes? I’m reminded of what Jesus said in addressing Peter’s fears as he began to sink after actually walking on the water. “And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” (Matthew 14:31)
Chapter 32

“The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.”
Proverbs 16:9 (NASB)

As the Lord began to quickly confirm His word in my heart, He assured me that this move to California was all a part of His plan for our lives. I then began to rest in Him. The next thing I knew, I was being offered a “crème de la crème” job.

I received a call from my nursing registry. They informed me that they received a phone call from General Motor’s Automotive Plant requesting a “Black” nurse. Well, that was the oddest thing I had ever heard. My initial response was to jokingly say, “Am I black enough?”

It seems as if the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) had an issue with the General Motors plant in Atlanta regarding their discriminatory practices. In all the years that the General Motors’ plant had been in Atlanta, they had never hired a Black nurse. Mind you, they had several nurses and a doctor on staff during the hours that the plant was open. However, all of the medical staff was always Caucasian. Whenever a nurse retired, they would always have another Caucasian nurse take the position. They had many Black employees on the assembly lines, but never on staff in the medical office. If I took the job, it would mean that I would be the first Black nurse to integrate the medical staff at the General Motors plant in Atlanta.
Being more interested in the money than the prestige, I took the challenge. Having walked through discrimination and prejudice before, I thought to myself, “It’s only for one month until we leave for California.” To be completely honest with you, it wasn’t the discrimination that bothered me. It was the fact that I would be working in a situation similar to a hospital emergency room. Next to pediatrics, the emergency room was on the top of the list of places I disliked. For me, it was a high anxiety and intense workplace. In an emergency room, people may be brought in off the streets with gunshot wounds, amputated limbs or a crushed skull from an automobile accident. This is not always the case, but you never know what kind of case would be brought in. In considering this position, the biggest incentive was the fact that I would be making a little bit more money than I would make doing private duty.

My first day on the job was quite encouraging. The Lord had already gone before me. The medical staff, both doctor and nurses, were all exceptionally friendly and quite helpful in orientating me to the routine.

It was a busy place. I learned that some employees would make up an excuse to get off the line, pretending to have a headache and come requesting Tylenol. Then after a week, I noticed an increasing number of Black employees coming to check me out.

My presence in the medical office stirred up a little fuss. You could see the state of shock on the eyes of the employees. Some had worked in the plant for many years, and they couldn’t believe their eyes. They were shocked to see me, a Black nurse, working in the medical office and functioning in the same capacity as the other nurses.

I was amused by it all. That is until we started getting some more serious cases. We treated eye injuries from the
splash of battery acid. We also treated an employee whose toe was amputated from a large piece of metal falling on his foot. Of the less serious complaints, we ran the gamut from headaches and premenstrual cramps to allergies and sinus problems.

During the short time that I worked at the General Motors plant, the medical staff and I became very close. When the doctor, who was in charge of the office, found out that I would soon be leaving, he expressed his regret in losing me. He also asked if there was anything he could do. He said, “Don’t hesitate to ask.”

When I informed him that I was moving to California, he asked if I had applied for my California state nurse’s license yet. I told him, yes, but that I was still waiting for their response. To my surprise, he then volunteered to phone the state office in Sacramento (the state capital) to put in a good word for me. I was speechless. I couldn’t believe that he would do this for me. Besides, I had never heard of anyone phoning a state office to put in a good word for someone. Of course, I verbally expressed my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation. Much to my amazement, he immediately followed through with the call.

With our combined salaries, Joe and I saved enough money to make the trip. What was so astounding is that all of Joe’s mentally-challenged students took up a collection to send him to school. It reminded me of the poor widow in the Scripture who is commended by Jesus for giving out of her poverty all that she had. These students gave Joe all they had, their entire week’s wages. Some gave two or three dollars and others gave five or ten dollars, but they gave all they had. In doing so, they deeply touched Joe’s heart. The senior citizens from the Friday night Bible study, took us out to dinner and presented Joe with a beautiful custom-made plaque expressing
their appreciation for him teaching Bible study. They also gave Joe money for school.

Everything was falling into place. However, it was drawing close to the time for us to leave for California, and Joe still hadn’t received his acceptance from the school. Joe was so much more assured than I was. He even started giving our furniture away.

You see, when we first discussed moving to California, we both came to an agreement. Since we wouldn’t have enough money to take any of our furniture with us and we couldn’t store it, we decided to give it away. People tried to convince us to sell it to make a little money, but the Lord told us to give it away. The word got around real fast that nice furniture was being given away. Before I knew it, our rooms were being emptied.

Even though God had confirmed His word in my heart, Joe’s radical leaps of faith frightened me a bit. He had given our furniture away and was ready to drive cross country without knowing whether he was accepted in the school. Now, that was a little scary for me! I realized that if we were out of God’s will, it would be a long trek back home from California. Just as I began to worry myself sick, the peace of the Lord came over me. I’m sure that Joe was praying for me. He knew how difficult it was for me to make transitions.

The day came. We dreaded having to say goodbye to all the friends, that we had drawn so close to. What was so disturbing is that all of the college students had gone home for the summer break. It was sad to think that we wouldn’t be there when they returned in the Fall looking for us. As we drove off, we said our good-byes to the city that we enjoyed ministering in. As tears trickled down my cheeks, so many beautiful memories flashed through my mind.
We headed first to New York. Then after a brief visit with family, we headed for California. Remember this wasn’t our first time driving cross country.

We actually drove across for the first time in 1971 to find Joe’s dad. His dad lived in Los Angeles which was now going to be our first stop. We made arrangements to stay with him a few days, before driving to the school in Anaheim.

God in His awesome wonder often leaves me questioning, “Why did I ever doubt Him?” Scripture says, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.” (2 Timothy 2:13) God was so faithful to us. He brought us all the way cross country to California. When we got to Joe’s dad, guess what was there waiting for us? Joe’s acceptance letter, which had been forwarded to his dad’s address. Yes, Joe was accepted into Melodyland School of Theology. We were both ready to jump and shout.

I was so glad that I didn’t dig my heels in and refuse to move. I’m also glad that I didn’t kick and scream all the way cross country. I followed my husband even though I wasn’t sure that he was making the right decision. Our time in California was not only the turning of the page of a new chapter. It is the beginning of my second book, a sequel to this book. It will cover our years in seminary and our preparation for ministry.

As I close the final chapter of this book, I’m reminded of the chain of events that first took us from New York to Atlanta and then from Atlanta to California. Once we were in Atlanta, we thought we had it all figured out. At that point on our journey, we thought that we would be in Atlanta for three or four years until Joe completed his education at Morris Brown College. It goes to show you, we never know what tomorrow holds.
As James said, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are [just] a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, [you ought] to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’” (James 4:13-15)

This was the first time that we had to move at such short notice. The lessons that I learned have enabled me to pick up and go wherever the Lord sends us. I learned not to have emotional attachments to anything that I own. I can leave it all today if the Lord calls me to do so.

In these “End Times”, I believe God is bringing all of us to this point. He may never require you to pick up and go to another country or even another state, but you must be ready if He does call you. Every watchman and true prophet of God has been warning us of what is on the horizon. We will be facing troubled times, but God is able to keep us as we walk in obedience heeding His call. To those who have not yet committed their lives to Christ, today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow is not promised to you. Heed the call, and invite Jesus into your life.

In closing, I pray that this book has in some way spoken to your heart and encouraged you in your faith. Remember, all you have to do is to surrender to God, submit to His authority and commit yourself to obey His every command.

To be continued…